

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF GRANADA HILLS

DEACONS: A BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING

A PAPER PRESENTED TO THE DEACON BODY  
OF FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF GRANADA HILLS

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## Deacons: A Biblical Understanding

### INTRODUCTION

For two thousand years, the Church of Jesus Christ has wrestled with the subject of the purpose and nature behind the ministry of deacons, without much consensus. Within Baptist life, Charles Deweese notes that, “Deacons have been described in Baptist writings for well over 350 years,”<sup>1</sup> and once more, without an overall consensus as to function or form. Deacons have appeared to be involved in an unlimited number of ministries throughout church history.

Deweese describes their ministry thus:

The authority given to deacons was for positive and practical purposes – namely, to serve as church officers, to assist in limited administrative functions, to care for a church’s treasury, to make adequate provisions for the Lord’s table, to ensure that the minister’s needs were cared for, to minister to the sick, to stimulate responsible stewardship by encouraging voluntary contributions, and to be general servants of God, the church and the needy. . . . in America in the latter half of the eighteenth century, the role of deacons as caretakers of the temporal or secular affairs of the church began to assume a priority that it had never had before. The involvement of deacons in administrative, managerial, and business functions became more pronounced.<sup>2</sup>

It has been this author’s pleasure to consider the subject of deacons and read several works which attempt to come to an agreeable conclusion as to what the role, form and function of deacons is to be within the Church and especially within the work of Baptist churches. However, to this author’s dismay, very little of the literature devoted specifically to the subject of deacons has dealt with the text of Scripture as its primary source. For example, Deweese says in his preface, “The New Testament provides a clear reason for the appearance of deacons. . . .

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<sup>1</sup> Charles W. Deweese, *The Emerging Role of Deacons* (Nashville: Broadman, 1979) 23.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 39 40.

While the primary purposes of this book are to portray deacon trends of the past and present. . . the beginning point is the Bible. Here lies the standard by which all deacon life must be evaluated.”<sup>3</sup> While this author agrees with Deweese’s statement in general and appreciates his treatment of diaconal ministry throughout church history, he devotes only one and three quarters of a page (out of eighty-five pages in the book) to the Scriptural basis behind the work of deacons. Likewise, little exegetical material can be found in Robert Naylor’s popular treatment of Baptist deacon ministry,<sup>4</sup> or in the more recently published works by Robert Sheffield.<sup>5</sup> Out of eight specialized books on deacons consulted for the present study, only one attempted to provide a significant treatment and exegesis of the major passages in the New Testament regarding deacons.<sup>6</sup> It appears to the present writer, that if one actually believes that the Bible is the beginning and the end for faith and practice, more attention to the biblical data should be given when examining the role of deacons. Protestantism for centuries has rejected the idea that history is a valid and authoritative means to determine theological belief and ecclesiastical application. This writer has found it to be less than appealing to read works on how a particular church conducts deacon ministry, without their having first given significant attention to the proper understanding of the related biblical texts. Some may immediately argue that there is little actual material in the New Testament regarding deacon ministry. While such an argument

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Naylor, *The Baptist Deacon* (Nashville: Broadman, 1955).

<sup>5</sup> Robert Sheffield, *The Ministry of Baptist Deacons* (Nashville: Convention Press,

<sup>6</sup>Alexander Strauch, *The New Testament Deacon* (Littleton: Lewis and Roth, 1992).

may be true,<sup>7</sup> it still does not allow for a cursory treatment of the texts that do address diaconal ministry and is no excuse for passing over such texts in order to focus upon the practical aspects of a deacon's work.

Therefore, this writer begins with the presupposition that the Bible is a sufficient source of information concerning who deacons are and what their primary role is to be within the overall ministry of a local church. While I have not found the material in the specialized books on deacons to be unbiblical in every regard, the majority of them do not allow their application of deacon ministry to flow from the text of Scripture as much as from personal experience or church history. The general purpose of this paper is to give primary attention to the biblical nature of deacon ministry and draw some initial conclusions from the pages of Scripture as to the role, form and function of a biblical deacon ministry.

## EXAMINING THE SCRIPTURES

### **Introduction**

As mentioned above, the biblical material concerning New Testament deacons is limited. Two New Testament passages directly refer to an official body of deacons, namely, Philippians 1:1<sup>8</sup> and 1 Timothy 3:8-13. This paper also proposes that even though Acts 6:1-6 does not

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<sup>7</sup> Only two passages in the New Testament directly speak of an official body of deacons: Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3:9-15. Acts 6:1-6 is debated as to its relation to the role of deacons and will be considered later in this paper. Romans 16:1 is often sighted in regard to women deacons, but the reference cannot dogmatically be used to indicate that Phoebe was an official deacon.

<sup>8</sup> MacArthur disagrees that Philippians 1:1 is a reference to an official body of deacons. He notes, "To say that Philippians 1:1 refers to the office of deacon might be correct, but it is an

mention the Seven as an official body of deacons or assert that the ministry of deacons began with the Seven, there is ample evidence to conclude that Luke's discussion of the Seven and their ministry relationship to the Twelve was that upon which the church eventually derived and modeled later deacon ministry. Thus, the following discussion of the biblical content concerning deacons will begin with a brief overview of the term translated "deacon" in the New Testament, followed by specific examinations of Acts 6:1-6; Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3:8-13.

### **The Term Translated as "Deacon" in the New Testament**

"Deacon" is a word that is derived from a transliteration of the Greek term *diakonos*, meaning "servant." Only in two passages in the New Testament is *diakonos* actually translated (in most versions) as "deacon;"<sup>9</sup> and in each instance, the word is plural, referring to a group, rather than an individual. Among the verb, noun and adjective forms, *diakonos* is used over one hundred times in the New Testament. The following is a sample of what the term may refer to in the pages of the New Testament:

- A Literal Servant (Matthew 20:26; 23:11; Mark 9:35; 10:43; John 2:5; 12:26)
- A Metaphorical Servant
  - Government – Romans 13:4
  - Christ is not a servant of sin – Galatians 2:17

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arbitrary choice. There is not enough evidence to be dogmatic about what Paul is saying." *The Master's Plan for the Church*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 206. It is agreed that the context is limited, however, contrary to MacArthur's assertion, the term "overseer" is a common word to identify elders (Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Timothy 3:1ff; Titus 1:5-9), thus, ample reason to assume that two distinct and official leadership groups are spoken of in this verse. More concerning this will be mentioned later in the specific discussion of Philippians 1:1.

