

1 Timothy 3:8-13 — The Qualifications Of Deacons

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Welcome to CrossWinds. We are studying our way through the book of 1 Timothy. We are in 1 Timothy 3. Last week, we looked at the qualifications for elders in the church. This week, as we go a little further into 1 Timothy 3, we find the qualifications of deacons in the church. I know what you are thinking. First, we lose an hour of sleep for Daylight Savings Time. Now we have a sermon on church politics. This is going to be a long Sunday.

This is not all bad. Just as it is important for our high school seniors to take a course on government so they will become responsible citizens in our nation, it is important for us to study God's design for church government so we will become responsible members of Christ's church.

Let me give you some background on deacons before we hit their qualifications in Timothy. Deacon in Greek simply means *to serve*. It was originally used to describe the work of a waiter in a restaurant. Over time in the early church it eventually came to describe an office in the church. The church deacons were a group of people that dedicated themselves to helping people and meeting the needs of people in the church.

We see the idea of a special class of deacons first developing in Acts 6. There were widows in the church. The church took care of the food for the elderly women in the church whose husbands were deceased. The early church ran a soup kitchen. The problem is people played favorites when handing out the fried chicken dinners. The Greek widows were getting skinny because they were overlooked in the distribution of food. The Jewish widows were fat and happy

because there was always more than enough put on their plates. Somebody cried foul. It wasn't fair. What do you do with a problem in the church? You go to the leadership of the church, which at this time was the apostles. People wanted the apostles to step in and manage the church soup kitchen. They wanted the apostles to make a spreadsheet and check on the kitchen staff to make sure everybody had the same amount on their plates so things were fair and equitable.

While the apostles were good theologians, they knew they did not have the time to oversee the food three times a day in the serving lines. If they managed this important ministry, they would not have time to pray and preach, which is what God called them to do. They wisely decided to appoint seven men known to be full of the Holy Spirit to administer the church soup kitchen so the apostles could devote themselves to praying, studying and preaching.

If you trace your finger through the Bible you find this is a consistent pattern. Paul, or another apostle, came to town and preached the gospel of Jesus. A church began. In Titus 1:5 and Acts 14:23 we see the next step is Paul always appointed elders for the oversight of the church. As the church grew, the elders then appointed deacons to take care of managing the needs of the church and the people in the church so the elders could stay focused on praying and preaching. Without good deacons the elders didn't get their jobs done. Deacons are essential. If a church doesn't have deacons using that formal title they at least need to appoint teams of people to serve in a deacon-like capacity or the elders and pastors will be overwhelmed and their ministry will atrophy. The

pastors and elders will lose their spiritual health and become ineffective because of busyness.

While Acts 6 shows us the root of the deacon office, the office of deacons serving next to elders doesn't show itself until Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3. Why do we only see this office mentioned in these two places? While the concept of deacons shows up early in the church history, it isn't until some of the final letters of the New Testament are written that we see deacons becoming a church office because this office developed as churches grew and needed greater management. Let me show you how this works by looking at Philippians 1:1.

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons: Philippians 1:1 (ESV)

Look at the way Paul addressed the church. He addressed three groups in the church. First, there are the elders or the overseers of the church. As we learned last week, elders and overseers are terms used interchangeably in the New Testament. They are the spiritual leaders. Second, there are deacons. They are the servant leaders in the church that take care of the needs of the people and the practical needs of church life. Third, there are the members of the church called the saints in Philippi. They are organized by the deacons, and they help the deacons in meeting the needs of the church.

This is the same way we need to look at our church today. The elder/pastors have the teaching and leadership responsibility over the church. Second there are deacons in the church. While we don't have people serving under that title at CrossWinds, many people serve in that capacity by leading an area of ministry in the church like ushering, building maintenance, church treasurer and

whatever else needs to get done. Finally, there are the church members who were actively involved working with the deacons and helping the deacons. Deacons are always thinking diagonally about people. They organize the practical needs of church operation and address people needs within the church.

At CrossWinds, we do not have people that serve as deacons. After preaching through this text the elders will be examining our church structure to see if there are changes we want to make in any future by-laws so we can be more biblical and pleasing to Christ.

