

A Biblical Look at Deacons

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Many Christian denominations, including many Baptists believe that there are two officers in a church, one being the pastor (elder or bishop) and the other of a deacon. The reason for this article is that I can find no biblical grounds in the New Testament for the establishment of an "office" of a deacon. There is no example or reference to an official *diaconate* (the office or period of office of a deacon) in New Testament church, that has authority or office over the local congregation. There is certainly a biblical position in the church of "deacons" or better "servants," but it is not a position of authority in a local church.

The word, "*diakonos*," which is transliterated in our English Bibles, "deacon" is simply the Greek word "servant." The New Testament gives examples of both "appointed" servants elected by the church to specific tasks and of "unelected" servants who served the Lord in a general sense in a local church. The noun "*diakonos*" is used thirty times in the New Testament, and in only five of those does it refer to a specifically appointed servant:

Philippians 1:1 *"Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons (diakonos - noun)"*

1 Timothy 3:8 *"Likewise must the deacons (diakonos - noun) be grave, not double tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre"*

1 Timothy 3:10 *"And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon (diakoneo - a verb), being found blameless."*

1 Timothy 3:12-13 *"Let the deacons (diakonos - noun) be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For they that have used the office of a deacon (diakoneo - verb) well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus."*

The word is generally used simply to denote one who served the Lord or ministered as a servant. For example:

Romans 16:1 *"I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant (diakonos - noun) of the church which is at Cenchrea."*

The word translated "deacon" in 1 Timothy 3:13 is the verb diakoneo is found only in 1 Timothy 3:10, 13. The single word "*diakoneo*" is translated into the phrase, "use the office of a deacon." However, Phebe, not being a man and not the "husband of one wife" could not hold the position of a deacon as the

word is popularly used. The word means servant, and the context tells you if the person has an elected position or simply one who served in the church. Phebe was simply a faithful member who served the Lord in her church. Her "ministry" was as a servant.

Most commentators base their assumption that the position of a deacon is an official office in a church on three factors:

1. The King James Bible and most English Bibles in 1 Timothy 3:10, 13, translate the one Greek word, "diakoneo," into English phrase, "*use the office of a deacon.*"
2. Many commentators and Bible dictionaries make the assumption that because Paul in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 lists the qualifications of a deacon, he is setting forth the official office of "deacon."
3. Down through history, most commentators have simply accepted the incorrect traditional ideas of those they followed without a thorough examination of the matter themselves.
4. The Roman Catholic and Protestant churches all had a hierarchal system of church government in which "deacons" was an official ruling office. To have translated the word "diakonos" as "servant" would have degraded the position in these churches and made it less of an honored position. Further, the title "Deacon" envisioned a place of honor, whereas the title "servant" would not.

THE SOURCE OF THE PROBLEM

The first problem with the present-day misunderstanding of this position is caused by the transliteration (spelled in letters of another alphabet) of the Greek word "diakonos" into the word "deacon" instead of translating the word into the English equivalent. The same word is found thirty times in the New Testament and in only five verses in our English, New Testament is the Greek word transliterated "deacon" ("diakonos" a noun, three times and "diakoneo" a verb, twice).

The other twenty-five times the word is properly translated "servant" or "minister." It is exactly the same Greek word. There is no precedent, rule in grammar or translation, that would support or validate the transliteration of the word, "diakonos," into the English word, "deacon." The English word "servant" is a proper and accurate translation of the Greek word "diakonos."

In 1 Timothy 3:10 and 13 the phrase, "use the office of a deacon," is translated from one Greek word "diakoneo", being a verb, which is properly translated "ministry" or "service of a servant," denoting the action of the verb. The Greek word is defined by Arndt and Gingrich as meaning "to wait on someone."¹ Thayer defines the word as meaning "to be a servant, attendant, domestic; to serve, wait upon." He further states, "like the Latin, ministrare, to wait at table and offer food and drink to guests."² This word is a verb denoting an action of serving and is not a noun that would denote a title of an office, officer, or official.

