

“Living For Christ In A Confused and Confusing World”

A Study of Paul’s Letters to Timothy

Sermon #7

“The Responsibility of the Deacon!”

1Timothy 3:8-13

The word “deacon” simply means minister or servant. Some form of this word appears 101 times in the New Testament; only five of those times does it refer to the office of the deacon. The rest refer to the lifestyle of a servant that every Christian is called to. In the general sense the word “deacon” (*diakonos*) is used by Jesus in reference to the true servant that all Christians are to be (Matt 20:26-28, John 12:26). Jesus uses the word (*diakonos*) in Matthew 20:26 when he says, “... whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant (literally- deacon)”

But in a more specific sense the word deacon is used to refer to one who serves the church. The early church was so effective in meeting the needs of the people that according to Acts 4:34, “There was no needy persons among them” (NIV). But as the young church grew more and more people came under the circle of care until a serious problem developed. There came a time when the Apostle could not keep up with all the work that needed to be done. According to Acts 6:1 some came with a complaint that because Grecian Jews were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. The church was called together according to Acts 6:2 to find a solution. The Twelve at that point told the church (Acts 6:2-4) “.... It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. (3) ³Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them (4) and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.”

These seven men thus chosen became the first deacons (although not called deacons here the word is used twice to describe their work).

“Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, (9) holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. (10) But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless. (11) Likewise, their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. (12) Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. (13) For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.”

First, They Must be Individuals of Integrity (v. 8)

Verse eight begins with “likewise” which simply means “*in like manner.*” Deacons therefore must possess the same quality of maturity and character that is expected of the pastor.

This integrity is exemplified by the use of the word “reverent” in verse eight which also can be translated “*worthy of respect,*” “*dignified*” or “*serious.*”

“A rather pompous-looking deacon was endeavoring to impress upon a class of boys the importance of living the Christian life. “Why do people call me a Christian?” the man asked. After a moment’s pause, one youngster said, “Maybe it’s because they don’t know you.” A little boy just got saved and sat on a bench next to old man who looked upset. The little boy said to the man, “Sir, do you need to get saved?” The man startled said abruptly, “I’ll tell you I’ve been a Deacon in this church for over 30 years and Chairman of Deacons for 15 years.” The little boy responded, “Sir, it don’t matter what you done, Jesus loves you and He’ll still save you!”

“not double-tongued” (v. 8)

This literally means that he does not have “*divided words*” or as we would say today, “*Does not speak out of both sides of his mouth.*”

Not like the story I heard of a deacon who sent in his apologies for the Sunday morning service, claiming that he was ill with flu. One of the members, however, said he had seen the deacon on his way to a ball game. After the service, the minister went to visit the deacon, “Brother,” he said, “I have information that you were not sick at all this morning, but went to watch a ball game.” The deacon protested: “That’s a vicious lie! And I’ll show you my FISH to prove it!”

This phrase “not double-tongued” literally means not guilty of “*saying one thing to one and something else to another*” (Barclay). Since the responsibility of the deacon would take him from home to home, it could be immensely harmful to the church for him to be double tongued saying one thing at one house and something different in another. There is always the temptation to speak of the same matter in different tones and matter to different people. The deacon is to be straightforward. He is not to be cause of misunderstandings and differences. There are some people who get caught up in division and disharmony. Deacons should be men who can be relied upon to the exact truth in what they say.

He must also be one who can be counted upon to handle issues of confidentiality.

“not given to much wine,”

Homer Kent observes, “The fact that deacons were not told to become total abstainers, but rather to be temperate, does not mean that Christians today can use liquor in moderate amounts. The wine employed for the common beverage was very largely water. The social stigma and the tremendous social evils that accompany drinking today did not attach

themselves to the use of wine as the common beverage in the homes of Paul's day." [As quoted by Irwin Woodworth Raymond. *The Teaching of the Early Church on the Use of Wine and Strong Drink*. (New York: Columbia Univ., 1927) p. 88]

Alfred Barnes says, "It is not affirmed that it would be proper for the deacon, any more than the elder, to indulge in the use of wine in small quantities; but it is affirmed that a man much given to wine, ought not, on any consideration, to be a deacon"

The consistent testimony of the Bible is against the use of strong drink. It is certainly best for a Christian not to drink wine or strong drink at all. In fact it would be a mark of wisdom.

"not greedy for money,"

The basic idea is the he is not to be a person who has a dishonorable means of making a living. His integrity is to extend to his financial dealings.

Not only are they to be Individuals of Integrity but also....

Secondly, They Must Individuals With Spiritual Maturity (vv. 9-10)

What is the deacon's understanding of the Word of God? Verse nine says, "holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience."

