

1 Timothy 3:8-13

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“Deacons likewise *must be* men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, *but* holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach. Women *must likewise be* dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things. Let deacons be husbands of *only one wife*, and good managers of *their* children and their own households. For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.”

Introduction

Good morning. Well, it is a pleasure to be with you guys again, as we gather together around the Scriptures. If you turn your bibles to 1 Timothy chapter 3, we will continue our study that lays out the concept of spiritual leadership. Earlier, we talked through the idea of what an elder is and what it means for someone to be qualified to be a shepherd in the household of God. Today, we will begin (starting in verses 8 through 13) a particular portion of scripture that deals with the deacons; with those individuals that are called to minister in the church.

I don't know if you guys caught drift of this, but if you read through chapter 3, I think you will start to realize there are a lot of things that Paul emphasizes in spiritual leadership and service (i.e. in terms of the officers of the church) that makes you to wonder why he mentions them. To some degree, they are things we expect or would consider normal (e.g. to be above reproach). These aren't odd or "super-normal" or "super-Christian" kind of characteristics. These are good and excellent things.

At the same time, there are qualities that go unmentioned possibly because they are simply obvious. For instance, an overseer or elder of the church ought to love the Lord with all his heart and permeate his whole being. They ought to evangelize the lost. They should care about the gospel and whether or not the individuals they come in contact with are believers and where people's eternal destinies lie. An overseer should care about such things.

We may be tempted to ask, "How come these things *aren't* mentioned?" What you have to realize is that Paul (by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit) is writing this letter to Timothy to say, "Timothy, I'm keeping you in Ephesus so that you might put things in order." Paul could be only emphasizing those things that would naturally and culturally difficult for the Ephesians or he could be emphasizing only those things that were already being abused by those who were supposedly the elders and deacons in the Ephesian church.

When you take that perspective, I think you will understand that there is much more to being an elder than just the qualifications that are listed. Nevertheless, those things that *are* mentioned are significant since they help to curb the very excesses, the very sinful things that would degrade and erode the church's foundation. The stuff mentioned in this chapter is paramount for any church to think through carefully (i.e. what these things mean and what an individual qualified to do the service of God, in the family of God, in His household, what that would mean for us).

Now, let's turn our attention to the concept of the deacon this morning. It's a great idea. You might know the Greek term for it (i.e. you may have heard it bantered around now and again). It is **diakonos** (δίακονος) from which we nearly transliterate into "**deacons**" in our English. The word group in Greek specifically designates the idea of servant-hood. What is interesting is how Paul used the titles of office to suggest their function in the church. Notice how elders *oversee* and deacons *serve*. In fact, this **diakonos** word group is used throughout the New Testament in a lot of different ways (e.g. "for ministering," "for being a servant," "for service," "for support," "for relief," even "for care" or "administration"). It has this sense of ministry. It is used in this sense of even the Apostles (e.g. 2 Corinthians 4; Romans 11) to say that they are servants (**diakonos**) of God, not *deacons* of God, but they are actual servants. And so, the particular office of the deacon comes from the concept of service.

That is really important for us to remember because it reminds us that there is a great attitude of humility, not of accomplishment, embedded in the offices of the church. The fact that someone calls himself "pastor" is not necessarily of

great and high regard; that you are an “elder” in the church is not necessarily to say that you accomplished anything. Not at all. It is to say that you have voluntarily and willingly given yourself over to serve the body of Christ. Is it a great place to desire to be in? Absolutely, but it is a first and foremost a place of ministry and of service. The office of the deacon is named after being about the task of service.

Let me highlight this to you with more the poignant words of Jesus (we’ve already looked at this when we talked about service and humility versus office and ambition; a worldly sense of accomplishment). In [Mark 10:40-45](#), Jesus addressed His disciples, who were often proud and overly ambitious.

“You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. But it is not so among you. But whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

The term for “servant” is **diakonos**. Is Christ saying you shall all be in the office of a deacon? No. It hasn’t even become an official office title yet. He addresses the office in only three places in the New Testament (Romans 16:1—when it talks about Phoebe being a deaconess; Philippians 1; and here in 1 Timothy) and if we take the Lord’s words about the concept of humble service from Mark 10, that even the King of the universe, Creator and Sustainer of all things, had taken bodily form in order to serve us in our redemption, then it is not just a shame, it is absolute travesty to see men and women desire offices in the church for any sense of pride and ambition.

It should be a humbly sought after prize because it is indeed a humble and exonerated thing to be like Jesus in service to body of Christ. With that in mind, we want to approach this particular portion of scripture and ask the Lord to instruct us as we look at the office of the deacon and how that ministers to us in its qualifications.

Heavenly Father,

We thank You for the blessing for the Word of God. We thank You that we can gather together as a corporate body. We can sing our praise. We can just exalt Him who is living; He who cannot fade nor change, and we thank You for the grace that is given to us in the death of Jesus Christ for the remission of our sins.

