

Deacons: The Servants of the Church

Deacon Lesson Guide

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(Accompanies Deacon Lesson Video found at freshwaterjrc.com)

What you need: Bible, this print out, quiet place, copy of Freshwater Ministry Structure, pen, highlighter, coffee and jelly donut.

Part I: What is our Ministry Structure?

Review:

Elders

Deacons

Part II: What is an elder?

Definition:

Elders are those individuals officially recognized by the church as its shepherds and leaders. With the assistance of the other Elders they lovingly lead the church and steward the gospel of Christ. They are to ensure to the best of their ability that scripture is taught, that the saints are prayed for, and that the church is protected from spiritual and doctrinal division.

Synonyms:

The New Testament uses several words to refer to the office of Elder. Most commonly, the words *episkopos* and *presbuteros* are used. These words are usually translated, respectively, as bishop (or overseer), and elder. Another word, *poimen*, is found less frequently in the New Testament even though its translation, pastor, is a common English word used in churches to refer to this office. We believe the New Testament uses these words interchangeably. Freshwater commonly uses the word 'Elder' to refer to those that are in direct leadership of the church and reserves the word 'Pastor' for those Elders that are also compensated financially for their leadership in a particular ministry.

Part III: What Characterizes an Elder?

(TITUS 1:6-9; 1 TIMOTHY 3:1-7; 1 PETER 5:1-3; ACTS 20:17-37)

Elder is another term for pastor, bishop, overseer or shepherd. Elders are men above reproach or blameless. These are not sinless men—sinless men do not exist. The elders who would lead the churches had to be men without any outward character flaw. It is a person who others in the church have no obvious reason to accuse him of sin. He would have internal evidence against himself because he knows his inclinations toward evil and sin. His lifestyle would need to be exemplary. Important to note is that all Christians should strive for these general characteristics, not just the Elders.

This list from 1 Timothy is a description of a person living above reproach. The normal attendee of a church would not be denied entrance into the church if one lacked these character qualities. However, an elder must demonstrate ALL of these qualities to serve in the office as an elder. This is the highest office in the church and the other pastoral epistle states this as a role exclusively for males (1 Tim. 2:11-15).

Being 'above approach' (Titus 1:6, 7; 1 Tim 3:2) seems to be the overarching, summarizing characteristic. Being above reproach is the first requirement in both 1 Timothy and Titus. The other items on the list explain what above reproach means. If we pursue the two lists, as well as 1 Peter, we find 17 qualities of an elder who is above reproach.

1. HUSBAND DEVOTED TO ONE WIFE,(TITUS 1:6; 1 TIM 3:2), A ONE-WOMAN MAN.
2. CHILDREN IN SUBMISSION (TITUS 1:6; 1 TIM 3:4-5).
3. FAITHFUL STEWARD (TITUS 1:7)
4. HUMBLE - NOT ARROGANT (TITUS 1:7)
5. GENTLE - NOT QUICK-TEMPERED (TITUS 1:7; 1 TIM 3:3)
6. MODERATE - NOT A DRUNKARD (TITUS 1:7; 1 TIM 3:3)
7. PEACEFUL - NOT VIOLENT (TITUS 1:7; 1 TIM 3:3)
8. FINANCIAL INTEGRITY - NOT GREEDY FOR GAIN (TITUS 1:7; 1 TIM 3:3; 1 PETER 5:3)
9. HOSPITABLE (TITUS 1:8; 1 TIM 3:2)
10. LOVER OF GOOD (TITUS 1:8)
11. SELF-CONTROLLED (TITUS 1:8; 1 TIM 3:2)
12. UPRIGHT (TITUS 1:8)
13. HOLY (TITUS 1:8)
14. ABLE TO TEACH (TITUS 1:9; 1 TIM 3:2)
15. SPIRITUALLY MATURE (1 TIM 3:6)
16. RESPECTABLE (1 TIM 3:7)
17. EXAMPLE TO THE FLOCK (1 PETER 5:3)

Part IV: How are the Elders to lead the church? In other words, what are their responsibilities?

The Elders of Freshwater Church act as stewards and leaders of Christ's Church. As stewards and leaders, Jesus is the supreme and ultimate leader of Freshwater Church in every imaginable way. To

understand how current and future Elders will lead Freshwater, we will first be reminded of the authority of Christ in His Church.

