

Servants of the Church
1 Timothy 3:8-13
Dr. Steve Hereford, Pastor-Teacher

INTRODUCTION

1. I would like to invite you to take God's Word and turn with me to 1 Timothy chapter 3.
2. Today is a special day in the life of our church because the elders are appointing Travis Werre as a deacon of our church.
3. But before we do that I want to share with you about the ministry of deacons as it is presented in 1 Timothy chapter 3.
4. Read 1 Timothy 3:8-13.
5. If you have been at Changed By Grace for any length of time you have become familiar with First and Second Timothy and Titus.
6. These three books make up the *pastoral* epistles.
7. They bear this designation because they address pastoral and church issues.
8. The letter we are looking at this morning, 1 Timothy, is addressed to a young pastor who is given instructions about leadership in the church.
9. In chapter two he is told to not permit women to be pastors and in chapter three not let unqualified men be pastors.

10. In chapter 3 verses 8-13, he gives instructions about deacons.
11. As we look at this section, we going to address it in three ways:
12. We will first look at the meaning of the term deacon and then the existence of deacons in the New Testament, and finally the qualifications of deacons as it is found here in 1 Timothy chapter 3.
13. Let's begin by looking at *the meaning of the term "deacon."*

I. The Meaning of the Term “Deacon”

A. There Are Three Words Used in the New Testament that Refer to Deacons

1. Diakonos - “servant”
2. Diakonia - “service”
3. Diakoneo - “to serve”

B. These Three Words Have a Wide Variety of Meanings but in General They Refer to Any Kind of Service that Supplies the Need of Another Person

“The words are used at least a hundred times in the New Testament, and they are usually translated with variants of the English words *serve* or *minister*” (John MacArthur, *The Master’s Plan for the Church*, p.174).

1. Serving food: The original and most limited meaning of the word (diakoneo - to serve) had to do with *serving tables*

a) It was used of the servants at the Wedding in Cana - John 2:1-9

b) It was used of Peter’s mother-in-law

Luke 4:38-39 - “Now He arose from the synagogue and entered Simon's house. But Simon's wife's mother was sick with a high fever, and they made request of Him concerning her. 39 So He stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. And immediately she arose and served them.”

c) It was used of Martha

- (1) Luke 10:38-40 - “Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. 39 And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. 40 But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me.”
 - (2) John 12:1-2 - “Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead. 2 There they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him.”
2. General service: On some occasions, diakoneo (to serve) or one of the related words is used without specifying what kind of service is involved
 - a) John 12:26 - “If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor.”
 - b) Luke 22:27 - “For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves.”
 3. Spiritual service: There are other references where any of the three words is used and it reflects the

believers role as a servant

- a) In Romans 15:25, Paul said that he was “going to Jerusalem to *minister* (diakoneo - to serve) to the saints.”
- b) Paul told the elders at Ephesus that his manner of living among them consisted of “serving (douleuo, from doulos - a servant) the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews” (Acts 20:20).

C. Deacons are Servants Not Elders

1. They do not function like elders

- a) No where does it say that deacons “rule” in the church as it says of elders in 1 Timothy 5:17 yet churches have deacons who rule with authority.
- b) No where does it say that deacons are to be skilled in teaching like it says of elders in 1 Timothy 3:2 (able to teach).
- c) They serve so the elders can be free to study, preach, and teaching God’s Word.

2. The structure of the church is: Jesus, Elders, Deacons, and Congregation

- a) Jesus is the head of the church

Col.1:18 - “And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn

from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.”

- b) Elders are the shepherds or “under shepherds of Christ”

1 Peter 5:2-4 - “Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; 3 nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; 4 and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.”

- c) Deacons are the servants of the church (1 Tim.3:8-13; Phil.1:1)

- d) The congregation is to model submission

Heb.13:17 - “Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.”

II. The Existence of Deacons in the New Testament

- A. There is No Information Given in the New Testament that Speaks of the Function of Deacons Except for the Term Itself
- B. The Only Information That is Given Are the Qualifications for the Office (1 Tim.3:8-13)
- C. Acts 6 is Not Referring to Deacons

1. The traditional interpretation of Acts 6 is the seven men chosen to meet the need of the Hellenistic Jews were deacons
 - a) They base it on the use of the word diakoneo in verse 1.
 - b) And the use of the word diakonia (to serve) in verse 2.
 - c) Some say that the use of those words implies that these men were chosen to fill the office of deacon.
2. Another argument for viewing these men as deacons is that early church history confirms that in the postapostolic period deacons were assigned charge of administrative affairs – including the distribution of goods to the poor. Even the postapostolic church at Rome limited the number of deacons to seven for many years.
3. In spite of these arguments there are a number of reasons for rejecting the notion that these seven men were chosen to fill the office of deacon.
 - a) The use of diakonia and diakoneo is inconclusive because diakonia is used in Acts 6:4 in reference to the work of the apostles themselves. So there is no reason to conclude that the office of deacon is meant in verse 5.
 - b) The New Testament never refers to the men listed in Acts 6:5 as deacons. Only two of the men are mentioned elsewhere in Scripture (Stephen and Philip), but they are nowhere

called deacons.