Greek scholar, Kenneth Wuest translates the word, "*be serving as deacons.*"³ Most other translators translate the word, "serve as deacons."³ This is strong evidence that the New Testament does not support the establishment of an "office" or "board" of deacons. The English phrase "use the office" is a verb and if the Lord had intended to be referencing an official "office" then He would have used a noun. The biblical example is that of deacons being appointed servants to perform a specified service to the congregation. There is no example in the New Testament of an appointed servant functioning as ruling person or having authority in the church over the pastor or church.

The most common modern definition and understanding of the English word "office" is: "a position of responsibility or some degree of executive authority." (1.b, "office") In other words, an "office" is a position of some authority. However, the word office can be used in another sense as "something that one ought to do or must do: an assigned or assumed duty, task, role, or the proper or customary action of something: FUNCTION: something done for another: SERVICE" (4.a-c, "office").

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TRANSLITERATION VS TRANSLATION

Transliterating the verb *diakoneo* into "office of a deacon" does not distinguish which meaning is correct. History shows that, probably under the influence of the Church of England and Protestant churches, whose roots are found in Roman Catholicism; the word was understood incorrectly as referring to an official office, which supported their unbiblical hierarchical system of church government. These churches established "deacons" as official ruling officers in their churches.

The word "office" and "use" is not in any Greek text. Vines Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words says, the word is a verb, not a noun. ⁵ It is the word, "diakoneo," and means "to serve." As stated earlier, the phrase, "let them use of office of a deacon," is only one word in the Koine Greek and can accurately be translated "let them serve (or minister) as servants." The Greek word is a verb showing action, whereas the English word "office" is a noun which denotes a position. Clearly, the word "diakoneo" would be better translated "let them serve (or minister) as servants."

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Some might suppose that to take this position is to be opposed to having biblical deacons. This is not the case. The use of appointed servants in the church is a part of the Lord's stated organization of a local church. However, it is not scriptural to elect men to unbiblical positions in our churches. It is not God's will to appoint men as officers in a local church, call them "deacons," and purport that they hold a biblical position. In over thirty-one years of experience in churches, three years serving as a deacon, twenty-eight years as a pastor, as well as many examples of other churches of which I have personal knowledge, I have seen clear illustrations of the destructive results of misusing and misapplying the biblical role of a deacon. Any time the word of God is ignored or distorted there will be a negative result.

THE PRECEDENT FOUND IN ACTS 6:1-7

The role of a deacon, as Acts 6:1-7, clearly states, was that of waiting on tables and the distribution of food to the widows in the Jerusalem church. The root word "diako" from which "diakonos" is derived means "to run errands." ⁶ Seven spiritual men of good character were elected, not by the apostles, but by the congregation to look after that business. This was done to free the pastors from menial tasks, so they could better attend to their responsibilities in regard to studying, preaching and teaching. (Acts 6:4)

This is the only example we have of these specially appointed men serving in a church. From the example in the New Testament we can conclude the tasks to which a deacon can be biblically appointed are not limited to waiting tables, applying the interpretive "rule of first occurrence." The sphere of their responsibility should be limited to characteristics of the task in Acts 6:1-7, which was a menial administrative service to the congregation.

Some have supposed these were the forerunners of the later established official position of the office of a "deacon" of 1 Timothy 3:8-13. This idea is not consistent with the biblical record. In Acts 6:2, the Apostles called the church together and said, "*It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.*" The Apostles were asking the church to appoint someone to "serve tables." We understand this because the word "*diakoneo*" simply means "to serve or to wait on tables." An example of its use in the New Testament is found in Luke 10:40, when Martha complained to the Lord Jesus that, "*my sister hath left me to "serve"(diakoneo) alone.*" This is the same word used in 1 Timothy 3:10, 13 which was transliterated "*use the office of a deacon.*" The Jerusalem church understood clearly that they were appointing servants to "take care of this business," which was waiting on tables. Certainly, they understood they were not establishing an office of leadership in their church or putting these men in an official position over their church.

The type of servant, whether appointed or non-appointed), is indicated by the context in which the word is used. In Acts 6:1-7, and in 1 Timothy 3:8-13, the context tells you these men were "appointed servants." In other verses, where the word "*diakonos*," a noun, is used, the context explains that these references refer to servants in general.

