

1 Timothy 3:8-13 - The Qualifications and Work of Deacons

Introduction: This morning we have part 2 of 2 on the office of deacon. Last week we looked at the rationale and primary function of deacons in the church of Christ. We saw from Acts 6:1-7 that there was a major two-fold crisis that faced the church:

1. There were widows being neglected in the daily distribution of the necessities of life.
2. The apostles could not faithfully pray and minister the Word as well as oversee the proper care of widows.

The solution: 7 men were selected from the multitude of disciples who were of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, brought to the apostles who then laid their hands on them and prayed over them - and then appointed them over the business of caring for the widows. And always remember the great end result of a well-oiled eldership praying and ministering the Word along with a well-oiled diaconate ministering to people's physical needs:

Acts 6:7 Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.

1. Qualifications of Deacons - v8-10

[8] Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money,

⇒ **Reverent** - "worthy of respect/honor, noble, dignified." This someone who *inspires* respect and admiration in others.

Not double-tongued - "saying one thing with one person, another with another (with intent to deceive)." This is someone who gets facts right consistently, they are good at getting the story straight, and what they tell one person is *identical* to what they tell another.

Illustration: 2 Kings 5:20-27 [20] But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, "Look, my master has spared Naaman this Syrian, while not receiving from his hands what he brought; but as the Lord lives, I will run after him and take something from him." [21] So Gehazi pursued Naaman. When Naaman saw him running after him, he got down from the chariot to meet him, and said, "Is all well?" [22] And he said, "All is well. My master has sent me, saying, [**lie #1**] 'Indeed, just now two young men of the sons of the prophets have come to me from the mountains of Ephraim. Please give them a talent of silver and two changes of garments.' " [23] So Naaman said, "Please, take two talents." And he urged him, and bound two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of garments, and handed them to two of his servants; and they carried them on ahead of him. [24] When he came to the citadel, he took them from their hand, and stored them away in the house; then he let the men go, and they departed. [25] Now he went in and stood before his master. Elisha said to him, "Where did you go, Gehazi?" And he said, [**lie #2**] "Your servant did not go anywhere." [26] Then he said to him, "Did not my heart go with you when the man turned back from his chariot to meet you? Is it time to receive money and to receive clothing, olive groves and vineyards, sheep and oxen, male and female servants? [27] Therefore the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and your descendants forever." And he went out from his presence leprous, as white as snow.

Application: One of the great things about telling the truth is that you get to tell the same story to everyone. If you're a liar, you constantly have to try to remember who you lied to, what lie you told them, and then try to be consistent with those lies you've told. Not to mention God's attitude toward liars:

Proverbs 12:19 The truthful lip shall be established forever, But a lying tongue is but for a moment.

Proverbs 12:22 Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, But those who deal truthfully are His delight.

Proverbs 6:16 These six things the Lord hates, Yes, seven are an abomination to Him: ...
A lying tongue...

Application 2: By the grace of God, *always tell the truth*. Don't exaggerate, don't fudge facts, don't smooth things over. Tell the truth *all the time*.

⇒ **Not given to much wine** - "to continue in close attention to something" - they cannot be like this with wine - not addicted or given over or enslaved to it.

Illustration: Nabal the husband of Abigail - **1 Samuel 25:36-38** Now Abigail went to Nabal, and there he was, holding a feast in his house, like the feast of a king. And Nabal's heart was merry within him, for he was very drunk; ... So it was, in the morning, when the wine had gone from Nabal, and his wife had told him these things, that his heart died within him, and he became like a stone. [38] Then it came about, after about ten days, that the Lord struck Nabal, and he died.

Ephes. 5:18 And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit,

⇒ **Not greedy for money** - not interested in making money illegally or dishonestly.

Illustration: Judas Iscariot, at Jesus' anointing at Bethany in the home of the resurrected Lazarus - **John 12:4-6** [4] Then one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, who would betray Him, said, [5] "Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" [6] This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it. [This is exactly what the KJV means by "filthy lucre" - i.e. dishonest gain]

[9] holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience.

Point: This is one of the reasons it is an error to see the task of deacons as *only* physical mercy ministries. While that does comprise the bulk of what they do, they nevertheless must know and hold to the faith with a pure conscience - i.e. they are deeply convicted about the great doctrines of Scripture about God, man, sin, grace, Jesus, salvation, what it means to be a Christian, biblical worship, family discipleship, etc.

Illustration: Job and Joseph were men who held fast to the faith - to God - even during their trials. They were steadfast in their devotion and had pure consciences about it.

