

What does a Deacon do?

By Craig M White

Version 3.0

- What is a deacon?
- How should they be appointed?
- Are their primary duties to give sermonettes and organise socials?
- Or is it to serve the underprivileged, sacrificing their time and resources for others?
- What should be done if someone fills the role of deacon but does not fulfill it?

“RIGHT FEARS NO FIGHT!”

Why? Because you immediately have the upper hand, the opposition will inevitably be defeated – no matter how long it takes. Victory is inevitable.

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The purpose and desire are to foster Biblical, historical and related studies that strengthen the Church of God's message & mission and provides further support to its traditional doctrinal positions.

Related Bible Studies

- *Bible Study Note: Meaning of Ecclesiastes 5:1*
- *Christians helping each other*
- *Comparing Offices in the Synagogue and the Church (chart)*
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- *They have their Reward*
- *Was Peter the Leading Apostle?*
- *What is Justice?*
- *What is Sound Doctrine?*
- *Youth and their elders*

Background

By way of background, Church structure has always interested me, and it didn't take long to see (in my teens) that there were similarities between the synagogue structure of the first century and that of the Church.

I recall talking about this with a Worldwide Church of God minister in late 1973 or early 1974 but with little in answers. I still recall thinking that James was the Church leader – he explained that it was Peter after which I undertook my own studies which confirmed his view.

Anyhow, over the decades I devoured many articles on the subject and have a box full of them plus electronic folders. One of the most eye-opening books is *From Synagogue to Church* by James Burtchaell which I stumbled across at the University of Sydney library in the early or mid-1990s.

The positions of pastors, elders, deacons, teachers, Matt 18:15-20 practice, appointment of elders by a body or council of elders (ITim 4:14) etc were similar to that of the synagogue. After all, the early church met in the synagogue and after being thrown out were forced to meet in homes or halls.

Helpful works include *40 Questions about Elders and Deacons* by B L Merkle and *Biblical Eldership* by A Strauss. The former, alas, does not see how the New Testament Church's structure was very similar to that of the Synagogue in the first century. Nevertheless, the author has a lot of worthwhile information.¹

NB: this article is not referring to current deacons and deaconesses. Rather, the author is concerned how some propel themselves or are appointed when they are not appropriate – many at grassroots know.

Whom should not be chosen?

When this article was first published, it had the title, *So you want to be a Deacon?*

This was because it reflected the content of the article which portrayed concern that some wish to propel themselves into positions. However, the Bible reveals that the role of a deacon is a very serious position with duties critical to the health of the local Church. Such a one must be non-political.

There are those that desire ordination as a deacon as a stepping-stone up the ranks. I have seen that attitude of wanting to 'get ahead' which leads to the spirit of competition, trampling over others and crawling to ministers for this purpose.

¹ One which has a lot of research but cannot see the connection to the synagogue is *The Original Bishops* by A C Stewart.

Unfortunately you will find friends having their friends ordained. Cronyism and nepotism do happen and results in the wrong people being ordained. They serve and help all their friends and family while ignoring and denigrating (in fact, even slandering) all those they imagine as “threats” or rivals. Normally this is just their jealousy playing out. Or paranoia of the other person’s capacity and ability.

In one case, a man ‘made himself available’ for ordination in a Church. When he could see that he was not getting anywhere, attacked the minister and joined another church. After fighting with the minister in that church he joined another and the situation was the same, if not worse, by instigating all sorts of upheavals. Then he went to another and another until he finally was ordained – but only after impressing the minister with ‘wining and dining.’ He extolled attitudes of jealousy toward other members that were involved with trying to use their gifts and talents, attacking them and blocking them for many years.

It is clear that he was the wrong choice and is nice to those who he wants to be nice to; and nasty toward those he is jealous of, attempting to keep them from opportunities.

As far as the ministry knew, he was a nice guy.

Many years ago I lived in England. In the local congregation there was great rivalry between two men aching for ordination. The spirit of competition led to one going behind the back of the other to denounce him and even slander him. It was disgraceful, but as a young man I found that unwarranted but could do nothing about it. But I took careful note and watch for these sorts of goings on.

There is much more that could be written exposing these disgraceful behaviours (Eph 5:11).

