

In his book, *Leaders Eat Last*, Simon Sinek explains his understanding for church leadership.. While working in Afghanistan, Sinek had an experience that had great impact on his understanding. He explains:

Everything on our trip went wrong. We actually got stuck there because the base came under rocket attack when I was there. And it was (through) this experience where I learned what service really means.

Service means giving to others with no expectation of anything in return. Fulfillment, calm, security, peace of mind, confidence, all come from a willingness to serve others. Because ... only when I decided that I would look after others ... did I find calm, security, peace of mind.

The rank of office is not what makes someone a leader. Leadership is the choice to serve others with or without any formal rank ... Leaders are the ones who run headfirst into the unknown. They rush toward the danger. They put their own interests aside to protect us or to pull us into the future. Leaders would sooner sacrifice what is theirs to save what is ours. And they would never sacrifice what is ours to save what is theirs. This is what it means to be a leader.

Elder is not the only church office (or leader) discussed in 1 Timothy 3. Last week we discussed elders. This week we see that Paul's thoughts (next) turn to the position of deacon. "Deacon" simply means "servant." ... So some think that our passage is about anyone who serves in the church. ... But the fact that qualifications are spelled out... shows that he actually had the church office of "deacon" in mind.

The source of the word *deacon* is interesting. It is a compound word... based upon *dia* ("through") and *konis* ("dust")... "through dust." The imagery suggests a man who moves quickly to perform his tasks and who

creates a trail of dust by his haste. (I think that Simon Sinek is right to compare military men and women with church leaders.) ... God raises up men and women of character to serve in His church as deacons and deaconesses. His concern is not about talents... looks... abilities... popularity... or worldly success. He looks for spiritual character.

In the Older Testament... when Saul was chosen to lead God's people... he was picked because he was a "choice and handsome man." ... "*There was not a more handsome person than he among the sons of Israel*" - Scripture informs us. ... He was chosen for his good looks. ... But as we continue to read in the Book of 1st Samuel... we see what a disaster his leadership was. Saul was an impetuous king who overstepped his authority... and a jealous king... who slaughtered God's priests and their families... so that he could stay king. ... When Samuel looked for a replacement king... the Lord reminded him that "*the Lord looks at the heart.*'

By the time that we get to the New Testament... there is no confusion as to what we are to look for in a leader for God's people. Last week we saw what we are to look for in an elder. As UNDER-shepherds... they need to be men who listen to the GREAT-shepherd (Jesus.) They peruse a holy lifestyle... making sure that they are able to hear Him and follow His instruction for the local church that they lead. They enact the will of the Great Shepherd (Jesus.)

As we pick up with 1 Timothy... verse 8... today... we are going to try to understand what makes a deacon "deek." ... We will see that both an elder and a deacon must be the type of person whom Will Rogers

described as “*not afraid to sell the family parrot to the town gossip!*”
Because of their consistent Christian character... everyone can trust them.

The standard for deacons is in no way inferior to the requirements for elders. Elders and deacons have different functions – even though their spiritual qualifications are nearly identical. ... There is no drop-off in spiritual quality... or maturity from elder-overseers to deacons. There (really) is only one difference. An elder must be able to teach. While many deacons (through the centuries) were excellent teachers – this is not required... as it is for an elder.

1 Tim 3:8-13

It is very striking that – *in last week’s passage concerning the elders* – the Apostle wrote NOTHING about *women*. Yet (here)... in dealing with *deacons*... their wives are brought into the picture. Why weren’t the *elder’s* wives considered...? (It’s only the *deacon’s* wives.) ... Is Paul talking about wives at all... or did the ESV mistranslate this verse? Hmmm... I’ll bring this back-up when we come to verse 11. ... (This is something on which *NOT ALL BIBLE SCHOLARS* agree.)

But here is something where there is strong agreement: the function of deacon in the early church rose out of the situation described in Acts 6. ... As I have you turn there with me in your Bibles... I will try to set the stage for what we are about to read.

1st Century Jerusalem was very used to receiving many visitors. ... Jews from all over the world would swell it’s streets... to three times it’s normal population... during Jewish festivals and holidays.