It is incorrect to make the assumption that Charles C. Ryrie does in his Ryrie Study Bible note on Acts 6:2, which says, "The Greek word for "serve" is the one from which we derive "deacon," but these men were deacons only in the sense of being servants. However, these men were not servants in the sense of officers in the church ⁷ As a Protestant; Ryrie is upholding the position as an official ruling office.

This is the standard position of the Protestant denominations that got this false idea from the corrupt Roman Catholic system. The context of Acts 6:2 clearly shows no "office" in a church was being established, but men were being appointed to a particular service. There is no support in the New Testament for the assumption that God later changed the position and established a ruling office of deacons. There is no hint or example of this in the New Testament. Ephesians 4:11 is the last statement in the New Testament concerning those who ministered in an official or full-time capacity. *"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers."* (Ephesians 4:11) Note, deacons (servants) are not included. Deacons are not included because these are the official positions in an assembly that God "gave."

Ryrie, in his note on 1 Timothy 3:8, again sites the difference between the "servants" of Acts 6:1-7 and the "servants" (deacons) of 1 Timothy 3:8-13.⁸ In Acts 6:3, the Apostles stated the qualifications of these first appointed servants in the church as being, "men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom." These qualifications were simply a generalization of the character of these men and Paul in 1 Timothy 3:8-13, made the earlier generalization more specific. These men were to serve in a position in which there had been accusations of impropriety. There were both Jews. Some were Hebrew, Aramaic speaking Jews and the others, Greek speaking widows.

The Greek speaking widows were complaining that the Hebrew widows were getting preferential treatment because they were born in Judea and spoke the native language. It was the Apostles, who were serving them food, and they were the ones the complaints were being directed toward. The Grecian widows, were looked down upon by the Jews of Judea, as being inferior thus the Grecian widows perceived they were being slighted. The contention I believe was not founded. Although the Apostles were Galatians (Grecians) it would be out of character for them to show either group of widows any preference. However, it seems the Greek speaking widows thought they were not being treated fairly. Therefore, the task of administering to these widows called for men who were above reproach in character. There is no reason to suppose these were "forerunners" of officials called "deacons" as Ryrie states. They had no title other than that of being a servant. They were not called deacons because no such a title is used in the New Testament. This will be covered further later in this paper. In Acts 6:1-7, we have the first mention of these servants being appointed by the church to do some specific work that needed being done. There is absolutely nothing in the New Testament to suggest that these were a different position or appointment and that the later "deacons" of 1 Timothy 3:8-13, were official "officers" in the local church.

THE EXAMPLE OF PHEBE IN ROMANS 16:1-2

It is interesting and revealing to read Ryrie's note on Romans 16:1. The verse says, "Phebe, our sister, which is a "servant" of the church which is at Cenchrea." The word "servant" here is the feminine word "diakonon." Ryrie says, "The word here translated "servant" is often translated "deacon", which leads some to believe that Phebe was a deaconess. However, the word is more likely used here in an unofficial sense of helper."⁹ However, if you understand that the word is correctly translated "servant" and not deaconess there is no problem. Phebe was a servant in her church in the same way any woman can be a servant in their church. Her position was of service not leadership.

Ryrie concludes this was not "the official" position of a deacon because Phebe was a woman. However, if you understand the word is correctly translated "servant" and not deaconess there is no problem. Phebe was a servant in her church in the same way any woman can be a servant in their church. Her position was of service not leadership. The reason some have a problem with the Phebe being a "deacon" is they assume that it is an official office of leadership in the church. When asked do I believe in, "deaconesses in the church." I reply, "absolutely!" However, I always qualify my reply by explaining that the word denotes a female "servant" and not an officer of the church.

