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Looking for NT Deacons; 1 Tim 3:8-13 (I)
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Introduction – It's that time of year again. Two weeks from today, we as a local church body, will nominate and select 4 men to serve as deacons of our congregation. God has so organized the church so that there are only two offices named in the NT, elder or pastor or shepherd or overseer and deacon. That's why we find the qualification for the overseer in 3:1-7 and the qualifications for the deacon in 3:8-13.

So what is a deacon? The Greek word literally means servant. Diakonos and it's related forms occur about 100 times in the NT, and they all mean service, or serve, or support, or relief. It is only here and in Philippians 1:1 that the word is used as a title for an office in the church. 1 Timothy was written some 30 years after the birth of the church at Pentecost. So the church has grown to the point that there is a need for further organization.

All of this means there is a general use of the word servant that applies to every believer. We are all called to be deacons in the sense that we are all called to serve one another and the church. And there is also the specific use of the word deacon that applies to those men who have been especially called by God and recognized by the church to serve the church in an official, designated role.

In God's wise design for the care of His people, He has structured the church in such a way that the spiritual needs of the local church would be attended by the pastors and the day to day physical and material needs of the local church would be attended by the deacons. That's why we find this list of qualifications in 1 Timothy 3. Serving the local church in the office of pastor or deacon is a serious, joyful calling to watch over God's people. These qualifications span every realm of a deacon's life. This morning we're going to look at the first 3 realms and next Sunday, Lord willing, we will look at the fourth realm of the home.

- I. The Personal Testimony (v8)
 - a. Dignified – the word means serious. A deacon must be a serious person. That doesn't mean he can't be a jovial, fun-loving guy. The people of God are to be filled with joy!

- i. It means a deacon must be known as a man who takes the serious matters of life and the serious matters of the church seriously. He doesn't belittle or make trivial or make light of the weighty matters of life and faith and the church.
 - ii. He doesn't make mountains out of molehills, but he also doesn't make molehills out of mountains. His character is dignified when it comes to the things of God.
 - iii. It is a serious business to delve into the business of the local church. Decisions must be made. Decisions that have little to no visible impact and those that have an impact for generations to come. Tasks must be settled and finished so as not to hinder the work of the gospel. Unity must be maintained so that the witness of the church may be preserved.
 - iv. To serve the church is to serve the people who belong to God, those for whom Christ died and purchased with His own blood. Even for the most menial of tasks, there is a seriousness about it.
- b. Not double-tongued – to be double-tongued means to say something to one person and something entirely different to another. To speak out of both sides of the mouth.
 - i. The need here is for men of courage. A deacon must be one who will stand for the truth of God's Word, will stand by the decisions and direction of the church, and will gently but firmly encourage its members to join together and avoid disruption and disunity.
 - ii. A deacon is not a wishy-washy person. A deacon is not one who sides with whomever he happens to be with at the time. A deacon is one who maintains the doctrine of the Bible and the direction of the church. He's not double-tongued.
- c. Not addicted to much wine – the issue here is not alcohol or the difference between the alcoholic content of wine in Jesus' day as opposed to the higher alcoholic content of wine in our day. People in Bible times became drunk and became addicted to wine just as they do in our day as well.
 - i. The issue here is addiction. Being controlled by a substance rather than by the Spirit of God. As Paul says elsewhere in

Ephesians 5:18 “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.”

- ii. When someone is addicted to wine or anything else, he is preoccupied with that substance or thing. It holds great power and influence over his life. It is a stronghold, a choke hold on his spiritual life. His life revolves around another drink to the neglect of everyone and everything else.
 - iii. He can't serve other until he finds victory over his addiction in Jesus Christ.
- d. Not greedy for dishonest gain – a deacon must be trustworthy. He must not out for self. He must not be looking to promote self or receive for self. He must not be materialistic. He must not be one who cuts corners.
- i. If he is going to serve us we must be able to trust him.
 - ii. He must be a man of honor, a selfless man, gladly willing to sacrifice himself for the good of God's people. He must be upright and a man of integrity.

II. The Individual Faith (v9)

- a. Hold the mystery of the faith – Paul uses the word “mystery” to mean things that were not known or not fully known in the OT but now have been revealed in the NT. The Incarnation of Christ, the indwelling of Christ within each believer, the unity of Jew and Gentile in Christ, the saving gospel, all of these are referred to as mysteries in the NT. In other words, one who holds the mystery of the faith is one who knows and cherishes and defends the faith.
 - i. He holds the mystery of the faith. He clings to it. He keeps it.
- b. With a clear conscience – that means the deacon not only knows and cherishes the faith, but he lives the faith. He practices what he says he believes. His conscience is clear. He doesn't knowingly and willingly live in opposition to Scripture.
 - i. For sure, deacons sin. No one is without sin. But a deacon is to be one who desires to please and honor and glorify God by the way he lives his life. He is quick to confess. Quick to repent. When he lays his head down on his pillow at night, he can rest knowing that he's lived the day for the glory of God.

- III. The Affirmation of the Church (v10)
 - a. The testing comes within the realm of the church. A man is tested in that the church observes if he has a servant-heart and a servant willingness and a servant record.
 - b. Does he avoid service or does he volunteer for service?
 - c. Does he only show up for the easy tasks or is he there for the difficult tasks that require something from him?
 - d. Testing takes time. It takes time for the church to observe a servant heart. It takes time to get to know someone beyond the Sunday morning light conversation.
 - e. The other side of Paul's word here is for the church. If he is tested, if he has proven himself blameless, let him serve!
 - i. Nominate the proven servants to serve.
 - ii. Don't overlook him because his age doesn't fit your preference. Don't overlook him because he doesn't run in your circles. If he has a servant's heart and has proven overtime that God has called him to serve, let him serve.

Conclusion – Conclude with this thought. When you take a good, honest look at the qualifications for a deacon, you realize what you're looking at is a description of a growing Christian. Shouldn't we all take seriously the things of God? Shouldn't we all be honest in our speech? Shouldn't we all be free from addiction and filled with the Spirit? Shouldn't we all be free from materialism and dishonest gain? Shouldn't we all cherish and live the faith? Shouldn't we all be proven servants of the church?

So maybe before we look out at the men of the church and ask ourselves, "Who should I nominate to be my deacon?", maybe we should look to our own selves first and ask for God's grace that we might be growing in our faith. Before we require something of someone else, shouldn't we be walking on the same path? Grassy Pond not only needs twelve men to serve in the specific meaning of deacon, we need our whole church serving in the general meaning of deacons. You see if we are a church full of deacons in the general sense of the word, it won't be difficult at all, and we won't go wrong at all in finding deacons in the specific sense of the word.