

Everybody Deacon Now: The Call for all Christians to Serve in the Church

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¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of *diakonia*, for building up the body of Christ,
— Ephesians 4:11–12 —

For the last few months our church has been considering [Paul's first letter to Timothy](#) and how the instructions for the household of God lead us to order our local church. As Paul unveils the purpose of his letter, "I am writing these things to you so that, . . . you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God" (1 Timothy 3:14–15).

Immediately before this purpose statement, Paul gives qualifications for elders (vv. 1–7) and deacons (vv. 8–13). And in our church we have focused a great amount of energy thinking about this office of the deacon. In fact, this Sunday at our member's meeting we will present an update to the statement of faith and the constitution to bring our church order in greater alignment with Scripture.

That said, there is actually very little written about the "office" of deacon in the New Testament. An argument could even be made that the office of deacon is not called for like that of the overseer/elder/pastor. It is clearly not described in the same detail as the office of elder. There seems to be good reasons for this disparity, namely the need to have a clear and consistent teaching office in the church, even as the office of deacon is more flexible, need-based, and church-specific.

With all that in mind, it is helpful to go back to the Bible and see what it says about deacons (*diakonos*), deaconing (*diakoneō*), and the ministry of service (*diakonia*). When we do, we learn a great deal about what "deaconing" is—and what deaconing isn't. In particular, we discover this word-group shows up 100 times in the New Testament. Yet, in all of those references, it only refers to the *office* of deacon 3 or 4 times, depending on how one understands Paul's description of Phoebe (Rom. 16:1; Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:8, 12). Most often the word relates to service of all varieties (cf. 1 Cor. 12:5), especially service to relieve the physical needs of others.

As we study the office of deacons, we need to remember that all Christians are called to serve. And as Jonathan Leeman has helpfully framed it, [all church members also fill an office with Christ-delegated authority and God-given responsibilities](#). In short, while Scripture speaks a few times about the role of deacons; it speaks all the time about deaconing. Every Christian is called to serve (*diakoneō*); every member of the church has a ministry (*diakonia*); and every church is built up best when all its members are using their gifts for the upbuilding of the body (1 Cor. 12:7; Eph. 4:12).

Critically, elders and deacons are not servants who do the work of the ministry in place of the church members; they are simply servants of Christ who model the kind of service all church members are to fulfill. Thus, as we talk about deacons, it is vital to see every member of the body has a gift, a role, and a place of service. Overseers are appointed to help members be equipped for that service and to find the right place of service. Alongside the elders, deacons are exemplary models of good works, who beckon other men and women in the church to follow in their steps.

Truly, a church that is most healthy doesn't just have the right org chart. It has a living and active membership, where every part is contributing their gifts to the whole. In this setting, qualified elders and deacons play a needed role in establishing and maintaining every member ministry, but the same is true in reverse. Elders and deacons come from churches, where Spirit-empowered disciples are exercising their gifts long before they are recognized in any official capacity.

It is this point that I want to stress today. The church does just need elders and deacons to serve; it needs every member to serve. And to show how the New Testament emphasizes that point, I am attaching a one-page [PDF](#) that shows every use of *diakon*-in the New Testament. In considering deacons and deaconing, this word study helped me get a sense of what new covenant service looks like, where deacons come from, and why the church should not deacon openings like job postings.

The call for service is a call for all members of the body to serve. Because when the whole body is serving, equipped by the Word faithfully proclaimed by the elders, there will be servants of good-repute that can and should be recognized for their service (cf. 1 Cor. 12:23). These men and women become the "deacons" who model good works, who bring order to the church, who relieve to those in need, and who (with rest of the church) gain confidence in the gospel (1 Tim. 3:13).

For all these reasons and more, we can rightly say—the church needs deacons. But before it needs or recognizes deacons *as deacons*, it needs an army of faithful servants. Jesus said that all who follow him will be servants like him (Luke 22:26–27), and this should be the chief instruction about deacons and deaconing in the church.

May God raise up an army of royal priests who serve one another with the gifts God has given them. If you want to know more about the Bible's teaching, download this [PDF](#), open your concordance, and look at all the ways deaconing takes place in the New Testament. I promise you, as you give yourself to the Word, God will teach you what it means to be a servant like Christ. May he then use that knowledge to make us like his son, a true and first servant in the household of God.

Soli Deo Gloria, ds