<sup>9</sup> Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:8, 10, 12, 13.

- Paul, a servant of the gospel – Ephesians 3:7; Colossians 1:23
- Tychicus, a faithful servant of the Lord – Ephesians 6:21; Colossians 4:7
- Epaphrus, a fellow bond-servant and faithful servant of Christ – Colossians 1:7
- Paul, a servant of the church – Colossians 1:25
- Timothy, a good servant of Christ Jesus – 1 Timothy 4:6
- Phoebe, a servant of the church – Romans 16:1

As demonstrated in the list above, the term can refer to preachers, a woman, apostolic helpers, government, Christ and a literal servant, just to name a few of the references. The term *diakonos* generally refers to one who gives himself/herself to serving another person or group of people. Obviously the term is a very broad one, and as can be seen, none of the above references refer in any manner to the position within the church commonly understood to be that of the “deacon.”<sup>10</sup> Therefore, merely examining the meaning of the Greek term translated as “deacon,” does not sufficiently address much more than a general understanding that the office of deacons is an office of service. This, however, must not be overlooked. Church history confirms that many have misunderstood even this most basic element of deacon ministry. Deacons, in Scripture, have never been marked as rulers or managers, but servants.<sup>11</sup> Overseers<sup>12</sup> are marked as those

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<sup>10</sup> Although some hold that Phoebe was in fact a deacon, Romans 16:1.

<sup>11</sup> Deweese’s chapter on “Modern Baptist Deacons,” notes how the literature and practice concerning deacon ministry in the 1800s and up through the mid 1900s revolved around viewing deacons as the business managers of the church (41-53, 59). Deweese says, “Deacon bodies were described as boards as early as the 1840s” (41).

<sup>12</sup> This paper understands the biblical position of “pastor,” “overseer,” and “elder” to be one and the same position which also in the New Testament was a plural body of church leadership (i.e., Acts 14:23; 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-4).

who are to “take care of the church of God” (1 Timothy 3:5), “direct the affairs of the church” (1 Timothy 5:17), “shepherd the flock of God. . . exercising oversight. . .” (1 Peter 5:2). Thus, Scripture is explicit concerning the role of pastors/overseers/elders, and makes a significant demarcation between the function of pastors and the function of deacons. Scripture does not indicate that deacons held or functioned in the same manner as pastors; their purpose and consequently, function was different and distinct.

### **An Examination of Acts 6:1-6 in Regard to Deacon Ministry**

#### **Objections and Answers**

Acts 6:1-6<sup>13</sup> is a passage widely discussed as to whether it has any direct or even implicit reference to the ministry of deacons. On the one hand, opponents to the view that deacon ministry is in view in this passage note that the noun *diakonos* is never used of the seven men chosen to assist the Apostles in the church in Jerusalem. Furthermore, some would argue that there is no indication in the book of Acts that this group of seven continued to exist in Jerusalem or even outside of Jerusalem once the initial complaint that created their need was satisfied (Acts 6:1). Also, while the book of Acts mentions elders on several occasions, the book never mentions a group of deacons. A further mark that some use to indicate that deacon ministry is not found in Acts 6 is that when the church in Antioch sent famine relief to the Jerusalem church, mention is made that it was brought to the elders of the church, not the deacons. Lastly, it is

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<sup>13</sup> The translation of the passage is the author’s own unless otherwise noted.



noted that neither Stephen or Philip continued in their role among the Seven of assisting the Apostles in caring for the needs of the widows in the Jerusalem church.<sup>14</sup>

Adequate answers can be given to these objections. First, though the noun *diakonos* is not used in the Acts account, related forms are used. *Diakonia* is used in 6:1 to refer to the daily “service” for the Jerusalem Christian widows, and the verb *diakonein* is used in 6:2 to refer to the widow’s ministry as serving tables. It could be surmised that before the commissioning of the Seven, the Twelve (apostles) were actually handling the daily care of the widows. This was not viewed as pleasing to the Twelve, because they would have to neglect the Word of God in order to give themselves to the “ministry of the tables” (6:2). Instead, they would rather give themselves to the service (*diakonia*) of the Word (6:4). This writer agrees that Acts 6:1-6 did not create at that point in the church’s history an official body of deacons, yet, the ground-work was laid. It could also be noted that the Apostles are never mentioned to be elders in Acts 6, nor are they in the remainder of the book of Acts. As the Church grew and the number of Apostles began to decline, new apostles were not appointed to take their place in the various churches, but elders/overseers/pastors, were installed into such oversight and shepherding roles once held by the Apostles. There is no difficulty seeing in Acts 6:1-6 the Apostles and their ministry as precursors to future pastors/elders/overseers. And when one considers the linguistic and functional link the Twelve had with the Seven, there should equally be no difficulty in seeing the Seven as precursors to the later role of deacons. To simply state that the noun *diakonos* is not

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<sup>14</sup> Cf., MacArthur, *Acts* (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 182-183; I. H. Marshall, *Acts*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 125; C. K. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*. International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 304; John B. Polhill, *Acts*. New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 183.

used is hardly sufficient ground to suppose that Acts 6:1-6 is not the historical indication of the emergence of the future ministry of deacons.

Secondly, there is insufficient evidence to be dogmatic that the ministry of the Seven did not continue past Acts 6. In fact, there is evidence to the contrary. It is illogical to assume that the “daily” need of the widows did not continue after Acts 6. Furthermore, the phrase “the Seven” is used later in the book of Acts in reference to Philip. This specific demarcation denotes that this group was viewed as an official body, just as “the Twelve” were an official ministering group (Acts 6:2). Simply because Philip is marked as “an evangelist” in Acts 21:8, does not mean that he was not also still one of “the Seven,”<sup>15</sup> or that the Jerusalem widow ministry, established in Acts 6, was no longer being conducted. Nor does Stephen’s preaching role (Acts 6:8-7:60) mean that the group which was assisting the Apostles with the widow’s ministry ceased to exist. How do we know that the other five did not continue in this role and that Philip and Stephen were replaced by other men, as God moved them on to other aspects of ministry? Did the Apostles, or the elders who later took their place, cease to need to give their greatest energies to prayer and the ministry of the Word after the occasion of Acts 6?