1. JESUS IS THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH IN EVERY CAPACITY (Colossians 1:15-20, 1 Peter 5:4)
2. JESUS IS THE PATTERN AND EXAMPLE FOR THE ELDERS TO FOLLOW (1 Corinthians 11:1, Philippians 2:1-11)
3. JESUS ENTRUSTS THE ELDERS OF THE CHURCH WITH THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL (1 Thessalonians 2:1-8, 1 Corinthians 1:17)
4. THE BIBLE IS JESUS' PERFECT WORDS TO THE CHURCH AND IS IN AUTHORITY OVER THE CHURCH (Jude 1:3)

At the same time that Jesus is the head of the church, Jesus has entrusted leadership of His Church into the hands of qualified and called men. Scripture tells us much about the relationship between the Elders and Christ's Church.

1. THE ELDERS ARE TO GOVERN THE CHURCH IN AN ORDERLY WAY. (1 Corinthians 14:40)
2. THE ELDERS ARE THE HIGHEST HUMAN AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH (Hebrews 13:17, 1 Peter 5:1-2, Acts 20:28)
3. THE ELDERS ARE TO LEAD BY EXAMPLE (Colossians 1:24-25, 1 Timothy 4:11-16, 1 Peter 5:1-11, 2 Timothy 1:3-14)
4. THE ELDERS ARE TO DEVELOP OTHER LEADERS AND DISCIPLES OF JESUS (2 Timothy 2:1-2, Ephesians 4:11-16)
5. ELDERS ARE TO PROTECT THE CHURCH AGAINST FALSE TEACHERS (1 Timothy 1:3-11)
6. ELDERS ARE WORTHY OF RESPECT UNLESS UNDER DISCIPLINE FOR SIN (Hebrews 13:17, 1 Thessalonians 5:12, 1 Timothy 5:17-18)

Part V: Where does the position of the Deacon originate?

Acts 6:1-7

Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists^[a] arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. **2** And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. **3** Therefore, brothers,^[b] pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. **4** But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." **5** And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. **6** These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them. **7** And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith. *

*Some claim that Acts 6 is not referring to deacons. “The reason many are hesitant to call the Seven the first deacons is because the noun “deacon” (*diakonos*) does not occur in the text. Only the related noun *diakonia* (“ministry” or “service”) and verb *diakoneo* (to serve) are found (Acts 6:1-2). Another issue is that the text mentions the apostles but not elders. Therefore, a direct correlation is difficult to make. Yet Acts 6 does provide a paradigm that seems to have continued in the early church.” Benjamin L. Merkle in Baptist Foundations: Church Government for an Anti-Institutional Age.

In Acts 6 the position of the Deacon grows out of 2 issues:

1. Church Growth
2. Distractions

Part VI: Qualifications of a Deacon

The only passage that mentions the qualifications of Deacons is 1 Timothy 3:8-13. Let’s look at the text now.

8 Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued,[a] not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. **9** They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. **10** And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. **11** Their wives likewise[b] must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. **12** Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. **13** For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

1. Worthy of Respect (v.8)
2. Not Hypocritical (v.8)
3. Sound in Faith and Life (v.9)
4. Tested (v.10)
5. Woman Deacon or Godly Wife?? (v.11)
 - a. Here’s what we affirm about Gender:
 - i. God has created every single person, male or female, with inherent worth/value. No man is worth more to God than any woman, and likewise, no woman is worth more than any man. All people have equal worth and equal value.
 - ii. At the same time, men and women do not have the same roles.
 - iii. So, we believe that although God calls women to lead/teach other women, we don’t believe that God calls women to lead/teach men, specifically as Elders. We believe that that’s clear from the Word.
 - iv. But the position of Deacon isn’t the same as the position of Elder. Deacons aren’t teaching. They aren’t in an authority position ruling over the church like Elders are.
 - v. So, can a Deacon be a woman?
 - b. Well, let’s look at v.11 again, except in a couple different translations:

ESV: “Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things.”

NIV: “In the same way, the women are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.”

NASB: "Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things."

- c. Here's the issue: The greek word that Paul uses here, the word "*gunaikas*" can either refer to "women" or to "wives". It can (and is) translated either way. And Context is the only thing that can help a translator determine whether Paul was saying, "The wife of a deacon", or whether Paul was now saying "women deacons". We are left to determine his meaning and intent (either "women deacons" or "wives of deacons") by looking at the context surrounding the word.

