



# Minutes With Messiah

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## Get Off the Phone

Recently the United States Congress chose not to ban cell phones while driving cars. This was in spite of recent research that says that five times as many people die each year as a direct result of driving with cell phones as died from faulty Firestone Tires. Congress said that there were so many other distractions that affected drivers as well, like putting on make-up or eating.

All this serves to point out that distractions can be hazardous to one's health. How many of us (yes, me too) have been walking along and looked at a distraction only to run into a wall, a tree, or some other obstacle? Don't tell me it never happened to you; lying is a sin.

Speaking of sin, that is a distraction as we walk the path God wants of us. Even in this day of ready light at night time we often try to move around in the dark, and sometimes stumble thereby. The people of Christ's time understood this even more. John used this example to point out the difference between sin and faithfulness, between hate and love.

He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes. (1 John 2:10-11)

Every day we are faced with distractions. One of them may be hatred, as indicated by John. Ezekiel 7:19 says that gold and silver may be our distraction, keeping us from obeying God. Ezekiel also spoke of idols as distractions, calling them "the stumblingblock of their iniquity" (Ezek 14:3). All these we might consider the readily avoidable distractions. Surely we don't bow down to a statue or rely on our money for salvation. We never hate anybody; at least not anybody we have actually met. And yet we let our minds be distracted by "lesser" things.

"I just don't have the time to read my Bible," someone says while watching the latest murder and sex on "NYPD Blue" or the nightly news. "I would like to

attend the assembly of the saints more often, but I have to work two jobs to make ends meet," says the man driving the Mercedes.

Nobody said the distractions had to be sinful of themselves. A distraction from obeying God becomes sinful, even if intrinsically neutral. At least, that is what Paul told the Romans and the Corinthians.

But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse. But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak. For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. (1 Cor 8:8-12; a similar passage is in Romans 14)

Food, even that offered to idols, is not sinful. But Paul had a word for distracting a brother by what one eats—that word was "sin."

When we talk about cell phones we may say with the bumper sticker, "Get off the phone or get off the road." But in our Christian walk we can't afford to get off the road. That leaves the other option. Get off the phone; ignore the distractions and "press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." (Phil 3:14)

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# Misunderstood Deacon

Deacon, minister, servant. All are equivalent meanings. Then does a preacher have to be a Deacon to be called a minister? Are there ministers who are not deacons? Are there deacons who are not ministers? And who should be moved from being a deacon to being a Deacon? (I use the capital D here to denote the office of deacon indicated in 1 Timothy 3.) All these questions and others lend credence to the idea that there might be such a thing as a “misunderstood deacon.”

Although much has been written on the office of a Deacon, some confusion exists yet. I don't hope to end the confusion, but merely shed some light on some aspects of it. Since I am, from here on, generally talking about the deacons to whom Paul referred in 1 Timothy 3, I will henceforward drop the capital.

## Ministers and Deacons

Not every time that English translations of the Bible use the word minister are they translating the Greek word that is sometimes transliterated “deacon.” Sometimes it is a translation of other words that have the meaning of: one who holds public office (from which we get the word “liturgy”) as in Rom 15:16, “That I [Paul] should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles”; or a subordinate, as in 1 Cor 4:1, “Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.” Many times, however, it is a translation of the word meaning a servant, also rendered “deacon.”

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That there were those called ministers who were not the same as those designated deacons is readily apparent. In Romans 13:4 Paul refers to the representative of the established government as a minister of God. Since that may have included many who are unbelievers (as is true of many of the world's leaders today), he is clearly not talking about those whom the church might designate as deacons. In 2 Cor 11:15 Paul uses the word referring to servants of Satan—certainly not those Paul would want to be

selected by the church for special service.

Paul also spoke of those who were preachers of the gospel, not necessarily for a single congregation, as ministers/deacons. He used the term for Christ (Rom 15:8), himself (Col 1:23, 25), himself and Apollos (1 Cor 3:5), and Timothy (1 Thes 3:2). While it is conceivable that a preacher sent from a congregation to teach others, as was Paul, may be a deacon of that congregation it may also be that not everyone who was called a minister was also a deacon.

Nor is it necessary that every deacon be a preacher/minister. One distinction between the qualities of an elder (as listed in 1 Tim 3) and the qualities of a deacon listed shortly thereafter is that an elder must be “apt to teach,” but a deacon is not so required.

## Who Should be Chosen a Deacon?

I will be looking at two different aspects of this question. The first, and obvious, aspect is the “qualifications” or “qualities” of deacons. These are specified in 1 Tim 3:8-13.

Likewise must the deacons be grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless. Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Essentially, a deacon should be a good Christian man, married to a good Christian woman, having children (at least one), who (the deacon, not the children) is also a good manager. This is a description of just about any family man in the church. Possibly a widower or divorced man may be disqualified, but beyond that almost any married father in the church may be selected as a deacon.

Perhaps the one requirement that is most often neglected is that he must first be tested. I understand this to mean that a man who has not shown any inclination toward service in the first place is not qualified to be a deacon. You don't select a man and hope that conferring the title will make him more of a servant than he has

been in the past. It may also mean that a deacon is to be “tested” as to whether he holds “the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.” That is, he should be shown to be living a correct life. On the other hand, the testing may simply be referring to a selection process, of which I have seen several.