Lord, as we look at this particular portion of Scripture, Lord, and even if some of us in this room feel like “Well, maybe I’m not fit to be a deacon.” I pray that You would encourage us to think through what is that ideal; to pursue, to desire in ourselves the same character qualities that are listed here; and more than that, we would desire to be such men and women of character that we might be useful to Your purpose in the church.

Father, help us to see church not as just a once a week kind of event where we get together and we feel good and pat each other on the back, but instead that we might see it as an opportunity for us to minister, to really make a difference in the world according to Your design and Your gifting to us, so that we might in our own unique way, Lord, we may serve You to the greatest of our ability with the life and the abilities and gifts You’ve given to us.

We thank You that we even have an opportunity as those who are only worthy of death not to just have life, but to have life in service to the true and gracious King, Jesus Christ.

So we thank You for Your love and ask that You would teach us in this time around the Scriptures.

*In Jesus’ name,
Amen. Amen.*

As we begin our discussion, in light of Jesus’ words from Mark 10, we should not look to men who are our leaders and adore them for their particular giftedness. If God has gifted some in the church, we should praise the Lord and thank Him for them and for their service, but in the end we should not exalt an individual. It is to God who is gracious to give gifts unto men to minister to one another that we should give our praise. It should always be by way of humble service that all of these offices should be addressed.

It is kind of curious when you consider that if there is one action in the Passion Week of Christ, it was the act of Jesus washing the disciples’ feet—an absolute act of complete humility. Jesus says to them, “I am washing your feet and I want you to be as I do.” It’s not a command for that to become an ordinance of the church. We don’t gather you guys together and wash each other’s feet. The idea is that what can better exemplify humble service than the King, the Creator of all, the Sustainer of all, getting on His knees with His towel and washing off the dirty feet of these disciples who had just hours earlier had been jockeying for position asking, “Lord, can I sit on Your right hand?” What can be more gracious than that act?

Have you ever heard of “Royal Monday?” It is the Thursday before Easter and it celebrates the humble act of foot washing that Christ exemplified. Exactly who did this first is uncertain, but it’s a tradition that England holds even to this very day. It began in England in 1213 when King John washed the feet of the poor, giving 13 pence to each of the fortunate ones.

This became known as “Royal Monday” the Thursday before Easter. In an act of humility, the king of England would come and wash the people’s feet and maybe King John’s intention was right and good.

What is funny is that 400 years later, the royal registry records on a particular “Royal Monday,” *Thursday, April 1685* that “Our gracious King James II, washed, wiped, and kissed the feet of 52 poor men with wonderful humility.” How ironic is it that they have to record his incredible act of “humility” which he had performed with pompous circumstance in front of all the gathered people had gone and people might recognize his humility? It’s a false humility.

And the curious thing about that is that it is *still* practiced today. You might say, “I don’t remember the Queen of England kneeling down to wash anyone’s feet.” They don’t actually do the whole foot washing now (which might be a good thing—it avoids the hypocrisy of the whole pageant), however, the attendants still bring towels!

Now, if you see the “Royal Monday,” the ruler of England comes and instead of washing the feet of someone they give them something. It is this practice of “humility” that has changed properly over the years (and maybe rightly), but is done in a false and pretentious way. How odd is that?

R. Kent Hughes says this:

“The range of Ecclesiastical history demonstrates how prone the church has been to miss the point and he is talking about humble service here; not only the examples of the Lord in foot washing. The example of the Lord in foot washing has been treated with parody (it’s been made fun of) but also in some instances the office of the deacon has become a seat of power and even abuse. In some traditions, it is pursued as a political office. How far this is from the Spirit of Christ, how far from the heart of the followers, and how far from the profile of servants and deacons in 1 Timothy.”

Very well said. When we look upon these particular characteristics of the deacon, we must recognize that the office is named first and foremost with the concept of ministry. Why do we have deacons? Because they are to serve, not to make decisions, not to demonstrate themselves in any kind of pomp, to demonstrate that they have arrived, that they have something good to offer. No! They are there to serve and if they don’t fulfill that particular function, what are they doing in that office? If it is a political office, if it is some sense of power or abuse, then foolishness!

The overseer and the deacons are servants. They ought to be humble and they ought to demonstrate the character of Christ, Himself. With that in mind, let’s take a look at some of the characteristics that would qualify an individual to be a deacon in the church.

Qualifications of a Deacon (vv. 8-10, 12)

“Deacons likewise *must be* men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, *but* holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach... Let deacons be husbands of *only* one wife, *and* good managers of *their* children and their own households.”

