

# What Is a Deacon & What Is He to Do?

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## The Text (1 Timothy 3:8-10, 12-13)

8 Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, 9 but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. 10 These men must also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach ... 12 Deacons must be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households. 13 For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

## The Deacon

In the Scriptures, the term deacon (διάκονος) refers to a servant. A deacon recognizes his role as a servant of the Lord Most high and Christ as the Head of the Church. And furthermore, his role is to serve the local flock and follow the model of Jesus Christ, the One who came not to be served but to serve (διακονέω) and lay down his life as a ransom for many.

## The Goal of a Deacon

One of the leadership positions in a local church is the role of deacon. A deacon, though not a pastor/elder, is one who does lead, however. Yet he has a specific goal in his leadership role as deacon. The deacon's ambition must be to serve and take on responsibilities to care for the flock so that the pastors and elders can be freed up to devote more time to prayer and the ministry of the Word. Thus, the goal of a deacon is primarily to serve the Lord and serve the flock by specifically serving the pastors/elders by taking duties, needs, responsibilities, practical help, and a myriad of other functions off of them so as to allow them to focus specifically, primarily and unhindered on the primary calling of shepherd-leadership. Thus, the goal is not that they simply "do duties" around the building – plumbing, maintenance, correspondence, watching the thermostat, etc. – but rather that they do *whatever is needed* to free up the pastors so they can have adequate time to devote to prayer and the ministry of the Word.

## The Character of a Deacon

The Bible clearly reveals who a deacon is and what must characterize the man. The following are character traits that must be evident *before* he takes the leadership role in a local church.

1. *A man of dignity* – This means the man must be honorable and worthy of respect. He must be well-respected and even revered by others. He must have a sense of dignity about him where others have seen him, have scrutinized him, have tested him, and have thus concluded that he is a man worthy of utmost respect. This is a man of dignity.
2. *Not double-tongued* – This man is sincere. He hates hypocrisy. He does not have two-faces. He has integrity. He does not speak one way about someone to his face and then speak ill concerning that person behind their back to others. He is not a hypocritical, insincere, fake. He is true, real, full of integrity and entirely proven worthy of trust.
3. *Not addicted to wine* – This man is not a heavy drinker. He certainly does not get drunk nor does he give himself to much wine (or any form of alcohol or substance).
4. *Not fond of sordid gain* – This man sternly refuses to be greedy for money. His heart has no covetousness or greediness about it. He is not greedy or dishonest with money. He is wise with his money, handles it well, manages it well, but has no love of money.

## The Spiritual Maturity of a Deacon

The Bible shows that a deacon must demonstrate godliness in order to be qualified for this leadership position. A handyman does not qualify him as a deacon. A man who has served on committees elsewhere does not automatically give him the position. A man who fits

a need in a local assembly does not necessarily mean this man qualifies as a deacon. A deacon must hold to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. This underscores the uncompromising reality that a deacon must be a very godly, spiritual, biblical man. He must be a man of conviction, courage, boldness, and holiness. He holds on to the mystery of the faith. He gives himself to the faith. He clings to the faith. He has nowhere to turn but to hug the cross with all the might he has. He has no strength but to stand on the Word of God. This man must hold, keep, give himself to, cling to, devote himself to, and be utterly convinced of the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. That Paul brings in the phrase “clear conscience” emphasizes the need for the deacon’s personal holiness. He is a man who lives his Christian life with a clear conscience. He has no ongoing sin. He lives in no persistent transgression. He refuses to rebel. He bows to his knees frequently in honest and fervent repentance. He hates his impurities and his sin and he cleaves to God’s grace and Christ’s righteousness which clothes him. He is a holy man, a zealous man, a pure man, an exemplary man; he has proved himself to be a worthy man to lead.

### **The Home Life of a Deacon**

Since every marriage serves as a walking demonstration of the gospel of Jesus Christ, it should come as no shock that the deacon’s marriage must be blameless and worthy of emulation. How can a man lead in the church who has a bad – or, even, an ‘average’ – marriage? The deacon must be a *one-woman-man*. He must be singularly devoted in his heart, soul, body, emotions, affections, and thoughts to his wife – *and to her alone*. There must be no side relationships, no side texting relationships, no adulterous affairs or emotional affairs. He must control his eyes, his body parts, his hands and his mind. He must give himself wholly, singularly, passionately, and exclusively to the “one that his soul loves.” Anything less disqualifies this man from leadership in Christ’s church. He knows that the way Jesus Christ has loved him exactly parallels how he treats his wife. He loves her zealously, passionately, jealously, fervently, consistently, courageously, providing, sacrificially, selflessly, unconditionally, and eternally. Nothing can separate his love for his wife. She is his first ministry.

And the Holy Spirit goes beyond only the marriage relationship in the life of a deacon to the parenting, home-life with the children. The man who desires to serve as a deacon in Christ’s church must be good managers of their children and of their own households. This assumes the man aspiring to the office of deacon spends time with his children, disciplines them when they sin, points them to Christ daily, leads those at home in family worship, and manages the affairs of the household well. The emphasis is on the children and ruling over them well. He is not some heavy-handed, intimidating dominator. Rather, he leads his children and rules over them in a graceful, grace-filled, gospel-driven, and God-glorifying way. Christ is his model of what it is to lead well. Leadership is conviction. Leadership is determination. Leadership is courage. Leadership involves humility, confession, honesty, and dependence on the Spirit. The man desiring to serve as a deacon must show himself to be discipling his children, praying with them and for them tenaciously, leading in family worship on a regular basis, he must manage the finances well, the discipline well, the general tenor and culture of the home-life in a way that is biblical and gospel-saturated.

### **Conclusion – The Testing**

As in all leadership positions, the deacon must be examined carefully before he publicly takes on the leadership role. The Scripture says that these men must be tested first. That means that the men wanting to be deacon *must exemplify all of these characteristics in his life before he is even considered for a deacon*. He must be evidencing this as a pattern of life. He must be tested, examined, scrutinized, looked at, questioned so as to understand his real character.

And those who serve well as deacon obtain a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus since, after all, there is nothing that is more Christ-like than one who gives himself to serve God and God’s people sacrificially.