Two of the men appointed in Acts 6, Philip and Stephen, achieved prominence as preachers. However, neither is later identified as or given the title of deacon. The most obvious reason is that there was no such official "title" as "deacon" in use in New Testament times. The word "servant" was a job description that described their ministry. There is no reference in the New Testament of anyone being called or given the title of "deacon." For example, if a modern church elected someone as "grounds keeper" we would not be making an official authoritative office in the church, but rather be giving a job description of the position and responsibility to which that the person was elected. We would certainly not call the church member "Grounds Keeper Jones" or "Servant Jones." The misunderstanding would go away if we stopped using the word "deacon" and used the correct English word "servant." But on a humorous note, who would want to be called "Servant Jones?" The title "Deacon Jones" carries with it a false sense of prestige and honor, which is totally contrary to the biblical position and responsibility.

Someone might point out the phrase "use the office of" is used in 1 Timothy 3:1, in reference to a "office" of a bishop. Here, too, the Greek word is "diakoneo" and is better translated "to minister" or "to serve." This verse, too, can be properly translated, "If a man desire the ministry (or service) of a bishop, he desireth a good work." The responsibility and position of leadership is established in the use of the word "bishop" which means an "overseer" and other

verses of Scriptures establish the place of leadership of the pastor (Acts 20:28, Eph. 4:11-12, 1 Timothy 5:17, Hebrews 13:17, 1 Peter 5:2).

It should be noted that when Paul sent Titus to the churches of Crete, to "set them in order" by instructing them in the appointing of pastors, he did not instruct him to also appoint "deacons" (Titus 1:5). If there are two "offices" in a church, pastors and deacon, why did Paul not tell Titus to appoint "deacons" as well? This omission is especially important when it is understood that Paul sent Titus to organize these assemblies and "set them in order." If a church must have deacons in order to be properly organized, why did Paul omit their appointment?

In none of the New Testament lists of gifts that are related to ministering, and leadership in a church are deacons mentioned (1 Cor. 12:28, Eph. 4:11). Surely, it was not an oversight on God's part to omit deacons. I believe the reason they were not listed is that there was no such "office." These appointed servants of the congregation held an important job in the church, but it was not a position or office of leadership. Their job was to help the pastors by performing menial tasks for the congregation and work as peacemakers among the widows of the church, thus freeing the pastor's time to ". . . give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4). The word ministry used in Acts 6:4, is interestingly "diakonia" or "service." Their appointment was clearly not to advise or have any ruling authority over the pastor or congregation.

In Acts 6:3, when the Twelve Disciples called the assembly together they asked the congregation to appoint "seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this "business." The word "business" is the Greek word "chrea" which means "necessity or duty." The congregation was not appointing them to an office, but giving them a responsibility or duty to take care of the widows. Over the years I have watched as churches have elected deacons from their assemblies "to serve on the Board of Deacons" and be elevated to positions of authority over the congregation. Clearly, churches have left the biblical example and elected men to an "honorary" position of leadership, serving on an official ruling board of a church.

Instead of electing servants that were needed to carry on administrative tasks and be helpers to the pastor and congregation, churches put these men in a place of authority over the local congregation and often even over the pastor. It is normal today to elect deacons without giving them any real function in the church, and "ordain" them merely to an honorary position in the church. Some see electing men deacons as an act of honor, recognition and reward in the church. Often, instead of looking for men qualified to perform some specific task

that needs to be done, men are chosen because of the social or economic status in the church or because they "earned" the honor.

It is a common practice in some churches to see their position as being counselors to the pastor or working in the leadership of a church in conjunction with the pastor. Frequently, pastors have elevated deacons above the other members of the congregation by holding special counsel with their "Board of Deacons." Often, if a pastor wants something done in the congregation, he first must go to his "deacon board" and get their counsel or approval on the matter. This unbiblical practice gives the false impression to the congregation that deacons hold a leadership or elevated position over the church. There is no biblical example of a pastor seeking the counsel of his deacons in the overseeing of a local church.

