

Subject: *Qualifications of Church Leaders, Part 3*

Scripture: *1 Timothy 3:8-13*

One boy was asked what he learned in Sunday School and he said, “We learned how Jesus healed the sick and cast out deacons.” Someone asked a little boy if he knew the difference between the pastor and deacons. He said, “I think the pastor gets paid for being good, and the deacons are good for nothing.”

The Bible teaches some very important things about deacons and their role in the church. Just like the office of a pastor, the focus of the Bible is on the deacon’s life and character rather than his duties, the man rather than the ministry. The most important thing is being the right kind of man. Like the pastor, he is to be an example to other believers. The first word of verse 8, “likewise,” is an important word showing the close connection of pastor and deacons. The deacons must also meet certain qualifications like the pastor, and like the pastor, the deacons must meet these qualifications when they are being considered for deacon service and they must continue to meet these qualifications as long as they serve.

THE DIGNITY OF A DEACON

The word “grave” (vs. 8) doesn’t have anything to do with death, although I have known a few deacons in the past who were pretty dead. That means “serious about the church and the things of God.” The word “grave” was used to express royalty and majesty. The church is a family and we are children of the king. There ought to be a sense of dignity in a deacon. A deacon is to conduct himself in a manner that deserves respect. This word is also used of the deacon’s wives in verse 11.

THE INTEGRITY OF A DEACON

First of all, a deacon must be trustworthy in what he says. “Doubletongued” (vs. 8) literally means a man of “divided words” or double-talker, saying one thing to one person and saying something else to another. Native Indians used to say: “He speaks with forked tongue.” It is important that he have integrity in what he says. Next, he must not be given to much wine. He is to have a clear testimony and good clear judgment. He must not be greedy of filthy lucre. He must have integrity in handling money. In his position as a deacon, he could be tempted to steal (like Judas). He must not seek money at the expense of his testimony. This means he should not gamble, partake of dishonest profit, or make money a priority in his life.

J. L. Kraft, founder of the giant company Kraft Foods, said that as a young man he wanted to be the most successful maker and seller of cheese in the world. He planned on becoming rich and famous. He began by selling cheese from little wagon pulled by a pony named Paddy. As a young man he worked hard, but his business just wasn’t going anywhere. One day he pulled the wagon to a stop and began to talk to his pony, “Paddy, something’s wrong. We’re not doing it right. We’ve got things turned around and our priorities aren’t where they should be. Maybe we ought to serve God and put Him first.” That night Kraft went home and made a covenant that for the rest of his life he would serve God first. Years later when J. L. Kraft was the President of one of America’s largest corporations, he said, “I would rather be a servant in my church than to be the head my great company. My first job is serving Jesus.”

Later in this same letter (1 Tim. 6:6-8) God reminds all believers to be content. Church leaders are to set an example of Christian contentment. In other words, all people should be able to say that deacon is a good man. He is a man of integrity.

THE MATURITY OF A DEACON

A deacon must have spiritual depth (vs. 9). He must be grounded in the Word. He should know what he believes and why he believes it (holding the mystery of the faith). And he is to live what he believes (a pure conscience). This is the conscience of a man who is saved and walks with the Lord. He is not to be a hypocrite. His behavior must be consistent with his beliefs. A deacon is not required to teach like a pastor, but he should have the same commitment to God's Word as the pastor. And he should support the Bible teaching and preaching of the church. He should be in Sunday School and the worship services and participate in Bible studies and classes. He is to be a disciple, a learner, a man who is growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord.

THE QUALITY OF A DEACON

Deacons should first be "proved" (vs. 10) which means tried, tested to make sure they are quality men. "Blameless" means free from accusation (see vs. 2). They should pass the test of human evaluation. They must not be new Christians. They should be in the church long enough for people to know them well. Any man who is going to be a deacon must pass the test of proven character. And even after he becomes a deacon, he should still measure up (just like that pastor). There should not be a double standard, and any man who doesn't want other people to watch him and listen to him and evaluate him should not be a deacon. It is often said that a pastor lives in a glass house, and so does the deacon.

The church is responsible for selecting tried and proven men. When the first deacons were chosen, the apostles told the congregation **Acts 6:3** *Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.* How could the congregation know if the men were of good reputation, filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom if they had not observed them over time?

THE MINISTRY OF A DEACON

Being a deacon is not a position to be filled, but an opportunity to be used (vs. 10). "Use the office of a deacon" is actually one word in Greek and it is found over 30 times in the NT. Most of the time it is translated "minister" as in **Mark 10:45** *For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.* Deacons need to "deac." The word deacon means "servant." It comes from two words meaning "through the dust." The idea is someone who moves quickly through the dusty streets following his master to fulfill his duties. What is a deacon supposed to do? The first deacons were chosen in Acts 6:1-4. There were seven men. Only two of the seven are well known, Stephen and Philip. Stephen was the first martyr. Philip became the first missionary. Both of them were preaching deacons.

They were set over the business (task, assignment) of caring for the widows (Acts 6:3). The deacons helped with the daily distribution of food for the widows. The deacons do whatever needs to be done. They are the problem-solvers. They make sure that the people's needs are being met. The church is in the people business, so a deacon must love and serve the people. They serve the Lord by serving the people. They assist the pastor so he can spend time doing what God has called him to do. We have a deacon family ministry for this purpose. David Miller, a preacher I knew in Arkansas, had a dog named "Deacon." That's not a bad idea because a deacon can be a pastor's best friend.

THE FIDELITY OF A DEACON

He is to be a faithful man, a “one-woman man” just like the pastor (vs. 2). This has often been the one requirement that seems to stand out as the acid-test, but it is not more important than the rest. He is to be faithful to his wife and children, just like the pastor. Those who know him the best should think the most of him. He has the respect of his wife and children. He is to set a good example for other men in the church.

The deacon’s wives must be grave (dignified), not slanderers (Gk., *diabolos*, word used for the devil, literally, “she-devils”), and faithful in all things. Her husband, her children, and her church can count on her. A deacon’s wife should support him and his ministry in the church. She should be the wind beneath his wings, not the anchor on his boat.

THE OPPORTUNITY OF A DEACON

To “purchase” means to acquire or to gain. A deacon who serves well gains a good standing in the church (vs. 13). He earns the respect of the people. People will respect their deacons not because they have the position of deacon, but because they serve faithfully and they have earned the respect of the church. The world doesn’t put a high value on servants, but God does and the church does. Great boldness means freedom to speak or earning the right to be heard. Not to mention the rewards a faithful deacon will receive when he gets to heaven. When a deacon is faithful to his assignment and he knows he has done so with the right motive, he will have inner satisfaction knowing that God is pleased.

Leaders are accountable. To whom much is given, much will also be required. Like pastors, the deacons are not perfect, but they are held to a higher standard. The church should pray for them, encourage them, and follow them as they follow Christ.