Now, this section begins with the deacons and if you’re looking at your study bibles, (depending on whether or not your bibles are organized into paragraphs) you’ll see that there is a paragraph break at verse 8. If your bible isn’t organized into paragraphs, you’ll usually see that verse 8 is in bold. This tells you that there is a paragraph break there. The key word here, “likewise,” links it to the previous verses 1-7 which talked about the concept of the overseer or the elder.

“Deacons likewise *must be* men of dignity...”

This term *hōsautōs* (ὡσαύτως) for “likewise” is a very significant because it tells us that the subject is different from what had been discussed, but at the same time, there is some association with it. In other words, this whole section of Scripture talks about the offices of the overseer/deacon and since we are under the same umbrella topic of the leaders or officers of the church, Paul can say, “Likewise, let us discuss now, this separate but nevertheless the same rubric issue of the deacons.”

The first term there is that he is a man of “**dignity**” or *semnos* (σεμνός). I think the NIV translates it pretty well in extrapolating the idea that he is “worthy of respect.” That’s the concept here and it means that he is an individual that is not just interesting. He is worthy of our respect. He is not just a glamorous individual. He’s not just an excellent individual in terms of what he does. He is dignified and worthy of some level of respect. In other words, he is a godly man.

If you guys haven’t caught that point, the overseers are godly men. Likewise, the deacons are to be godly men. Deaconesses are godly women. They should all equally be godly. There are no levels of godliness. You may hear, “That guy is really godly. He ought to be an elder in the church.” And you may hear, “That guy is godly, but only so-so godly. I give him an ‘8’ on a scale of 1-20. So let’s put him down to the level of a deacon.” These offices are not a measure of an individual’s spirituality. Not at all! They ought to all be godly men; just as an overseer is to be respectable or above reproach, the deacon is similarly to be worthy of respect.

These are similar ideas and it reminds us as believers—as regular day-in/day-out Christians who don't have an office in the church (for all of you guys who are sitting there saying "I don't have an office in the church right now")—it reminds us that all Christians ought to be in pursuit of these characteristics. We ought to pursue a life that demonstrates a worthiness and respectability. If that is not part of our pursuit in sanctification, then what in the world are you being sanctified to? If you are glad with a reputation of being out of control or not being reverent or not being careful about the things of the Lord or not having a godly character, then what exactly are you sanctified unto?

What is the process of the Holy Spirit's work in your life since you've become a believer? Can you call yourself a Christian? This is the pursuit for all of us and it seems almost ridiculous for Paul to say "Hey, he should be a godly man, worthy of respect." Nevertheless, because apparently there had been some that have been serving in the church of Ephesus that possibly were not godly or maybe it was difficult to find individuals that were worthy of respect that was and is one of the main and first qualifications for a deacon. Like the qualifications listed for the overseer in verse 2, this idea of being a man of dignity is the umbrella statement from which all the particulars now will be laid out.

"not double-tongued..."

The first of them is that he is not **"double-tongued"** or *dilogos* (δίλογος). A great term, it literally means "not one to say one thing and then say another later." He does not have two tongues about it. He won't talk to you and address you cordially and then when you are gone say, "That guy doesn't know anything." He is not a hypocrite in the manner by which he discusses stuff. It means particularly that he is credible, that he is honest, and that he is a man who speaks truth.

What we say is quite revealing about what is in our hearts. The scriptures are very clear about that. Our speech is well connected to the meditations of our hearts. It's like when you guys are watching some sport or something fun on television, maybe a movie; you saw something on television and it's kind of in your mind and then you're talking to somebody and that which your mind had been meditating on most recently will creep into your conversation. It is natural for this to happen. We speak what we fill our hearts with and if we speak that which is inappropriate, then we become lacking in credibility. James 3 is that classic passage in Scripture where it talks about the power of the tongue

"For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well." (James 3:2)

When it says **"perfect"** or *teleios* (τέλειος), it means that he is "complete." If you want to be a man that has arrived, if you want to be a woman that has arrived (spiritually speaking), then you would not be one to stumble over the words that you speak. The way that James puts it (and I think our English captures that well), *"If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man"* suggests to us that the likelihood of that is very small. We all have issues with the things we say.

If there is a desire in us to have better and greater self-control, patience when we are wronged—to be more disciplined in terms of our spiritual lives, whether it's in prayer or study of the Word—what is the secret? According to James 3:2, it starts "with his speech." If you can bridle your speech (such that he speaks truthfully, he speaks well), James says that you'll be able to control, bridle the whole body. Have integrity, honesty, consistency in speech. The individual who is to be a deacon is not given to saying one thing in one context and another thing in another context.

"or addicted to much wine..."

The next thing that he talks about is he is also not known for his wine. Again, this has been an issue in the Ephesian church because that had been addressed a couple times now. In verse 3, it talked about the overseer not being addicted to wine. There (v. 3), **"addicted"** or *paroinos* (παροινος) literally meant, "to be near his wine." Similarly here (v. 8), **"addicted"** or *prosecho* (προσεχω) means "to not be known for drinking" or "not holding the mind on much wine." This warning of that particular characteristic (i.e. being addicted to wine) is fitting for our culture. We love and romanticize the concept of wine to an extent that is beyond anything Paul could have envisioned.

