

**1st Timothy 3: 10 and 11 – “The Testing of Deacons”, Sermons # 40 and 41
combined together in the series – “To Honor God in the Church”,
Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on February 15th, 2015,
in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

I have stated to you before that the qualifications for the office of a deacon are the same as those for an elder; they are character qualifications. The difference between the two offices is their function and focus of work. It is not that elders are more spiritual in their work and the deacons more physical in theirs. Both deacons and elders should both be spiritually-minded men. And deacons are not merely caretakers of the building and maintenance men; although they do superintend these matters and thus free up the pastor to labor in the Word of God and prayer. Deacons are ministers of mercy. They are concerned that people be shown the love and mercy of Christ in very practical ways. But the words, “Likewise deacons” in verse 8 show us that it is essential in a deacon that he, as well as the elder, “also” be blameless in his character. He must be reverent in his attitude toward God, worthy of respect in the eyes of the congregation; holding high the standard of God’s Word; the mystery of the faith, with a pure conscience. Here in verse 10, we find that men who would be raised up as deacons must first be tested. And the word “also” is found there: “Let these also first be tested”, before they are raised up to their work.

The deacon is a special office of a servant for which a man must be qualified and approved. Everyone who is a Christian is to be a servant. We are called as Christians to serve one another. But the fact that a man does not serve as a deacon until he is examined, tested, and approved, shows that not everyone who serves is a deacon. A deacon is a servant acting publicly and officially on behalf of the church. The kind of testing which is being spoken of in this verse, is the evaluation by the existing leadership and the congregation, over time, as to the prospective candidate’s character qualifications in action. Is he blameless, is the question? So what I want to do this afternoon is to set before you the process which you as the congregation and I as your pastor, will engage in. What will the process be like which will bring a man into the diaconate? I believe that it should include the following 4 steps and evaluations.

Step One – A recognition that both overseers and the congregation are involved in this process of raising up deacons.

Turn with me over to Titus Chapter 1, verse 5. “For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you.” Paul had preached the gospel to many cities in the island of Crete and, not having the time to stay and to organize them into churches, he left Titus there in order that he should set in order the things that were lacking and to appoint elders. What this meant was that Titus was to help them to see leadership raised up and an organized church formed among them. This appointment of elders would not take place without the common suffrage of the congregation; there would be the “stretching forth of the hands” as is described in Acts 14: 23. There would be a congregational vote. But those appointments would be authorized and certified by Titus’ authority which was conveyed to him by the Apostle Paul. In living your Christian life I hope that each one of you will come to see that your becoming formally involved in a local church is God’s will for you. When you join a local church and become a member of that church formally, you then have an important part in the raising up of godly men to minister in the offices of elder and deacon. Your vote counts in the raising up of office bearers. If you do not join you cannot have a part. Let us understand that the local church is God’s plan for raising up humble, mature, thoughtful, and useful Christians to do service to forward His kingdom. God does not recognize informal confusion in the local church. He recognizes what He has appointed.

The offices of elders and deacons were of His appointment through the apostles of our Lord. And, to see the growth and advancement of truth and righteousness in that church, the raising up of elders and deacons was essential then, and it is essential now. Teaching, leading, directing, and taking holy initiative in all matters related to faith and practice with regard to that local church, are placed under the responsibility of the pastor or pastors. Things will be lacking in the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry if elders are not appointed.

A discerning elder knows his need of help; he also knows the need of delegating responsibility. He knows that a church without a functioning diaconate will be like a body without hands. It is wisdom in him which causes him to recognize a need for deacons and to take the initiative to see them raised up. In 1st Timothy 5: 17 it says, "Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double-honor." The words, "rule well" have been translated by F.F. Bruce as "those who direct the affairs of the church." The word "direct" (*προηλοτεμι*, *prohistemi*, in the Greek) signifies leading, managing, directing, or superintending. Alexander Strauch says: "So in vital matters as important as examining and appointing deacons, the overseer-elders should direct the entire examination process. If not, disorder and mismanagement will ensue and people will be hurt." "In practical reality, if the shepherds do not take the initiative, little will take place in their church." "The shepherds should lead in the examination process and lead also in setting forth the need of additional officers in the local church, but the congregation has an important role as well." "Theirs is to look out from amount themselves." "Theirs is to know these qualifications and to think of who in the congregation, among the men, meets them."