Before we jump into these verse in 1 Timothy 3, let me show you the way it is outlined. The first few verses give us qualifications for deacons in general. The next set of qualifications are for lady deacons in particular. They are called deaconesses. The third set of qualifications are for men in particular. Lastly, we will look at the reward of being a deacon. Let's jump in.

What are the qualities of deacons?

Deacons must be worthy of respect.

Deacons likewise must be dignified... 1 Timothy 3:8 (ESV)

The word dignified means worthy of respect. If a person is to serve as a deacon leading people in the church you want them to be someone people admire and look up to. You look for someone where people say, "I want to be like them."

Do any of you men say, "There is this guy in church and I want my life to be like his. He does a great job with his kids. I admire the way he handles himself. His marriage is the kind of marriage I want to have. I love the way he and his wife get along. I love the way he always brings his Bible to men's Bible

study on Thursday morning and he always has something good to say.” He is a man worthy of your respect. That is what it means to be a person who is dignified.

Women, do you have another lady in the church you admire? She may not be perfect but you love the way she is attentive to her kids and her husband. She somehow still has time to hold a job; she is always calm and has a smile. That woman is dignified. She is worthy of respect and people look up to her because of the way she handles herself. The Bible tells us that is the first quality you look for in a deacon or deaconess. They need to be people that others look up to and want to follow. Look at what the Bible says about the importance of leaders setting a good example with their lives.

Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. Hebrews 13:7 (ESV)

Our leaders should be people whose lives we want to imitate. If you see a guy that overworks or he doesn't make time to help other people or he isn't regular at church on Sunday, that isn't the guy you want as a deacon.

Deacons cannot be two-faced.

...not double-tongued... 1 Timothy 3:8 (ESV)

A deacon does not practice midwestern nice. Have you been to a church where people are nice, courteous and feign interest in you but when it comes to actually caring, they don't ever make a phone call or take time to talk to you after the service. After the pastor says, “Amen” they are out the door faster than a bullet out of a gun.

In one way they look like they really care about you, but the honest truth is they could care less about you. They are only midwestern nice. Those midwestern nice people are the kinds of people you don't want as deacons. Deacons are people that when they talk to you, they genuinely care about you.

If they sense something is wrong when they talk to you during greeting time in the service, they are quick to grab you after the service is over. They listen to your story and they sort of freak you out because they look at you the whole time you are talking and they don't blink. That makes you feel weird because you are not used to someone genuinely caring about your problems. Then when you finish, instead of talking about themselves, they start asking you questions because they care about you. Not only do they listen to the pain in your life but they go out of their way to do something to help you. They offer to pray with you. They offer to bring you a meal. Those are the kinds of people we want as deacons. We want people that genuinely care about others, not people proficient in midwestern nice where they pretend to care but they really don't.

Deacons cannot be regular drinkers.

...not addicted to much wine... 1 Timothy 3:8 (ESV)

No drunk deacons allowed. Last week, I told you that I made the choice to completely abstain from alcohol. One of the reasons is because I have never heard someone say, "I am so thankful I drink. It made life so much better. My marriage is better because I drink. My kids thank me for having Scotch and whiskey when they come home from school because it makes me a better parent." The only thing I have seen with drinking is regrets.

If alcohol almost always leads to regrets, why did Paul say deacons should not be addicted to much wine? Why didn't Paul say deacons should abstain from wine? There are two reasons. The first thing to realize is the wine in the ancient world wasn't nearly as strong as what we drink today. You had to seriously float your back teeth to get drunk because most wine was such a low proof. They had hard liquor in the ancient world but that wasn't the low fermentation wine most people drank. Second, the ancient world didn't have a purified water system with chlorine and fluoride. If you have ever traveled overseas to a third world country you always hear, "Don't drink the water!" If you do, you will get sick. One of the ways they killed the microbes in their drinking water was by drinking that slightly fermented wine or adding wine to water to make it safe to drink. That is why wine was not crossed off the beverage list but a lot of drinking was off limits.

There is another practical reason deacons shouldn't have a proclivity for drinking.