Have you guys ever watched a football game without seeing a beer commercial? I doubt it. I'm pretty sure that almost every commercial is a beer commercial. Don't get me wrong, they are funny. Some of them are good. I'll admit that. These advertising guys are certainly clever. They make a good beer commercial, but it doesn't make me want to go buy a beer and drink it. What do you guys think of when I say "Napa Valley?" It is a beautiful area, but you would think of "wine country." That would be generally the first thing that comes to mind!

Alcohol has so inundated our society that it is something that Christians ought to be more careful about. As I said before, I find no offense if you have a little wine with your meal. If we're having a meal together and you order a little wine, I don't say, "What? How dare you!" It's not a big deal to me at all. I wouldn't stare at the wine. I wouldn't stare at you. It doesn't bother me at all because as long as you don't take it to the point of drunkenness, it is not necessarily sin.

Let me say however that it is neither commendable. If you tell me, "Nam, I can tell my wine. I know my business about that." You know what would be much greater to me? If you can tell me what the greatest theme in Scripture was or in a particular portion of Scripture or in a particular book—that's the kind of intoxication that's worthwhile in my mind. That's an enjoyment worthwhile.

This is my greatest objection for Christians who have wine now and then or who like a little bit of alcohol now and then. Again, I don't stand in judgment of that at all and I'm not offended. But as a Christian, you must know why that's allowable to you. You personally, have to do that. It's not for me to decide why that's allowable or not allowable for you. It's for you to decide that.

With a lot of my friends (I talk to them about it), I realized that they don't necessarily have a biblical perspective on it. They just like it. I'm saying that in many things we do, it is not an acceptable that "I like it" because that's what I learned to like. That's not good enough. You need to think through Scriptures have to say about it and if you think it through and read through it. At the very minimum, I think you'll find that it is not commendable or necessarily something that is held in high honor.

A deacon cannot be known as an individual that is "close to his wine" or "**addicted to much wine.**" The concept of addiction is something that we import in; it doesn't have a word that says very specifically that he's a "wine-o," or a "fall-down drunk." That's not the terminology that's used here in the Greek. It literally means (it is similar to what was said earlier) he's not close to his wine; his reputation is not that he is a drinker. If that is his reputation, then he is not qualified to be a deacon. If that is one of the strong suits he has, it serves no spiritual purpose and he is not qualified by that purpose alone.

"or fond of sordid gain..."

Notice that he says right after this that deacons ought to be men with some sense of respectability. He talks about those things that deacons are not to be: he is not to be double-tongued; that is, not given to saying something one place and saying something else in another place (basically distorting truth); he is not addicted to much wine (in other words, he is not "near his wine"), he's not known for that; nor is he "**fond of sordid gain.**"

Verses 1-3 are negative qualifications that disqualify an individual. It's like what Aus Guinness said, "He is neither a man that is drunk on wine nor drunk on money." He is not fond of sordid gain or *mē aischrokerdēs* (μη αισχροκερδής). This is a very curious phrase. It means "something that is beneath us that is dirty, filthy lucre." The idea is that you delight in gaining monies that is soiled. What exactly would this mean? It would mean that Ebenezer the Scrooge could not be qualified for the deacon. Someone whose money is made on the downtrodden and possesses sleazy business practices, that individual is not qualified.

Apparently, he has a sense of the value of money that is different from the way that the Lord sees the value of money. How does God see the value of money? Is there a value to money in God's eyes? I think there is but only to the degree that it serves, ministers, aids, and provides. Does God grant to us jobs that pay us well? I hope He does. I would have hoped that that would be His provision to you, to take care of you, so that you can take care of your family, so you can raise the church, so you can send some into the mission field, so you can do something with the money that God blesses you with—that is the value of money to God.

You might say, "Well, that's the value of money to me, too." A deacon should not be an individual who delights in winning a "sucker's bet." There should be no delight in taking money from someone who doesn't know any better. If an individual has built a reputation for such sordid gain, he is not qualified to be a deacon. In fact, if you think about how this verse says a deacon is to be a man of dignity, all of these are things that erode an individual's respectability or dignity. If he is double-tongued or if he is a hypocrite in his speech, if what he speaks is untrue, then he loses respectability. If he is known for his drinking, he loses respectability. If he is an individual that is fond of sordid gain, he loses his respectability. There is no dignity in such individuals and as a result, these are individuals who would not be qualified as deacons.

"but holding to the mystery of the faith..."

I love the phrase that is used here. It speaks to the concept of spiritual maturity. Instead of being individuals that are double-tongued, addicted too much wine, fond of sordid gain, they ought to be individuals that are "**holding to the mystery of faith with a clear conscience.**" That's good terminology. They hold to the mystery of the faith.

