

Elders and Deacons

The Two Offices of the
NT Church

Nel Sewraj

Role & Responsibilities of Elders

- The Greek word that is used for the office of a bishop or elder is "episkope," and the word used for the one who holds the office is "episkopos."
- Elders then are the superintendents or the officers in general charge or the overseeing the congregation
- Elders are in charge of the oversight of the local body of believers. This is what we might call a pastor or minister today

Role & Responsibilities of Elders

1. The elders help to settle disputes in the church
 - Acts 15:1-6
 - Elders are the decision makers
 - Elders have the stature, spiritual maturity and character. They are qualified enough to settle disputes and make resolutions

Role & Responsibilities of Elders

2. The elders have the governing grace to release strong, effectual prayers
 - James 5:14-18
 - Since the elders have to meet specific qualifications, their lives are godly and therefore the sin in their lives is minimal and is confessed regularly.
 - Elders have the grace & stature to make powerful governmental prayers

Role & Responsibilities of Elders

3. The elders are the authority structure over the church
 - 1 Peter 5:1-4
 - Elders are the designated leaders of the church, and the flock is entrusted to them by God
 - They lead the church into the purposes of God with humility & no hidden agendas

Role & Responsibilities of Elders

4. The elders have oversight over the spiritual development of the believers
 - Hebrews 13:7
 - This verse does not specifically say “elders,” it is talking about church leaders
 - Elders have to account for the spiritual life of the church

Role & Responsibilities of Elders

5. The elders are responsible for the impartation of the Word of the Lord
 - Acts 6:2-4
 - The priority of elders are prayer and study of the Word
 - Elders have oversight or management of all areas pertaining to the believers and church. Although elders don't do everything, but they are responsible for everything

Role & Responsibilities of Deacons

- In the New Testament, the word usually translated "serve" is the Greek word *diakoneo*, which literally means "through the dirt."
- *Diakoneo* refers to an attendant, a waiter, or one who ministers to another. From this word we get the English word "deacon."
- We first see the word "deacon" (*diakoneo*) used this way in the book of Acts.

Role & Responsibilities of Deacons

- Acts 6:1f
- Deacons minister to the church's physical needs. They serve and help the believers
- Deacons are to be appointed to take care of everything outside the responsibilities of elders.
- In a modern church, this might include taking on administrative or organizational tasks, ushering, being responsible for building maintenance, or

Role & Responsibilities of Deacons

- The responsibilities of deacons are not clearly listed or outlined. Concerning deacons, no passage really describes their function. They are assumed to be everything that does not include the duties of elders.
- According to the Word, the office of deacon is an honour and a blessing. *“For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in*

Role & Responsibilities of Deacons

- Important considerations from Acts 6:
 - One of those chosen to care for the widows was Philip who is later seen doing the work of an evangelist.
 - Another was Stephen. He wrought many signs & wonders (v.8), preached with wisdom and Spirit (v.10) and was ultimately martyred by the Jewish council
 - So though deacons serve as helpers in a variety of areas, their ministries are not

Role & Responsibilities of Deacons

- In the New Testament the word “deacon” is used in two ways:
 1. In a general sense – refers to all acts of ministry
 2. In an official sense – refers to the appointment into the office of a deacon
- The “deacon” thus refers to an office which involves the basic duty of rendering service to others. A deacon is one who is placed in an official position for a ministry of

Elders vs Deacons

1. In the New Testament elders served as overseers over the church. Deacons served as assistants to these elders. Deacons are the supporting and relieving officers of the elders
2. Elders and deacons are not two independent offices with each doing its own thing. Both are to be supportive of one another, working together to accomplish God's purposes for the church

Elders vs Deacons

3. God holds the elders responsible for the ministry of the church; this includes the deacons and the work they are asked to do
 - Elders are responsible to see that things are done according to the principles of Scripture. Therefore when elders ask for things to be done a certain way, they are not trying to interfere, they are simply doing the job God has called them to do
 - Although deacons are under the leadership of the elders their input is

Elders vs Deacons

4. Paul always describes the elders plural. The ideal is for the church to be shepherded by a team of elders. This does not negate apostolic or set authority within that team
5. Deacons were not the principle "shepherds" of God's flock, but an extension of the elders to "serve" or "wait on" the flock of God. Theirs was a ministry of care giving

Ministry Team in the Local Church

**THE ONLY TWO
LEADERSHIP OFFICES
IN THE NT CHURCH**

ELDERS

Sen Elder
Other Elders

DEACONS *(sometimes given oversight responsibilities)*

1. Administration
2. Ushering
3. Maintenance
4. Accounting

OTHER HELPERS

(those who don't meet the qualifications of deacons and yet have some practical responsibility)
eg. Those with duties

**REST OF THE
CONGREGATION**

Biblical Qualifications for Elders

“Those who are choosing elders in churches today would do well to look carefully at candidates in the light of these qualifications, and to look for those character traits and patterns of godly living rather than worldly achievement, fame, or success...”