Many people that drink use alcohol to self-medicate their stress. We hear people say they are drowning their sorrows or they need a drink to unwind after work. Deacons are always working with people hearing about their problems because deacons by nature care about people. If you are a person who naturally drowns your sorrows to take care of the stress in your own life, you will be one drunk deacon once you start taking on the stress in everybody else's lives!

If you are given to handling stress with alcohol, serving as a deacon is not a good fit.

Deacons cannot be using people for money.

...not greedy for dishonest gain... 1 Timothy 3:8 (ESV)

This doesn't say a deacon can't be somebody interested in making financial gain. There is nothing wrong with making a profit. There is nothing wrong with providing a valuable service and getting paid for it, even getting paid well. The problem is dishonest gain. This is the guy in the church that talks to you in the hall because he wants to sell you a great investment property. It is ten acres of rainforest in Brazil. If you are somebody that tries to leverage your church relationships for business relationships, you can't be a deacon.

This is somebody that is involved in a pyramid scheme and is trying to use church relationships for profit. He or she comes to church to try to sell people stuff. We don't have a deacon of Advocare for a reason. There is nothing wrong with Advocare. I am happy if you are part of the business, but if you want to use the position of deacon, where you care for people in need, as a way to build relationships with hurting people so you can sell them Advocare, you can't be a deacon. We don't want people coming to you with their problems and after you pray with them, you offer to sell them a bottle of vitamins out of the trunk of your Geo Metro.

On the other side, there is nothing wrong with wanting to do business with people in the church. I want my money to go in the pockets of other Christians, especially church people. The problem is when we try to get dishonest gain from other people in the church. For example, let's say you need a plumber. You call the church plumber to fix your faucet. Now you expect him to work for free or at a huge discount because you are in the same CWU class and you pray together on

Wednesday nights. That is dishonest gain. You are trying to leverage a church relationship for your profit.

I thought about this a while. Let me give you my take on this. If you do business with someone in the church, plan to pay full price for his or her services. Be joyful about it, knowing he or she is charging you fairly and you are blessing a brother or sister in Christ so he or she can feed his or her family.

If the business owner in the church wants to extend you a discount, that is his or her choice. Don't expect church businesses to do jobs for free. If you are always trying to get something for nothing from church people, you shouldn't be a deacon, because if you become a deacon, everyone will know you as the tightwad deacon.

Deacons must hold the faith and live with a clear conscience.

They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience...1 Timothy 3:9 (ESV)

This is the one key distinction between elders and deacons. Elders need to be apt to teach the faith. Deacons don't need to teach the faith but they need to be able to hold the faith. That means they need to understand the basics of the faith. They need a good grasp of their Bible. They need to understand the basics and not be men or women of theological confusion.

Let me show you why they need to understand the basics. In Acts 6, we see one of the men chosen to administer that early church soup kitchen was named Stephen. He was one of the first church deacons. In Acts 7, he was martyred. Before they killed him, Stephen gave one of the longest and best

sermons in the entire book of Acts. It was a good thing he understood the basics of the faith otherwise he wouldn't have a thing to say in that pivotal moment.

The same is true today. Imagine you are the head usher at CrossWinds. One Sunday morning, a member of the church that works on your team asks you about a movie called "The Shack." He doesn't know how much to believe about the movie so he asks the head usher if he should think of God the Father as a black woman that lives in a shack in the woods. The head usher should be theologically competent enough to be able to say, "I read the Bible. I know the Bible tells us to pray to our father who art in heaven, not our mother who is in the shack in the woods. I would be a little suspect of the movie."

That is why deacons need to understand the spiritual basics so they can field those kinds of basic questions.

In addition, a deacon should have a clear conscience. This means you are not worried somebody will expose what you did Friday night. If you walk into church and somebody says your name you don't jump because you have a guilty conscience.

Deacons should be tested before appointed.

And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. 1 Timothy 3:10 (ESV)

The idea is we don't throw a deacon into a position of leadership. We don't say, "Here are the church financial books. I hope you handle money." We don't say, "Here is a couple whose marriage is on the rocks. I hope you can help them get things fixed before it is too late." Deacons should go through on-the-job training to see if they have the right competence to serve and to make sure they

are trained to serve well. We don't throw people at a problem, call them a deacon, and hope it works out.

