

## What are deacons?

If elders are the only church leaders, what are we to make of deacons, who are clearly church officers subject to similar qualifications?

Deacons do not have any spiritual authority in church meetings; they are not like elders who are responsible as fathers or as shepherds to the flock. In the secular world the word deacon (Greek: *diakonos*) referred to a servant; in Matt 22:13 the word 'servants' is *diakonos*. The original root word meant to run an errand and the etymology suggested raising dust by hastening. *Diakonos* means someone who executes the commands of others, a servant, attendant, a waiter.

In the general secular sense of 'servants', all God's people are deacons and sometimes preachers have this word applied to them ('ministers' 1 Cor 3:5; 2 Cor 3:6). However, in the technical ecclesiastical sense it refers to a particular church officer who serves the local body. Phil 1:1 refers to both church officers, elders (bishops) and deacons in Philippi. 1 Tim 3:8ff explains the qualifications for being one.

Although the term is not used in Acts 6:1-6, the principle of the office is explained there. Certain administrative needs had arisen in the Jerusalem church and the apostles were guided to seek a group of men to take the administrative pressure off the spiritual leaders. The qualifications they insisted upon were significant spiritual and moral demands, '**seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business**' (v3). The selection was made by consensus in the body and approved by the apostles. The result of this was that the Gospel spread since preaching was not restricted by administration of needs (v7).

It is an ironic tragedy that in some supposedly UK Reformed churches there are no elders yet deacons rule the church with a rod of iron. Those who are supposed to be servants and waiters then become tyrants. However, it is another tragedy when elders are restricted from praying and teaching because they have to run around doing errands and sorting out practical problems.

God has shown us that both the spiritual and practical needs of the local church need to be properly administered and catered for. Elders govern the first while deacons perform the second.

Scripture quotations are from The New King James Version  
© Thomas Nelson 1982

**Paul Fahy Copyright © 2015**  
Understanding Ministries

## What are deacons?

If elders are the only church leaders, what are we to make of deacons, who are clearly church officers subject to similar qualifications?

Deacons do not have any spiritual authority in church meetings; they are not like elders who are responsible as fathers or as shepherds to the flock. In the secular world the word deacon (Greek: *diakonos*) referred to a servant; in Matt 22:13 the word 'servants' is *diakonos*. The original root word meant to run an errand and the etymology suggested raising dust by hastening. *Diakonos* means someone who executes the commands of others, a servant, attendant, a waiter.

In the general secular sense of 'servants', all God's people are deacons and sometimes preachers have this word applied to them ('ministers' 1 Cor 3:5; 2 Cor 3:6). However, in the technical ecclesiastical sense it refers to a particular church officer who serves the local body. Phil 1:1 refers to both church officers, elders (bishops) and deacons in Philippi. 1 Tim 3:8ff explains the qualifications for being one.

Although the term is not used in Acts 6:1-6, the principle of the office is explained there. Certain administrative needs had arisen in the Jerusalem church and the apostles were guided to seek a group of men to take the administrative pressure off the spiritual leaders. The qualifications they insisted upon were significant spiritual and moral demands, '**seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business**' (v3). The selection was made by consensus in the body and approved by the apostles. The result of this was that the Gospel spread since preaching was not restricted by administration of needs (v7).

It is an ironic tragedy that in some supposedly UK Reformed churches there are no elders yet deacons rule the church with a rod of iron. Those who are supposed to be servants and waiters then become tyrants. However, it is another tragedy when elders are restricted from praying and teaching because they have to run around doing errands and sorting out practical problems.

God has shown us that both the spiritual and practical needs of the local church need to be properly administered and catered for. Elders govern the first while deacons perform the second.

Scripture quotations are from The New King James Version  
© Thomas Nelson 1982

**Paul Fahy Copyright © 2015**  
Understanding Ministries