

Deacons - Their Role at Westbrooke Church

The church is ruled by Jesus Christ. He makes His will known through certain men whom He designates and equips for this task, men called "elders." The elders in turn commit the carrying out of those divine directives in areas of service to men with servant hearts called "deacons."

Mature, Faithful Men

Deacons are not "mini-elders" waiting to mature into areas of true leadership. In fact, a quick glance at the list of qualifications for deacons and elders shows that a deacon must be every bit as spiritually mature as an elder. The only difference is the elders' ability to teach, which marks the key difference between his and the deacon's ministries. Deacons must be proven faithful, with a capacity to lead the members of their congregation and to manage their own households well. As in the case of an elder, the focus here is primarily upon what a man is as a deacon, rather than what he does. A deacon is a servant.

Servants

Originally the Greek word for "deacon" seems to have meant "one who waits on tables." It later came to mean "ministry" or "service" in general. The New Testament uses the terms in this word group interchangeably to refer to both "spiritual" service, (for example, prayer and teaching) and "physical" service (for example, serving a meal). (Compare Luke 22:27) Interestingly enough, the first deacons we see in the New Testament are doing exactly what the word originally meant; serving tables. They are settling a dispute as to how the food is to be served to the Jerusalem church shortly after Pentecost, so that the apostles would be free to devote themselves to "prayer and the ministry" of the Word." (Acts 6:4-8)

It is important to realize the extent of the problem facing the church at this time. A conservative estimate would put the size of the church in Acts 6 in excess of 20,000 people. The twelve men called apostles could hardly have handled so large a church on their own and were clearly quick to delegate responsibilities on this occasion. Not only would the food need to be distributed but the finances collected and safeguarded, the needy distinguished from the not-so-needy, the food purchased and dispensed properly. That huge administrative work was given to seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom," who were put in charge of the task of serving. More importantly perhaps from our standpoint is the reason that stands behind their work: so that the apostles did not have to "neglect the Word of God in order to serve tables."

An Enabling Ministry

Here then is the essence of a deacon's ministry. He serves the daily needs of the people in a church in order to free the elders to pursue prayer and the ministry of the Word.

Deacons do the vital work of administration, assisting the elders in carrying out the Lord's will as he reveals it. Theirs is a ministry of support and enablement; not a "glory" ministry, not a work done "up front" or in a way that brings much recognition. Theirs is a role of service and commitment to the needs of others.

In a special sense the deacon's task is the essence of spiritual greatness, for our Lord said, "it is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant." (Matthew 20:26)

See also "[A Framework for Recognizing Elders and Deacons Within the Local Assembly](#)"