Third, deacons do not have to be mentioned in any remaining portion of the book of Acts in order for Acts 6 to be the historical marker of where the ministry was eventually derived. Acts is the historical record of how the church began and developed from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and into the uttermost parts of the world (Acts 1:8). Acts is not a full description concerning ecclesiology or the later development of the maturing church. Acts 6 is reflective of

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<sup>15</sup> The verb in Acts 21:8 is the present active participle of the verb translated “to be” (*eimi*), thus indicating a possible continuation of his role as one of “the Seven.”

a church that was rapidly growing and was in existence for some time (Acts 2:41-47; 5:32-37).<sup>16</sup> Once the growing church in Jerusalem had a significant need for some to assist the existing leaders in caring for the widows, such a ministry was formed. Thus, the book of Acts indicates throughout the remainder of its pages the emergence of new congregations. Acts does not focus upon any one congregation, especially longstanding churches, and the details of their church ecclesiology.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, with the book of Acts describing the beginning of multiple congregations and spending little time discussing to any great detail the ecclesiological structure of these congregations, it would not be necessary to mention a body of deacons in these churches. It is of interesting note that in regard to the new-found congregations in Crete, Paul instructed Titus to appoint elders but no mention of deacons is made. This is another indicator that deacons were the product of a more mature congregation that developed diaconal ministry only after a solid pastoral leadership was in place.

Fourth, simply because the church in Jerusalem had elders who received the Antiochian love offering brought by Paul and Barnabas' for the needy saints in Jerusalem is not a definite indication that there were no deacons in the church there (Acts 11:29-30). This merely indicates that the church in Antioch was sending the offering in charge of Barnabas and Saul to be

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<sup>16</sup> Polhill suggests that the Acts 6 incident occurred perhaps five years or so after Pentecost, 178.

<sup>17</sup> Even the mention of elders in the already well established church in Ephesus in Acts 20:17 is no real indication of what the entire ecclesiastical structure of the Ephesian church consisted. All that can be said for certain from the Acts account is that the church had a body of elders, which is also confirmed in Paul's first letter to Timothy who was eventually sent to Ephesus well after Paul's Miletus visit (1 Timothy 1:5; 4:14). What is also abundantly clear from Paul's letter to Timothy while he was at Ephesus is that they did possess a body of deacons (1 Timothy 3:8-13).

received by the elders in Jerusalem. Are we to assume then that the need that was present in Acts 6 for the Apostles to have some to assist them in the distribution of funds and food to the needy was now not needed in Acts 11 for the elders? Acts 6 does not necessarily indicate the funds given to the church in Jerusalem were not *received* by the Apostles,<sup>18</sup> but it does describe that the *distribution* of such funds and support was handled by “the Seven.”

### **Parallels Between Acts 6 and Later Deacons**

Acts 6:1-6 can be seen as the demarcation of the beginning of what would eventually and officially be termed deacon ministry. First, there is a linguistic parallel. The key problem in Acts 6:1-6 is a *diakonia* (service) problem. The Hellenistic widows were not being served (6:1, *diakonia*). It was not agreeable to the apostle’s to forsake the word of God in order to serve (6:2, *diakonein*) tables, because the ministry (6:4, *diakonia*) of the Apostles would be devotion to prayer and the word. Acts 6:1-6 is fundamentally a passage about *diakonia* (service). As noted above, the term *diakonia* or *diakonos* can have a very broad range of ministry including physical service as well as the service of preaching and teaching. It clearly has both senses here. However, the focus of the passage is not upon the *diakonia* of preaching but upon the *diakonia* of serving the widows, because the Apostles needed assistance so as not to neglect the *diakonia* entrusted to them. The question remains then in the remaining two passages in the New Testament that directly refer to an official group of leaders who serve alongside the overseers (Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3:8-13), as to why they are called by this term (*diakonoi*)? When

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<sup>18</sup> Acts 4:37 indicates that the gifts given by the congregation to meet the needs of the needy were laid down at the Apostles’ feet. There is no reason to doubt that this was still the procedure in and after Acts 6. Acts 6 does not address the *reception* of gifts for the needy as much as it addresses the *distribution* of help to the needy.

this linguistic parallel is seen in light of the yet to be mentioned structural/functional and selection parallels, it becomes much more clear that Acts 6 is referring to a deacon body; unofficial as of yet in the development of the church, but nonetheless, an acting body of servants.

Second there is a structural and functional parallel that indicates that Acts 6:1-6 is referring to what would be later understood as an official body of deacons. Two groups are clearly denoted in the Acts 6 account: Apostles and the Seven. The Apostles stated that their functional role in the Church was their relationship to the ministry of the Word (6:2, 4). They did not want to be distracted from the hard work of preaching and teaching (1 Timothy 5:17),<sup>19</sup> by the very necessary work of caring for the needs of the widows. Therefore, the creation of a second group of leaders who would care for those ministries would keep the Apostles serving in their God ordained primary ministry. Thus, one group whose priority is preaching and teaching is described and so is another group whose priority is allowing the first group undistracted attention to their God-given priorities, especially in the area of hands on service to the saints. This writer suggests that the connection between the overseers and deacons mentioned in Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3:1-13 are clearly paralleled in this account. Few commentators fail to see the connection between the Apostles and the eventual role of pastors/overseers/elders.<sup>20</sup> The qualifications for overseers and elders revolve around their role in preaching and teaching (1 Timothy 3:2; 5:17; Titus 1:9), just as the Apostles indicated that

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<sup>19</sup> “Preaching is the most probable meaning of *the word of God*” Barrett, 311.

<sup>20</sup> I.e., MacArthur, *Acts*, draws a direct connection between the ministry of the Twelve and the current ministry of pastors, yet falls short of seeing any direct connection between the ministry of the Seven and the current ministry of deacons, 179.

