

CHURCH LEADERSHIP

Deacons

(Leader's Notes)



Churches need leaders! As the gospel spread from town to town in the time of the Apostles, leaders were appointed to care for these new Christians. Who were appointed as the leaders? We are going to look into God's Word to see what we can learn about Church leadership.

The Church is very different to a club or a society. The Church is the Body of Christ, with Christ himself as the Head. He wants men and women who can lead and care for the Church in his place. This means the leaders represent Jesus and the Bible gives us clear guidelines to help us choose who these leaders should be.

What are the leaders to be called?

If you look at different Churches you may see that they call their leaders by different names. This may seem confusing but the reason is simple. The Bible was originally written in Hebrew and Greek. When it was translated different words were used to express the meanings.

One Greek word that is used for Church leaders is 'diakonos'. This is often written as deacon. It is also translated as servant since the meaning of the word is 'someone who serves'. The New Testament also uses another word 'presbuteros', which can be translated as presbyter, elder, overseer or bishop. While the deacons served in the Church, these men who were called the elders or overseers did the preaching, teaching and shepherding the flock.

Who should be appointed as deacons and what should their responsibility be?

Scripture Reading

1 Timothy 3:1-13

In this chapter Paul writes to Timothy and gives him instructions on what sort of men and women to choose for deacons and elders.

What are the qualifications of a deacon?

- ❶ Make a list of the qualifications Paul gives in 1 Timothy 3:8-12. Also see Acts 6:3
(Men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, not pursuing dishonest gain, hold the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience, only have one wife, manage their children well and their wives must be worthy of respect too. The Book of Acts adds that a deacon must be full of the Spirit and wisdom.)
- ❷ What sort of person do you think is worthy of respect? See v8. Discuss.
- ❸ What does it mean that a deacon must hold the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience?
(It means that the deacon must have a good understanding of the Word of God and is living up to those truths. His conscience is clear because he is obeying the Word of God.)

Perhaps we think that deacons are men and women who can only do practical things. This is far from true! It is just as important that the deacons are men full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom as the elders are. Stephen, who was appointed a deacon in Acts 6:8 was full of God's grace and power, and did great wonders and performed miraculous signs.

What are the qualifications of a deacon's wife or deaconess?

There are two ways of translating 1 Timothy 3:11. It could be speaking about the deacon's wife or about a woman deacon, or deaconess. We know there were women deacons. For example, Phoebe, who is mentioned by Paul in Romans 16:1. So these qualifications apply equally to the wives of deacons and to deaconesses.

- ④ What extra qualifications are given specifically for women? 1 Timothy 3:11
(She must be worthy of respect, not a malicious talker, temperate and trustworthy in everything.)
- ⑤ Why would it not be good for a man to be a deacon if his wife was a gossip? do you think?

How do you choose a deacon?

- ⑥ What must we do according to 1 Timothy 3:10? What does this mean?
(It means that the people we choose as deacons have already shown the qualifications or character traits in their lives before they are appointed as deacons. They are men and women who have shown that they are faithful and reliable. We don't choose someone hoping they will change! We choose someone who has already proven themselves.)

What are the blessings of becoming a deacon?

Some may think they are too busy to be a deacon or elder, but really it is an honour to be chosen. You may not be ready yet, but you can prepare yourself.

- ⑦ What does 1 Timothy 3:1 say about wanting to become a leader?
(He desires a noble task.)
- ⑧ What are the privileges of being a deacon? 1 Timothy 3:13
(It they serve well they gain an excellent standing and have a great assurance in their faith.)

When a person has served faithfully as a deacon they will gain a good reputation in the Church, as well as in the community. This brings honour to the Lord. The Bible also says that this gives the person a confidence in their Christian life, knowing others have seen Christ-like qualities in their life.

What is the task of a deacon?

As we have seen, the word deacon means, 'a person who serves'. When the Church first began the apostles realised they needed men to help them with the practical duties and so seven men were chosen.

- ⑩ Why did the apostles feel it was important to choose men to help, and what did they do? Acts 6:1-6
(There was too much work to be done and the apostles knew they would neglect the ministry that God had called them to do, which was preaching the Word of God, if they tried to do everything themselves. So they chose seven men to help distribute food to the widows.)

These seven men were chosen to do a specific task to help the apostles. As the Church developed over the years, this became a pattern. Men and women were chosen to help in the practical running of the Church. We need people like that today too.

Who chooses the deacons?

Who is to choose the deacons? In Acts 6:5 we read that it was the whole group who chose them. The Apostles suggested to the group of believers that it would be good to choose other men to help care for the increasing number of widows, so they would not neglect what God had called them to do, which was to teach and preach the Word of God. We read that the group of believers were pleased with this suggestion and they chose seven men. These men were then presented to the Apostles, who prayed and laid hands on them.

It is our responsibility to choose the men and women who are to be the deacons and deaconesses in the Church. Then we are to pray for them and set them apart for the work of the Lord. So we need to choose carefully and prayerfully.