

The Deacon in Action

1 Timothy 3:8-13; Acts 6:1-8:3

- I. Distinction between Elders and Deacons
- II. General Description of the Work of Deacons
- III. The Ministry of Service
- IV. Conc.

I. Distinction between Elders and Deacons

A. Why are there two offices?

1. It does indeed seem biblical that there are two offices.

a. 1Tim. 3:1-7 is about elders as are also the passages of 2Tim. 2:24-26 and Titus 1:5-9.

b. 1Tim. 3:8-13 is distinctively about deacons.

Oddly enough, they are mentioned as a group in only one other place in the NT in Phil. 1:1.

2. The Greek term for deacon (διάκονος – diakonos) mng. gen., “servant” or “minister,” has a wide

2. (cont.) range of meanings. Beyond what we have before us, the term as a noun can refer to government (Rm. 13:4), to servants of Satan (2Cor. 11:15), to those appointed to throw out the improperly dressed man in the kingdom wedding hall (Mt. 22:13), to the servants who carried the waterpots at the wedding in Cana (Jn. 2:5), to him who would be great by serving (Mt. 23:11), to the godly minded Phoebe (Rm. 16:1); but mostly it refers to men ministering the word (1Cor. 3:5; 2Cor. 3:6; 6:4; Eph. 3:7; 6:21; Col. 1:7, 23; 4:7).

3. Moreover, as a verb (διακονέω – diakoneō), we see similar things, e.g., the angels ministered to Jesus after His temptations (Mt. 4:11), also, “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve” (Mt. 20:28). Heb. 6:10 says, “For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints.” OT prophets tried to understand their own writings when “It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these

3. (cont.) things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look (1Pt. 1:12).

4. But there are several “hands-on” uses as well, e.g., failed Gentiles wonder when they “did not take care of” Jesus (Mt. 25:44), and at the cross, “Many women were there looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee while ministering to Him” (Mt. 27:55). Then there was the case of Peter’s mother-in-law who was ill, “And He came to her and raised her up, taking her by the hand, and the fever left her, and she waited on them” (Mk. 1:31). In Lk. 10:40, Martha said, “Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me

4. (cont.) to do all the serving alone?” On another occasion, they made Jesus a supper “and Martha was serving; but Lazarus was one of those reclining at the table with Him” (Jn. 12:2). Some passages are broad enough to allow for both ideas of “hands-on” & spiritual ministry in the word: “If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him” (Jn. 12:26).

5. The very broad use of the Greek term for “deacon” in the NT has caused some to doubt the standard distinctions often drawn betw. elders & deacons, namely, that deacons are the more hands-on servant side of things in the church & that elders are more closely connected with ministering the word in keeping with Peter’s speaking gifts & serving gifts in 1Pt. 4:10-11. But the main point of dispute here is whether the 7 chosen to serve tables in Ac. 6 should be re: as deacons bec. the text does not *call* them deacons.

5. (cont.) However, another related Greek term translated, “serving,” does appear in the text, Ac. 6:1, “διακονία (lemma – διακονία).” Interestingly, it also appears in vs. 4, where it is translated “ministry,” that is, “But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry (διακονία lemma – διακονία) of the word.” So, we have come full circle. Vs. 1 is clearly hands-on service, vs. 4 is the “ministry of the word,” just as it plainly states. All forms of various terms for deacon can be used for physical or spiritual service, if you please.

Comparison of Spiritual Gifts in the NT

■ Speaks (1Pt. 4:11)

○ *(Active Speaking Gifts)*

- evangelists (Eph. 4:11)
- teaches (Rm. 12:7)
- teachers (1Cor. 12:28)
- pastors and teachers (Eph. 4:11)
- exhorts (Rm. 12:8)
- leads (Rm. 12:8)
- administrations (1Cor. 12:28)

■ Serves (1Pt. 4:11)

○ *(Active Serving Gifts)*

- service (Rm. 12:7)
- gives (Rm. 12:8)
- mercy (Rm. 12:8)
- helps (1Cor. 12:28)

6. It stands to biblical reason that deacons would be gifted with the serving gifts and perhaps also leading and administrations, especially when you consider what it entailed that seven men had to do in Ac. 6 in serving tables involving perhaps many hundreds if not thousands eating together every day. It must have been a daunting task, far more than the apostles could add to their daily responsibility of prayer and ministering the word of God. That the seven were regarded as officials in the church seems clear from Ac. 6:6.

7. All of that, taken together with the reality that the ability to teach was required for elders but not for deacons seems to support our position of two distinct offices here in 1Tim. 3:1-13.
8. At the same time, it seems equally clear that having a speaking gift did not disqualify one from serving in the office of deacon. One need go no further than Ac. 6-7 to get that. You see, Stephen was the first man named of the seven chosen to serve tables in Ac. 6:5b; he was “a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit.” He was also “full of

8. (cont.) of grace and power” (vs. 8) and “was performing great wonders and signs among the people” (vs. 8), hardly what you would expect from a man serving as a deacon only.
9. Moreover, when men disputed with Stephen in the context of his ministry of performing miracles (vs. 8), “they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking” (vs. 10). Remember here our contrast between speaking and serving gifts. Stephen clearly had *both*. Ac. 7 erases any doubts about that.

10. Very likely, Stephen was the lead deacon or chairman if you please, of those chosen to serve tables in Ac. 6:5, again, having been singled out as, “a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit,” though they were all “full of the Spirit and of wisdom” (vs. 3). With his miracle ministry (vs. 8), he became a threat to certain unbelieving Jews “from what was called the Synagogue of the Freedmen, including both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and some from Cilicia and Asia.”



11. Using false witnesses who said, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God” (Ac. 6:11b), they “stirred up the people, the elders and the scribes, and they came up to him and dragged him away and brought him before the Council” (vs. 12b), the authoritative Sanhedrin, where more witnesses were needed to prove a charge. But more *false* witnesses, that is, liars were put forward who said, “This man incessantly speaks against this holy place and the Law; for we have heard him say that this

11. (cont.) Nazarene, Jesus, will destroy this place and alter the customs which Moses handed down to us” (vv. 13b-14).
12. Probably to intimidate Stephen, they were “fixing their gaze on him,” maybe as a withering stare to incite fear. But then the whole Council “saw his face like the face of an angel” perhaps like the glow on Moses’ face in the OT (Ex. 34:29) or even like Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration (Mt. 17:2). Thus it was *visibly* manifest who was speaking for God!

13. Off the top of his head, Stephen gave the entire history of the nation in response to the question, “Are these things so?” in Ac. 7:1. He spoke about:
- a. God’s dealings with Abraham (2-8)
 - b. The Patriarchs’ sojourn in Egypt (9-16)
 - c. God’s deliverance of Israel by Moses (17-36)
 - d. Israel’s rebellion against God and Moses (37-43)
 - e. God’s true tabernacle (44-50)
 - f. Israel’s resistance of the Holy Spirit (51-53)
 - g. Stephen’s martyrdom by stoning (54-60)
- (https://www.ccel.org/contrib/exec_outlines/acts/acts_07.htm)

14. This sermon of almost unparalleled power resulted in Stephen's martyrdom by stoning, not only observed by, but fully endorsed by, Saul of Tarsus (Ac. 8:1) at whose feet they laid their coats (Ac. 7:58) so that they could freely hurl their stones.

IV. Conc.

As a result of the decision made in Ac. 6:1-6, “The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith” (Ac. 6:7).

Paul encourages us in this regard by saying, “For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus” (1Tim. 3:13).