Biblical Qualifications for Elders

“Especially in churches in western industrial societies, there seems to be a tendency to think that success in the world of business (or law, or medicine, or government) is an indication of suitability for the office of elder, but this is not the teaching of the New Testament”

Wayne Grudem

An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine

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Biblical Qualifications for Deacons

1. Deacons must be reverent
 - Serious, dignified.
 - Greek – venerable, honourable, honest. From root meaning: devout
 - Church members who by their serious deportment inspire respect
 - It does not mean that they don't have a sense of humour. However they not silly, or goofy people who take nothing seriously

Biblical Qualifications for Deacons

2. Deacons must not lie or be double-tongued
 - Greek – “dilogos.” It means to utter the same thing twice (from “dis” and “lego”). Also being deceitful, or speaking one thing and meaning another
 - Literally means “of double speech”; saying one thing to this person, and another to that person
 - Members who can be relied on for the exact truth of what they say, and for the

Biblical Qualifications for Deacons

3. Deacons must not be heavy drinkers

- Deacons given to much intoxication will often not have alertness of mind. Their thinking and self control will be affected

- They expose themselves to the exploitation of evil one - bringing down with them the church.
Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8)
A drunk person can do anything (e.g. become violent, vulgar or disrespectful, gossip about others, devour (betray) people's confidence)

- Definitely not a good example to other

Biblical Qualifications for Deacons

4. Deacons must not be greedy for money

- “filthy lucre” (kju) ~ gaining money by shameful, disgraceful & dishonourable means

He (Judas) said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it. (John 12:6)

Deacons may be entrusted with the church's finances. If they are greedy as Judas was, they may be tempted to use it for themselves

- *what was put into it. (John 12:6)*
It is vital for the deacon not to be swayed by money. It would be tragic if a

Biblical Qualifications for Deacons

5. Deacons must operate out of pure hearts and clear consciences (v. 9)
 - Too many believers profess their faith yet they are corrupt at heart and they lack character
 - Like all our other faculties, our conscience (our sense of right & wrong) has been perverted by the Fall
 - Deacons therefore must love truth. Truth is powerful enough to keep them from error and delusion

Biblical Qualifications for Deacons

6. Deacons must first be tested and proved over time by the church (v. 10)

- There is no probation for the office of the deacon. Deacons qualify for this office prior to being installed into it
- The church cannot be placed in the hands of anyone. The life of the deacons must be proved in every area so that they will not dishonour the office. They have had ample

Biblical Qualifications for Deacons

6. Deacons must first be tested and proved over time by the church (v. 10)

- *Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, long before this day*
proven their life & worth to the church
- *full of the Spirit and of wisdom,* whom we will appoint to this duty. (v. 10)
- The church must investigate the life and character of all its members and call them to account. (Acts 6:3) Those whom the

Biblical Qualifications for Deacons

7. Special note to deaconesses & wives of deacons (v. 11)

- The word “wife” here is the Greek “gune” which means a *woman* and specifically a *wife*
- There were deaconesses at Ephesus, such as Phoebe (Rom. 16:1 “/ *commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae*”) The word “servant” here is the Greek “diakonos” which means deacon or deaconess)

Biblical Qualifications for Deacons

7. Special note to deaconesses & wives of deacons (v. 11)

1. Be reverent – already explained
2. Be not slanderers/ gossipers i.e. someone who carries false tales and who is malicious when reporting about others; one who disgraces others and brings them into disrepute
3. Be sober-minded i.e. to live a soberly means to live a righteous and godly life; not intoxicated or overpowered by the things of this world; not wild, mad and insane
4. Be faithful – trustworthy and true in both her

Biblical Qualifications for Deacons

8. Deacons must have one spouse
(v.12)

- They should not have to attitude of putting away their wives, upon dislike, for the sake of marrying another

Biblical Qualifications for Deacons

8. Deacons must rule their children and their own houses well (v. 12)
- The word “rule” here is the Greek “proistemi.” (From two root word “pro” which means ‘in front of’ and “histemi” which means ‘to stand’) The word means:
 - To stand before (first in rank)
 - To preside over (the home president)
 - To rule over

Biblical Qualifications for Deacons

8. Deacons must rule their children and their own houses well (v. 12)
- Their authority, their government, their rules & regulations must be enforced. They must demand compliance from their children and everyone living in their homes.
 - The difference between elders and deacons is that elders have achieved this compliance and attained a reverent & godly household (v.4)

Conclusion

v.13

“obtain/gain for themselves a good standing/purchase to themselves a good degree.”

It literally means ‘to acquire a step’ i.e. a higher step.

Those who have served and used the office of the deacon well move upward in their office to that of elder

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