such were their roles. The connection between the Twelve and pastors seems obvious. How, then can one miss the connection between the Seven and deacons? Why do some fail to admit a parallel role with the Seven yet admit such a parallel with the Twelve? Even if the Seven did not continue in the long run in their ministry (which is tenuous) and they were not an official precursor to deacons, the same could be argued concerning the Twelve; they obviously did not continue as the only ones in the church who possessed an official role of preaching and teaching. The connection between the Seven and deacons can be made linguistically and interestingly, the only two passages in the New Testament that mention the official role of deacons also both mention them in connection with overseers, the very ones who are argued to replace the Apostles as the official preachers and teachers in the church. Acts 6 is the only passage that clearly shows the future ministry relationship functionally between overseers and deacons. Just as pastors find their precursor in the early days of the church in the preaching and teaching role of the Twelve, so deacons find their precursor in the early day of the church in the serving roles of the Seven.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Cf., Strauch, 75, 76, “We cannot help but think that Acts 6 is meant to further clarify the identity of the New Testament diaconate. The overseer-elders mentioned in Paul’s letters and Acts correspond to the twelve apostles mentioned in Acts 6 in their position of pastoral oversight of the church, although the elders are not apostles. . . . As the overseer-elders correspond to the twelve apostles in Acts 6, the deacons of Paul’s letters correspond to the Seven in Jerusalem. . . .” Richard N. Longenecker, *Acts* in *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* Ed, Frank E. Gabelein [CD-ROM] (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997): “. . . the ministry to which the seven were appointed was functionally equivalent to what Paul covered in the title “deacon” (cf. 1 Timothy 3:8-13) – which is but to affirm the maxim that in the NT ‘ministry was a function long before it became an office.’” “It seems appropriate to think of these seven men as ‘deacons’ even though the name deacons had perhaps not yet come to be applied to them as they began this responsibility, for they seem to be given tasks which fit well with the responsibilities of deacons hinted at in 1 Timothy 3:8-12” Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) 919.

Third, there is a selection parallel. Just as the qualifications for deacons in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 are spiritual character qualifications, rather than functional qualifications or a job description, so are the qualifications for the Seven in Acts 6:1-6. These men were to be spiritually wise men, even though they were merely going to assist in the physical needs of the Hellenistic widows. The qualifications indicate that the Seven would be an official position – they had to meet high spiritual standards and would be working with the Apostles, actually carrying out and having charge over the very ministry it appears the Apostles themselves were previously handling (Acts 4:37). Only spiritually qualified men were to function in the role the Seven were appointed to, and only spiritually qualified men were to function in the role of servants found in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. Berkoff notes such a selection and qualification parallel in his theology: “The requirements for the office, as mentioned in Acts 6, are rather exacting, and in that respect agree with the demands mentioned in 1 Timothy 3:8-12, 12.”<sup>22</sup> The Linguistic, functional and selection parallels all give weight toward Acts 6:1-6 being the basis upon which the later developed official position of deacons was founded.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Louis Berkoff, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 586.

<sup>23</sup> Knight in his commentary on the Pastoral Epistles notes the conceptual and linguistic parallels between 1 Timothy 3 and Acts 6: “The early Jerusalem community presents not only a conceptual parallel but also linguistic parallels. . . . The linguistic connections with those who are in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 described with the noun *diakonoï* and the verb *diakonein* (used in a technical sense) is striking and is in accord with the division of labor in conceptual terms in Acts 6. These three passages [including Philippians 1:1] show, then, a twofold division of labor in early, middle, and later time periods in the NT church, in key cities in three various geographical areas (Palestine, Greece, and Asia Minor), and in both Jewish and Greco-Roman settings” *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 175.

## The Diaconal Ministry in Acts 6:1-6

Acts 6:1-6 provides the church with an originating account for the office of deacon. Its description is invaluable to see several aspects of diaconal ministry, especially in the issues of roles between pastors and deacons (the Twelve and the Seven), pastors and congregation (Twelve and the multitude), and deacons and congregation (the Seven and the multitude). The passage begins with the setting of an ever growing group of disciples and the emergence of a complaint arising from one segment of the burgeoning church, namely the Greek speaking Jews.<sup>24</sup> The language barrier between the Hellenistic Jews and the Hebrew Jews seems to have been causing an oversight to occur in meeting the needs of the Greek speaking widows in the Christian community. Luke expresses that the complaint was that an ongoing oversight was being felt by the Hellenistic widows and that the complaint was no mere contentless murmuring.<sup>25</sup> The widows were being neglected in the daily “service,” which may indicate that there was more involved than the mere handing out of food. It is possible that the term used here (*diakonia*) refers to a very broad sense of service and might have included monetary as well as

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<sup>24</sup> “Hellenist” probably refers only to a linguistic difference, rather than a cultural difference among the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem at the time. These were Jews who spoke Greek (as opposed to a more technical term indicating Jews who acted like Greeks) rather than Hebrew or Aramaic. Cf., Marshall, 125; Polhill, 175; F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*. New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 120; Longenecker, *Acts* in EBC, CD-ROM.

<sup>25</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 543-544, *paretheorounto* is a progressive imperfect, describing an action or state that is in progress in past time from the viewpoint of the speaker. Barrett, 309, indicates that the use of the indicative indicates that the Hellenist widows were in truth being overlooked; a mere unproven allegation would have been expressed in the optative.



food assistance.<sup>26</sup> This oversight may have been also related to the inability of the Twelve to be able to adequately administrate the daily service of the widows as well as their need to give themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word (6:2, 4). The church at this time may have numbered close to 20,000 people in Jerusalem, thus making the leadership and administrative needs enormous and obviously overwhelming.<sup>27</sup> The verb used in verse two translated “having left” in regard to the Apostle’s ministry in preaching, may actually indicate that they had already been experiencing the stress of overseeing the daily service and the daily constraint of trying to give themselves to preaching and teaching.<sup>28</sup> The ministry of the Word may have already been suffering due to the Apostles pressing demand of the urgent need of overseeing such a large group of people who had tremendous physical as well as spiritual needs. The relationship between the Apostles and the congregation should not be overlooked at this juncture. It was the Apostles who summoned the church together to discuss the matter of the widow’s need and it was the Apostles who suggested the plan to resolve the problem and stated the reasons behind why there was a need for a new group to assist them with this ministry. It is of note that the

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<sup>26</sup> The use of the phrase “to serve tables” in verse 2 was one that described not only the passing out of food, but the oversight of money. Barrett, 311, notes that the term was used to refer to a banker’s counter. Polhill concurs, 180. Polhill further notes a parallel between the Jewish system of serving their widows. “The church may have followed somewhat the precedents already set in contemporary Judaism, which had a double system of distribution to the needy. The Jews had a weekly dole for resident needy, called the quppah. It was given out every Friday and consisted of enough money for fourteen meals. There was also a daily distribution, known as the tamhuy. It was for nonresidents and transients and consisted of food and drink, which were delivered from house to house where known needy were dwelling” 180.

<sup>27</sup> MacArthur, *Acts*, 177.

<sup>28</sup> The verb is an Aorist Active Participle.

congregation submitted themselves to the direction provided by the Apostles in setting forth the specifics of the plan and it is equally of note that the congregation affirmed the plan, having judged it to be a prudent means of alleviating the pressing situation.<sup>29</sup> It was not the Apostles who chose the men who would serve, but it was the congregation who chose them. The text does not give any indication as to how the congregation went about selecting the seven who were to serve. Strauch notes:

When feeding massive numbers of people. . . our Lord quickly organized them into manageable groups ‘of hundreds and of fifties’ for orderly distribution (Mark 6:40). From its earliest days, the nation of Israel was organized into precisely defined, manageable groups for communication, war, service, and travel. . . So it is quite possible that the congregation in Jerusalem was already organized into similar manageable units. Such organization would enable issues to be decided and information to be passed along quickly (Acts 12:12, 17:15:4, 6, 22; 21:17, 18).<sup>30</sup>

It is interesting that only seven were chosen. This indicates that they were probably not the ones who physically did all of the hands on labor, but they were those who were chosen to oversee the entire affair of making sure the widows were cared for daily. They were the administrators and organizers for what would have entailed the work of more than seven men. The relationship between the Apostles and the Seven and the congregation is further defined as the Twelve instructed the congregation to choose the Seven and the Twelve would put them in charge of the administration of the widows’ care. Thus, the Twelve gave instruction concerning the plan and

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<sup>29</sup> The Greek phrase literally reads in verse 5, “And this pleased all of the multitude, in their judgment, and they chose. . .”

<sup>30</sup> Strauch, 37.

were the overseers of the Seven, putting them in charge of the administration. The congregation chose who they desired to serve in this capacity<sup>31</sup>, and the Seven had “charge” of the ministry.

Having chosen the seven men, the congregation brought them before the Twelve and the Twelve laid their hands on them, in a symbolic manner indicating that these seven were being set aside for a specific task. Of note is that the same term referred to above when the congregation affirmed the Apostles’ plan “in their judgment” is also used in verse six when the Seven were “put forward before (or in the judgment) of the Apostles . . .” It appears that the congregation chose the seven and the Twelve approved of this decision as well.

The following chart provides a summary of Acts 6:1-6 and the respective roles played by the Apostles, the congregation and the Seven in the determination, selection and function of the Seven.

<i>The Twelve</i>	<i>The Congregation</i>	<i>The Seven</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Summoned the Congregation (v 2)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Brought the complaint to the attention of the Apostles (v 1)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Were in charge of the task (v 3)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proposed the Plan ( vv 2-4)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Chose the Seven (vv 3, 5)</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Put the Seven in charge of the task (v 3)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Affirmed through their judgment the Apostle’s plan (v 5)</li> </ul>	

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<sup>31</sup> Polhill notes, “It is important to note that the congregation made the selection. The apostles assumed the leadership in making the proposal, but they left final approval of the plan and selection of the seven to congregational decision” 181.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Affirmed the congregation's choice of the seven through the laying on of hands (v 6)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Put the Seven forward for the judgment of the Apostles (v 6)</li> </ul>	
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A good illustration is made here for the manner in which pastors, congregations and deacons should therefore work together in the selection and affirmation of deacons. From this pattern in Acts, it seems wise that the principle of pastoral leadership in proposing a plan that could be affirmed by the congregation, which allowed the congregation to choose those who would serve them, and which allowed the pastors to affirm the congregation's choice, brings the illustration of Acts 6:1-6 to modern application. Such a plan also allows for total unity between the pastoral leadership and the congregation in who is chosen and how they will serve. What must also be noted in application of Acts 6 is that the primary reason there was a need for deacons was not merely to handle the temporal and non-spiritual needs<sup>32</sup> of the congregation, but to assist those who had the God-given responsibility of preaching and teaching so they could give their greatest efforts to that which God had gifted and called them to do. Thus, deacons should be those who assist the pastors in helping to care for the flock of God, handling and being in charge of those areas of the ministry which would keep pastors from giving their primary

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<sup>32</sup> I.e., W.B. Johnson, "A Church of Christ, with Her Offices, Laws, Duties, and Form of Government." Sermon delivered on September 22, 1844 at Gilead Meeting House, Union Distric, South Carolina, 15. W. B. Johnson, "The Deacons or Servants of a Church of Christ" *The Gospel Developed*, 92-99. Cf., also, R. B. C. Howell, *The Deaconship Its Nature, Qualifications, Relations and Duties* (Piladelphia: Judson, 1847).

attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.<sup>33</sup> Obviously, this view allows for a very broad range of activity and functions for those who serve as deacons. Interestingly enough, Acts 6:1-6 is the only passage that discusses to any degree what the function of the deacons was to be, and here it is very broad: to assist the pastors in order to allow them to maintain the priority of praying for the flock and overseeing the ministry of God's Word to the flock. In Jerusalem, as the record shows in Acts 6, the pressing need of the moment surrounded the support of the Hellenistic widows. It is the view of this paper that benevolence ministry was not the primary focus for the formation of diaconal servants, but rather, helping those whose charge it was to pray and minister the word keep their priorities intact.<sup>34</sup> It would behoove current deacon bodies, congregations and pastoral leadership to dialogue upon the pressing needs of an individual church and specifically determine how deacons might best work along side pastors in meeting those needs, along with a continual evaluation of existing and emerging needs.

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<sup>33</sup> This is not to suggest that pastors should lock themselves in their offices having no personal contact with the flock or give any time to temporal or personal issues among the flock of God's people. Certainly they are to shepherd the flock of God among them (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1 ff). However, their primary means of shepherding the flock is through preaching and teaching God's Word. When administrative or the constant personal needs of the flock begin to pull pastors from prayer and teaching, both pastor and flock suffer.

<sup>34</sup> Strauch contends that deacon ministry is not so broad, but more limited to the areas of administering mercy and benevolence. He views Acts 6 as limiting deacon ministry to benevolent service rather than merely freeing pastors in general to prayer and preaching. While this writer believes that benevolence and services of mercy and congregational care may be included in diaconal ministry, such ministry is not Scripturally limited to that.

