

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 9/24/95 PM
1 Timothy 3:8-13 "God's Design for Deacons"

Tonight, we will be having our Annual Business meeting, and one of the key components will be the election of church officers. Two weeks ago, we asked a series of critical questions. What is God's design for church leaders? Who does God want to lead in His Church? Who qualifies to be a church leader according to God's standard? God has not left us in the dark in this area. He has given us in written form His design for church leadership in 1 Timothy 3.

In our first time together, we investigated God's Design for the Overseer (1-7). We learned that the terms "overseer" (bishop), "elder," and "pastor" are synonymous in the New Testament. God's standard for leadership is high.

A second leadership position is mentioned in 1 Timothy 3, which will receive our focus tonight: God's Design for the Deacon (8-13). Our aim is to see to answer three questions.

Outline:

- I. What is a deacon?
 - A. By definition, he is a servant.
 - B. By example, he is a servant (Acts 6).
- II. Who can be a deacon? (8-12)
 - A. A man with Godly Character (8)
 - B. A man of the Word (9)
 - 1. He knows the truth.
 - 2. He lives out the truth.
 - C. A man who has proven himself (10)
 - D. A man who has his family in order (11-12)
 - 1. His wife is godly.
 - 2. His children are obedient.
 - 3. His household is managed.
- III. Why be a deacon? (13)
 - Two results of faithful deaconing...
 - A. Result #1: Security
 - B. Result #2: Boldness

I. What is a deacon?

Timothy was in Ephesus when he received this letter. His job was to help the church there know how to operate and function (3:15). In a sense, 1 Timothy is a lot like a "How To" manual. Chapter Three is a "how to" on picking church leaders.

V 8 "In like manner must the deacons." In like manner--that is, just like a church must look for certain criteria for men who would be overseers, so must it do with aspiring deacons. What is a deacon? In Titus, there is no listing of deacon qualifications, only elder qualifications. One possible reason is that the church in Crete was younger than the church in Ephesus, and wasn't ready for deacons yet. They needed elders. Eventually, as

a church grows, the need for expanded leadership grows. The church needs both offices. So what is a deacon?

A. By definition, he is a servant.

The Greek term is "diakonos" which literally means "a humble servant" (BKC). A deacon is one who serves and ministers. Don't miss this. First and foremost, a deacon is a servant. By God's design, he fills an important leadership role in the church, working hand in hand with the elders.

Please realize something. In Scriptural terms, a deacon is not a "board" member like we often think of the term for instance with school boards. He is not a paper pusher. By definition, he is a servant.

B. By example, he is a servant (Acts 6).

The seven men mentioned in the first section of Acts 6 were not technically deacons, but they represent a vivid picture of the role of a deacon. Remember the story--the apostles were being overwhelmed with the ministry of the church, namely the care of the widows. So they appointed seven, Spirit-filled men to serve the widows' tables, so they could devote themselves to the ministry of prayer and the Word. The seven men were given the task of "serving."

That's what a deacon is to do. He is a servant. Deacons assist the elders so they can give themselves to teaching and to prayer. Warren Wiersbe observes (221), "The first deacons were appointed to be assistants to the Apostles. In a local church today deacons relieve the pastors/elders of other tasks so that they may concentrate on the ministry of the Word, prayer, and spiritual oversight."

II. Who can be a deacon? (8-12)

Paul lists some 9 qualifications for deacons in vv 8-12. Some of these are a repetition of those specified for the elders in vv 1-7. Some traits are positive, and some negative. Some things are essential for a deacon, while others are unacceptable.

Who can be a deacon? In order to be qualified to be a deacon, a man must meet the following four requirements. He must be...

A. A man with Godly Character (8)

Someone has said, "Character is what you do when no one is looking." In v 8, Paul identifies a series of traits that have to do with character.

"In like manner must the deacon be grave (not in the grave!)" The word means "serious, reverent." It describes a man of dignity. He must be a man who is respectable. He must also be one who takes his role seriously.

If a man has a frivolous attitude towards spiritual things, he is not qualified to be a deacon. Why not? A deacon must be one that others can imitate. This also implies that a deacon must be a man who doesn't merely "fill" a position, but who "uses" his position to edify the church.

"Not double-tongued"--That's interesting. It means "given to repetition." He must not be a person who is prone to say one thing to this person, and something else to that person. Frankly, public figures are prone to do just that to make themselves look good. Stretch the truth a little here, and leave out a little truth over there. This is unacceptable. He must be a man whose word is as good as gold.

"Not given to much wine"--we talked about that last time. In our day when homes are destroyed by alcohol (and other foreign substances), a deacon must lead the way in abstinence.

"Not greedy of filthy lucre"--That makes sense when you consider these are the men who have access to the finances and benevolent moneys of the church. It can be tempting to handle money that is not your own. A deacon must not be greedy, but trustworthy.

Here's the first area then. To be qualified to be a deacon, then, a person must be a man of character. What else?

B. A man of the Word (9)

Dwight Eisenhower said (RBC, 27), "You don't lead by hitting people over the head. That's assault, not leadership." A deacon candidate is a man who gives evidence that he is living his life in submission to a higher authority than himself--the Word of God. Before a man can be a leader, he must exhibit that he is a follower, a follower of the Book.