In Acts 15, when the church at Antioch needed counsel they went to the Jerusalem church. In Acts 15:4, 22, it states the matter was placed before the whole church, the apostles and the elders. (Acts 15:6) The apostles, elders and the whole church recognized that this was the proper way to seek counsel in a church. If there was a hierarchy recognized in the Jerusalem church why did they not just take the matter to them? The reason is there was no elder or Presbyterian type of rule in the early church. By involving the whole church and its leaders, the precedent of congregational rule was confirmed. Christ's strong denunciation of the Nicolaitanes in Rev. 2:6, 15 is further evidence that God "hates" (means to detest) those who would seek to establish a hierarchy to rule over the local congregation. Couple this with the fact that Jesus in Revelation 2-3, addressed each church through its pastor (angel/messenger) and it sets the matter to rest. Christ was speaking to the whole congregation to commend them or instruct them to turn from the error of their ways. He properly did it through their overseer whom he had placed to lead them. Please note God inspired John to write this almost sixty years after He instituted the institution of the local church. This shows this was the practice at the end of the 1st century in the churches, and deacons did not have an official position.

Often the justification of using deacons as leaders or counselors to the pastor and church comes from a pragmatic philosophy of church organization, which ignores biblical principle and example. This view says if it works, then do it. It is a poor leader who must go to his deacons and get them on his side before he attempts to bring a matter before his congregation. There is nothing wrong with a pastor discussing church matters with men in his church, but it is unbiblical for a pastor to go to his "church board" in order to carry out his duties as the overseer of his church. This is simply a form of the unscriptural "elder rule" of the Presbyterians and a few other churches. This procedure is merely a dressed-up form of Presbyterianism or elder rule, which is foreign to New

Testament churches. The New Testament teaches in every case congregational rule, which means that all members of the church are equal in all matters concerning the church's business. Evidence of this can be seen in the New Testament example given in Acts 6:2, which states that the Twelve Disciples carried the matter to the congregation, and the congregation appointed them to the task that needed attention. If the New Testament was teaching "elder" rule, the Apostles would have appointed these servants, but that is clearly not how God wanted it done.

Using men unscripturally in this position tends to elevate them above the rest of the congregation. Often church constitutions incorrectly require the pastor and church to use the deacons in leadership positions. One place this can create a real problem is in giving deacons the position of locating and calling a new pastor. When a pastor leaves, these men are elevated to a special leadership status in the congregation. This sends a wrong message requiring that deacons must be the ones who look for and present to the congregation a new pastor.

To spiritual men this is not a problem, but for many, it gives them the first taste of authority in the church. History proves this point and sadly, it is a valid one. Many times when the new pastor comes, the deacons are not always willing to relinquish their new-found prestige and position. The congregation, placed under deacon leadership, often begins to look to them for guidance. Some church members find it easier to get a deacon to agree with them and take their side in some disagreement involving the pastor. This has often been the turning point when deacons eventually began to take control of a church. Many times this procedure has ultimately led to deacons ruling over a local church and seeing themselves as having the position of authority over the hiring and firing of their pastor.

Is it correct and proper to use men from the congregation to help in holding services when the church is without a pastor? Philip and Steven are examples of men who were appointed servants (deacons) in the church who were also preachers. I have been using men in my congregation to hold Bible studies, prayer meetings and even to preach periodically during my entire ministry, but I did not use them simply because they held the special status of deacon. Being a deacon is not what qualifies a man to teach or preach in the church. The men I chose were used because they were godly and spiritual men, and it had nothing to do with them being a deacon. The emphasis in using the men in the church should not be that they are deacons, as any man in the church could be used without regard to whether they are deacons or not. Surely, my congregation and I should seek to appoint and use spiritual men with the ability to carry out a needed service or task, and this should be the only criteria.

Deacons could serve the congregation in this function based on their ability and willingness to serve, but not on their position as deacons.

In the first church I pastured, I ran head-on into the situation where the deacons ran the pastor and the church. In one of my first business meetings, I made a proposal to the church which they voted on and wholeheartedly accepted. Several days later the "head deacon" (Chairman of the Deacon Board) came to my house and brought up the matter I had presented. He informed me that in the future if I wanted to present something to the church, I should first consult him, and if he thought it worthy, he would present it to the deacon board. If the deacon board thought it a worthy idea, they would present it to the church, and it would pass without difficulty. When I informed him, this was not the proper function of deacons, pastors, or of biblical church polity, and I would follow the New Testament, he became upset and from that day on started a campaign to remove me as pastor. He did not want to relinquish his unbiblical position and power in that church. I do not believe that God will or can bless a congregation that allows men to usurp their pastor's God-given position and take the rule over him and the congregation. Once this unbiblical situation comes into power over a church it becomes a yoke that few churches can cast off. Further, this unbiblical use of men in churches has also spiritually destroyed many good men who were incorrectly elected to an unscriptural "board of deacons" and told they had authority over the pastor and congregation. This situation is especially hard for a young pastor to deal with, and it has caused many to fall by the wayside.

