

Setting the Church in Order: Deacons 7-7-13

There are two commands that Paul gives evangelists Timothy and Titus regarding the appointment of Elders and Deacons:

Titus 1:5 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you
I Timothy 3:14-15a These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God...

These two statements have something in common: they both suggest that a church needs elders AND deacons in order to be “in order”, or to have worth “conduct” in the house of God. This is not really a surprising statement; we are told that the church was given specific offices in order to prepare the church of the works it is given (Ephesians 4:11-13, I Corinthians 12:14-22). Simply put, from these passages we should conclude that to be in order, ALL of the parts are needed.

The word “Diakonos” is mentioned 29 times in the New Testament. Mostly it is used to describe those who minister or serve (the literal meaning of the word), but there are two times where it is used to describe that specific office we have come to associate it with: Philippians 1:1, I Timothy 3:8. The latter passages gives us a series of qualifications necessary for one who is to do this work. Uniquely, it also gives the qualifications his wife must meet (not to say that there is no implicit qualification to an elder’s wife; however, this is the only explicit list).

Deacons	Wife of a Deacon
Reverent/grave	Reverent
Not double-tongued	Not slanderers
Not given to much wine	Temperate
Not greedy for money	Faithful in all things
Tested	
Blameless	
Husbands of one wife	
Ruling their children & homes	

These qualifications are actually qualities expected from any Christian,

Deacons	ALL Christians
Reverent/grave	Titus 2:2
Not double-tongued	Colossians 3:8-9
Not given to much wine	Ephesians 5:18
Not greedy for money	Hebrews 13:5
Tested	James 1:3
Blameless	I Timothy 5:7
Husbands of one wife	I Corinthian 7:2
Ruling their children & homes	Titus 3:8

Perhaps the most mysterious of these qualifications, not listed here, is this: "...holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience". What is the "Mystery"? Just a few verses later Paul defines the Mystery (I Timothy 3:16). However, it may not be that entire list that is being mentioned here, but one point, that is, the point hi-lighted in Ephesians 3:4-6. There the mystery is identified with the presence of Gentiles in the church. Let us consider why that may be the main point of this quality.

In Acts 6 we meet the first "deacons". They were truly not deacons as we are considering them, since they had difference qualifications and purposes. However, they are very much like deacons in that they were qualified to serve the church like a deacon. The important point to consider is that in the moment they were called, there was a division in the church over impartiality. It was necessary that these men handle a situation that was not merely logistical, but spiritual.

We must consider that these first deacons were fundamentally peacekeepers. They were commissioned to ensure that the body was not divided, but that in the sake of practical things, they were impartial.

From this example, and from the command to hold to the mystery, we can see that one major aspect of the purpose of a deacon is that of a peacekeeper. To ensure the church functions properly requires great spiritual depth and a great love of the brethren.