

QUALIFICATIONS OF SERVANT-LEADERS

*Taken from <https://www.gracechurch.org/membership/posts/205>.

The following qualifications for a deacon apply to all who serve in general ministry and should also be considered as the qualifications for deaconesses and ushers.

The New Testament uses three primary words that refer to deacons: *diakonos*, which means “servant”; *diakonia*, which means “service”; and *diakoneō*, which means “to serve.” The original use of this group of words might have been specific, meaning the service of waiting on tables or serving people food. But it broadened beyond that and came to mean any kind of service. While all believers are to be characterized by service, some have been specially gifted by the Spirit of God to serve (cf. Romans 12:7). Only in 1 Timothy 3 is there a specific discussion of the office of deacon (vv. 8–10, 12).

Deacons are equally qualified with elders in terms of character and spiritual life. The one difference between their qualifications is that an elder must be able to teach, but the deacon doesn’t have to be. The elders oversee the work of those who serve the Lord, and they are assisted in their work by deacons. The basic offices of a church do not need to be any more sophisticated than that. The qualifications for deacons can be divided into two categories: personal character and spiritual character.

Personal Character

The following qualifications for servant-leadership apply to both deacons and deaconesses (cf. 1 Timothy 3:11).

- ***He must be a man of dignity.*** The Greek term translated “dignity” means “worthy of respect, stately, dignified.” It denotes a seriousness of mind and character. A deacon must be worthy of respect and serious-minded, not treating serious things lightly.
- ***He must not be double-tongued.*** He is always consistent and righteous in what he says. He is not to be one who says one thing to one person and something else to another. He knows how to bridle his tongue and is not a malicious gossip.
- ***He must not be addicted to much wine.*** He is to be characterized by clear thinking and self-control.
- ***He must not be fond of gain.*** His goals in life are not to be monetary. First Timothy 6:9 says that a pervasive desire for financial gain corrupts a man.

Spiritual Character

- ***He must be doctrinally sound.*** First Timothy 3:9 says that he must hold “to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.” “The faith” refers to the whole of Christian truth. The spiritual character of a deacon begins with his affirmation of New Testament doctrine. A “clear conscience” is the result of obeying the truth. He must hold to the faith and apply the truth in his life.
- ***He must be active in spiritual service.*** Verse 10 says, “Let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons.” The verb translated “be tested” speaks of an ongoing test, not a single test or probationary period. The test is an ongoing general assessment by the church of his service to Christ. Before being affirmed as a deacon, he must prove himself to be faithful in serving the Lord.
- ***He must be morally pure.*** His life is to be “beyond reproach” (v.10). Like an elder, a deacon must be morally pure, having an irreproachable character. Verse 12 echoes the standard of moral purity, for it says, “Let deacons be husbands of only one wife.” A deacon must be totally consecrated and devoted to his wife.
- ***He must lead a godly family.*** Verse 12 also says that he must be a good manager of his children and household. The proving ground for leadership is how a man manages his children and home, and the way that a man cares for his children and home is an excellent indicator of his ability to care for God's church.

Although specific personal and spiritual qualifications must be met by those in the offices of elder and deacon, that does not mean the standard is lower for anyone else in the congregation. The qualifications should be a goal and guideline for every believer. Everyone should seek to have these character qualifications in his life—whether he is a recognized, office-holding believer or simply a servant to the Body of Christ.

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