

## Deacons 1 Timothy 3:8-13

**Introduction:** *Read 1 Timothy 3:8-13.* These qualifications are fairly intimidating. Understand them from an impressionistic perspective. The picture painted is a Monet. If taken too literally no one would qualify!

**What is a deacon (1Ti 3:8)?** Deacon is transliterated from *diakonos*, “servant.” It was used to refer to a table waiter. The New Testament does not give a job description for deacons. There are no clear examples in the New Testament of deacons in action. Based on the meaning of the word *diakonos*, a deacon was responsible for various areas of service in the church.

**Assuming the men in Acts 6 were deacons, what was their ministry?** In Acts 6, men who were likely deacons oversaw the charity program for widows in order to free up the apostles for the ministry of teaching. As pointed out above, the primary difference in qualification difference between deacon and elder is teaching ability.

**ESV Acts 6:1-4** Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

Based on Acts 6, it would appear that deacons serve the church by doing administrative things in order to free up the elders.

**What qualifications were there for the “deacons” (Acts 6:3)?**

**ESV Acts 6:3** Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty.

**What is the significance of the word “likewise” in 1 Timothy 3:8?** It shows a link between the qualifications of deacons and that of elders. The two lists are very similar. Both elder and deacon are officers of the church; both represent the church; both are to be men of mature faith and character.

**ESV Philippians 1:1** Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons . . .

**How, in general, are the qualifications for overseer (1Ti 3:2-7) different from the qualifications for deacons (1Ti 3:8-13)? Why is there a difference?** The primary difference lies in the ability to teach. Deacons obviously do not have a teaching function as a part of their job description.

**What does “dignified” mean (1Ti 3:8)?** In English it means having or showing a composed or serious manner that is worthy of respect. It is from *semnos*, “worthy of respect, stately” (Kent, p. 132). The opposite would be to be a clown, to be undignified, to be a goof-ball. He exhibits appropriate social behavior.

**What does “not double-tongued” (3:8) mean?** It means he is not two-faced! In English to be double-tongued is to be marked by deliberate deceptiveness especially by pretending one set of feelings and acting under the influence of another. It is from *mé dilogous* (“not two words”). It is to be duplicitous. To not be double tongued is to be straight-forward, honest, honorable, frank and sincere.

ESV **James 5:12** . . . let your "yes" be yes and your "no" be no . . .

**What does it mean to not be addicted to much wine (3:8)?** It means to not be given to drunkenness, to not drink a lot (which is different from being a teetotaler).

Dealing with people’s problems can drive a church leader to drink, so he must not have a weakness for alcohol. However, the real issue here is self control.

**A deacon must not be greedy for dishonest gain (3:8). What does this suggest about the sphere of his ministry?** From this we must assume that the deacon’s ministry gave him opportunity to give in to this temptation. The Acts 6 “deacons” oversaw the money used to help the widows. If a deacon handles collections, there was a chance for embezzlement.

Erdman wrote, “Judas was not the last treasurer who betrayed his Lord for a few pieces of silver” (Kent, p. 134).

Even outside church there are plenty of opportunities to profit from dishonest gain. There must be no hint of shady dealings in the life of a deacon.

**What does it mean to hold to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience (3:9)?** 1) A deacon must be a man of genuine faith, not struggling with doubts. He is steadfast in the faith. 2) Further, his lifestyle must match his profession of faith with no unrepented of sin. 3) Also, even though a deacon does not have to be able to teach, he may well be in a position to counsel and encourage people, so he must be settled in his theological convictions. A deacon cannot be a know-nothing. Like the elder, he must be trained in theology.

**Belief Basics:** A deacon must have a thorough understanding of the Gospel, a belief in historic Christian orthodoxy (such as the Trinity) and the five fundamentals of the faith: 1) virgin birth, 2) deity of Christ, 3) substitutionary blood atonement, 4) Jesus’ bodily resurrection from the dead and 5) the inerrancy of the Scriptures. Differing local churches have unique distinctives that should also be added for a deacon to hold to. These might include the doctrines of grace, new covenant theology, complementarian gender roles and the importance of holding to early church practice.

**Verse 10 states that a deacon must first be tested. How might that be done?** It could largely be done simply by observing him over time, long before he is asked to be a deacon. *Is he faithful to perform small tasks asked of him? Does he volunteer for service? Does he follow-through with commitments? Does he pass the qualification test? How does he respond to difficult circumstances? Does he support the church financially?*

ESV **Luke 16:10** One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very **little** is also dishonest in much.

**With regard to what is the deacon to be blameless (3:10)?** He is to be blameless with regard to having first been tested. Blameless means exemplary, pure, upright, not guilty. It is from *anegklétos* (literally is “not called in”) and means not accused.

### Deacon’s Wives

**Not only the deacon, but also his wife, must meet certain qualifications. Why would it be important for a deacon’s wife to be dignified, not slanderers\*, sober-minded and faithful (3:11)?** The sensitive and confidential nature of a deacon’s ministry requires it, as do the fact he is entrusted with many of the church’s material assets. In Acts 5, had Ananias’ wife Sapphira been a 1 Timothy 3:11 type of women perhaps she could have help keep Ananias from giving in to temptation.