The other, related, aspect of the question is whether a congregation should limit the number of deacons. I had a preacher once ask me why I was not at that time a deacon. His thought was that a congregation should name all qualified men as deacons. He said that any congregation has enough jobs to do that every qualified man should hold the office. I am still not fully convinced this is so. If the men selected for service in Acts 6 can be referred to as deacons, and some would say they should not, then the apostles and elders clearly selected only part of the qualified pool of men to hold the office. They were selected for a special service and apparently would not have been selected if that service were not required. Even if those men were not deacons there is nothing to indicate in 1 Timothy 3 that every man qualified as an elder or deacon must necessarily be so named. Although most churches that have a number of men qualified for the office do also have specific works for most of them to do, creating “busy work” just so a deacon has a given task is no better for churches than it is for businesses.

If the men chosen in Acts 6 were deacons, it is also possible that once the specific work for which they were selected has been completed then they should no longer be considered as holding that office. It is likely that the Philip selected to see to the needs of the Grecian widows in Acts 6 is the same Philip who preached to the Samaritans and the Ethiopian in Acts 8. If so, then his task concerning the widows was apparently completed before Acts 8. Was he still a deacon when he went out of the city preaching, or had that function, and that office, ended before that time? The scripture is silent on the matter. But if a deacon is selected to manage a specific, temporary function, it appears that once that need is met he need no longer hold the office.

## Servant or Leader?

How often I have heard, in prayers or otherwise, reference made to “the leaders of this church, the elders and deacons.” Therein I find another demonstration of “the misunderstood deacon.”

Is a deacon a leader of the congregation? What is his function? The word means servant. Vine indicates “*Diakonos* views a servant in relationship to his work; *doulos* [slave] views him in relationship to his master.” (*Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*) This would indicate that a

deacon is primarily a servant, not a leader. To whom is he a servant? Certainly to Christ. Most probably to the elders, and thus to the whole congregation. If, in fact, his primary function was financial or physical management as is probable (based on Acts 6 and 1 Timothy 3:12-13), then he cannot be called a leader of the church. His job is performing a duty or service as directed by another, rather than directing others. Any leadership is incidental to rather than necessary to his functioning as a deacon.

In modern times the concept of a deacon as a leader in the congregation has led to the idea that the office of deacon is primarily a stepping stone to the eldership. While some of the qualities required of each

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office are the same, the concept of a deacon as a servant might actually make him less likely to be qualified as an elder, who is charged with leadership. The offices are unrelated to each other. A man need not have been a deacon to be an elder. A good deacon may never qualify to be an elder.

Misunderstood or not, the office of deacon is both important and honorable. Paul closed his discussion of deacons saying that one who served well purchases a good standing or position. Further, he gains “great boldness in the faith.” That alone seems to make it a worthy position to which to aspire.

## ***Our New Logo***

Minutes With Messiah has a new logo, as seen on page 1. There was some confusion about the old logo. Its intent was to show the continuity of the Messianic tradition through Judaism to Christ. Although the cross in the logo was intentionally larger and more prominent, some questioned whether I was making the cross and the star of David equal. To avoid confusion I chose to design a new logo. It consists of the initials MWM (for Minutes With Messiah) in the form of a stylized heart atop a mountain peak. The idea is based on 2 Cor 3:3, where Paul talks of the Corinthians as Christ's letter written on the heart, and Philippians 3:4, "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

# Roll Call

All through high school and college the first thing that happened in any of my classes was roll call. Throughout a career in the Navy, every work or duty day started with a roll call. Most of the time it was to make sure that everyone who was supposed to be there was there. Some of the time, particularly in classes, it was also to make sure that anyone who wasn't supposed to be there didn't stay. Colleges especially don't like people to audit classes without paying at least a small fee.

The old song, "When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder (I'll Be There)" brings up memories of a lifetime of roll calls. The song is based on Revelation 20:11-15:

And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

It sure looks like some of the classroom scenes of my youth. You walk in and sit down and the teacher says, "Class, get out your books." Then another book is opened, the grade book. The teacher calls out the names in the book and you answer, "Here." People have nightmares where they show up in a class and their name is not called. Then they realize they are in the wrong class.

One of my nightmares (or is it daymares since I never actually dreamed it, just dread it) is that I will show up at this final classroom scene. I will sit down and open my books, the Old and New Testaments, and the Teacher will open his other book. He calls out the names in His book, and at the end of the list I find my name is not there. It's "finals" day, I have been sitting through the class for my whole life, and I find that the teacher doesn't recognize me as a class member.

It's a scary thought, since it is a required class for graduation. I don't have an excuse for not being in the roll book because the Teacher's son offered to pay my tuition. Then I realize that a lot of other people could have been in the class, but didn't take advantage of the offer either. They sat through class, but don't get credit because they didn't accept the tuition payment.

I don't want that to be the scene at the last day. And it need not be. Jesus has paid my tuition. "Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men. Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God." (1 Cor 7:23-24) When the roll is called up yonder, I'll be there. And my name will be called. May you also be recognized as part of the class.

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