(Now) Jerusalem barely had enough food and provisions for its regular citizenry – so this put quite a stretch on its resources. (It makes me wonder what kind of a toilet paper panic THEY experienced...) We probably didn't have it NEARLY as bad as they did with shortages.

Everyone realized that when they went on pilgrimage to Jerusalem... they needed to take their own provisions... because otherwise they probably would not be available. They had to bring their own food (fish... chicken... sheep... and grain for making bread.) And it had to be enough for their entire family for their whole stay.

So when Pentecost came (right after Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection)... the streets of Jerusalem swelled once again with religious pilgrims to their holy city. Gentile converts from all over the known world gathered to show their zeal for the Jewish faith. (The gentile converts were called "Hellenistic Jews.")

The Holy Spirit fell... Peter and others preached... and the Hellenistic Jews all hear the Gospel in their own language. THOUSANDS became Christians every day. (Now) many of these new converts wanted to stay in Jerusalem to learn more. (They had no church in their homeland.) So the church in Jerusalem became a mega church of both Jews and Hellenistic (or Gentile) new believers.

The Hellenists who stayed put an incredible strain on the already thin supply of available resources. Some of them were widows... who needed to be provided for. The church in Jerusalem had developed a plan for feeding widows. But suddenly they had Jewish and Hellenistic widows who stayed. With limited resources... the Jewish widows were given obvious

preference. The church needed fair administrators who wouldn't be prejudiced.

Acts 6:1-7

Men of good reputation and character were selected... who were filled with the Holy Spirit. They possessed the gift of wisdom... and such was needed to handle the practical problems of administration... when it came to the church's resources. They were servants of the Lord... but they served the church.

Paul wrote 1st Timothy some 30 years after the incident in Acts chapter 6. The church had now spread over the Roman Empire and was developed to the point that the offices of elder and deacon were needed in those churches as well. ... So Paul gives Timothy five areas in which deacons should be distinguished. The first area is by their personal character. We see this in verse 8.

1 Timothy 3:8

Deacons must be dignified. Other translations translate this as "*deacons must be serious*." ... Dignified and serious convey that he must be a realist... (not a dreamer who chases after rainbows.) He can't be one who is easily influenced. ... You know... we often have people come by the church and present their personal need for money... and I know that they are hoping our deacons will be gullible. If they are too easily influenced... a fraudulent person might drain the benevolent fund... and a person with a legitimate need would go wanting.

Verse 8 also says "not double-tongued." ... A doubletongued person is a liar; he is not truthful but adjusts his speech to his situation. But the

character of a deacon is that he does not say one thing to one member and something entirely opposite to another member. You can depend on what he says. Anyone could trust this man.

Third... deacons are not to be addicted to wine. (I already commented on this one – last week – with regard to the elders.) They are not to be indulgent with wine. They must not be alcoholics to any degree at all. If they drink alcohol... it must be with moderation... sobriety... and self-control.

Fourth... (this one was also mentioned last week)... not to be greedy for dishonest gain. ... They cannot be “wheeler-dealers”... always ready to take advantage of a situation in order to profit for themselves. This cannot be a temptation for someone who has access to the church’s finances. We make ourselves vulnerable to them... so they must be trustworthy.

1 Timothy 3:9

This is a call to deep spiritual commitment to the mission of the church. The “*mystery of the faith*” is the gospel—revealed through Jesus Christ... witnessed and taught by the apostles... and entrusted to the church to proclaim throughout the world. ... The deacon must cling to the gospel in faith... and consistently live out its truth by serving. ... Deacons are the hands and feet of the church (more directly than the other offices.) Therefore... the apostle called for deacons to embody sincerity... moral purity... and submission to biblical truth.

Deacons must be men of spiritual depth. Specifically they should be men who understand and hold fast the deep truths of the faith. ... Though the

deacons are not required to be “*able to teach*” (as are elders)... but “they must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith - ***with a clear conscience***”. Here is the concept of a clear conscience once again. Remember that Paul told Timothy that essential to fighting the good fight is “holding on to faith and a *good conscience*” (1:19).