So what he saying is that the raising up of a deacon is not a popularity contest. It is not a popular election. It is a test of character in action over time. Every voting member of this congregation has the solemn and joyful responsibility to look out from themselves and see what God is building into the lives of the men here in this place. Is there, in the particular man being considered, a discerning love of people? Does he really care for people? Is he on the look-out to see whether the weaker members of the church have needs which need to be addressed? Is there a desire to take action without having to be told to do it, to help others, and to engage in good works? Is there good Biblical discernment and the use of right biblical principles in problem-solving situations? Is there a willingness and a desire to work together with other men to accomplish a task or to see a problem solved? Is he a man who can submit to suggestions and submit to the authority of the elders or pastor, in that he wants to work together with the elder to find the best way to help the needy in their midst? All of this, the congregation should think about.

Step 2 – In the process which brings a man into the diaconate, there should be a recognition of the importance of prayer and humility.

In this whole process that we are talking about this afternoon, of raising up another office-bearer, there must be a prayerful and humble attitude in the congregation as well as in the candidate himself. We must pray to be guided in our thoughts and in our judgments. "We must desire God's will and pleasure, not our own." (Strauch) We must ask – "Who would God be raising up to this work? And we must pray to be shown. You remember the story of David's being anointed king; how Samuel, a very discerning man and a prophet was evaluating in his own mind who would be God's choice, and he saw Eliab, David's older brother, and he said: 'Surely this is the Lord's anointed'. But the Lord said to Samuel in 1st Samuel 16: 7, "Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him." "For the Lord does not see as a man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." Man is always looking at the outward appearance. He cannot immediately see the heart. Many mistakes can be made by first impressions. But a steady, humble, prayerful look may indeed allow us to see who God can use in service unto Him and in the church in this official capacity. The man who is being fitted by God for this office and work will not necessarily be the most

outgoing and obviously friendly man. It is possible that he may often be a quieter man who does things not to be noticed but because he loves God and the welfare of people around him. And as you think about it, this will certainly be better than a man who is full of words and full of himself.

Step 3 – There needs to be an examination of the character qualities of the candidate’s wife as well as himself.

The placement of this verse on wives, in verse 11, right in the middle of the only formal treatment in the whole Word God, concerning deacons, has given rise to a controversy within the church as to whether there is an office of deaconess in the church. Commentators are split down the middle; some saying that there is an office, others that there is not. The difficulty centers around the word translated “wives” in our NKJV. The word “their” is not in the original, but it is supplied by the translators. The translated “wives” in the Greek is *γυναικας* (gynaikas), and it may be translated “women” just as much as it could be translated “wives”, depending on the context. Those who favor the view that these women are deaconesses also point to the word “likewise” as introducing a new category of officials like deacons or elders. But I believe that this is pressing the word “likewise” too far. It may refer to the standard which is being set for deacons without establishing a new category of deaconesses. It may also refer back to “wives” of elders as well. I believe that if Paul had intended a new category of deaconess that he would have used a term such as “woman assistants” or “women that help”. But he does not. In post-Early Church times, a different term, that is the word “diaconissa”, or deaconess, was coined.

Having read a number of commentaries on this subject and having thought of this one isolated verse in its context, I cannot believe that a separate office is being established. Verse 12 could have easily said, “Let deacons be husbands of one wife, and deaconesses the wife of one husband.” But it does not, and further, the creation of a 3rd office is something which would involve a direct and deliberate mention and designation by an apostle in the writings of the Scriptures. It would have been necessary to write a number of verses on the exercise of authority on the part of deaconess, which we find nowhere in the Scriptures. In fact the very opposite is mentioned expressly in Chapter 2, verse 12, here in 1st Timothy, and so I conclude that there is no office of deaconess. But there is a real need for the wives of both elders and deacons to meet the qualifications listed here in verse 11. I believe that the Apostle Paul used the word “women” to encompass both the wives of deacons and other women serving in the church under the authority and direction of the combined leadership of elders and deacons. I also believe that “women” is a broad enough term to encompass the wives of elders as well, women who may serve the church at the direction of their husbands or a delegated responsibility under the direction of the leadership. These women would not be supervising or managing or leading or exercising authority over any of the men of the church, but they would be serving in those diaconal tasks at the request of the leadership.