1 Tim 3:9 reads, "Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience." What does that mean? In part, it points out something we must not miss, that deacons are called to do more than serving as business managers who do things like revamping the colors in the nursery. Theirs is a spiritual ministry, and not merely a social ministry, and certainly not simply a business venture.

They are to hold "the mystery of the faith." In Colossians 1, Paul calls the gospel of Christ a "mystery." He doesn't have in mind an "Agatha Christie" mystery, but uses a word which was common in his day. It refers to special truths known only to those on the inside.

The point is this. To be a deacon a man must meet two standards.

1. He knows the truth.

Deacons are to "hold the mystery of the faith." They are to help insure that the mystery of the gospel of Christ is not tainted or twisted by false doctrine in the church. A deacon must know the truth.

But there's more. He must hold the truth "with a pure conscience." Which implies...

2. He lives out the truth.

A man must have a clear conscience to be a deacon. That goes for any leader, in fact. Accusations fly against leaders, all the time, but are they true? A man must know they are not if he is to be a deacon.

The bottom line is this. A deacon cannot be a hypocrite. He must know the Word, but that alone is not enough--he must live the Word.

C. A man who has proven himself (10)

V 10 is quite interesting, "And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless." Please notice that it takes more than desire to be a deacon. It requires accountability and evaluation. A man might say, "I've prayed about it, and I believe God wants me to serve as a deacon." Should he be put on the ballot? Not necessarily. Why not? Desire is only the first step (1). He must be proven.

What does that mean? The word "proved" means "to test, to approve." It implies that a potential deacon must be tested first. He must "prove" himself in lesser positions of responsibility first.

Someone might object, "But our constitution says we need more deacons." Again Wiersbe is insightful (222), "It always weakens the testimony of a local church when a member who has not been proved is made an officer of the church. 'Maybe Jim will attend church more if we make him a deacon,' is a statement that shows ignorance both of Jim and of the Word of God. An untested Christian is an unprepared Christian."

Just because a man is a great businessman or a nice guy in the community or even elected to some other leadership positions in the community does not mean he is qualified to be a deacon. He must prove himself as a man who meets God's qualifications.

D. A man who has his family in order (11-12)

How can you tell if a man's family is in order? Look for three marks in his home mentioned in vv 11-12.

1. His wife is godly.

V 11 "Even so must their wives be grave (same word in v 8), not slanderers (lit. "not devil-like"; Remember, the devil is the accuser. He loves to stir things up. A deacon's wife must not), sober, faithful in all things."

To be qualified, a deacon's wife must be faithful and reliable. As the NASB puts it, she must not be a "malicious gossip." Why not? Because his wife is part of his ministry.

V 12 reveals, "Let deacons be the husbands of one wife." There are certainly important places of ministry for those who have been through the pain of divorce, but to be a deacon, a man must be literally "a one woman man." He must possess a godly marriage. He must have a godly wife who is serious about the ministry. Not a few men have been disqualified from church leadership because of wives whose lives didn't enhance the beauty of the gospel.

2. His children are obedient.

V 12 says "ruling their children well." There is no question who is leading in his home. His children are not perfect, but they are disciplined. When problems arise, he deals with them biblically. His children do not "run" the home. He does.

3. His household is managed.

The NASB translates the phrase in v 12, "good managers of their children and their own households." A man's household includes his wife and children, but more than that. He must have his finances in order. His name isn't in the paper every other month for writing bad checks. He pays his bills. As head of his home, he demonstrates behavior that will make him a suitable leader in the church.

By now, one thing is perfectly clear. God's standard is high when it comes to leadership in the church! For elders and for deacons (by the way, according to our church constitution, trustees must meet the same requirements deacons do). This high standard causes us to ask a third question...

III. Why be a deacon? (13)

We see the answer in v 13, "For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ

Jesus." Camp on that word "well," those who have served WELL as deacons. Not everyone who has filled a slot for a term as deacon has served WELL (I would commend our deacons publically, for they indeed are a group of godly men). What is true of those who serve well?

Notice two results of faithful deaconing...

A. Result #1: Security

"Purchase to themselves a good degree." The word "degree" suggests the idea of a "high standing, a great confidence." Men who serve well gain a sense of security when it comes to their standing with God. Another result is...

B. Result #2: Boldness

"And great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus." Deacons who serve well obtain great boldness, a word which involves freedom of speech and confidence.

Wiersbe suggests that the word "degree" means "rank (as in an army), step, or a rung on a ladder." The idea is that God "promotes" a faithful deacon and gives him more spiritual opportunity for ministry--that is spiritual promotion. As Wiersbe says, "What a joy it is to a pastor to see deacons become elders, and then to see some of the elders called into pastoral ministry on a fulltime basis." Remember, in the early church, pastors were probably called out from their own local congregations, not imported from other places.

Never forget this. It's a great privilege to serve the Lord in any capacity. This certainly is true for the deacon. Thank God for our deacons. Perhaps God would have you to serve as a deacon some day. What a privilege!