**What is the first requirement for a deacon’s wife (3:11)?** Parallel to the first requirement for her husband, she must be dignified (*semnos*).

**What is the second quality she must have (3:11)?** She must not be one who slanders others. It is from *mé diabolous*; *dia* means “through” and *ballo* means “to throw”, thus, to throw through, to hurl accusations at. Satan is the accuser of the brethren, the ultimate slanderer, thus *diabalos* became a Greek name for him (usually translated devil).

**Why is it so critical she not be one who slanders (3:11)?** Deacons and their wives will be privy to confidential information about others and their struggles.

**What is sober-minded (3:11)?** Sober-minded sounds very dour! It is from *nepalios* (3524), “sober.” It literally refers to the opposite of being intoxicated. Also used figuratively, it meant complete clarity of mind and the resulting good judgment. A deacon’s wife should not have a drinking problem and she should be a woman of sound thinking.

**What is the final requirement for a deacon’s wife (3:11)?** She must be faithful in all things.

### Deaconess (?)

**What evidence is there that 1 Timothy 3:11 might be a reference to a deaconess?**

- a. It is odd that Paul would give qualifications for a deacon’s wife but give no corresponding qualifications for an elder’s wife! This suggests he is giving the qualifications for deaconesses.

- b. The word “likewise” (3:11), since it was used in 3:8 to flag the transition from elder to deacon. Here it perhaps flags a transition from deacon to deaconess.
- c. No pronoun was used with the word “women” to indicate that the concept of “wife” was intended.
- d. Romans 16:1 suggests that Phoebe was a deaconess.

ESV **Romans 16:1** I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant (*diakonos*) of the church at Cenchreae . . .

- e. **Why was a long list of qualifications given for widows in 1 Timothy 5 yet not for the supposed deaconess?** Perhaps because 1 Timothy 3:11 refers to a deacon’s wife, not a deaconess.
- f. According to 1 Timothy 2:11-15, women are not to teach or have authority over men in the church, and a key difference between an elder and deacon is teaching ability (teaching is not in a deacon’s job description). Thus there is no conflict between 1 Timothy 2:11-15 and the idea of a deaconess.

### Back to Deacons

**What does it mean to be the husband of one wife (3:12)?** The Greek literally says, “a one woman man.” The simple status of being divorced is probably not in view here (the Greek for divorced is *apoluo* and is not used here). This has reference more to with faithfulness to his wife than marital status. Bill Clinton is the husband of one wife but not a one woman man.

**1 Timothy 3:12 goes back to male deacons and makes the same requirement of them concerning their families that was made of elders (3:4-5). Since this same requirement is made for deacons, what does that suggest about a deacon’s ministry?** It suggests that it could involve management, either of people or money. Certainly, the “deacons” of Acts 6 had a big job in overseeing the church’s widow welfare program. Perhaps the male deacons did more managing that did the female deacons. Perhaps female deacons did a lot of ministering to the women in the church (widows or young mothers).

*Would a single man qualify?*

*Would a man with no children qualify?*

**What indicators can the church look for to determine if a man is managing his children and households well (3:12)?**

*Would a man with rebellious children qualify?*

*A man in debt with lots of credit cards? A man behind on his financial obligations?*

*A man who gives little to nothing to the church financially?*

*A man who has poor social skills, or who is eccentric?*

*A man estranged from his children?*

*A man who quarrels with his wife continually?*

*A man who cannot get along with his wife? A man who essentially lives a separate life from his wife?*

*A man who says he cannot control his wife?*

*A man whose wife complains about him frequently?*

**What benefit is there to serving as a deacon, according to 3:13?** They gain a good standing with the church and also strengthen their faith. Furthermore, the retirement benefits are out of this world!

**What needs might be met by deacons in a church today (3:8-13)?** Deacons could oversee the church's collections and handle its financial affairs. Deacons could also be sure that needs are being met in the congregation and that no one is overlooked (including those pastor-teachers worthy of double honor). Women deacons could minister to shut-in widows and young mothers at home with small kids. Deacons could oversee work details sent to aid the elderly, widows or single mothers. A male deacon could officiate at a church meeting in the absence of an elder. Deacons could help the pastors with the counseling load. All this could help free up the elders' time for the ministry of prayer and the Word (as in Acts 6:4, deacons are to be people who are full of the Spirit and wisdom). Deacons could also oversee the upkeep of the church meeting place.

**Application:** That we don't have deacons on our churches may reveal that we are not meeting people's needs as thoroughly as the Lord would have us to.

### **The Appointment of Deacons**

**Assuming the men of Acts 6:1-6 were deacons, by what process were they chosen?** The apostles recognized the need for such men, gave the personal qualifications each was to have, and then let the church choose the men. Once chosen, the apostles laid their hands on them and appointed them to the ministry. This lone example would suggest that the church should select its own deacons, based on the qualifications given in 1 Timothy 3.

**Hope:** Even if not all men meet these qualifications, all men should aspire to have these character qualities in their lives.

### **Further Reading:**

Strauch, Alexander, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call To Restore Biblical Church Leadership* (Littleton, CO: Lewis & Roth, 1988).

Kent, Homer, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1982).

\*\*\*\*Ask this question before having someone read the passage.

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