Over the years I have followed a procedure which I believe best represents the New Testament example of congregational rule. Simply stated, when I need counsel or have matters to discuss with the men, I call all the men of the church together and discuss the matter with them. Proverbs 15:22 says, "Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established." I always make it very clear that what we are discussing will be brought before the whole church and properly discussed and voted on. In following this procedure, I am not promoting a special and unbiblical class of men in our church. I am showing equal respect for all of our men. Some might point out that in larger churches, it might be difficult to follow this procedure. My answer to that is twofold. First, if I follow this practice now while my church is small and solidly ground my people into understanding the biblical role of specially elected servants in the church, later they will not allow a group of deacons or anyone else to gain control or to usurp authority over the pastor or the congregation. Secondly, if the church becomes too large to call all the men together, I believe it would be advisable to appoint a committee to look into the particular situations to make recommendations with the pastor to the church. These committees could be elected annually, and their terms of service limited

to ensuring that they would not become an unbiblical group. Their responsibilities should also be clearly defined and limited.

I have always made it a priority to teach what the Bible says concerning what God intended "deacons" to be to the church. Our "deacons" (servants) clean the church, do the yard work, cut the grass, do maintenance on the building, and work at handling the church's books, finances, clerical duties and other tasks. Those whom God has giving the talent of teaching can certainly be used in this position.

One problem is that some churches appoint men to the position as a deacon for life. The church constitution should clearly set forth their duties and term of service. They should be elected annually and receive prior approval from the pastor who makes sure they meet all the biblical qualifications. The church constitution should have clear instructions for the election and for the removal of men who become disqualified to serve.

I do not want to belabor the point, but when a church finds itself without a pastor, often the deacons of a church are given the task of finding a new pastor for the church. I believe it is a better procedure for the outgoing pastor to instruct the church in calling a new pastor and by electing a temporary pulpit committee from the floor in a business meeting. These people would be instructed as to their duties and procedures. It will (should) be clear that they would function as the servants of the whole assembly, and once the new pastor is called and arrives; their services are terminated. This violates no scripture and does not elevate deacons to be responsible for hiring and firing pastors. It sets a bad precedent for a "board of deacons" to seek and present pastoral candidates to the church. Spiritual men would properly understand their responsibility; however, in many cases using deacons as a "pulpit committee" eventually ends with the "board" seeing themselves as the ones who "hire and fire" the pastor. The carnal nature of man concludes that if you can hire and fire the pastor, you have authority over him. Using a temporary pulpit committee, elected by the congregation from the assembly, precludes deacons assuming authority over the pastor that God does not give them. [To read an email from a hurting church where deacons ruled, go to my Frequently Asked Questions about Deacons Page.](#)

Often, smaller churches do not need deacons (elected servants) as the menial tasks are done generally by all the congregation on a volunteer basis. When things need to be discussed, as stated above, I call all the men together, and we confer on the matter at hand. This procedure has served our congregation well, and we operate in a spirit of unity. A church does not have to

have deacons in order to have a biblical church polity. When there is a need for some service a pastor can mention it in a service and get volunteers.