## Philippians 1:1

### Objections and Answers

Outside of 1 Timothy 3, Philippians 1:1 is the only passage in the New Testament that specifically mentions an official group known as “deacons.” MacArthur takes issues with the view that the office or position of “deacons” is spoken of in this passage, stating:

The word here could refer to officers in the church, but the context does not seem to warrant such an interpretation. . . . The most natural interpretation of this verse is that Paul was addressing his letter to the whole church. . . . including the leadership and those who serve. To say that Philippians 1:1 refers to the office of deacons might be correct, but it is an arbitrary choice. There is not enough evidence to be dogmatic about what Paul is saying.<sup>35</sup>

It is true that Paul is addressing his letter to the entire church in the city of Philippi. Paul states, “to all the saints in Christ Jesus, those who are in Philippi . . .”<sup>36</sup> It is further agreed that the following phrase, “with the overseers and deacons,” is not viewed as those outside the church but within. However, this writer finds several reasons why “overseers and deacons” both refer to official leadership positions within the church in Philippi.

First, the term translated “overseer” is used three other times in the New Testament to refer to those within the church who were official leaders (Acts 20:28; 1 Timothy 3:1, 2; Titus 1:7). In one of these passages (Titus 1:5-7) these leaders are also called by the synonymous term

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<sup>35</sup> MacArthur, *The Master’s Plan for the Church*, 206.

<sup>36</sup> The translation of this verse is the author’s own unless otherwise noted.

“elder.”<sup>37</sup> Elders and overseers, in the sense of New Testament leadership, appear to be two titles to refer to one and the same position.

Second, it is significant that the only other place where “overseers” and “deacons” are addressed together is in a passage describing church leadership (1 Timothy 3:1-13). The two terms mentioned in Philippians 1:1 are connected by the conjunction “and” (*kai*) and fall under the one preposition “with” (*sun*), indicating some sort of close relationship. Nothing in the context points toward a general, non-leadership understanding of the term “deacon” in Philippians 1:1. Furthermore, why would Paul address the church in general, the leadership in specific (“overseers”) and then a nebulous group of general people “who serve?” A clearer understanding of the passage is to understand the phrase as describing Paul’s intention to write to the entire congregation in Philippi along with the overseers (elders, pastors) and deacons.

### **Diaconal Ministry in Philippians 1:1**

Philippians 1:1, though only briefly mentioning deacons, does provide several interesting points to be considered concerning the relationship of deacons to overseers (pastors, elders). First, building upon what has been noted above, both of the terms mentioned here are leadership terms. Deacons are viewed alongside pastoral leadership. They are addressed together as they

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<sup>37</sup> Contra, MacArthur, *The Master’s Plan for the Church*, “The word translated “overseers” . . . is not the word normally used to identify elders. . . .” 206. MacArthur tends to see this reference in Philippians 1:1 as a reference to general leadership as opposed to those known as elders. However, Titus 1:5-7, seems to indicate that elders and overseers were the same position of leadership (see also Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Peter 5:1-2). Interestingly, MacArthur states earlier in his book in a specific discussion concerning “elders,” that Philippians 1:1 and the reference to “overseers” was an argument for a plurality of “elders.” “The Norm in the New Testament was a plurality of elders. Nowhere in the New Testament is there reference to a one-pastor congregation. That is not to say there were none, but none are mentioned. It is significant

also are in 1 Timothy 3:1-13. Clearly, Paul did not view the position of deacon as an insignificant position, relegated to obscurity or mere subordination to pastors. Both positions are equally leadership positions. As was noted in the discussion of Acts 6, the precursors to deacons were described as those who worked along side the precursors to pastors in helping and assisting them in the ministry to the flock in an officially recognized and set-aside capacity. Modern efforts to dismiss the position of deacons or give little attention to the position because of past abuses or because the position of pastor is overly exalted, do not acknowledge what Paul acknowledges both here in Philippians as well as in 1 Timothy 3 (not to mention Luke's description in Acts 6).<sup>38</sup>

Second, Paul describes both leadership groups in a unique relationship to the congregation of saints in Philippi. Paul uses a preposition "with" (*sun*), to indicate that the leadership was in direct association with and directly accompanied the congregation.<sup>39</sup> Fee's comments here are helpful:

The language used for this addition, "together w/along with," is the sure give away as to the role of leadership in the Pauline churches. The community as a whole is addressed, and in most cases therefore the 'overseers and deacons' are simply reckoned as being within the community. When they are singled out, as here, the leaders are not

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that Paul addressed his epistle to the Philippians 'to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers [pl., *episkopoi*] and deacons' (1:1)" 195.

<sup>38</sup> This understanding of deacons as being a clearly defined leadership position in the church should not be construed as endorsing Gordon Fee's position that the term "elder," in the New Testament referred to both overseers and deacons (Cf., *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus* New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1988) 78. Fee makes a Scripturally indefensible claim at this juncture. The case can be made for a view that understands overseers and elders to be one and the same group (Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5-7 and 1 Peter 5:1-2) but deacons are nowhere in the New Testament linked synonymously with "elders."

<sup>39</sup> Wallace, 382.



‘over’ the church, but are addressed ‘alongside of’ the church, as a *distinguishable* part of the whole, but as *part of the whole*, not above or outside it.<sup>40</sup> Leadership must in fact lead and the congregation is certainly called to submit under the guidance and care given by those God has place in positions of shepherding (1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13; Hebrews 13:17), yet, Peter’s admonition to such leaders is that they are not to view themselves as the flock’s lords, but as the flock’s example (1 Peter 5:1-4). Leadership, pastors and deacons alike, are to understand that their position and responsibility is to work along with the congregation.

Third, Philippians 1:1 gives a good indication through the titles used for leadership what the functions of leadership were. Paul addresses those who were to “oversee” and those who were “to serve.” The titles reflect the function. Deacons are not described as “overseers” in the New Testament in the sense that they are to oversee the entire ministry and manage the affairs of the church – such a role is designated in Scripture for pastors (overseers, elders – cf., 1 Timothy 3:5; 5:17; 1 Peter 5:2, Acts 20:28). This is not to suggest that deacons do not oversee certain aspects of church ministry. The Twelve gave the Seven “charge over” the ministry of overseeing the needs of the Hellenistic widows (Acts 6:3). Yet, deacons are not called to be general overseers, but more likely, specific overseers. Likewise, pastors are not to neglect the spiritual care and needs of the congregation, delegating all such care to deacons, while giving themselves exclusively to Bible study and prayer. James 5:14 indicates that the elders of the church (pastors, overseers) should be called upon for prayer by those who are suffering severe illness, possibly as a result of sin (James 5:13-18). The writer of Hebrews also indicates that such leaders must give

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<sup>40</sup> 67. One might also add, leadership is not only not above or outside, but also they are not ‘under’ the congregation.

an account to God for the souls of those under their oversight (cf., also 13:17). Overseers are to provide general oversight of the affairs of the church (1 Timothy 5:17) and deacons are to render specific service to the church, as their titles reflect.<sup>41</sup> Clearly their titles are distinct from one another, thus, their duties are also to be distinct. Deacons are not to assume the functions of pastors and pastors should not assume the functions of deacons; otherwise, how could pastors then give proper attention to prayer and the ministry of the word or deacons give proper attention to their ministry of service?