When it talks about the concept of the "mystery," I want you to understand something. It's not the mysteries like the Sherlock Holmes mysteries. No. It's not the act of trying to figure out something that is hidden from all the clues. Instead, the term "**mystery**" in the New Testament is a technical term. It is used of things that Old Testament saints would probably not have been able to figure out on their own.

If you had lived before the time of our Lord (i.e. during the Old Testament time), you might be studying the Old Testament and you know certain things are going to happen in the future, but you're just not sure of some of the elements of it. However, you are surprised by some of the details when the Church comes on the scene.

The term "**mystery**" has been used in these contexts:

- The "mystery" of the incarnation of Christ" in [1 Timothy 3:16](#);
- The "mystery" of the indwelling of Christ in believers in [Colossians 1:26-27](#);
- The "mystery" of the unity of the Church (in terms of Jews and Gentiles having oneness in Christ) in [Ephesians 1:9](#) and in particular, [Ephesians 3:4-6](#);

- The “mystery” of the Gospel of life in [Colossians 4:3](#); and
- The “mystery” of the rapture of the Church in [1 Corinthians 15](#).

So when we talk about “**mystery**” in the New Testament, we’re not talking about something mystical. This is not talking about how a deacon will be an individual that holds to the mystical elements of the faith. The qualification is that he holds to the faith! He holds to the mystery that has been revealed about the things of the faith.

Do you think that at the time of the establishment of the Church that the apostle Peter was shocked at how the Gentiles were included into the body of Christ in oneness with the Jews? Of course! In [Galatians 2:11](#), Paul says that he had to tell Cephas (Peter) to his face, “Quit being such a hypocrite! You got to eat with the Gentiles, too! Quit separating yourself out because we are all one in Christ!” These things caught these guys off guard. These things are indeed revelation that has been newly revealed and that’s why the New Testament likes to use that term “**mystery**” for those things.

A deacon’s reputation is that he is to be dignified and that he holds to the “**mystery of the faith.**” The things revealed in the New Testament, he delights in them. He holds to them. He clings to them. He knows them. He is well informed about his beliefs. He is a man of good discernment. By saying that, I hope we tear down this weird, superficial attitude that we have about elders, i.e. that they (elders) *really* know their stuff while deacons are just so-so. It’s not about levels of spirituality. It’s just different roles and functions in the church that God has designed.

The office of the deacon is an exalted position in the eyes of God because of their service, because of their reputation, because of their godliness and their dignity, as well as their knowledge of the things of Word of God and their convictions concerning that. You cannot serve in any office in the church unless there is some element of discernment and knowledge of what you believe.

Again, it comes back to normal basic Christianity for all of us. These aren’t super-exceptional things. These are things that ought to characterize all of us. We should all become well-founded in the faith. We should all be able to understand, to discern if this is the right thing for a church to do or not to do because we know what the Word of God says about it. The Word of God should have enough influence upon us that we should hold to the mystery of the faith tightly with a clear conscience. We should be able to say, “Hey, I can’t pinpoint exactly why, but something about this doesn’t seem right to me.” If we have not come to such an intuition, then we are not as discerning as we ought to be. We cannot be characterized as individuals that hold to the mystery of the faith and do it with a clear conscience.

“...with a clear conscience.”

The “**clear conscience**” is an interesting one. It is *katharos suneidēsis* (καθαρός συνείδησις) in the Greek. Not only is it that he understands what we are to believe, he acts upon biblical truth so that his conscience doesn’t contradict his profession; what he says, what he professes to believe is never contradicted by what he does—his conscience is clear.

It’s that to say that he would never sin? Of course not. None of us in this room (except for maybe one of us) can say that he or she has never sinned. Actually, not one of us can make that claim. I just said that just to kind of present a little bit of “mystery” for you guys. There’s no one in this room that can actually say that we will not sin from this moment on. Not a single one! Sin will abound and yet, to live with a clear conscience means that we confess, we repent, we get away from sin and we do that as soon as possible and we make ourselves right with the Lord because that is our delight. We ought to have a clear conscience.

I like how Jonathan Edwards illustrated the idea of the clear conscience. He compared the conscience with a sundial and God’s Word as the sun. He says:

“Only when the Word of God is shining upon the sundial does it give you an accurate reading.”

You guys know what a sundial is right? It casts a shadow so that when the sun is directly overhead, it casts a small shadow and as it moves, you can tell what time it is based on the shadow that it casts on the sundial. What Jonathan Edwards is trying to say is that the Word of God is just like that to our conscience. It lets us know exactly what time it is, what condition it is and what we should and should not be doing. It gives us direction. Moonlight cannot work. To use candlelight is folly. Any other moral conscience center, any other source of light, to be a barometer of your conscience will lead you astray. Only the Word of God and only the Scriptures always tell the truth.

