

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

Deacons—Ministers for The Body

1 Timothy 3:8-13

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PowerPoint Presentation included: NONE

SermonAudio Blurb:

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I. Introduction.

- A. We continue in this study out of 1 Timothy related to Church leadership.
- B. We have seen the office of elder, both in its history and then, last week, its qualifications.
- C. Paul now takes us to another aspect of biblical leadership in the form of the deacon.
 1. This is a work in progress for MDF.
 2. We have deacons and one deaconness (introduce).
- D. Let me start by way of introduction by giving you several pieces of information.
 1. All of this will allow us to then consider three key questions related to a deacon:
 2. From Where Did Deacons Come? Who May Be A Deacon? What Is Their Purpose?
- E. Introductory information.
 1. A common term in the bible, but used usually in a non-technical way:
 - a. The word in its most simplest meaning is that of a table waiter. A servant who renders helpful service to others.
 - b. This is seen in John 2.5 where Jesus is at the wedding at Cana and Mary speaks to the servants, telling them to do what He asked.
 - c. It was taken up by the Christian Church right away and used for speaking of all types of people.

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- (1) This is all because Christ said that if you wish to be great in God's kingdom, you must be a διάκονος of all (cf. Matt. 20:26).
 - (2) Preachers and Teachers were called servants, or ministers in 1 Cor. 3:5.
 - (3) Paul even refers to false teachers as servants of Satan in 1 Cor. 11:5.
- d. But at some point in time, it also began to refer to a specific group of people within local churches. We see this in 1 Timothy 3 where twice Paul speak of deacons and lists the qualification for those who wish to be one.
2. This is an aspect of our church that we need to continue to strengthen at this point.
 - a. It is a process where we shift from thinking in traditional ways to thinking missionally.
 - b. But to do this properly we need to grasp what this office of ministry is all about.
 3. Let's ask the first question. . . .

II. From Where Did Deacons Come?

- A. Acts 6:1-4.
 1. The problem in the church.
 - a. Hellenistic Jews complaining because their widows were not being cared for.
 - b. Apparently the native Jews handled the giving of the food.
 - c. The people went to the leadership for help.
 2. The concern.
 - a. The Apostles were concerned about being taken away from their primary role of prayer and the Word.
 - b. "desirable" means "proper," or "fitting."
 - c. The caring of the widows is fitting and good (James 1:27), but it was not to take away from their primary tasks.

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- d. This is important for us to consider, especially when we think about what elders should be most busy doing.
3. The solution.
 - a. Seven men were appointed to oversee this task.
 - (1) Note that they were put in a position of oversight in a specific type of ministry.
 - (2) The term “put in charge” means to be appointed to do something, *with authority*. However, it is a delegated authority.
 - (3) Note also that it does not say that they were to actually be dispensing the food, though they might do that.
 - (4) Probably better, they were to be the **problem solvers** in the care of the widows. I think it is reasonable to conclude that this is the primary function of deacons, solving problems that are affecting the health and ministry of the church.
 - (5) A point of interest is that the names of these 7 men are all Greek names and it appears that they were godly men who were Hellenistic Jews so that they would make sure that these suffering widows would be cared for.
 - (6) Lastly, we can see in this passage that there is no distinction between the spiritual and the secular. Whether it is prayer and bible teaching; or it is distributing food to the poor, it is all ministry through the power of God and for His glory.
 - b. The Apostles would then devote themselves to their primary tasks.
 4. Initial conclusion.
 - a. It seems appropriate to conclude that these men were to oversee and handle those ministries within the church that would direct the attention and energy of the Apostles away from their work.
 - b. We see that there is a distinction that is being made between the various types of ministry that occurs in the Church. There is that which pertains to the spiritual care and feeding of the people of God and there is that which pertains to the practical needs and functions of the church.

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- c. It is also appropriate to note that the ministry they were to care for was what one man calls a ministry of deeds—to provide loving service to needy brothers and sisters in Christ (Strauch, 30).
5. It is my opinion, that here in Acts 6 what we see is at the very least a proto-type of the office of deacons.
6. Bottom line, it appears that if I am correct in this understanding, then the work of the deacon is to oversee the people’s practical and material needs.
 - a. This would include the administration and oversight of these ministries.
 - b. Also the administration and dispersal of funds.
7. As a result this required that they be of a high moral character.