A fourth noteworthy aspect from the mention of overseers and deacons in Philippians 1:1 is that overseers and deacons are viewed as somewhat of a leadership team. It is interesting that wherever deacons are mentioned in an official capacity, overseers are as well. When mentioned together they are viewed as a complimentary team of leaders. How unfortunate are the multiplied stories and jokes about rifts and divisions between deacons and pastors, especially when Scripture speaks of them as a unified group who serve with the congregation.

Pastors and deacons work with the flock of God to provide both spiritual and physical oversight for the flock. Neither is exclusively “spiritual” with the other being exclusively “temporal.” One focuses upon teaching more than the other, yet both are to work together in order to be aware of and give specific attention to both the physical and spiritual needs of the flock God has called them to serve.

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<sup>41</sup> Fee, 69 “. . . the overseers are probably those who give general oversight to the congregation while the ‘deacons’ are distinguished by their actual deeds of service.”

### **1 Timothy 3:8-13**

The final New Testament passage directly addressing the role and function of deacons is found in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. The context of the passage lists the office of deacon along with the office of overseers. As Fee notes, “To designate these men as deacons as over against overseers does not imply that they were not ‘leaders’ as well.”<sup>42</sup> The overarching emphasis of 1 Timothy 3 is the qualifications needed for those who should serve as overseers and deacons. The qualities are character based rather than functional.<sup>43</sup> These qualifications bear directly upon the subject of the basis of a church’s selection of their leaders.

While it is not the intention of this paper to make light of the character qualifications listed in 1 Timothy 3:8-13, this writer has chosen to give attention to the treatment of two specific issues brought up in the passage. These issues include the testing of deacons in verse ten and the subject of “wives/women” in verse 11.

Verse ten, as translated in the New American Standard Bible, states, “And let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach.” Of note is the fact that Paul indicates that deacons are to be tested “also.” By including the “also” Paul had in mind another group who was tested in addition to the deacons. In the context, this no doubt refers to the overseers mentioned in verses one through seven. Therefore, there is to be a period or manner of testing the character of those who desire to serve in positions of either pastoral or diaconal leadership. What is not clear from the 1 Timothy 3 account is *who* is to do the testing;

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<sup>42</sup> Fee, 1 Timothy, 86.

however Acts 6:1-6 gives a good pattern. In Acts, the Twelve asked the congregation to choose the qualified men who would serve, thus, indicating that the congregation was found sufficient to determine who among them fit the qualifications called for by the Twelve. As stated above, it was the Twelve also approved of the seven men who were chosen by the congregation (6:6). It appears from this foundational example that the testing was two-fold: both the congregation and the leadership examined those chosen to serve.

There is another noteworthy point concerning this testing of those who would be deacons (and overseers for that matter). The words translated, “let these . . . be tested,” and “let them serve as deacons,” in the New American Standard Version (NASB), are both commands in the Greek language. Greek grammarian Daniel B. Wallace notes that the particular construction used here indicates a stronger force than is expressed in the NASB. He notes, “The Greek is stronger than a mere option, engaging the volition and placing a requirement on the individual.”<sup>44</sup> The first verb “let them . . . be tested” is therefore a command indicating that they *must* be tested by someone outside themselves.<sup>45</sup> The second verb is also a command and also has a greater force to it than is represented in the NASB translation. Thus, deacons must be tested, and if found to be blameless, then they have a degree of obligation placed upon them to serve as deacons. It is as if the congregation has sought out those who are qualified and gifted to

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<sup>43</sup> The only functional qualification in 1 Timothy 3:1-13 is in regard to overseers in that they should be able to teach (3:2), which marks a primary distinction between pastors and deacons.

<sup>44</sup> 486, n. 97.

<sup>45</sup> *Dokimazesthosan* is a present passive imperative, third person plural from *dokimazo* (to test, approve).

serve and such men have also been tested by the present pastoral leadership as well and thus such men should submit themselves to serve the body as servants of the church unless some compelling reason exists as to why they should not. Naylor noted this as well when he stated, “In the matter of deacon selection . . . a man does not determine for himself that he is deacon material. He is not the one who decides that he is capable as anyone else of serving as a deacon. It does not work that way. The New Testament pattern is that a church will make its selection of deacons at the time of need and according to the number needed.”<sup>46</sup> The means<sup>47</sup> by which a deacon may serve is described by Paul as that of being found blameless in his character. This does not mean that he is to be perfect, but is to possess such a character that no significant or accurate charge could be brought against him that his character contradicts that which is listed by the Apostle in verse 8-13. If such a man is found, he should then give himself to service because of his character. We are reminded here that the qualifications to serve in leadership are not based upon personality, social status, financial status, or secular skills. Just because a man is an effective leader in his society does not necessarily mean that he will be a spiritually successful leader in God’s church. No qualifications for a man who serves in the position of a deacon should go beyond or suppress those specifically given by the Holy Spirit through the pen of the Apostle Paul. Serving as a deacon is to be done by those who are qualified and those who are compelled.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> 34.

<sup>47</sup> The present participle *ontes* is taken here to be a circumstantial participle of means. Cf., Wallace, 625, 628-629.