- c) Keep in mind that Acts was written in the earliest years of the church. We have already seen that none of the epistles written to specific churches recognized the office of deacon, except the possible indication in Philippians.
- d) There is no strong evidence in those epistles to claim that the office of deacon was instituted in Acts 6.
- e) Elders are mentioned later in the book of Acts and in several of the epistles to the churches, but not deacons.
- f) If Acts 6 is indeed the institution of the deacon's office, it seems strange that deacons are never referred to again in Acts.
- g) Notice the word "task" in Acts 6:3. That suggests the seven men were called to help take care of a one-time crisis, not necessarily installed into a permanent office.
- h) Notice also that the seven men chosen had Greek names. If those men were being appointed to the Jerusalem church for an ongoing ministry, it would seem strange that only Greeks would be chosen. A permanent order of deacons in Jerusalem would not likely be made up of Greeks.

On the other hand, it seems reasonable to conclude that seven Greeks would be chosen to take care of a short-term ministry to the

Hellenistic widows who had been neglected.
Those men knew the situation and their people.

- i) It is best to see the events described in Acts 6 as an effort by the Jerusalem church to take care of a temporary crisis, and the calling of the seven men as a temporary ministry (Taken from John MacArthur, *The Master's Plan for the Church*, 178-180).

III. The Qualifications of Deacons (1 Timothy 3:8-13)

In 1 Timothy 3:8-13 Paul instructs Timothy concerning another office in the church – deacons. There are various interpretations as to whether this is referring to both men and women or to men and their wives.

A. The Use of the Word “Likewise” (vv.8,11)

1. The repetition of the word seems to indicate another category within this office

The close connection between this paragraph and the preceding one is seen in its grammatical structure.

“Likewise” Gr.hosautos, “in the same way or in like manner”

“Likewise” “ties the requirements of a deacon to those of an overseer. Just as an overseer must be above reproach, likewise it is necessary for a deacon to be dignified” (Word Biblical Commentary, Vol.46, Pastoral Epistles).

“Just as a pastor lives in a glass house and

represents all a Christian should be, so does the deacon. He must be chosen for what he is and not what he has or who he is in the world's eyes. There are musts for him as well as the pastor or overseer" (KJV Bible commentary).

2. The second use of "likewise" then is also referring to another category within this office - deaconess
 - a) The pronoun "their" is not in the original
 - b) "Wives" is *gunaikas* which is better translated *women*
 - c) Paul is saying, "Likewise, women"
 - d) It doesn't make sense to talk about the qualifications of deacon's wives and not the elders so the best interpretation is that this is referring to deacons who are women

Remember: When I refer to women deacons I am not referring to them as elders or pastors or saying that they have spiritual authority. Deacons are not pastors or elders. They have no authority other than what the elders delegate to them.

B. Deacons Who Are Men (vv.8-10, 12-13)

1. "Reverent" (v.8)

Gr.*semnos*, it means, "serious, in mind as well as character."

One who serves as a deacon understands the

seriousness of spiritual issues. His attitude and character manifests the seriousness of what he is doing.

2. “Not double-tongued” (v.8)

Gr.dilogos, means, “two-tongued.”

Fritz Rienecker suggests the idea of a “talebearer, suggesting the idea of gossipers, or it could be consistent in what one says, i.e., not saying one thing while thinking another, or not saying one thing to one man and a different thing to the next” (The Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament, 623).

Deacons need to know how to speak with integrity at certain times. They are not to speak hypocritically but consistently, righteously, and honestly.

3. “Not given to much wine” (v.8)

Gr.prosechontas, literally means, “not holding near much wine.”

In Paul’s day, wine was practically the only drink available, and since it was drunk allot, it had to be mixed in a ten-to-one ratio with water in order to prevent intoxication.

Since it was necessary to drink wine, one who would serve the church was not to be indulged in it. When Paul said that a deacon was “not to be given to much wine,” he meant that this is to be his habitual practice.

4. “Not greedy for money” (v.8)

Gr.aischrokerdes, means “greedy for gain.”