“For our proud confidence is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you.” (2 Corinthians 1:12)

Clear conscience is a testimony of maturity and that’s what these deacons must have. They should hold fast to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.

“**And let these also first be tested...**”

This verse simply says that they ought to be tested for service; the test of reputation over an extended period of time. Curiously enough, it is given to us in the present tense. In other words, they should *continue* to be tested; not necessarily that there is a probationary period or something like that. If someone is in the office of a deacon we should constantly be

observing their behavior and not necessarily to scrutinize them, but to say that just because you have come into an office, that office is neither permanent, nor is it to say that you have arrived and you never need to grow in anything ever again. The office of the deacon, just like the office of an overseer, is not the “end all be all” of our spiritual journey. The office of an overseer and of a deacon has certain qualifications, but these qualifications don’t just end once you’re in the office.

There’s been a lot of news about the appointment of the chief justice of the Supreme Court. Did you know that the justices of the Supreme Court have a lifetime appointment? I was thinking “Man, what other job is that good?” You’re hired until you die! I’m sure if they do something illegal they can get put in jail, but nevertheless, they are appointed for a lifetime.

The church officers (at least from this particular statement) are not necessarily. They ought to be continued to be tested. They ought **“first be tested”** and let them continue to serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach. We are to look after them and watch after them. On the one hand, it is not to overly emphasize to “watchdog” them to see if they trip along the way, but instead the concept is that all of the church ought to see them and emulate their behavior. If we are to emulate their behavior and actions and lifestyles, then we are also to hold them to account because where the leaders lead so will the entire congregation follow.

“...then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach.”

The term **“beyond reproach”** or *anegkleōtos* (ἀνεγκλητός) is the same one we saw used for elders who were to be “unblameable”; that is nothing could be used to discredit them in public or in private. Deacons (like elders) are to be the real deal. They are not men or women who are beyond sin, but they are consistent in the pursuit of mortifying sin in their lives. They want to be sanctified. They want to be godly. They want to be men and women who would honor the Lord. It’s a spiritual issue here that is discussed in verse 10. Let’s look at verse 12 and we’ll come back to look at verse 11.

“Let deacons be husbands of *only* one wife, and good managers of *their* children and their own households.”

Where have we come across that already? We just looked at that in verses 4 and 5 for the qualifications of an overseer.

“He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?)” (1 Timothy 3:4-5)

Consistency in the home is the qualification not just for overseers, but for the deacons, as well. It would remind us that even as Christians, an honorable and significant pursuit in our lives would be consistency in your home. Why is that precious? Anybody that is married in this room knows clearly that you know your spouse’s sins better than anybody in the world; and your spouse knows your sins better than anybody else in the world. It is a very sanctifying (meaning that sometimes it is difficult) to be married and all the more so when you have children. You should thank the Lord for His willingness to buffet you constantly with these issues that challenge you and challenge your patience, challenge your character, so you have to become who you are in your home (your most intimate setting) that you would be to your friends and to your neighbors.

Isn’t true that we are often so much nicer to our friends than to our family? If you can’t relate to marriage, then relate to your relationship with your parents, especially during your teenage years. You would say stuff to mom and dad that you would never dare to say to your good friend for fear of losing that friend. But for mom and dad, you can’t lose them, so you just let them have it!

In the home, consistency of who we are proves out the genuineness and the depth of our character. If I really want to know what kind of person you really are, I wouldn’t go to your close friends—I would ask your roommate. I would ask your spouse. I would ask your children. I would ask your moms and dads. I would ask those who are closest to you, who see you in your most willingly “ugly” state. They know stuff about you that no one else does and that concept that deacons are to be **“good managers of *their* children and their own households”** (which is also true for the overseer) is the same idea to being consistent in their homes and family life. If they are, they are the “real deal.” Indeed, they are exactly who they have said that they are.

Qualification of a Deaconess (v. 11)

“Women *must* likewise *be* dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things.”

There is a great deal of disagreement about what this particular term for **“women”** or *gune* (γυνή) means. It’s not divided up. You might think that it’s divided up between those who are egalitarians and those who are complimentarians. If you don’t know what we are talking about, we are talking about Paul’s earlier admonition in 1 Timothy 2 about women not being teachers or having authority in the church over men and how the office of the overseer or the elder is only held by men.

You may think that from that position that this is referring to wives of deacons. That’s not necessarily true. In fact, there is great scholarship on both sides. There’s a great deal of disagreement. This is not a divisive issue (meaning you would cut off fellowship with other churches). Understand that if you have friends at another church, who have solid teaching and is a godly church, a bible-believing church and you talk to them and they say “We don’t have deaconesses.” Don’t say

"You're bizarre and you're in sin. You're a heretic!" It is one of those things where the church is greatly divided over. Understand that it's not something that disqualifies them from being a solid, conservative, bible-believing church at all.