<sup>48</sup> This also presupposes that a local church is providing an adequate means of discipling and equipping its members to be godly people who could potentially be chosen to serve. It also

Perhaps the most debated and difficult area to interpret in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 is verse eleven and the discussion concerning whether women in general are discussed or wives. It must be noted from the beginning that there is no easy answer and church history from even its early stages has seen all the various views held.<sup>49</sup> The problem lies within the fact that the term translated “women” (NASB) can also be translated “wives” (KJV, NIV). Greek does not use a distinct word for wives as opposed to women; the context must help one to determine which the author of the passage intended. Knight proposes four prominent viewpoints as to how this has been viewed throughout church history. These four views include:

- Women who are part of the deacon body – i.e., women deacons.
- A distinct group of leaders from that of Overseers and Deacons known as “Deaconesses”
- Female assistants to the deacons.
- Wives of deacons.<sup>50</sup>

Arguments for the first view are significant. The use of the word, “likewise” is used in the chapter to denote discussions of new groups of individuals (3:8). Also, the normal manner for Paul to indicate that he is speaking about a wife in contrast to a woman in general is to provide a possessive pronoun so that the phrase would read, “their *own* wife/wives,” or “your wife,” which

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presupposes that a man would be adequately equipped by those God had given to the church for equipping the saints for the work of ministry (Ephesians 4:11-12). One who is compelled by his character and his congregation to serve as a deacon must also be one who is equipped to do so as well.

<sup>49</sup> Dewese, 15, 16.

<sup>50</sup> 170-172.

he does not do here (cf., Colossians 3:19; Ephesians 5:25). However, the term likewise, while admittedly marking a change in the discussion, does not demand that one see that the verse refer to another leader, but merely that Paul is making a distinction between the deacons he is addressing in verses 8-10, 12-13. “Likewise,” does not indicate another leadership position in 2:9, which is closely connected to the present context. Also, Paul does not have to use a personal qualifier to mean “wife” (3:2, 12; 5:9; Titus 1:6).

There are more definitive reasons to believe that Paul is making reference here to wives of deacons rather than any of the other three options mentioned above. Most significantly is where Paul places the discussion of “wives/women” in the discussion of the qualifications of deacons. It is sandwiched in between a discussion clearly discussing deacons who are male (3:12). Women are not referred to in this section as deaconesses (although a feminine term could have been used to describe them as such). As Strauch notes, “The first recorded instance of the Greek word *diakonissa*, appears to be in the nineteenth canon of the First Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325).”<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, if Paul is singling out women deacons in verse 11, why does he use the ambiguous general word *gunaikas* and not *diakonoi* with the feminine article – *tas diakonous*?<sup>52</sup> The placement of verse 11 in regard to wives/women in between the discussion of male deacons also suggests that verse eleven is another mark of a character qualification necessary for those who would serve as deacons. Why would this be so, in light of the fact that

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<sup>51</sup> Alexander Strauch, “Women Deacons, Deacons’ Assistants, or Wives of Deacons?” *EmJ* Vol 1:3 (Fall 1992), 199.

<sup>52</sup> Strauch, “Women Deacons,” 200.

the wives of the overseers are not mentioned in the discussion of their qualifications (vv 1-7)? Deacons are those who provide much more of the “hands-on” and applicational aspects of the ministry. Their wives would no doubt be directly involved in the actual serving aspects of their functions as deacons, whereas, Paul has already stated earlier in 1 Timothy 2:9-15, that women were not allowed to engage in the public teaching ministry which is the chief characteristic of those who serve as overseers.<sup>53</sup> In other words, an overseer’s wife would not directly involve herself in the public teaching ministry of her husband, in the sense that she also would be teaching with him, whereas, Paul seems to indicate that the deacon’s wife should be and would be directly engaged in the service aspect of the ministry with him. Also of note is the fact that if verse eleven referred to women deacons, why is there no mention of her need to be a one-man-kind of woman, just as the overseers and deacons were to be one-woman-kind of men (3:2, 12). Paul uses a similar qualification for widows who were to be supported by the church (5:9). Clearly Paul makes marital fidelity a qualification for anyone who would hold any form of official position in the church; why then not for women if they can serve as deacons. Since this very qualification of being a one-woman-kind of man is mentioned concerning male deacons just after verse 11, it seems inappropriate to assume that it would not equally be necessary for those who would serve as women deacons, if that is what Paul had in mind. It seems best therefore to understand verse 11 as a description of the wives of deacons rather than women deacons.

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<sup>53</sup> Robert M. Lewis, “The ‘Women’ of 1 Timothy 3:11,” *BibSac* v 136 # 542 (April 79), 169.



Paul concludes his comments concerning deacons in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 by stating that “those who serve well as deacons”<sup>54</sup> are those who will acquire for themselves a good standing and a tremendous confidence in regard to the Christian faith found in Christ alone. The position of deacons is valued highly by Paul and should also be so valued among the community of faith.

### CONCLUSION

While this paper does not consider every question that could be raised concerning deacon ministry, it is hoped by this author, that what has been presented here provides accurate and adequate help in determining the biblical framework from which a local church’s deacon ministry must flow. It is not enough to simply affirm that the Bible speaks about deacons and then produce one’s own program for deacon selection and ministry. Every church’s deacon ministry should reflect the priorities and principles set forth in what Scripture does state concerning such a ministry. Ministries that do not develop and promote and give adequate attention to the role of deacon leadership do an injustice not merely to the position, but to the Word of God that describes the necessity of the position.

As a point of review and as a conclusion to the present discussion, I will suggest a proposed general plan that I believe would reflect the overall biblical parameters for deacon selection and ministry.

1. A local church should determine the specific needs within its ministry that require the work of deacons, so as to assist the pastors and ensure that they are able to give adequate time and attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word.

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<sup>54</sup> This is one word in the Greek (διακονήσαντες).

2. A local church should then determine the areas of ministry that the diaconate will have charge over. This should be clearly stated so that the congregation, the pastors, and the deacons all understand what the responsibilities will be. Again, Scripture is very general when referencing the specific functions of deacons, allowing each unique ministry to develop servant leaders in accordance to the specific needs among them.
3. A local church could then determine how exactly the deacons would go about fulfilling the needs and responsibilities determined among them. A specific but flexible plan should be devised that can change as the ministry changes and gives clear direction to each deacon.
4. The number of deacons should be determined. How many deacons will it take to accomplish all that is needed by the particular ministry demands and how many are qualified to meet such a demand?
5. A plan should be proposed to the congregation as well as a reminder from the Pastor as to the specific qualifications set forth in Scripture in regard to deacons. The plan should clearly communicate the goals and tasks of deacon ministry, with special emphasis placed upon what God's Word says qualifies one to serve in this capacity.
6. The congregation should then be allowed to choose those who they desire to serve them as deacons – those they believe not only will be capable of fulfilling the plan proposed, but those who are viewed to fulfill the biblical qualifications.
7. The Pastor(s) of the church should examine the men chosen and train them as needed. The pastor(s) should also publicly affirm those the congregation has brought forth to serve as deacons.

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