III. Who May Be A Deacon?

- A. 1 Timothy 3:8-10, 14-15.
 1. These are objective qualities of a deacon. Moves us from the thinking, “Fred is a great guy.” Or, “Fred is always there to serve.” Or, “Fred is really good with his money.” And into certain qualifications that must be present.
 2. Dignified.
 - a. These are men who are respectable in their lifestyle and speech.
 - b. They have good character.
 - c. They are not silly for silly’s sake. There is a the ability to command respect.
 3. Not double-tongued.
 - a. Literally means to say things twice.
 - b. It is the idea of being hypocritical, lying, insincere, or deceitful.
 - c. Speaking out of both sides of the mouth.
 4. Not addicted to wine.
 - a. Simply means that they are not drunks.
 - b. They are not controlled by wine, etc.

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- c. Behind this is the bigger issue that they exercise self-control.
5. Not fond of sordid gain.
 - a. Critical because they handle money.
 - b. (Illustration of the man palming money after counting it and being caught on tape.)
 - c. The money they will handle will be the Lord's money given to the Lord by God's people.
 - d. We do not want a man who shows an inordinate interest in making or keeping money.
 - e. A deacon needs to be a generous person, and a person who loves money is never truly generous in his heart.
6. Holding fast to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.
 - a. "Mystery" here refers to the revelation given in Christ. The substance, or essence, of Christianity.
 - b. There are some **technical** issues with this verse as to whether the genitive "faith" is considered objective or subjective.
 - (1) If it is objective then the point is about the truths of Christianity. That he has a deep grasp of the fulness of biblical truth.
 - (2) If it is subjective then the point is about the potential deacon's personal faith in Christ. That he is holding on by faith to Christ.
 - c. It seems that the best understanding is that it is subjective for the deacon is not considered to be a teaching office. It seems strange that the deacons would be required to have a deep understanding of the biblical doctrines, **when this is not required of elders**, who teach.
 - d. Therefore, the point here is that the deacon must be one who guards his relationship and walk with the Lord. He has a deep, abiding walk and seeks to not do anything that would harm it.
7. He must be tested first.

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- a. “Tested” literally refers to an examination.
 - b. The deacon is to go through a time in which he is essentially investigated.
 - c. The word “also” points back to the fact that the elders are to be tested as well and Paul wants them to know that they need to do the same thing for the deacons.
 - (1) There are no indications as to how he is to be examined.
 - (2) Some recommend that he be questioned verbally on the basics of faith and his walk.
 - (3) Others recommend the same but in a written format.
 - (4) Others would say that it is enough to watch the person carefully over time, especially during difficult times to see how the person responds. **I think that this is the best understanding.**
 - d. Notice that at issue in the examination is the broad term of being “above reproach.”
 - (1) The man must be of high moral quality.
 - (2) There should be no area in his life that is subject to biblical criticism.
 - (a) I do not mean perfection.
 - (b) But I also do not mean to overlook issues that are sinful that the man struggles in.
 - (c) Examples would be a propensity toward anger. A bad relationship with his wife. Or, a tendency toward gossip. Or, poor money management.
8. He is to be a one woman man.
 - a. This is the same as the elder.
 - b. The point here is that he is utterly faithful to his wife.
 9. He is to be able to manage his home and children.
 - a. Again we see this in a practical way.

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- b. The children and home are windows to how the man truly acts and lives.
 - c. You see children who are out of control and I will say that there are some concerns as to how the man exercises his headship within the home.
 - d. If his home is falling apart, it is unkempt, if the finances are in disarray, then there is some real concern as to how he would manage the finances and facility of the church.
- B. What about deaconesses (1 Timothy 3:11)?
- 1. Wife of deacons view.
 - a. The basic idea here is that the nature of this office is such that there are certain tasks better suited to a woman or that the deacon would need the help of his wife at times.
 - b. Arguments for this view.
 - (1) These qualifications come right in the midst of the deacons' qualifications. If it was for deaconesses then they should have been set apart.
 - (2) The nature of the work of deacons required help from their wives (the care of the sick, widows, or orphans).
 - (3) The word γυναῖκας is a generic term that refers to "woman" or "wife." If Paul was referring to deaconesses then he should have used the feminine form of διάκονοι.
 - c. Arguments against this view.
 - (1) Should all deacons be married then, if the assumption is that at times the man will not be able to best fulfill the task?
 - (2) Notice that Paul listed general qualifications for the deacons, then, prior to discussing **uniquely male oriented qualifications**, he adds the qualifications for women.
 - (3) There is no discussion about the qualifications of elder's wives, surely they would (and do!) aid their husbands in the

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work of being shepherds (e.g. hospitality, counseling of females, confrontation of females).

- (4) Grammatically there is no article or possessive pronoun (the wives, or their wives) that creates a normal and natural connection to the deacons.

