

“Spiritual Gifts from God: Part Five”

1Corinthians 12:1, “Concerning spiritual *gifts*, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware.” **4-5**, “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord.” **7**, “But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” **18**, “But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired.” **27**, “Now you are Christ’s body, and individually members of it.”

Every believer is gifted to serve in the body of Christ, the church of God: (cf. **Romans 12:6-8**) **prophecy** [proclaiming God’s Word], **servicing** [ministering to the basic needs of believers], **teaching** [interpreting and explaining God’s Word], **exhorting** [encouraging obedience to God’s Word], **giving** [generously and freely to those in need], **leading** [guiding or governing by example, with diligence], **showing mercy** [expressing compassion and empathy, in order to lessen another’s burdens and comfort their sorrows].

Last we we studied about one of ordained offices in the Church, that of **Elders** [who the man is within the Church] or **Overseers** [what the man does in serving the Church] , also called Pastors or **Shepherds** [how the man.

Acts 20:17, “From Miletus [Paul] sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church.” **28**, “ Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”

1Peter 5:1-3, “Therefore, I exhort the **elders** among you, as *your* fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, **shepherd** the flock of God among you, **exercising oversight** not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the will of God*; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but *proving to be examples* to the flock.

The men who lead the church as Elders, are provided with a blend of the gifts recorded in **Romans 12:6-8**, as prophecy, teaching, exhorting, and leading; for their main work is to manage and care for the flock of God, as Paul writes (**Ephesians 2:12-14**), “for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking

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the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.”

Today we will study what the Bible tells us about the other ordained office given to the Church as a gift from God, the office of Deacon [Greek *diakonos* = *servant*]. The men and women who care for the church as Deacons, are provided with a blend of the gifts recorded in **Romans 12:6-8**, as serving, giving, showing mercy.

There is only one place in the New Testament where we find the qualifications given for the office of Deacon; these qualifications are listed after, and yet include some of the same qualifications given to the office of Elder/Overseer.

1Timothy 3:8 says, "Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain." "Likewise" refers back to **1Timothy 3:1**, which states, "If any man aspires to the office of overseer..."

That indicates deacons occupy an ordained office, as overseers do. So in the church there is to be a plurality of godly men (overseers in **1Timothy 3:1**; elders in **Titus 1:5**) who are responsible to lead and care for God's church, and they are assisted in caring for the flock by the deacons.

The biblical emphasis is not on the organization or the office; but instead on the servant-leader's spiritual qualifications in **1Timothy 3; Titus 1**, and his or her responsibility and duty to serve the Church of God.

The qualifications for Deacon are about personal and spiritual character. **Personal character...** First, deacons must be dignified (**1Timothy 3:8**). This means that they must be worthy of respect and do not treat serious things lightly.

The Greek word for "dignity" is *semnos*, which means "venerable, honorable, reputable, grave, serious, and stately." The same Greek word appears in **Titus 2:2**, which says that older men "are to be *dignified*, temperate, sensible, sound in faith, in love, in perseverance."

A deacon must not be "double-tongued," i.e., not one who says one thing to one person and something else to another; but instead, they are always consistent and truthful in what they say. Next, deacons are not to be addicted to wine; but instead are to be known for their sober-mindedness and self-control. Finally, Paul says that deacons should not be fond of dishonest gain (deacons sometimes handle church funds), we know that desires for financial gain can corrupt a person and have brought many to ruin.

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Spiritual character... Deacon's must hold (**1Timothy 3:9**), "to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience." In other words, deacons must have convictions based on sound biblical doctrine, leading to a clear conscience, based on faith in the Lord the application of God's truth in their life.

Deacons must first be tested (**1Timothy 3:10**), "then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach." Before a person is officially appointed as a deacon, he or she must have proved themselves to be faithful in serving the Lord, so as to be above reproach or any accusation for sinful living. Those who are not above reproach are disqualified from serving as deacons.

1Timothy 3:11 begins, "Women must likewise be dignified." Again, "likewise" relates back to an office of the church. Contrary to the King James Version's translation of that verse, "Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things," we know Paul was not talking about *the wives of deacons*, there is no pronoun used to refer to *wives*; in fact, the word for *wives* is not in the text, but instead it is the Greek word for *women*. Also, since there are no comments about the wives of elders, why would there be any comments about the wives of deacons?

The Greek word for "women" in **1Timothy 3:11** is *gunaikas*. Apparently Paul used that term to be specific since there is no feminine form of *diakonos*, and otherwise it would be assumed that deacons could only be male, since the very same form of the word *diakonos* is neutered, being both masculine and feminine; it would have been unclear for Paul to use just the term *diakonos* if he wanted to refer to female servers, so he identified them as women.

Are there any references to female deacons in the Bible? In **Romans 16:1** we read, "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant [*diakonos*] of the church which is at Cenchrea." Phoebe was recognized by the church for her service. It is very possible, although it is not clearly stated, that she served in an official capacity as deacon in the local church in Cenchrea.

1Timothy 3:12, concerning male deacons, is the same as **1Timothy 3:2**, concerning male elders, saying they must be, "the husband of *only* one wife." The Greek text in both passages actually reads that he is to be, "a one-woman man," single-mindedly devoted to his wife, or fiancé, or girlfriend. This is not talking about whether or not a man is married, or has been divorced, it is talking about him being totally faithful and devoted to his own wife.

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Deacons, if married, are to be (**1Timothy 3:12**) “good managers of their children and their own households” this is applied to elders (**1Timothy 3:4**), with the additional **verse 5** saying, “if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?.” And so, a deacon must demonstrate some kind of management ability, by the way he manages his own children and household, just as an elder must do.

Although specific personal and spiritual qualifications must be met by those who serve in the office of deacon, every member of the Body of Christ should seek to exemplify those qualifications, whether they serve as a recognized office-holding deacon, or simply as a servant to the Family of God. The qualifications of **1Timothy 3** should be a goal and a guideline for every believer.

Philippians 1:1-6, “Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the **overseers and deacons**: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now. For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.”

So then, we see that there are two distinct church offices described in **1Timothy 3**: elders (male only), and deacons (male and female); but what is the major difference in the manner and the method of service between elders and deacons? Elders must be equipped and capable to both teach and lead the flock of God, whereas deacons are to serve under the direction of the elders, as they maintain awareness of the basic needs among those in the congregation.

Elders have the primary ministry responsibility of Teaching the Word, and Shepherding the Flock of God; whereas, the deacon’s primary function is to care for the flock’s basic needs, by providing various forms of support: familial, physical, emotional, spiritual, and sometimes financial. In this way, the elders are freed up to pray, study the Word, oversee and lead the church.

In a special sense, the deacon's task sums up the essence of spiritual greatness. Our Lord said (**Matthew 20:26-28**), “Whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve,” (**Mark 10:45**), “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

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The Lord Jesus Himself, then, is the model for those who would step into the deacon's role. It is a role of service, of sacrifice, and of commitment to others' needs. The reward of the deacon's office is not the temporal glory that comes from human admiration and praise, but rather the eternal blessing that comes from living a life of spiritual service to the glory of God, at the end of which they will, no doubt, hear (**Matthew 25:21**), “Well done, good and faithful servant. You were faithful with a few things, [and so now] I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.”

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