The standard for the wives of deacons as well as for any woman who would minister under the authority of the church is just as high as that of deacons and elders. There are given to us in this verse, 3 important and essential qualities which must be found in women who would serve alongside deacons or authority to the elders of the church. They are reverent (not slanderers), temperate, and faithful in all things. They are to be reverent. We find here again this word which is translated variously: dignified, grave, serious, worthy of respect. But this time we find an opposite thought is added by way of clarification – “not slanderers”. These last two words seem to me to be a parenthesis to the word “reverent”. Reverent – not slanderers. As though this is the chief way that women who minister in a diaconal context will show forth that reverence – in the way that they speak. They will not be persons interested in the negative gossip about people in need.. They will be pondering how to meet that need, how to bring constructive change, how to bring assistance and true help to both the deacons themselves and

the people in need. A deacon's wife, or any woman ministering on behalf of the church, must not be a malicious gossip; one who is often bringing out the faults of others when she speaks. The ideal here is set forth in the Proverbs 31 woman, in verse 20 – “She extends her hand to the poor yes she reaches out her hands to the needy.” Verse 26 – “She open her mouth with wisdom, and on her tongue is the law of kindness.” This is especially seen in her respect for her husband. She is in every sense a helper. Proverbs 31: 23 – “Her husband is known in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land.” Verse 11 – “The heart of her husband safely trusts in her.” Her speech, her caste conduct, her quiet spirit are readily apparent. Verse 12 – She does him good and not evil all the days of her life.”

The 2nd important and essential quality is temperate. *Νεπηαλιος* (Nephalios) in the Greek. Sober in the use of wine and food. Sobriety in the thoughts, which results in self-control and a thoughtful, balanced judgment. A person who is stable, clear-headed and self-restrained. She must be able to remain composed in difficult situations. It doesn't mean that she will not cry when she sees people's problems, but she will not lose control so much that she then needs to be ministered to herself; that she is paralyzed to act in those circumstances. Lastly, she is faithful in all things. She is trustworthy. We have already seen this in Proverbs 31, but there is one more example in Romans 16: 1 and 2, if you will turn there with me. It is Phoebe. “I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is servant of the church in Cenchrea, that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also.” Phoebe is being commended to the church at Rome in order that they might receive her in a manner worthy of the saints. Paul is saying that she meets the qualifications for this service.

John Gill says that “she was appointed by the church to take care of the poor sisters of the church, and this woman according to the account of her, she being neither poor nor very ancient; it seems rather that being a rich and generous woman, she served or ministered to the church by relieving the poor, not out of the church's stock, ...but out of her own substance; and received the ministers of the Gospel and all strangers into her house, which was open to all Christians; and was so exceedingly serviceable to that church and all the saints who came there.” So you can see from this that Phoebe was a helper of many and of the Apostle himself. They were to assist her there at Rome in whatever business she had need of them. A faithful woman, who can find? Who can find a virtuous wife? A deacon will find that her worth is far above rubies. The qualifications of the deacons wife are just as important and significant as the deacon himself. They should most definitely be thought over in relation to the prospective candidate's wife, just as surely as his qualifications for the office are examined by the church.

Step 4 – There should be a public recognition of the man who is being chosen to this office, and a formal installation into the office after an affirmative vote by the congregation.

There will no doubt be a need for meetings between the man nominated and those in leadership, to inquire as to their beliefs, their interests, their family, and the time commitments involved in becoming a deacon. There will need to be some instruction on what work he will be expected to do. But after the pastor and the committee give their final approval, the candidate should be publicly installed into the office. The laying on of hands of the pastor and prayer offered up by both the pastor and the existing deacons; these constitute the public recognition of the man who is being raised up to this office. This shows everyone present that we as a church see the importance of the work that they are being chosen to do. These men are being chosen to lead in the work of service to Christ as ministers of mercy. These men will show that practical everyday needs of people, both spiritual and physical, are of great importance to Christ and great importance to the advancement of His kingdom upon the earth.