If someone has a record of cliquishness, dirty talk, drinking too much, doing some business on the Sabbath, texting friends during services, going for a walk around the building instead of properly attending services, being rude and abusive toward people not in their clique and not supporting or believing many doctrines of the Church, should they be ordained as deacons?

Perhaps they should try for another church – but will they change and suddenly – hey presto! – after ordination they suddenly become nice toward everyone?

Note I Tim 3:8-10:

“Deacons likewise must be dignified, **not double-tongued**, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain.

They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.

And let them also **be tested first**; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless.”

Note: to be ordained as deacons, they must have the following characteristics as a minimum:

1. **dignified** - or do they slander people and nasty to them to their faces with all sorts of horrible and jealous remarks. Even very nasty and cutting remarks to their faces! Do they partake of and/or lead cliques? Are they negative 'influencers' or ring-leaders?
2. **are they double-tongued** – ie not to be inconsistent in speech or two-faced. Or saying one thing to deceive people but doing another. It is also know as being 'subtle.' Being under-handed is hardly Christian
3. **not greedy for dishonest gain** - eg doing business on the Sabbath
4. **hold the mystery of the faith** – which includes doctrinal integrity. I find it amazing that they do not believe in many doctrines, but keep that from the ministry.

If they have a negative track record of the above, they should not be ordained. But somehow, through 'wining and dining' or through subtlety.

Keep such out of the deaconships and possible future ministry! For all they will do is perpetuate the creeping political correctness that is flowing into the Churches of God and selfishness.

Like sleeper cells, they hide these alternative views to enable themselves to be ordained. Once ordained, they gradually slip in these views, protected by their pals.

The outcome is apostasy or a variation of it.

Or should the following be considered/undertaken prior to ordination?

1. members be alerted to whom they are considering for deaconship;
2. ask for feedback in a formal way (eg forms, open analysis, appeal process);
3. they are properly investigated for doctrine;
4. they are properly investigated for character and behaviour – not from their relatives and friends but by others affected by them over time.

How are deacons chosen?

The Scriptures show that a methodology be practiced. Let us review ITim 3:10 again:

“And let them [prospective deacons] also **be tested first**; then let them serve as deacons **if they prove themselves blameless.**” (ITim 3:10) See also IThess 5:21; IJohn 4:1 lest we have a Jer 12:10 type situation!

How do you test them prior to ordination? One way is to ask the members who are NOT related or personal friends or in their clique/inner circle. It is a no brainer! As well as give them serious jobs of service to do and see if they consistently fulfill them. Not sermonettes or Bible studies or the arrangement of a few socials (anyone can do these very easily). Instead serving and sacrificing for those in need such as those a bit different, the elderly and disabled. Some organise events to 'get the vote' so to speak. After their appointment, isn't it just amazing how they no longer perform those sorts of services?

Note: Friends and relatives are not supposed to test them! Or be asked if such-and-such should be ordained.

UCG's paper *Godly Governance* states:

"The account of Acts 6 is a striking parallel to what Moses did with Israel. In Deuteronomy 1:13, recounting the events of Exodus 18, he said, "Choose wise, understanding and knowledgeable men from among your tribes, and I will make them heads over you." In both the Old and New Testament we see a **collaborative process in which the "laity" had a major preliminary role in nominating people for certain positions, but the final decision rested with the appointed leader or leaders.**

The entire process in Acts 6 blended the principles of consensus, gaining input from the brethren, then sanctioning their input by the laying on of hands. We see structure, organization, procedure, involvement and ratification. The apostles expressed confidence toward the membership, and the members in turn toward the apostles. In this first governmental issue in the Church we see first the acknowledgment of God's will, then wisdom in problem-solving, concession that no one person or group had all the answers, respect for the members and submission to the spiritual leaders who had the final say. All in all, it was a well-handled process that God blessed—"the word of God spread, and the number of disciples multiplied greatly" (verse 7). Presumably, their physical needs were well attended from then on, overseen by these seven, generally acknowledged to be the first deacons." (pages 25-26)

So how is this policy meant to be implemented?

What does *deacon* mean and do?

They are servants of the church – in fact the Greek word means or infers to be a table waiter. Cp Acts 6:1-7.