In the New Testament times those who served in the church were involved in passing out money to widows, orphans, and needy people.

They also collected money and dispersed it for various purposes to carry on the business of the church.

There were no banks or audit firms, so every transaction was made in cash. The people who handled the money actually carried it in a little purse on their belt. The temptation was always present to use the money for one’s own purposes. So an official servant in the church had to be free from the love of money (Taken from John MacArthur, *Church Leadership*, 153).

5. “Holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience” (v.9)

The word “mystery” is musterion and it refers to something that was once hidden and is now revealed.

The “mystery of the faith” is the New Testament revelation – that which was hidden from past generations before the coming of Christ.

The deacon must hold to all the New Testament revelation. He must know and understand truth revealed in the New Covenant.

The spiritual character of a deacon begins with an affirmation of New Testament doctrine.

6. “Blameless” (v.10)

Gr. *anegkletos*, means, “without charge, blameless, without accusation, irreproachable.”

A deacon is to be without reproach, without spot, and without blemish. There should be nothing in his life for which he could be accused and thus disqualified.

7. “Husband of one wife” (v.12)

This is the same phrase used in reference to the elders in verse 2.

This rendering is probably not the best.

The word translated “wife” is *gunaikos* and the word for “husband” is *aner*. They are best translated “woman” and “man.”

“The Greek construction places emphasis on the word ‘one,’ thereby communicating the idea of a ‘one-woman man.’ Additionally the absence of a definite article stresses character, not marital circumstances; thus the character of an elder [and deacon] must reflect fidelity to one woman” (John MacArthur, *Church Leadership*, 45).

8. “Ruling their children and houses well” (v.12)

Just as an elder is to demonstrate leadership in his home, so does a deacon.

C. Deacons Who Are Women (v.11)

1. “Reverent” or “grave”

This is the same word used in verse 8 for the deacons who are men.

Women deacons or deaconesses also are to have a sense of dignity and stateliness. They are to understand the seriousness of spiritual issues and not make light of them.

2. “Not slanderers”

Gr.diabolos, often translated “devil.”

Women deacons are not to act like children of the devil. They must watch what they say and not pervert the knowledge they possess by slandering or gossip.

3. “Temperate”

Paul uses the same word in this verse (nephalios, “without wine” or “unmixed with wine”) as he did of the elders in verse 2.

Women deacons are to be sober and sensible in their judgments.

4. “Faithful in all things”

This qualification parallels that of verse 8, “not greedy for money.”

If a deacon was greedy, he or she could not be

trusted.

D. Both Groups (Men and Women Deacons) [v.13]

“Two rewards await those men and women who have served well as deacons. First, they obtain for themselves a high standing. Bathmos (standing) literally refers to an elevated stand. Here it is used metaphorically to speak of those who are a step above everyone else. In our vernacular, we might say they are put on a pedestal. That is not sinful pride, because deacons do not seek it, yet are worthy of it. Those who serve in humility will be exalted by God (James 4:10; 1 Peter 5:6), and by the church (1 Thess. 5:12-13). Faithful deacons will be respected and honored by those they serve. It is only by commanding such respect that deacons can be examples, since respected people are the ones emulated.

Second, they will gain great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus. Parresia (great confidence) is often used of boldness of speech (cf.. Acts 4:13). The faith that is in Christ Jesus refers to the sphere of Christian truth, the family of believers. Successful service breeds confidence and assurance among the people served. Those who serve God well and see His power and grace operative in their lives will be emboldened for even greater service” (John MacArthur, 1 Timothy).

CONCLUSION

1. As we conclude this morning, I want you to understand something.
2. What these men and women are called to in these qualifications is to set a pattern or example for us.

3. The same is true for those who serve as elders.
4. These qualifications are given so we know what kind of people they are and to discern whether they are qualified to serve the church in this capacity.
5. This does not mean that they are perfect but it does mean that they are striving to be.
6. In Philippians 3:12-14, Paul tells us that he hasn't attained to the resurrection from the dead or is he "already perfected," meaning, "spiritually matured" or we would say "arrived."
7. But he presses on, verse 13, "forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead."
8. He says, "I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."
9. That is our aim.
10. Paul took his sanctification seriously and so should all of us.
11. We are to pursue the prize of spiritual perfection or Christ-likeness.
12. As we close, let me ask where are you in this pursuit?
13. Are you pressing "toward the goal?"
14. Are you living a holy life by confronting your sin?
15. The calling of a deacon is a high calling.
16. Before I pray, I am going to ask Travis if he will join me with

Matt on the platform for prayer.

17. Let's pray.