The New English Bible translates this verse to read, "They must be men who combine a clear conscience with a firm hold on the deep truths of the faith."

Deacons are to be men of conviction. They must know what they believe and why they believe it. They must show discernment to not be men who are susceptible to every new theological wind. Deacons, indeed, all Christians should be ready and able to express clearly and convincingly what they believe.

According to verse ten this spiritual maturity is to be clearly discernible. He says, "But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless."

Paul says that that proposed deacons are to be tested, but he does not say how they are to be tested. But obviously he is not referring to an "official" deacon's test or even to a probationary period, but of the testing of one's reputation. Does this person exhibit evidence of having the qualities necessary to be a deacon.

The main point seems to be that he who would be a deacon must be able to sustain the test of having the eyes of the whole church focused on him. Of course implied in this test is that the person must be of sufficient age and have been a part of the local church for a sufficient length of time to allow time for their faithfulness to be a proven point.

This would surely go against the practice in some Baptist churches of transferring a person in as a deacon in their new church right along with their membership. No doubt many such things have occurred as that which I heard related in a story. In this story a man was visiting in a Baptist church and at the conclusion of the sermon the pastor extended the altar call. An invitation was given to come to the front for various things, and as a consequence a family came and sat in the front row. The preacher went across and talked quietly with them. In a moment he looked up and said to the congregation, "*Billy and Mary Lou have just moved here from Tampa. All agree that they should be brought into membership?*" The congregation said Amen and raised its hands. Then followed another quiet talk with the man. The pastor addressed the congregation again: "*Billy tells me that he was a deacon in his old church. All agree that he be appointed a deacon here?*" Again there was the same response. On that man's first visit to the congregation he left it as one of its deacons." [related in a sermon by Geoff Thomas. "How to Gain Excellent Standing and Great Assurance." -www.users.aber.ac.uk/emk/ap/sermons/#1Tim]

Alan Redpath in his book "Passion for Preaching" offers the following test for a man's words.

T Is it True

H Is it Helpful

I Is it Inspiring

N Is it Necessary

K Is it Kind..

Not only are they To Be Individuals With Spiritual Maturity but also...

Third, They are to be Persons With a Consistent Home life (v. 11-12)

Verse eleven states, "Likewise, their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things."

Literally this says, "women likewise," but there is some considerable debate about who the women being discussed here are. There are three basic positions held by conservative Bible scholars.

First, these are women who serve as deacons along with men of the church. (A. T. Roberson, Alfred Barnes)

Secondly, this is a separate office (deaconess) held by women. This is an auxiliary service performing ministries for which women are better adapted.

Third, that the women being discussed are the wives of the deacons. (Charles Ryrie)

Our church has traditionally held this verse to mean the wives of the deacons. They are to serve alongside their husbands in meeting the needs of women of the congregation. What should we expect of such women? That she not have any character flaws that would disqualify her husband from serving. The deacon is to have a wife whose respectability matches his own.

Verse twelve deacons, like the elders, are to be "... the husbands of one wife."

The qualification given here is similar to that of the pastor, he is to be "one woman man."

No woman other than his wife is to have his affections, martially, mentally or emotionally.

Alongside this is domestic qualification of a well-run household "ruling their children and their own houses well." (v. 12)

Verse thirteen

"For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus."

The deacon's reward for faithful service is a "good" (literally excellent) standing among their brethren in the church and significant spiritual growth.

Closing Illustration

In his book, "When God Whispers Your Name," Max Lucado tells the story of John Eggen, who had never preached a sermon in his life before the Sunday morning when it snowed and the pastor wasn't able to make it to the church. In fact, he was the only deacon to show up. He was not a preacher, but he was faithful and that meant on that particular Sunday morning he preached. God rewarded his faithfulness, and at the end of his hesitant sermon, one young man invited God into his heart. No one there could appreciate the significance of what had taken place that morning. The young man who accepted Christ that snowy Sunday morning was none other than Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the man who has often been called, the "prince of preachers." God blessed his preaching and when he was still less than 30 years old he became the pastor of London's Metropolitan Tabernacle. His sermons were so powerful that although the building could hold 5000 people, the crowds who came to hear him were so thick that they would line up outside trying to hear his sermons. That amazing life of faith all started on a cold Sunday morning with the faithfulness of a deacon who had never preached a sermon before that day. Faithfulness means being committed to what God lets us have the chance to do, whether it looks like a big assignment, or a small one. Giving the sermon to a handful of people on a Sunday morning when almost no one

shows up doesn't seem all that significant, but it demanded faithfulness and God blessed John Eggin's faithfulness."