But please listen to Kent Hughes’ warning about conscience. He writes:

We must also remember that conscience alone is not enough, because our conscience can deceive us. Jiminy Cricket’s advice to Pinocchio, “*let your conscience be your guide,*” is generally good advice. But if your conscience is seared by sin, it is of little help.

Jonathan Edwards likened conscience to a sundial and God’s Word to the sun. Only the light of the sun will give the correct reading. Moonlight cannot work. Candlelight is folly. Both will mislead you. The sunlight of Scripture will always tell the truth. And when we live by the truth “with a clear conscience,” we are in great shape.

1st Timothy 3:10

Paul’s intent here was not to require some formal testing procedure... but rather that these men “prove” their quality over time in the ordinary activities of life and ministry. ... After they showed themselves “irreproachable”... then let them serve as deacons. The words if they prove blameless is the translation of two Greek words - *anen-klē-toi ontes*. It literally means “*being free from accusation.*” ... [P A U S E] ...

We are due for some controversy about now (aren’t we?) ... So let’s go back to the one that I mentioned just after we read the entire passage. Women are mentioned in verse 11.

1st Timothy 3:11

Not very often... (but sometimes)... I have a major disagreement with how the version of the Bible that I preach from translates a particular word. ... This is one of those occasions. My ESV says “*Their **wives** likewise...*” Now... when reading from the Greek... the reader is to start with the most common understanding of a word. If it doesn’t fit... then you look at less common meanings. Here the Greek word is “*γυναικαζ*.” Its most common meaning is “*woman*” and a less common meaning is “*wife*.” I see no reason for moving to the less common meaning for the word.

It does not make any sense (at all to me) why Paul would be concerned about the deacon’s wives having spiritual maturity – but not the elder’s wives. If Paul was concerned about how the wives of deacons behaved... he would have likely been just as concerned about the way elder’s wives behaved – but he doesn’t say anything about them.

Even the way that Paul wrote would suggest that he did not intend for us to understand that he meant the deacon’s wives (here.) ... Do you see how we read in our English translations **THEIR** wives...? The Greek does not have the word for THEIR... with “*γυναικαζ*.” Paul would have written “τουζ *γυναικαζ*.” His style of Greek was to include possessive pronouns... as he does in the next verse “their children and their own households.”

When we do not see that Paul is concerned in this verse with deacon’s wives... and we take the most common understanding of “*γυναικαζ*” – it appears that Paul is saying that women **are also called** to serve as deacons. (They can occupy this formal church office.) But because there

is a **glaring absence** of the mention of women in the middle of Paul's discussion about elders... women are **not** called to occupy that office.

In the 16th chapter of Romans... Phoebe is called a "deacon" by the Apostle Paul. Today... we use the term "deaconess" for a female deacon. But there was no such word in Paul's day... so he calls Phoebe a "deacon." Serving as a deacon in the church at Cenchreae (the port city for Corinth)... she had been a great help to Paul.

Women can be deacons. So Paul gives four qualities that should characterize them. First... they (too) are to be dignified. This is the same word that Paul has already used. Women deacons must similarly be realistic people – not dreamers or gullible to the ploys people may try to trick them with.

Second... they are not to be slanderers. Literally (in the Greek) this word is "*she-devils*." (Initially... I debated whether or not I should mention this.) ... And I am not sure what kind of an image is conjured up in your mind at the term "*she-devil*." But here is what I think was the first century understanding... A "*she-devil*" was given to the practice of gossip and slandering the reputation of others. ... So care must be given to selecting women for this office who are not known as wreckers of reputations. Deaconesses see people in need and can so easily destroy the person who needs their help. ... They must not be women who just can't wait to run out and tell about the misfortunes of others.

Third... women deacons (once again) must also be sober-minded. They must be self-controlled... in all areas of their life – even their work. Some people can give themselves to work (so much) that they destroy

themselves. ... I read the other day about a sign that sat on an office desk which said: “**T.G.I.M.** - *Thank God it’s Monday!*” (That person may not be qualified for the office of deacon!)

