



# From Where Do Deacons Come?

Brownsburg Church of Christ

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## Introduction:

In **Acts 6:1**, the congregation in Jerusalem was growing like wildfire. Because of this growth special needs arose. One such need pertained to widows, specifically some who felt they were being overlooked along lines of race. When the apostles addressed the problem, they were wise enough to realize they could not deal with all things pertaining to the life and working of the church in Jerusalem. They instructed the congregation to look out among them and pick seven men to serve these tables. In my opinion, we find here the first mention of deacons in the New Testament. (Some argue that the scripture doesn't call them deacons and so we shouldn't, but consider the following. These were men who were "appointed" [**Acts 6:3**, same Greek word as "ordained" in **Titus 1:5**] by the laying on of the apostles' hands [**Acts 6:6**] to perform a necessary task of service within the congregation. The apostles described the work of these men as serving tables [**Acts 6:2**]. The term for serving is "diakoneo," the verb form of the noun "diakonos," which is translated deacon in **I Timothy 3:8**. In other words, the task these men accomplished was "deaconing." Unless there is some other office represented in scripture to which men are ordained to do the work of "deaconing," these men must be deacons. At the very least, we ought all be able to see these men as precursor to deacons and recognize we can learn a great deal from this passage about who can be deacons.) Like the apostles did in Jerusalem nearly 2000 years ago, so our elders are doing today. This congregation is growing and there is a tremendous amount of work that needs to be done. We presently have 13 deacons. But based upon the work we are accomplishing, we need more. The elders are asking us to look among the congregation and "select ... men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom [they] may put in charge of this task." To facilitate our search, we must know where to look and for what to look. In order to learn this, let us ask this question, "From where do deacons come?" **Acts 6:3** provides the answer.

## Discussion:

### I. Deacons come from among **our men**.

- A. When the apostles spoke to the Jerusalem saints, they asked them to search out among them (**Acts 6:3**). When Paul wrote to the Philippians, he addressed the letter "To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons" (**Philippians 1:1**). This explains two basic points. Deacons must be saints, that is, Christians, and they must be among us. We will not go to the church across town and appoint one of their members as our deacon. This demonstrates the Biblical nature of the offices held in a church of Christ. There is no office that spans wider than the local congregation.
- B. We will also note that the apostles asked the Jerusalem church to search out and select men (**Acts 6:3**). When Paul explained to Timothy who should be appointed he said, "Let deacons each be the husband of one wife" (**I Timothy 3:12**). A deacon comes from among our men.

### II. Deacons come from among our men who have a **good reputation**.

- A. As we search among our men, we are to be discriminating regarding who we appoint to this office. Not just anyone who claims to be a Christian can fill the role of church servant. Rather, it must be a Christian who has grown and proven himself to have a good reputation (**Acts 6:3**).
- B. The man must be known among the congregation. If the congregation doesn't know him, he cannot have a good reputation. Granted, that doesn't mean every individual actually and personally knows the man. It is impossible to conceive that all 10,000 members of the Jerusalem church personally knew the seven men chosen there. But they are known among the group and have demonstrated themselves as worthy.
- C. When Paul listed the qualifications for deacons in **I Timothy 3:8**, he describes the kind of reputation they must have, claiming they must be men of dignity and not double-tongued, addicted to wine or fond of sordid gain. That is, they must have demonstrated that they are honest men of worthy character. They are not hypocrites, speaking out of both sides of their mouths. They are not governed by the lusts of the flesh or by greed, but by a desire to serve the Lord.
- D. Additionally, Paul claimed these men must first be tested or proven (**I Timothy 3:10**). Since there is no specific test or accomplishment listed in scripture as being a prerequisite to being a deacon, we can only assume this speaks of the issue of reputation. We must pick from among our men who have demonstrated themselves as capable, worthy men. Men who stand out before the congregation. To highlight this, remember that a congregation of

nearly 10,000 had to select only 7 men from their number. Imagine how greatly these seven had to stand out with good reputations.

