

The Requirements of Deacons

1 Timothy 3:8-13

“In the same way, deacons must be well respected and have integrity. They must not be heavy drinkers or dishonest with money. ⁹ They must be committed to the mystery of the faith now revealed and must live with a clear conscience. ¹⁰ Before they are appointed as deacons, let them be closely examined. If they pass the test, then let them serve as deacons. ¹¹ In the same way, their wives^[a] must be respected and must not slander others. They must exercise self-control and be faithful in everything they do. ¹² A deacon must be faithful to his wife, and he must manage his children and household well. ¹³ Those who do well as deacons will be rewarded with respect from others and will have increased confidence in their faith in Christ Jesus.

Someone has rightly said: “Everything rises and falls on Leadership.”

The Ephesian church had been blessed with great leadership. Acts 20 tells us it was founded by Paul who later turned it over to Timothy. During his time in Ephesus, Paul trained a core of godly leaders to lead the church. **When he left, he empowered Timothy to lead and later wrote this letter to give him a strategy to correctly build the church.** Crucial to the task was establishing godly leadership - choosing the right deacons. In this section, Paul gave Timothy a divinely inspired checklist of qualifications to use.

It is imperative to understand that when God calls people to serve His church, He looks for those whose hearts are right with Him. His is not concerned about talents, wealth, power, or experience, but with spiritual virtue. He is looking for people who want to go in the same direction He is.

So in tonight's study we are going to look at the requirements of the deacon.

The Greek word that is translated "deacon" here is the same word that is translated "servant" in Matthew 20:27, "And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your servant (literally slave)." And the same word is used again in Matthew 23:11, "But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant."

Therefore, it is clear from Scripture deacons are not a ruling body. They neither rule over the body, nor do they police the pastors. Deacons serve the body and support the pastors. In the truest biblical sense, the deacon comes under the authority of the pastor and supports and responds to his leadership.

Although the word "deacon" is not used in Acts 6, there is no doubt that this was the beginning of the need and work of deacons in the New Testament church.

In the book of Acts we see the moving of the Holy Spirit and the growing power of the early church. And in that context we also see Satan trying to disrupt the inward peace of the church, and therefore disrupt the growth pattern of the church.

God had accomplished a wonderful thing. Ever since the day of Pentecost people were being saved and brought into the kingdom of God, and the Bible says that God "added daily to the church such as should be saved," and it looked as if Christianity was to sweep the world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

But, remember this, wherever there is a work of God, you can be sure that Satan will always show up. And when he does, he always looks for ways to hinder the work of God. And it was no different in the book of Acts.

And to hinder the work of God, Satan finds access to the hearts of God's very own people, and starts a spirit of murmuring and evilspeaking inside, knowing that if he can set believer against believer, child of God against child of God, he will easily accomplish his evil purposes.

Oh, how many a church, how many a testimony for God, has been destroyed in that way! God may be graciously working, precious souls are being saved, and then some member gets an idea that he is not being appreciated; a spirit of murmuring begins, and such an one goes about in the church complaining against the brethren. Little unkind things are said, reflecting on others, and so a spirit of opposition develops and the people wonder why the work of God does not make more progress, and why there seems to be no more power in the ministry, and why no more souls are being won to the Lord. It is all because there is a root of bitterness inside which is not judged!

And that is exactly the way Satan set out to destroy the early church, as seen in these words, "Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution."

Now, let me tell you what was happening right here. The King James Version uses the term "Grecians" but the New King James Version gets it right and uses the "Hellenists." **Who were these people that had lodged this complaint?** They were Jews who were born not in Palestine, but in other lands where Greek was the language commonly used. In other words, they were Greek speaking Jews who were brought up with different ideals and traditions. **The Hebrews were the Jews of Palestine who were much more rigid observers of the Law of Moses than the Hellenists Jews.** And a great deal of bitterness existed between these two groups. And this spirit of dissension, which existed before their conversion, cropped up after they were saved.

And as they sought to serve Christ together, there arose a disagreement over the way they were being ministered to. The Hellenists Jews (who were the outsiders) said, "Our widows are neglected in the daily distribution." In other words, the hometown folks are getting more than we are. So they began to complain and murmur. And Satan was having a great victory!