Job: When Job learned about the deaths of his children, the theft of all his possessions, the murder of all his servants:

Job 1:20-22 Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshiped. [21] And he said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked shall I return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; Blessed be the name of the Lord." [22] In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong. [he held on]

When Job lost his health and was covered with boils (same term as that used to describe the plague in Egypt) from the top of his head to the soles of his feet we read:

Job 2:8-10 And he took for himself a potsherd with which to scrape himself while he sat in the midst of the ashes. [9] Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!" [10] But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

Joseph: Even after so much unjust suffering - when tempted by Potiphar's wife, he said:

Genesis 39:9 There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"

[10] But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless.

Point: This is simply a round-about way of saying the same thing that was said a little bit earlier about elders in verse 6:

1 Timothy 3:6 “not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil.”

Application: The exact same qualification applies to deacons - they must be “proven” or “tested” - i.e. not new converts. After they’ve been in the community awhile and they have been “found blameless,” *then they can serve as deacons.*

What’s always at stake with regard to officers? The sanctity of the glory of Christ - it is the thing that should cause all who wear the titles of elder and deacon to pause and examine themselves closely and carefully. We are representatives of the Savior whose name we wear in this world.

Application: Every local church in the body of Christ must never be tempted to simply get warm bodies as these officers. **Let me be blunt** - *every one of them must be extraordinary as Christian men - no exceptions.* They are extraordinary men - “full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.”

2. Deacons’ and Elders’ wives

[11] Likewise their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things.

Point: The term used here translated “wife” is the Greek term: *gune* - which is translated about half the time it is used as “woman” and the other half as “wife.” Here it is in the genitive form: *gunaikos*. Translations are divided on how to translate the word here - should it be “women” or “their wives?”

Point 2: The term *gunaikos* is used in this same passage twice - in v2 and the in the very next verse here, v12:

1 Timothy 3:2 A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach;

1 Timothy 3:12 Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.

Application: The person who wants to argue that in v11, the very same term in the same passage, *gunaikos*, means something different (i.e. the generic translation: “women”) from how it is used twice *in the same passage* needs to have very solid grounds for saying this.

Point 3: This passage is teaching us one of two possible things - and possibly, according to Patrick Fairburn **both**:

1. It is referring to the wives of the elders and the deacons. Since households must be well-run by the men who serve as elders and deacons, their marriages must be a godly example for others to follow - and we know from Scripture that Christians are only and always to marry other *Christians*.

2 Cor. 6:14-15 [14] Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? [15] And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?

1 Cor. 7:39 [39] A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, **only in the Lord.**

The wife of an elder or deacon must be as this passage states: “**reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things...**” Remember, God gives a wife to a man to be his “helper” (his *ezer*) - Genesis 2:18. If she is going to help him, she must be a godly, Christian woman as well.

2. OR, and I think less likely, these are women who were some kind of official assistants

to deacons, but were not ordained to the office itself.

The Primary reason I would reject the 2nd view in favor of the first view - that this is talking about the wives of the elders and deacons, and that women did not serve in an official capacity as deacons themselves is brought out clearly in the next verse:

3. Further Qualifications - v12

[12] Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.

Point: If women were officially ordained deacons, the passage would have to read something like: "Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, *or the wives of one husband.*"

Application: When the text speaks about who the deacons themselves specifically are it identifies them as "the husbands of one wife."

Application 2: Are there women who help the deacons? Yes. Are there ruling and teaching elders who also assist the deacons in helping meet physical needs? Yes. Are there congregants and the children of congregants who can be recruited by deacons to help or have things delegated to them? Yes.

BUT, when the text of God's word speaks of who the ordained deacons are, it is quite clear:

Acts 6:3 [the Apostles said to the multitude of disciples] Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; **[the men are then selected and then:]**

Acts 6:6 whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.

1 Timothy 3:12 Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.

What about Phoebe?

Romans 16:1 I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea,

Hermeneutics - The car manual - the chapter on the clock and the chapter on the carburetor that mentions the clock. *Where would you want to build your understanding the clock?* And which section should you interpret in light of the other?

There are only 3 places in the entire NT (out of the 27 usages of *diakonos*) that actually refer to the specific ordained office of deacon: Philippians 1:1, 1 Timothy 3:8 & 12. Outside of that, the term simply refers to being a "servant" in a general sense:

For example: 1 Corinthians 3:5 "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers (*diakonoi*) through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one?"

When God's Word is followed and the deacons serve well, what is the end result?

4. Good Standing and Great Boldness - v13

[13] For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

You may ask: How can any man live of the expectations laid upon them as a teaching elder, a ruling elder, or as a deacon? Because they are Full of the Holy Spirit and Wisdom!

From whence come elders and deacons to the church of Jesus Christ?

Let us never forget where the officers of Jesus' church come from:

Ephes. 4:8-16 Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men." [9] (Now this, "He ascended"--what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? [10] He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) [11] And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, [12] for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, [13] till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; [14] that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, [15] but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head--Christ-- [16] from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.