So, 2 interpretations have risen out of this issue. Both of them have justifications.

1. Paul is talking about wives of deacons. In the midst of giving qualifications for deacons, Paul lists (in v.11) the necessary requirements of the deacon's wife. As in, a deacon is not qualified to be a deacon if his wife does not meet these qualifications. This interpretation limits the position of deacon to men only.
2. Paul is talking about women deacons. In v.11 Paul now builds off of the qualifications for male deacons in v.8-10 and then gives the qualifications for female deacons. This interpretation claims that the position of deacon is open to both males and females.

And remember, the debate exists b/c what does Paul mean when he uses this word that can mean either wife, or woman? Which way is Paul using this word?

I believe that the context leads us to conclude that Paul was not writing about the wife of deacons, but instead he is now turning his attention to women, or female deacons. Let me give you 7 reasons that I've come to the conclusion, based on this text, that female deacons are completely biblical. IOW, 7 reasons that I believe the 2nd interpretation is correct.

1. If Paul was referring to the wives of deacons, he could have indicated his intention by adding the word "their", (which is not found in the greek) or by using a prepositional expression (wives "of deacons"; in Greek, a noun in the genitive case). He could have easily wrote "Their wives likewise..." or "Wives of deacons" and that would have made it abundantly clear that he was referring to the wives of deacons. He, however, does not write either of those. When you're reading in the ESV, and it says "Their wives", the word "their" is implied, IF he meant to say "Their wives". But it's not actually in the original language.
2. Some readers will wonder why Paul did not use the word 'deaconess' (the word commonly used today to refer to female deacons) to refer to 'female deacons.' The reason is simple; the word 'deaconess' did not exist when Paul wrote this text. Thus he employs the generic greek word (*gunaikas*) that is translated as 'women' or 'wife'.
3. Paul begins v.11 in a manner similar to v.8, which introduces a new office with the use of the word "likewise". This is a structure that he is using to introduce church offices.
4. Because the qualifications for Overseer (or Pastor/Elder) do not include any reference to their wives, it does not seem likely that Paul would add a special requirement for the wife of a deacon when the more important office of overseer has no such requirement. IOW, if there's a requirement for a Deacons Wife, then surely there should be a requirement for a Pastor's wife, and of course, there's not. See 1 Timothy 3:1-7.
5. Either Interpretation has to deal with the "strangeness" of the order of v.8-13. Both views must acknowledge that Paul addresses deacons in the preceding verses (3:8-10), suddenly switches (according to the first interpretation) to a discussion of their wives **or** (according to the second

interpretation) to a discussion of women deacons (v.11), and then returns to the matter of deacons (v.12-13).

6. In Romans 16:1-2 Paul commended Phoebe to the church at Rome and calls her a *diakonos* of the church, which may very well and I think certainly does refer to the office of deacon.
7. Like their male counterparts, female deacons do not have responsibilities to teach, lead, pray for the sick, or shepherd the church; those are the responsibilities of the elders. Therefore, female deacons do not violate Paul's prohibitions in 1 Timothy 2:12. Both male and female deacons, by contrast with the elders, engage in all other areas of service in the church.

Part VII: The relationship between Elders and Deacons

- I. The Office of Deacon is, in some respects, a lower office.
- II. Deacon is a Distinct office
- III. Deacon is an important office

Part VII: The Process

1. Elders communicate need for Deacons and open Deacon Nominations
2. Partners nominate potential Deacons using Deacon Nomination Form (available at freshwaterjc.com/admin)
3. Elders interview nominated Deacons
4. Nominated Deacons accept or refuse nomination
5. Deacon Candidates enter Deacon training program
6. Deacons are installed at Church and begin ministry

Additional Note about the gender of Deacons: Some people will claim that since in Acts 6 the Apostles state to "pick out from among you seven *men*" (v.3) the position of deacon must be limited to men. To that interpretation I would make an observation that Acts 6 does not seem to have the purpose of describing the **qualifications** for deacons. Rather, the purpose of that text seems to be to describe the **need** for deacons. 1 Timothy is the only book that intentionally outlines the qualifications of the position and, therefore, should be the text that we give more weight to when considering qualifications of the position.