2. The office of Deaconess view.

a. This view sees that there are areas of responsibility and ministry that are perhaps best or better overseen by women. Therefore, within the church specific women would be recognized as official servants just like men.

b. Arguments for this view.

- (1) It appears that there is a mention of a deaconess in Romans 16:1. *“I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea.”*

(a) The word “servant” is the same as we use for deacon, just the feminine form.

(b) Notice how she is uniquely picked out and that the term servant is much like a title.

- (2) ὡσαύτως (likewise) is used in 3:9 to introduce deacons versus elders (notice also 2:9 and Titus 2:3, 6).

c. Arguments against this view.

(1) There is little historical evidence for the existence of such an office (this is not a real compelling argument).

(2) Romans 16:1 can be taken to mean that Phoebe was a servant merely in the general sense.

(3) Although the term “likewise” every other time refers to a unique group, the fact that these qualifications are parenthetical seems to indicate that these are at best assistants or wives of the deacons.

3. Conclusion.

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- a. I believe that the arguments for the office of deaconess is stronger than the arguments for deacons' wives.
 - b. I also believe that the primary reason that most churches are worried or against deaconesses is because their deacons are given oversight responsibilities that are properly found with elders.
 - (1) Obviously the other scriptural passages relating to the role of men and women within the church come into play.
 - (2) A pre-eminent one is in 1 Timothy 2:11-12, where teaching and authoritative leading is prohibited when men are involved.
 - c. I also believe that most churches who do not operate with deaconesses actually have them, without actually calling them that name.
4. Qualifications for deaconesses.
- a. Dignified.
 - (1) These are women who are respectable in their lifestyle and speech.
 - (2) They have good character and their lives command respect from others.
 - b. Not malicious gossips.
 - (1) The word here is for slandering. The cutting and ripping of others with your mouth.
 - (2) This is expected of all believers but for a woman to be a deaconess or to the type of older woman who is to be training the younger women (Titus 2:3).
 - (a) There is something to be said about the older women of Titus 2 and their responsibilities.
 - (b) I believe that they exhibit some of the activities that should involve a deaconess.
 - c. Temperate.
 - (1) Can be taken in a literal or metaphorical sense.

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- (2) If literal then the idea is that she is not given to drunkenness.
- (3) If metaphorical, then the idea is that she is sober minded, stable.
- (4) I tend to see it as a caution against drunkenness.
- d. Faithful in all things.
 - (1) This carries the idea of trustworthiness and reliability.
 - (2) This also covers a massive amount of territory in the woman's life and activities.
 - (3) Obviously, to serve in an official capacity as a servant of the Body she needs to have lived in a faithful manner.

IV. What Is Their Purpose?

- A. Their relationship with the elders/shepherds of the church.
 - 1. They are to be in a close relationship with the shepherds. They should be seeking to cooperate, submit, and encourage the elders.
 - 2. They should be actively seeking to relieve the elders of duties that take away from the task of shepherding the people.
 - 3. If I am correct in my understanding of Acts 6, this is why deacons came about.
 - 4. Early on, a church is often too small to need deacons, but as it grows, so does the need for them. This is probably why Titus has no mention of deacons, while 1 Timothy does.
- B. Their relationship with the Body of the church.
 - 1. They are to have a priority concern over the physical needs of the people.
 - a. "We must not forget that the real treasures of the church are its people, not its pews and buildings. Yet, so often the needy are left unattended, and the church building receives priority attention both in time and funds" (Strauch, 157).
 - 2. Some suggestions.
 - a. Collectors of funds.

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- b. Distributors of care and relief.
- c. Practical outreach to the:
 - (1) Jobless.
 - (2) Sick.
 - (3) Widowed.
 - (4) Elderly.
 - (5) Homeless.
 - (6) Shut-ins.
 - (7) Disabled.
 - (8) Single-parent.
 - (9) Baptism.
 - (10) Membership inquiries.
 - (11) Ushers.
 - (12) “Official greeters.”
 - (13) Help plan community works of mercy.

V. Conclusion.

- A. This office is something we must develop more thoroughly here at MDF.
- B. It is an office that is respectable and worthy of consideration. As such it is something that requires the church to hold them in prayer and concern.

Small Group Questions

- What significance might we find in the fact that faithfulness is so often a requirement for someone in ministry? What does faithfulness look like? Give examples of what you see as unfaithfulness.
- In thinking about the deacons needing to be tested, how long do you think is wise to wait and watch a person before considering them? How often to you make the point to observe individuals in their time of testing?