### III. Deacons come from among our men who have a good reputation and are **full of the Spirit**.

- A. The apostles wanted the Jerusalem church to look for men who were full of the Holy Spirit (**Acts 6:3**). Our deacons must also be men who are filled with the Holy Spirit. Regrettably, because of so much confusion taught today about the Holy Spirit, we must define what this means.
- B. Through a study of the book of Acts, we recognize this does not refer to being baptized by the Holy Spirit. We only find two examples of that: the apostles (**Acts 2**) and Cornelius' household (**Acts 10**). We also understand it does not refer to having any miraculous gifts of the Spirit. It was not until after the apostles laid their hands on these seven men in **Acts 6** that we read about anyone having abilities to perform miracles other than the apostles (**Acts 2:43; 5:12; 8:6**). So the Jerusalem brethren were not looking for men with miraculous ability. For what then were they looking?
- C. The apostles wanted the brethren to choose men who were governed by the Holy Spirit. But how does the Spirit govern their lives? Does He control their lives and actions without their own consent of will? No. This concept in **Acts 6:3** is parallel to the teaching of Paul in **Romans 6-8**. In these chapters, Paul contrasts two indwelling powers: sin (**Romans 7:17, 20**) and the Holy Spirit (**Romans 8:9-11**). In neither case is Paul speaking about some powerful force in us, causing us to do anything against our own will. Rather, he is speaking about powers to which we submit our wills (**Romans 6:16**).
- D. In other words, deacons are men who submit to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. They are men who follow Paul's teaching in **Galatians 5:16-26**. They do not wallow in the deeds of the flesh but abound in the fruit of the Spirit. Guided, not by some mysterious inner prompting, but by the word of God which has come from the Spirit giving guidance to all men (**II Peter 1:20; II Timothy 3:16-17**). As Paul told Timothy, deacons are to be men who hold fast the mystery of faith with a clear conscience (**I Timothy 3:9**). That is, they know the faith and they hold onto it unswervingly. They are not men of doubt who waver in the balance, but are men who know the truth, hold the truth, and proclaim the truth.

### IV. Deacons come from among our men who have a good reputation, are **full of the Spirit and wisdom**.

- A. The apostles asked the Jerusalem church to look for men who were full of wisdom (**Acts 6:3**). Wisdom refers not only to knowledge, but more importantly to the application of knowledge in action. The deacon must know how to apply the knowledge he has to keeping his charge as servant of the church in a faithful manner.
- B. This is not an issue of being wise in "the ways of the world." According to Paul in **I Corinthians 14:20**, all Christians are to be babes in evil, but in our thinking mature. This is said in the context of using common sense regarding worship, recognizing that words nobody can understand will never edify anyone. Deacons are to be mature in their thinking, allowing common sense, as trained by the word of God, to help them fulfill their duties.
- C. Nor does this mean the world will consider these men to be wise. The world may in fact consider them to be fools, because men consider the wisdom of God foolishness. But these deacons must be wise regarding the things of God (**I Corinthians 1:18-31**).
- D. When we consider the qualifications listed in **I Timothy 3:12**, we recognize deacons must have demonstrated their wisdom. The proving ground is in the home. Deacons are to be men who are married, have children, and manage or rule their households well. Interestingly enough, the same proving ground Paul gave Timothy for the elders. The deacon has demonstrated his wisdom by leading his family in wisdom, with a wife and children who are in subjection to his lead, because he leads as a servant following the guidelines of **Ephesians 5:25, 28-29; 6:4**. He has therefore demonstrated his wisdom to keep a stewardship, because he is a good steward of his family and his household.

### Conclusion:

In short, a deacon is a good, strong Christian family man, who has demonstrated his ability to lead through service. It is the picture of a Christian who is growing (**II Peter 1:5-8**). Our elders have asked us to look among our men and find men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and wisdom, whom they may appoint as deacons to serve this congregation. Let us approach this task with seriousness and sobriety. Not making the mistake saying, "These are not elders, so it is not important." The office of deacon is every bit as important as that of elder. With much prayer and consideration we are asked to select men for this office.