



Paul does not directly mention the deacons in the structure of the local church¹. In view of the profile sketch below it can be accepted that he places them under the chapter 'helping'.

Explanation of the word 'deacons'.

'Deacon' is the translation of 'diakonos'.

'Diakonos' is to be found in 28 verses of the Bible and is only translated as 'deacons' 3 times, twice in 1 Timothy (see profile sketch below) and one more time in Philippians 1:1:

- *Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and **deacons** ...*

'Diakonos' is translated by the OLB as:

- one who executes the commands of another, esp. of a master
- a servant, attendant, minister
- the servant of a king
- a deacon, one who, by virtue of the office assigned to him by the church, cares for the poor and has charge of and distributes the money collected for their use
- a waiter, one who serves food and drink

According to the Greek/Dutch dictionary:

- servant, maidservant
- helper, messenger
- (use of the word in the N.T.) deacon

A few Bible verses in which 'diakonos' appears:

- *Whoever wants to become great among you must be your **servant**. (Matthew 20:26)*
- *"Then the king told the **attendants**, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'" (Matthew 22:13)*
- *His mother (Mary, at the wedding at Cana) said to the **servants**, "Do whatever he (Jesus) tells you." (John 2:5)*
- *Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my **servant** also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me. (John 12:26)*
- *For I tell you that Christ has become a **servant** of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, ... (Romans 15:8)*
(As Jesus said of Himself in Mark 10:45: For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.)
- *I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a **deacon** of the church in Cenchreae. (Romans 16:1)*

In the translation of the OLB 'diakonos' is mostly seen as being a **servant** with respect to an order or a command.

¹ Study: 1 Corinthians 12:28 - Structure of the local church.



It appears from the Bible texts that this is not always the case and that a '**diakonos**' is simply someone who serves someone else, as can be concluded from the translation by the Greek/Dutch dictionary.

Serving is the commission for everyone who belongs to the body of Jesus Christ, as Paul writes:

- *But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. (1 Corinthians 12:18)*
- *... so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have **equal concern for each other**. (1 Corinthians 12:25)*

This 'concern for each other', means that a disciple of Jesus Christ adopts a servanthood attitude in the church and is ready to be a servant/maidservant at any time.

A number of examples of this are to be found, among other places, in the study on gifts of grace/presents out of kindness from Romans 12².

The deacon.

Every disciple of Jesus Christ should serve others voluntarily during his lifetime, because of the love of God that is poured out in his/her heart.

In the church, however, people can also be given the **task** of serving the **whole church**.

To make the distinction that this serving takes place at the behest of the elders, these people are called '**deacons**' in the New Testament.

Profile sketch of a deacon.

Just as Paul gives a profile sketch for the elders to Timothy, he does likewise for the deacons too.

- *In the same way, **deacons** are to be worthy of respect,*
- *sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain.*
- *They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience.*
- *They must first be tested;*
- *and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.*
- *In the same way, the women are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.*
- *A deacon must be faithful to his wife and must manage his children and his household well.*
- *Those who have served well gain an excellent standing*
- *and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus. (1 Timothy 3:8-13)*

By beginning the profile sketch for the deacons with 'in the same way' Paul couples this to the profile sketch of the elders.

Both of these profile sketches show similarities on a number of points, even though he lays a few different emphases for the deacons.

² Study: Romans 12:6-9 - We have different gifts.



Looking more closely at the profile sketch.

- Like the elders, the deacons are to be above reproach and blameless, even though Paul adds that the deacons must first be tested. (*They must first be tested*)
- *A deacon must be faithful to his wife and must manage his children and his household well.* This is important for deacons too.
- Paul mentions the wives here, and this implies that he sees a deacon as serving in the church together - as a couple - with his wife.
- Deacons must also be faithful to their wives.
See the study about elders for further explanation.³

- *Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.*

This appears to indicate that deacons are closer to the people than the elders, because of the services they render. Because of this they will find more openness and be able to talk about the Gospel with greater courage.

Think of Stephen and Philip for example, two of the seven who were appointed to be deacons.

- *Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, **performed great wonders and signs among the people.*** (Acts 6:8)
- *... and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven. He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.* (Acts 21:8)

Appointment of the deacons.

No deacons are named by name in the New Testament.

The Book of Acts does talk about the appointment of seven men, who can be regarded as deacons.

- *In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.*
- *So the Twelve (apostles) gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables.*
- *Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them*
- *and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."*
- *This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism.*
- *They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.*
(Acts 6:1-6)

³ Study: Elders and overseers.



What are the circumstances?

- The church in Jerusalem had shown strong growth.
- As a result the practical tasks were becoming too onerous for the apostles.
- Because they wished to concentrate on their commission, prayer and ministering the Word, they called the church together.
- They asked the church to choose seven men, who were well reputed and full of the Spirit and wisdom.
- The men who were recommended by the church were confirmed in their commission by the apostles, by the laying on of hands. Because of this they can be regarded as deacons, even though that is not specifically stated.

What is to be learned from this?

Deacons are appointed for a practical task.

Because the attention of the apostles to the spiritual health of the church was going to suffer because of the practical tasks that were requested of them, they delegated these to others.

They were recommended by the church.

The apostles do not themselves seek to whom God is designating a responsibility for looking after the widows in the church.

Nor do they ask who want to put themselves forward as candidates for the task.

They ask the church to recommend suitable candidates.

Paul's above-mentioned profile sketch is a great help in this respect.

This has several advantages:

- it is healthy to give responsibilities to church members
- they will usually know one another better than those who lead the church
- they will be able to accept the authority of the people they themselves have recommended more easily.

They carry their duties out under authority.

Even though they are recommended by the church, the apostles, who are the ones who gave leadership to the church at that time, appoint them. They thus transfer some of their responsibilities to them.

In order to avoid misunderstandings it is sensible to describe the task given to a deacon clearly - both the specific task as the duration thereof.

The management of the church.

Acts 6 talks about the life of the early church that came into being following the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. At that time the apostles appear to be the leaders of the church, and they transfer a practical task to others as a first step.

The organisation of the church was apparently split up more and more, for Paul writes later, in 1 Corinthians 12:28, that he regards the apostles, prophets and teachers as the spiritual leaders, **before** going on to give instructions for the practical organisation of the church.