Deacons don't just need to be tested for competence. They also need to be tested for character. That means you need to spend time with people who might serve as deacons so you know what they are really like on the inside. You know how they run their families. You know how they parent their kids. It is super important you know potential deacons' character. The only way to do that is to know them in real life over time.

Now we come to a big debate. We looked at the qualifications for deacons in general. Next, Paul showed the qualities to look for in women that want to serve as deacons. Here is the big debate. Some Bible translations, like the ESV, say "their wives likewise must be dignified." This leads us to believe that only deacon's wives can serve as a deaconess. Other translations, like the NIV, say "women likewise must be dignified." Here is the debate — is this verse saying only the wives of male deacons are allowed to serve as deaconesses or is it referring to women in general and telling us women can serve as deaconesses as long as they fit the qualifications Paul laid out?

Here is my take. The Greek word used in this verse for woman could be translated either wives or women. It is not grammatically specific. When you can't determine the meaning from the grammar, the next thing we examine is context. It turns out this same Greek word is used a few verses earlier in 1 Timothy 2 where it says women should dress modestly. In that context it is not saying only married women should dress modestly and all the single Christian girls get

to wear mini-skirts and high heels. It is clearly talking about all Christians women honoring God by dressing modestly. Since Paul used this same Greek word only a few verses earlier to refer to women in general, it makes sense he would be using it in the same sense only a few sentences later.

In addition, I think Paul's grammatical ambiguity in this verse may be intentional. There is a principle called the genius of the "and." Sometimes things do not need to be either/or but they can be both/and. Good men serving as deacons in the church often find their wives serving right alongside them and functioning in the capacity of a deaconesses. In addition, some women will find themselves serving as deaconesses in the church apart from their husbands because their husbands are serving in a different area of the church, such as being elders. I think this refers to women in general *and* to the wives of male deacons who partner with them in deacon ministry. Let's look at some of the unique qualities to look for in deaconesses.

What are the essential qualities for women as deacons?

A deaconess must be worthy of respect.

Their wives (women) must be dignified... 1 Timothy 3:11 (ESV)

This means women who work with people should be respectable. People should look up to her. You should be able to say, "I hope my daughter grows up to be like her." If you find yourself saying to your daughter, "Learn from that woman. Do not be like her; that is a woman you do not want as a deaconess." You want a woman that other women want to follow, model and respect.

A deaconess must control her mouth.

...not slanders... 1 Timothy 3:11 (ESV)

Let's be honest. Women tend to sin with their mouths. I am not saying men don't. I am only saying some women are really good at sinning with their mouths. They say exactly what they are thinking. There is no filter in place. I am not picking on women. I am just reading the text.

Some women come up with ways to justify saying what they think no matter how hurtful or evil. They claim they need to talk because they are verbal processors. Other women put this under a much more spiritual category and claim they to share all the garbage in their lives with their friends on Facebook because they are prayer requests. The truth is matter is much of this stuff is nothing more than grumbling, nagging and gossip. It is an undisciplined tongue. The Bible calls it sin.

If you are a lady that can't control your tongue, you should not be a deaconess. This includes postings social media, even Facebook. Some of you ladies love to flex your verbal claws by scratching at others in a Facebook post. You think it is OK because you just posted it to your friend group. If the last 12 months has taught us anything, what we say on social media never stays in just your friend group.

Here is why it is so important for a woman to be able to control her tongue. If you serve as a deaconess, people will dump all the garbage in their lives on you. You will find yourself counseling people in the midst of divorces, abuse, alcohol, family dysfunction, sickness and death. If you can't keep your mouth shut and you spread all the garbage in their lives around the church, you will destroy them with your big mouth. If you want people to trust you, they need to

know you are a safe person that won't share the pain in their lives with everyone else around town.

A deaconess cannot be an emotional roller coaster.

...sober-minded... 1 Timothy 3:11 (ESV)

Sober-minded means not emotional. If you are going to be a deaconess, you need to be someone who can keep things under emotional control. If you are a woman that lives on an emotional roller coaster, serving as a deaconess will not be your thing. If dealing with your own problems leaves you going up and down every day, throw in everybody else's problems and your roller coaster will come off the tracks.