Then... the last qualification is that they are to be “*faithful in all things.*” They are to be responsible... trustworthy individuals... who carry through with their assignments. ... I am thankful that God has called such women to this office in our church.

After his special note to include the women who occupy this office (in verse 11)... Paul returns to his general discussion about deacons (*who were mainly men.*)

1 Timothy 3:12

Male deacons... (if they are married)... must have their eye for only one woman. They must have the character of being a “*one-woman man*” who does not flirt with or fantasize about other women. (We saw this qualification for elders... also.)

I don’t think that this verse mandates deacons to be married and have families. (Paul himself was probably not married and neither was Timothy.) But if they are married with families... there is a lot you can discern about their character... and whether or not they are qualified for the office of deacon. How do they handle life’s difficulties for themselves and those they are called to lead and care-for...? (That will be what they do in office.)

1 Timothy 3:13

Paul reminds us that deacons who serve well will receive a twofold reward. **FIRST** - Faithful deacons/deaconesses will *gain an excellent standing...* a

good reputation... among fellow Christians... who understand and appreciate the beauty of humble... self-less... Christ-like service. ... They will have the respect of and influence with the congregation.

The world system doesn't exactly "resent" people who give of themselves and seek nothing in return. ... But neither does it reward selfless servanthood. ... (You know... as well as I do) that the way to climb the corporate ladder is to get noticed... to take high-profile risks ("*Look at me! Look at me!*" "*You are so lucky to have me.*")... and downplay one's failures ("*Move along now... there's nothing to see here...*"). Unsung heroes in the corporate world rarely reap the rewards of success.

God's kingdom (however) works very differently. Jesus turned the corporate ladder upside down to declare (in effect)... "*The way up in My kingdom is to descend to the lowest rung and become the servant of all*" (Matt. 20:26–28). ... Paul echoes the Lord's words... promising that deacons and deaconesses who serve well earn this reward ... and one other. (The second is better than the first.)

The **SECOND** ONE is: They will also grow closer to Christ in *faith* and *assurance*. ... They have confidence (even boldness) in their own faith in Christ. ... The faithful deacon/deaconess will cultivate an unshakable confidence in the truth of the gospel... and their own sincerity of faith in Christ. (They lose any sense of felling like a hypocrite.) ... Doing good deeds always enhances our assurance of salvation because it resonates with the godly person the Holy Spirit is creating within us.

... .. [P A U S E]

Whether it is serving the Lord in an office of elder... deacon... deaconess... or regular church member... Christian leadership is about *fading*. The great ones willingly move into *irrelevance*.

I still remember trying to hold back my tears in the third grade when my School teacher (Mrs. Syers, who I had the biggest childhood crush on) read E.B. White's book – Charlotte's Webb – to us. It was all that I could do to keep from embarrassing myself... looking like a crybaby.

Charlotte's Webb (as you probably well know)... is the story about a spider named Charlotte who lives in a barn just above the stall of a pig named Wilbur. Wilbur is worried that once he grows fat enough... the farmer is going to turn him into bacon. (It's a valid concern. ... And I wonder how many children this book has turned into vegetarians...)

Anyway... Charlotte and Wilbur develop a close friendship... and as Wilbur grows larger... Charlotte uses all of her resources to try to rescue Wilbur. She writes messages in her web to convince the farm's owners that Wilbur is a pig worth saving. ... The story builds to the final chapter titled "The Moment of Triumph."

So what was Charlotte's moment of triumph?

As the story draws to a close... Charlotte the spider is in the barn dying... [Wilbur the pig is being judged at the county fair in a pig contest]... and she can hear the roar of applause for Wilbur [as he wins a special prize and thus his life is spared.] ... Charlotte finds great joy in knowing that her life has meant the success of another (her close friend - Wilbur.) Though no one will remember her... the things she has done... and the sacrifices she has made... she is satisfied... having loved her friend in life and in death.

Do you (*like me*) see Christian ministry (no matter what your position in the church is) – like that...? ... Leadership is about **fading**. The great ones willingly move into "**irrelevance**."