In many churches, after deacons are elected, they have a special ceremony in which the pastor and other deacons "lay hands" on the candidate and "ordain" the deacon. In the New Testament, there is no reference to "ordaining" deacons as practiced by many churches today. Note what A.C. Gaebelien says about the matter:

"The seven were then set before the Apostles and when they prayed they laid their hands on them. This is the first time we find the laying on of hands in the Book of Acts. As this "laying on of hands" is so much misunderstood, and has been made an act by which authority, power and blessing is claimed to be conferred, we must say a brief word on it. It is always proper in reading and interpreting the Word of God, to see if not elsewhere in the Bible the terms or things to be interpreted are used, so that through them the right meaning can be ascertained. The laying on of hands is first mentioned in the Book of Leviticus. In the opening chapters of that book we read how the offerer was to lay his hand upon the head of the offering. Thus we read of the Peace offering: "He shall lay his hand upon the head of his offering" (Lev. iii: 2). This meant the identification of the Israelite with the offering itself. And this is the only meaning of the laying on of hands from the side of the Apostles. They identified themselves and the assembly with them in their work for which they had been chosen. It was a very simple and appropriate act to show their fellowship with them. All else which has been made of the laying on of hands is an invention. There is no Scripture for the present day usage in Christendom, that a man, in order to preach the Gospel or teach the Word of God must be "ordained."¹⁰

The act of "laying on of hands" was merely a cultural oriental practice in which one would show his identification with or approval of the person on which he placed his hand. It was not used to "set apart to the sacred office in the church" or to "put their honor upon those chosen to the same responsible and dignified position" as Unger's Bible Dictionary states.¹¹ The present day use of "ordination" comes from the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches and should not be confused with what the early church practiced. After a church elects its officers each year it is proper to have special prayer and install them in their duties. This is completely in line with the biblical example.

In closing, I can find no scriptural precedent for a church to misuse or misapply the ministry of specially appointed servants (deacons) in the local church as many churches are doing today. The reason most church appoint

deacons is because of tradition. Clearly the Lord spoke often of the error of following traditions. (Matt. 15:2-3,6; Mark 7:3,5,8-9,13) Paul and Peter also warned against following traditions. (Col. 2:8; 1 Peter 1:18) I believe we must follow the biblical example literally and add nothing to it or take anything away from it. A godly servant, who serves his fellow believers faithfully, is an asset to any local church and brings honor to the Lord. The pastor and the church must be careful in setting the position within the biblical example and make sure that it is never changed.

It is interesting to read in Strong's Systematic Theology, such statements as, "The number of offices in the church is two: -first the office of bishop, presbyter, or pastor; and secondly, the office of deacon." ¹² In numerous pages following, which address the "officers" of the church and their duties, it is well to note that Strong never gives even one scriptural reference for his conclusion of deacons being "officers" in the church. The reason is apparent that there is no Scriptural reference available.

Elmer Towns, in his textbook, Theology for Today, also concludes there is an "office" of a deacon by using Philippians 1:1, in which Paul addresses the Epistle to "To all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons." He further says, "Because these are the only two that are identified with the title office, most churches conclude these are the only New Testament offices in the church." ¹³

First, to conclude that in Philippians 1:1, Paul only addresses the bishops and servants (deacons) and that this establishes the authority of a deacon is a weak point. If you correctly translate the sentence as "To all the saints in Christ Jesus, which are at Philippi, with the bishops and servants" the problem goes away. There is nothing in this verse to suggest that Paul was recognizing any other than the pastors and all the servants or members in the church at Philippi. Towns refers to 1 Timothy 3:1 and 3:11 as using the word "office" of a bishop and deacon respectively. He fails to note that the word translated into the English noun, "office" and the verb "use" is not in any Greek text. As stated earlier, the phrase translated in our English Bibles, "use the office" is one word in the Greek, which is a verb and is, literally translated "ministry or service of a servant." Thus, he, as well as many others are basing their conclusions that there is an "office" of a deacon on a faulty and misleading translation of the Greek text.

Chafer, the Baptist theologian, in his Systematic Theology, refers to the position of a deacon also as being an office, but correctly concludes that they "seem to have been concerned with the offices of comfort and charity rather than

with those of oversight."¹⁴ Thus he seems to understand the word "office" as being an assigned task and not an official church office.

A simple substitution of the word "ministry" for "offices" in his statement would bring it in line with the New Testament Greek text. In studying this matter, I have read the conclusions of dozens of commentators. One thing I find common to those who teach the "office of a deacon" idea is that they take a eisegetical approach in arriving at their conclusions. They seem to begin with the assumption, there is an "office" and then base their comments on this conjecture.