The term for "women" here is **gunaikas** (γυναικας) which can be translated in different ways depending on the context. "Women" is generally used for "wives." If it were to be translated as "wives" here, then what you are saying is that (after talking about deacons) the deacon's wife must likewise be dignified like her husband. She should be a good compliment for him. That's what it would mean if the term were translated as "wife" (i.e. of a deacon).

As I understand it (and I think it was the official position of the Church at the time), the term for "women" here refers to "deaconesses." If you look at verse 8 ("**Deacons likewise must be men of dignity...**") in the Greek (διάκονος ὡσαύτως σεμνοῖς), when you take out the term "men," it literally says that deacons likewise must be dignified. In verse 11, an exact parallel phrase (γυναικας ὡσαυτως σεμνας) says, "**Women must likewise be dignified...**" Literally, the difference between the two is between the terms **diakonos** (deacons) and **gunaikas** (women). The other terms present a literary pattern (especially in terms of "likewise") not unlike that used when talking about the offices of the elders and the deacons. So in my mind, it makes much more sense to take "**likewise**" to mean "Let's take another officer in the church, the female deacon or the deaconess." I think it fits in terms of the symmetry of what Paul is writing perfectly. The phrase is identical so I am led to think that it is talking about the female deacon.

Some would argue then, "Why doesn't Paul just use **diakonas** (the idea of deacon in the feminine form)? Greek has that beautiful quality that a lot of languages have that English does not and that's that words appear in masculine, feminine, or in neuter (non-gender). You can easily have said or make it the feminine form of deacon, but it wasn't written that way because the term itself is masculine.

Only later on in early church history (i.e. the first century) did the term "deaconess" (the female form of deacon) start to be used. So, if there was no term for a female deacon, how would Paul designate a female to that position in the church? I think he would designate her just like he did. He used the term "**woman**" (**gunaikas**) and wrote "**women likewise.**" The assumption is that we are still talking about deacons and in particular, women deacons, because there is not such a thing in the vocabulary at that time.

In fact, that's why when Phoebe was addressed in [Romans 16:1](#) as "*a servant [diakonos] of the church,*" it is probably referring to her position as a deaconess. If it was meant to be used for wives in this context, my question would be why not mention anything about the wives of the overseer? We just went through the whole section on the overseer; that he is a one-woman man (which is important) and he manages his household well; why not discuss at some point the concept of his wife? Is the elder's wife not required to be like unto him? It breaks the natural symmetry of what Paul's talking about in my mind.

Here, he is talking about women because he is talking about female deacons or deaconesses. What this means is that ladies can and should be recognized in the service of the church, not just in conjunction with their husbands, but according to their giftedness, according to their qualifications. You might think, "Well, does not that break the concept of a women teaching or exercising authority as mentioned in verse 12 of chapter 2?" Just think about it. We talked about it clearly that that admonition against women was in reference to the pastoral role or the elder role (specifically because of exercising authority and teaching).

Women are not supposed to have preaching roles in the church. However, in a small group setting where people are sharing are we suppose to say to women to be quiet? Of course not! There are guidelines in 1 Corinthians of how women are to prophesy in the church or even pray. Paul was not speaking of absolute silence, as some would make it out to be. That's not what it's talking about. They are to be quiet like all the other *men*; as we do in this *collective congregation*; as *all* the men and women of Israel throughout all their times of learning had done. One person talks through the Word—they preach the Word. *Everyone* else who is not preaching sits in silence.

The admonition there is against a woman having the preaching authority or having ruler authority as far as the office of the overseer in the church. The deaconess would not contradict that at all. Is it a function and office in the church? Certainly. But is it by way of authority? No, it's by way of service. That's what all Christians ought to involve themselves in. Women ought to be deaconesses just as men can be deacons.

Like I said, there are excellent men of God who hold to a different view on that and that's fantastic. There are excellent men of God who hold our view on that and that's fantastic. It's one of those things you don't want to divide a church over, nor do you want to call someone a heretic over, but it is a hotly debated topic nevertheless. Maybe not *that* hotly debated because people realize in the end, it is a service ministry and it is not breaking what 2 Timothy 2 has to say about not allowing a woman to teach or exercise authority in the church.

So with all that in mind, if "women" here is to be translated as "deaconesses," she must likewise, just as the elder has qualifications and just as the male deacons has qualifications, women likewise have certain qualifications.

"Women must likewise be dignified..."

They are to be "**dignified**" or **semnos** (σεμνός). In other words, they ought to mirror, in many ways, the respectability that the men have,

“...not malicious gossips...”