I am not being mean on this. I am simply saying that if you can't stand the sight of blood and guts, you shouldn't be a surgeon. If you can't stay calm, cool and collected under pressure, serving as a deaconess is not your thing.

A deaconess must be faithful in all things.

...faithful in all things. 1 Timothy 3:11 (ESV)

This means you get things done. You are a woman of your word. If someone needs you, you are there. It is not just faithfulness in serving as a deaconess but it is faithfulness in all things. You don't start neglecting your own family to serve other people. If dinner is never ready for your own kids at home because you are over at somebody else's house cooking their kids dinner, that is not good. If the laundry pile in your house is as tall as an NBA basketball player because you are over at somebody else's house doing their laundry because you are a deaconess, things will not go well. You need to be able to juggle your family needs plus other people.

What are the essential qualities for men as deacons?

A deacon must be a one-woman man.

Let deacons each be the husband of one wife... 1 Timothy 3:12 (ESV)

Just as some women can have a proclivity to sin with their mouths, men have a proclivity to sin in their sexuality. This doesn't mean women don't sin in this area but just that men are particularly prone to sin in this area. We talked about this last week. Paul was not saying you can only be married once to be a deacon. There are occasions where remarriage is allowable. This is referring to the quality of a man's heart. He needs to be a one-woman man. If you are not married to a woman, you should only be drinking in her beauty with your eyes.

I am not going to dive into this point too much because we talked about it last week, but I want to spend just one moment providing men and women a little help in the area of sexual purity.

When faced with sexual temptation, this is the dilemma we often have in our minds — do I want to do what God tells me is right or do I do what will bring me happiness and enjoy looking at another woman? We think being a one-woman man will please God but it is a recipe for boredom. If you find yourself wrestling with the dilemma of doing what God says is right versus what you think will make you happy, you have fallen into one of Satan's traps. Let's look at how Moses reframes this dilemma.

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days... Deuteronomy 30:19–20 (ESV)

Moses' point to Israel is still valid today. Choosing to honor God and be a one-woman man is the path to life, hope, laughter and blessing. Choosing to honor God in the area of sexual purity is the path to the most joy-filled life you can have. Choosing to not be a one-woman man and let other women weave themselves into the emotional fabric of your life is guaranteed to not produce happiness but instead pain, misery, scars and death. Remember that choosing to honor God and be a one-woman man is always the path of greatest happiness and joy.

Deacons must manage their households well.

...managing their children and household well. 1 Timothy 3:12 (ESV)

We talked about this last week when we talked about elders. One of the sins men drift toward is not providing strong, God-honoring leadership in their homes and for their children. Men drift toward the sin of passivity; just like Adam was passive with Eve, and he didn't lead his home, men drift toward the same passivity. They don't clean the gutters, mow the lawn and let the house fall into disrepair. They don't provide a disciplined home and let their children run wild. If that is the way a man runs his family, he will not work as a deacon. If he can't manage his home-life, he can't handle managing church-life.

Deacons who serve well gain a great reward.

For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus. 1 Timothy 3:13 (ESV)

If you are a deacon, and you serve well, the first thing you get is honor in the church. When you have deacons and deaconesses that serve others, the honest truth is everybody loves them. Everybody looks up to them. They build a

huge bank account of gratitude. People remember when they were in a crisis and the deacon or deaconess was there for them in their time of need. People remember those things for life.

In addition, they gain a great confidence in their faith. If you are a deacon or deaconess, you will find yourself on the bleeding edge of working with people in crisis. You will find yourself wrestling in prayer for people in times of need and you will have the thrill of seeing God answer prayers in a big way. You will have the thrill of seeing people become born-again.

If your faith is boring, become a deacon or deaconess and work with people in crisis. I guarantee you will have the joy of a faith where you see God showing up again and again.

Conclusion

As I close, I simply want to read a verse from Matthew. In this verse the word serve is the word for deacon. Jesus tells us the secret to greatness in his kingdom is to give our lives to serving people in need.

It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Matthew 20:26–28 (ESV)

While we talked about the office of a deacon this morning, the truth is God calls all of us to deacon — to serve others — like Christ served us. This week, my challenge for you is to genuinely care for other people and serve them in their times of need, like Jesus did for us.



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