Further, those who elect "deacon" in an official capacity, do not give any references to establish their practice and presumption exegetically. (Eisegesis means reading a meaning into Scripture. Exegesis means taking the meaning from the text). Some may not agree with this position and choose to use the "deacon board" or a modified elder rule approach in their churches. Those that do so should acknowledge they have no biblical foundation for their practice. They should understand that it is God Himself who established church polity and not man. This issue is a matter of conviction, based upon many years of study of the matter. Most churches have the seeds of their destruction sown when they were founded and one seed that could destroy a church is electing men to the unbiblical position of authority as deacons.

I do not make this a matter to break or base fellowship with other men. Many men and churches, which I deeply respect, do not hold to the biblical position. I would encourage them to take the time and study the matter thoroughly and follow the example of the Bereans. *"These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so (insert period)"* (Acts 17:11). However, I feel that I must, follow the dictates of my conscience and the New Testament example and in good conscience before the Lord obey His word. By taking this course, I am acknowledging that the Head of the congregation, that I pastor is the Lord Jesus Christ who died for it (Eph. 5:25). He is the Chief Shepherd. The local assembly belongs to Him, and I am but His overseer and under-shepherd. Neither I, nor anyone else, have any authority to change in any way the church that He founded and built. It is His assembly, and I must faithfully follow the strict example of the New Testament. I must not just blindly accept tradition or what many practice, but rather *"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."* (2 Timothy 2:15) and *". . . let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another"* (Gal. 6:4). God will not and cannot bless error in any form; therefore, a church with an

unbiblical use of servants "deacons" cannot expect God's favor or blessings in this area. In time this principle will prove itself to be true.

A Comparison of the Qualifications of Bishops and Deacons 1 Timothy 3:1-13

<u>Bishops(Pastors)</u>	<u>Servants (Deacons)</u>
1. First, have the desire (Is called of God, thus has the desire)	1. Not mentioned (Is appointed by the assembly - no call!)
2. Blameless	2. Blameless
3. Husband of one wife.	3. Husband of one wife.
4. Vigilant	4. Not mentioned
5. Sober	5. Not mentioned
6. Of good behavior	6. Not mentioned
7. Given to hospitality	7. Not mentioned
8. Apt to teach	8. Not mentioned
9. Not given to wine	9. Not given to much wine
10. No striker	10. Not mentioned
11. Not greedy of money	11. Not greedy of money
12. Patience	12. Not mentioned
13. Not a brawler	13. Not mentioned
14. Not covetous	14. Not mentioned
15. Rules his house well*	15. Rules house/children in subjection*
16. Not a novice	16. Must be proved
17. Have good report in community	17. Not mentioned
18. Grave	18. Not mentioned
19. Not double tongued	19. Not mentioned
20. Holding faith, and a good conscience(1 Tim. 1:19)	20. Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience

*(For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God.)

Note that in a comparison of the qualifications of bishops and deacons that the deacons qualifications have to do with service and not leadership.

End Notes:

1. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (Chicago:University of Chicago, 1957) p183.
2. Joseph H. Thayer, Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (Hendrickson:Mass, 2003) p137.
3. Kenneth S. Wuest The New Testament, An Expanded Translation William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1959, p494.
4. Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, <http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/office>.
5. Merrill F. Unger and William White, Vines Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words, 1985, p443.
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6. Kenneth S. Wuest, The New Testament, An Expanded Translation, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1959, p494.
7. Charles C. Ryrie, Ryrie Study Bible, Moody Press, Chicago, 1978, p1548
8. Ibid p1711.
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10. A.C. Gaebelien, The Acts of the Apostles, , Publication Office "Our Hope", New York City, 1912, p121.
11. Merrill F. Unger, The New Unger's Bible Dictionary, Moody Press:Chicago, 1988, p534.
12. A. H. Strong, Strong's Systemic Theology, Fleming H. Revell Company, Old Tappan, New Jersey, 1907, p914.
13. Elmer Towns, Theology for Today, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 1994, p492.
14. Lewis Sperry Chafer, Systematic Theology, Vol. IV, Dallas:Dallas Seminary Press,1948, p152.

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