The term that they use for **“malicious gossips”** literally means “slanderer” or someone who cuts people down. The Greek term for that is **diabolos** (διδάβολος) as in diablo. It’s used of the devil. In fact, our term for the “devil” (in the Greek at least) is this exact same term **diabolos**. He is the slanderer. If a woman is known to slander and say “I don’t like her because she is... I don’t like him because he is...” This is similar to the man who is double-tongued mentioned earlier in regards to deacons. She similarly needs to control her tongue.

A deaconess cannot be a deaconess if she is one that is more like the devil in terms of her speech. Malicious gossips is a good extrapolation of that in terms of trying to understand what that would mean for these ladies. It would mean that they would speak freely about stuff in a slanderous way; stuff that isn’t necessarily true, but they are glad to talk about it—that would be unhealthy for the church, that is definitely not sanctifying for her or for the one she is speaking about or for those who are listening. Such an individual should never be qualified for the office of the deaconess in the church.

“...but temperate, faithful in all things.”

She is also to be temperate, sober minded, and faithful in all things.

Benefits of Deaconship (v. 13)

“For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.”

There are 2 things that are the benefit of the office of the deacon:

1. By serving well, they have obtained a **“high standing”** or **bathmos kalos** (βαθμός καλός). It is an elevated position. It is a word that kind of means something similar to being on placed a pedestal. It is not to say that they get a prideful accolade because they are awesome, but the concept is that God, Himself, will exalt them. In other words, they obtain for themselves a high standing, not in any human accomplishment, but in the sense of who God is and what God has desired to use them for. There is a privilege in the office of a deacon because there is a privilege in the service to the Church. There is a privilege in ministry.
2. There is **“great confidence”** or a great boldness in the very sphere of the faith of Christ. It is a great benefit because there is divine privilege and high standing to be a minister in the church. There is also a great confidence in the things of Christ. As an individual grows and serves in the Church, it should be our greatest desire to be like Jesus Christ, our greatest example of service. When we talk about becoming like Jesus, what is the first thing that comes to your mind? Quite often, we think of things like being spotless in terms of sin, which is very important. We should pursue the mortification of sins, but in terms of how we flesh out our life and lifestyle, should we not be as the Lord Himself often commanded us, that is to love one another, to serve one another, and to be as Son of Man had been? Not to be served, but to serve? The degree to which you are in the service or the ministry to others in the church, you accomplish the very function for which Christ has saved you and left you on this planet for—to make His glory known and to minister in the world; to share the Gospel to those who are lost and just to minister in general to those who are saved. It is of great desire and benefit to pursue the things that are of Christ, for Christ, in the manner of which Christ would have done it.

Service should be one of our greatest desires and accomplishments and that’s what should be one of the foremost things that come to our hearts and minds when we think of “Hey, I want to be like Jesus!” Because I think Jesus would say “You want to be like Me? Great! I didn’t come to be served, but to serve. I taught that to My disciples, who later became these great apostles; who I empowered by the Spirit of God to do great things, mighty things, yet nevertheless, they were to learn the first lesson first, the basis by which Jesus ministered to us—He came to *serve*.”

We ought to seek the same thing. The office of the deacon and the deaconess is to be highly valued because again, it represents for us and among us that which is a primary function of the person of Christ. He serves. He is a servant to all. Let’s close in prayer.

Heavenly Father,

We thank You for the privilege of Your Word, and we thank You for the reminder of what it means to desire to seek to minister.

Lord, it’s funny in our day and age even the ideas of ministry and those who minister have taken on a life of its own. We think of the officers in the church to have some exalted position instead of realizing that the term actually means to go and serve.

Jesus, help us to look upon Your example. Help us to understand what the Word of God teaches us and what You, Yourself, have often spoken to us about through the Word of God that we ought to be servants and that if we desire to be great and God’s servants, we ought to be slaves of all.

Instead of finding ourselves exalted, instead of finding ourselves nourished and ministered to, we ought to seek to go and do the ministry. We ought to go and seek to do the service.

Instead of looking for something that accomplishes some delight for ourselves, we ought to seek that which is a delight unto someone else.

If we can learn such a principle of life to live so humbly with such service, Lord, we know that we would be a delight unto You. We would be a delight unto You for Your glory. We would be a delight unto our church, for its growth and development and we would pray that that would be in the forefront of all of our minds.

Let every person in this church, especially the members of this church, may we think carefully about what it means to minister and how we might creatively use our abilities, our opportunities to minister as we should, not to sit around and wait for someone to come to us, Lord, that we might be served, but that we might learn to be a servant of all, as You, Yourself, have demonstrated in Your death, in the program of redemption, to redeem us from our sins that we might know new life.

We give You the praise and ask that You would give us the humility and make our church, a church that is known for its ministry and its care and raise up within us Lord, elders that would lead, deacons that would minister, and that we would just by way of Your sovereign grace to us, we would become that model church, exemplifying the things of God to Your glory.

*In Jesus' name we pray,
Amen.*