They are servants that tend to the needs of others, especially the widows, orphans, lonely etc. This was explained in old WCG sermonettes – but we have gotten away from this now.

In other words, it is a lifetime of sacrifice to serve the under-privileged which means sacrifice! Yes, sacrificing their time, their cliques, aspects of their business etc in service to God and man. If sacrifice is too difficult to execute based on their character (ongoing, historical behaviours), they should not be ordained or allow themselves to be – lest they meet the wrath of God.

Their service and self-sacrifice are commonly known as 'mercy ministries' by helping the under-privileged such as the orphans and widows; the lonely and rejected; those a little quirky. Their primary role is not teaching or formal instruction though that is permissible. Overwhelmingly they are meant to be servants to the under-privileged – to do that they must sacrifice their

cliques and inner circles as well as their own personal time. That is rather hard to do, not so? (cp James 1:27)

They are there to sit down with and understand the needs of others, including their emotional needs. To feed and shelter members physically and emotionally. Their role is **FAR** more than just hall set up, socials and sermonettes – after all anyone can do those.

I recall that it was probably in 1993 that I was listening to a sermon by Rod Meredith, on servant leadership. I cannot recall the title.

In it he described what a deacon is supposed to do. He painted a scenario where a 'little old lady' came to services a little late and had difficulty in parking her car.

He said that instead of berating her, the deacon's job is to gently take her inside and find a place for her to sit. Then go outside and park the car on her behalf.

Unfortunately, when bad appointments are made, the following happens:

1. They are installed for life and it is very difficult to modify their behaviours and to be removed. Instead their performance must be reviewed;
2. Their family and friends keep on backing them up regardless of performance;
3. Those most affected are not listened to and may leave the Church due to the abuse or neglect;
4. As supervision is minimal, they fill an office, but do not fulfil it.

Notice:

"... that there may be no division in the body, but that **the members may have the same care for one another.**" (1Cor 12:25)

"I appeal to you, brothers, to **watch out [KJV= avoid] for those who cause divisions and create obstacles** contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. [ie those that do not care for others are causing division]

For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, **and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive.** [cp Dan 11:34]

For your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, but **I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil.**" (Rom 16:17-19)

"... that we may be mutually **encouraged by each other's faith**, both yours and mine." (Rom 1:12)

So, by not caring for others properly is causing division! Instead, they use subtle means to weasel their way into a position, including flatteries.

What a deacon is not

How many understand and practice the above in fulfillment of their role? How many have actually been trained in the office?

1. It is not a step **up** the ladder to become an elder;
2. It is not a position of rulership;
3. It is not a teaching position (though they can teach). Given the similarity between positions and offices in the synagogue and the early Church, it should be noted that the synagogue had teachers whom, apparently, were not formal ordinations but permitted to use their skill;
4. It is not to be used to further one's ambitions and to cement one's position or their friends;
5. It is not a place to jealously prevent others from using their spiritual gifts and talents.

"But if you have bitter jealousy and **selfish ambition** in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth.

This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, **demonic.**" (James 3:14-15)

Concluding Remarks: What happens if one does not fulfill his position as a deacon?

Some **fill** such a position but do not **fulfill** it.

Why are they not being supervised and have annual reviews to see how they are tracking? In the synagogue, they had 1, 2 or 3 years terms often-times.

If they do not perform, they should be worked with and warned. If they don't measure up, they **MUST** be let go. So that the Church can thrive.

The responsibilities and services of deacons is a very serious business. Are they up to it? **Now that we are aware what a deacon really does, do those that seek this office still want to be one?**

"Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, [how? Answer:]

learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause [or anyone underprivileged or in need. If you do this, then this is the outcome:].

"Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they

shall become like wool.” (Is 1:17-19)

Finally there has been an issue of being ‘in a rush’ to ordain people as if that would bring stability or growth. In fact, the opposite happens when the wrong person is ordained without the spiritual credentials.

In some churches deacons are there for life, making it virtually impossible to deal with the problem as family and friends (due to nepotism and cronyism) back him up and cover up his trouble-making. The innocent and abused are made to suffer.

But to the wrongfully ordained deacon, he “has made it.” But as my Mum would say, quoting Christ, “they have their reward.” In this regard, have a read of the Bible study [They have their Reward](#) that explains it.

References

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