Now, you would think that the pastor ought to go out and settle this problem. Not so. The twelve immediately called the multitude of the disciples together and said, "Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables." I suppose the complainers had gone to these leaders and said, "You ought to do something about this; after all you are the pastor." But the twelve said, "Brethren, we have something more important than dividing up bread and meat and portioning out money and food. Our business is to pray and minister the Word of God."

But this was a serious problem that was on the verge of destroying the fellowship, and required attention. So verses 3-5 record the answer, "Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude."

And the result of these men, who were full of wisdom, honesty and the Holy Spirit, handling these problems, and allowing the pastors to do what God had called them to do, is recorded in verse 7, "Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem." Listen to me very carefully, when dissension is checked within, Satan's work is hindered without, and the work of God goes on in great power and blessing.

Therefore, if a man is to serve as a deacon, he must have certain spiritual qualifications. And in this passage, Paul gives us the requirements for the man who would serve as a "deacon" in the local church.

First of all, "the deacons (must) be reverent..." The King James Version uses the word "grave," from the Greek word meaning, "honorable, a man of dignity." This qualification relates very well to the requirement in Acts 6, where the men must be of "honest report." In other words, the man who would serve as deacon must have the respect of his peers.

Secondly, "the deacons must not be doubletongued..." **He is not a man who gossips or speaks with hypocrisy.** In other words, a deacon speaks with integrity, consistency, and grace.

Thirdly, "the deacons must not be given to much wine." **I take this just as it is: the Bible teaches temperance and/or moderation, and that is important to see.** The Bible does not teach total abstinence but moderation in everything. Having said that, I must remind you the Bible is very clear on the issue concerning drunkenness!

Number four, "the deacon must not (be) greedy of filthy lucre." This carries with it two warnings. **First of all, a man that has an abnormal desire for money will be tempted to steal from the church.** Secondly, the man who has a problem with money is likely to want to hoard God's money as if it were his!

Number five; "the deacon must (be one who is) holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience." **Deacons are not just men who believe the truth, they live it.** They are men who have strong biblical knowledge and insight and are able to live what they believe.

Number six, verse 10 says, "And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless." **Paul is saying that a new believer should not be elected to serve as deacon.**

Why? To the new believer, church is simply a matter of “glory hallelujah” and “thank you Jesus.” But when they get elected to serve as a deacon, they find out that church is a big business, that in addition to visions and victories, church involves people and payments, planning and problems. And sometimes it is more than they can handle. Therefore, a man must first be proved to be steadfast in the faith before he is elected to serve as a deacon.

Number seven, verse 12 says, “Let the deacon be the husband of one wife, ruling their children and their own household well.” This is the same requirement that we discussed under the qualifications for a pastor. Just let me, once more, remind you that Paul is dealing with the pagan custom of polygamy, and this Scripture has nothing to do with divorce.

Now Paul has a word about the wives of deacons, in verse 11. The Greek reads like this, “In the same way, their wives must be respected and must not slander others. They must exercise self-control and be faithful in everything they do.” Too many times when we start to elect deacons, we never stop to think about their wives, and yet the Bible talks about the requirements of deacons' wives.

First of all, the deacon's wife must “be respected.” This word in the Greek carries with it the idea of being able to stay calm and cool in a situation. That is, a deacon's wife should not “fly off the handle” every time a problem arises.

Next, we are told that the deacon's wife should “not (be) slanderer.” That simply means that a deacon's wife is not to be a gossiping person. A gossipy deacon's wife can cause much trouble in the church by destroying what God is trying to accomplish with their tongue.

Next, we are told that the deacon's wife should “exercise self-control.” The idea here is a person that uses “common sense” when making decisions concerning the things of God!

Last of all, the deacon's wife should be "faithful in everything they do." Ladies and gentlemen, it is hard for a man to serve God and the church when his wife is constantly pulling in the other direction. **Constantly complaining.** Constantly finding fault with the church's ministry, instead of being faithful to the Lord.

In other words, the Bible teaches that a deacon's wife should be faithful to her husband, faithful to Christ Himself, and to His cause.

Paul draws this conclusion in verse 13, "Those who do well as deacons will be rewarded with respect from others and will have increased confidence in their faith in Christ Jesus." In other words, a deacon who serves well will become as a man who can be trusted in every walk of life!

Please allow me to summarize what I feel that the Word of God is saying that the requirements of a deacon should be: Deacons should be spiritually minded, Christ honoring, church loving, pastor supporting, and self giving Christians!! And, as pastor of this great church, I feel that we have some of the best deacons who ever served in that capacity!