

The Deacon's Scriptural Responsibilities

The biblical office of deacon is one of two offices of the church described in Scripture. Deacons were first selected by the church in Jerusalem to fulfill the specific need of serving the widows in the church (Acts 6:1–7). By serving the widows of the church, the first deacons allowed the apostles to concentrate on prayer and the ministry of the Word. In addition, the selection of deacons helped to address complaints that had arisen in the church.

From this passage, there are three clear responsibilities of deacons in the church. First, deacons are to serve the widows in the church by meeting their physical and spiritual needs as necessary. Scripture is very clear that godly widows deserve a special honor in the church and that God cares for the widows (1 Tim 5:1–16; James 1:27). The deacons have the responsibility to care for these women who have served God and the church.

Second, deacons serve the pastor and leaders of the church by taking responsibility for tasks that would prevent them from devotion to prayer and the Word. The specific example in Scripture is ministry to the widows, but this can also take other forms. This ministry of the deacons allows the pastor and staff to concentrate on their duties of teaching the Word of God.

Third, deacons serve the congregation by addressing complaints in the church. Some widows were complaining because they were being overlooked in the distribution of food. This was a legitimate complaint that needed to be addressed. In our modern contexts, the church still faces complaints within the body. The deacons serve the congregation by handling these complaints in a biblical fashion. When legitimate complaints arise, the deacons should seek solutions to address such complaints. When illegitimate complaints arise, the deacons can assist the pastor and staff by maintaining discipline within the church body (Matt 18:15–17).

Article created in 2011 by Evan Lenow, Ph. D.

Assoc. Professor of Ethics, School of Theology

Director, Riley Center

Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary