

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth One Verse at a Time*

Qualified Servants for the Church: Deacons (Part 2)

INTRODUCTION

A. Models of Spiritual Leadership

In seeking spiritual leaders, what kind of person does God look for?

1. Abraham

God blessed Abram when He called him to be the leader of the nation Israel--those who would come from his loins and from whom the Messiah would come. Nehemiah 9:8 tells us why: God "foundest his heart faithful before [Him]." The qualification for leadership that God saw in Abraham was a faithful heart.

2. David

When the Lord sent Samuel to look among the sons of a man named Jesse and identify one to be the king of Israel, He gave Samuel this standard: "Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature" (1 Sam. 16:7). God warned Samuel not to use those external features as a standard because that was how the people chose Saul, their current king. First Samuel 9:2 says that there was not a more handsome or taller man in Israel than Saul. He turned out to be an evil, unsuccessful king. So God said to Samuel, "The Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). Samuel chose David, a man with a heart that was right before God.

3. Solomon

Toward the end of David's life, God gave him a son by the name of Solomon. It was David's task to pass on the throne to Solomon. These are the words of wisdom he passed on to him: "Thou, Solomon, my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind" (1 Chron. 28:9).

4. Josiah

One of the most familiar and beloved kings of Judah was Josiah. He began his rule as a boy, yet God used him to bring about great revival and reform, and a new spirit of worship and obedience among the people. He repaired the Temple and restored the law of God. Second Kings 22:11 explains why God used Josiah so mightily: "Thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the

Lord." He wept before the Lord when God planned to destroy the people. Josiah was sensitive, humble, and tenderhearted.

5. Ezra

God used Ezra to lead Israel to repentance, revival, and restoration. This is why: "Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it" (Ezra 7:10).

6. The prophets

The father of John the Baptist was a priest named Zacharias. He accurately described the Old Testament prophets as God's "holy prophets" (Luke 1:70). Holiness was the key to their ministry.

7. John the Baptist

John the Baptist had the supreme task of announcing the coming of Messiah. He was an effective leader, bringing about great repentance in Israel. All the people of Jerusalem and Judea went out to see him. They were being baptized and preparing their hearts for the coming of Messiah. What made John effective was his spiritual virtue. Even Herod, who had John beheaded, "feared John, knowing that he was a righteous man, and holy" (Mark 6:20). The mark of John's leadership was his spiritual devotion.

8. Paul

Many Bible scholars have enjoyed studying Paul's leadership skills. What particularly stand out are his courage and the strength of his convictions. But in writing to the Thessalonians, Paul identified the key to his effectiveness by saying his behavior was holy, just, and blameless (1 Thess. 2:10).

B. The Issue of Spiritual Leadership

Those passages, and many others we didn't look at, show us that when the Lord looks for a man or woman to serve him, He looks to the spiritual dimension of their lives. He looks at the heart and He chooses people with integrity, purity, and virtue.

As Paul wrote to Timothy about establishing leaders in the church at Ephesus, the issues are all spiritual. In fact, throughout 1 Timothy Paul emphasizes the necessity of holy, pure, godly, blameless, and righteous living. Of major importance to Paul was that godliness and virtue be maintained among those who lead the church (1 Tim. 3:3-13).

Who Is a Man After God's Own Heart?

First Samuel 13:14 says, "The Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart." What kind of a man is that? One who thinks like He thinks, feels like He feels, and responds like He responds. He is a man with a heart that beats like Christ's, a heart that loves righteousness and hates sin, a heart that loves the sinner but rejects his deeds, a heart that reaches out in mercy to those who are hurting, a heart that cares, a heart that knows righteousness and obedience, and a heart that is consumed with extending the Father's glory. That's exactly the kind of heart Christ has. In Ezekiel 22:30 God says, "I sought for a man among them, that should ... stand in the gap before me." He wants someone to stand in His place and represent Him. From Abraham on, God has always sought that kind of person for leadership.

REVIEW

We have already studied the spiritual character of elders in 1 Timothy 3:1-7. Now we'll look at the character of deacons. The English word "deacon" is transliterated from the Greek word diakonos, which is usually translated "servant." By the time Paul wrote 1 Timothy, the Ephesian church had grown to the point that certain people were serving in the church in an official capacity. Paul referred to them as diakonos, and we call them deacons.

It's essential that those official servants be qualified. Although a deacon is not a pastor or elder, he is still a leader in the church because he serves the Lord by implementing what the elders decide. He is a model servant of Christ.

The New Testament doesn't say much about the organization and structure of who is accountable to whom. However it does say that elders are to lead the church, that deacons are to serve the church, and that both are to meet certain qualifications.

LESSON

I. DEACONS WHO ARE MEN (vv. 8-10, 12)

Verse 8 says, "In like manner." That simply means that Paul is introducing a new category. First came the overseers, now in like manner come the deacons.

A. Their Personal Character (v. 8)

1. "Grave"--Dignified

The Greek word translated "grave" (semnos) means "serious." It could be translated "dignified" or "stately." It carries the idea of being serious in mind as well as serious in character. Semnos" comes from the root $\sigma\epsilon\beta\omicron\mu\alpha\iota$, which means "to venerate" or "to worship." So semnos" refers to a person who has a stateliness about him that demands respect. Such a person has a majestic quality about him that makes people stand in awe. A synonym of semnos" is $\hbar\iota\epsilon\rho\upsilon\pi\epsilon\rho[\mu\alpha]\epsilon\varsigma$, which means "to act like a sacred person." This kind of individual, by virtue of his spiritual character, has a certain mystique about him.

One who serves as a deacon understands the seriousness of spiritual issues. He is not flippant or frivolous--he doesn't make light of serious matters. I confess that the older I get, the more serious life becomes to me.

2. "Not double-tongued"--Not a malicious gossip

This is the only place in Scripture where $\delta\iota\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\varsigma$ " appears. It simply means "two tongued." What is a two-tongued person? A gossip--someone who is quick to discuss private matters. Also, such a person is apt to say one thing to one person and another to someone else to gain his or her own personal goals.

Because deacons are privy to certain private matters and grave spiritual issues, they need to know how to speak with integrity at the appropriate times. There needs to be a high premium on verbal honesty and integrity among spiritual leaders. They are not to speak hypocritically but consistently, righteously, and honestly. Spinning lies among God's people is a serious matter.

3. "Not given to much wine"--Not a drunkard

The Greek phrase could be translated "not holding near much wine." Wine was about the only drink available in Paul's day. It was mixed in a ten-to-one ratio with water to prevent intoxication, but one still needed to exercise caution.

The Greek word translated "given to much wine" ($\rho\rho\sigma\epsilon\chi[\mu\alpha]\omicron$) means "to hold near." To use it in a metaphorical sense it means "to turn one's mind to" or "to occupy oneself with." It was a necessity to drink wine, but not indulge in it. The present active nature of the participle indicates it is to be the person's habitual practice. He is to be known as someone who doesn't allow drink to influence his life.

Why Isn't Teetotaling a Qualification?

Couldn't the Lord have solved a simple problem by just saying we can't drink wine at all? As difficult as it is for a twentieth-century American to understand and appreciate, wine was the common drink in the society of Paul's day. As a result they were not told to be total abstainers, but to be temperate.

The evils that accompany drinking were not attached to the moderate use of mixed wine in that day. However because of modern refrigeration capabilities, drinking wine isn't necessary, and it is potentially dangerous since it is unmixed.

4. "Not greedy of filthy lucre"--Not a greedy person

In New Testament times those who served in the church would be involved in passing out money to widows, orphans, and needy people. They would also be collecting money and dispensing it for various purposes to carry on the business of the church. There were no banks and audit firms, so every transaction was made in cash. The people who handled the money actually carried it in a little purse on their belt. The temptation was always present to use the money for one's own purposes. So an official servant in the church had to be free from the love of money.

B. Their Spiritual Life (v. 9)

"Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience."

1. Defining the mystery

The Greek word translated "mystery" (musterion) refers to something that was once hidden and now revealed. The "mystery of the faith" is New Testament revelation--that which was hidden from past generations before the coming of Christ. It is God's redemptive truth. There is much New Testament teaching on that mystery beginning in Matthew 13, continuing throughout the New Testament, and culminating in the book of Revelation.

2. Describing the commitment

a) To doctrine

The deacon must hold to all New Testament revelation. He must know and understand the truth revealed in the New Covenant. The spiritual character of a deacon begins with an affirmation of New Testament doctrine. He holds to the mystery of the "faith." "The faith" simply refers to the whole of Christian truth.

b) To a pure conscience

The deacon is to hold "the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience." He has a clear conscience because he obeys the truth. When a person who is strong doctrinally violates that doctrine, he has a strong conscience reprimanding him. Show me a person who is weak in his conviction of God's truth and I'll show you a person with a weak conscience. A person's conscience reacts to the body of truth he is committed to.

A godly deacon holds strongly to the revealed New Testament faith and therefore maintains a pure conscience. A pure conscience exists only when a person lives out his biblical convictions. By God's grace and power, and by confessing sin, we all can have a pure conscience and be an example to others.

C. Their Spiritual Service (v. 10a)

"Let these also first be proved [tested]; then let them use the office of a deacon."

This is an imperative: let them be tested. The Greek word translated "be proved" (*dokimaz[ma]o*) means "to approve after testing." The *ver* is in the present passive tense, which implies an ongoing test, not a single test or probationary period.

Then Paul issues another imperative: "Let them use the office of [serve as] a deacon." Deacons are to be continually tested. That test is an ongoing general assessment by the church of each deacon's service to Christ. "Also" in verse 10 means that truth applies to elders and pastors as well.

D. Their Moral Purity (v. 10b, 12a)

1. Being blameless (v. 10b)

"Being found blameless."

The qualification is not any lower for a servant. His function is different--he implements what the elders design, but his qualification is the same--he is to be blameless. He is to be without reproach, without spot, and without blemish. There should be nothing in his life for which he could be accused and thus disqualified.

As we have already discovered, the only difference between a deacon and an elder or pastor is that the elder must be a skilled teacher (v. 2). A unique function of an elder is the public teaching of God's Word. A deacons may teach, and may do so very effectively. Perhaps he may one day become a pastor or elder, but for now his primary function is to implement the teaching of the pastors and elders through his service. We could say that elders major on teaching and deacons major on administration. They work on meeting the personal needs of the flock. Skilled teachers need to be free to pray and study, so God equips servers to come alongside and enable them to do just that.

2. Being one-woman men (v. 12a)

"Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife."

That is the same moral qualification for an elder (v. 2). A deacon is not to be unfaithful either in action or attitude to the woman who is his wife. Is his heart and life totally devoted to her? His sexual morality, or lack thereof, must be taken into consideration.

E. Their Home Life (v. 12b)

"Ruling their children and their own houses well."

Just as an elder has to demonstrate leadership in his home, so does a deacon. They must manage their children and possessions well. They prove they have leadership ability by how capably they handle situations and solve problems in their home. They are to be models for everyone to follow.

II. DEACONS WHO ARE WOMEN (v. 11)

A. Their Office (v. 11a)

"Even so must their wives [the women]."

The Greek word translated "even so" is same word translated "in like manner" in verse 8, and it indicates that we are now introduced to a third category of people. The King James Version says, "Even so must their wives." I believe that's an inadequate translation. There's no word in Greek we could always translate as "wives." Verse 11 uses *gunaikeios*, which means "women." Paul didn't say, "their women," as if referring to the deacons' wives. The Greek text literally says, "Likewise women." But what women is Paul referring to?

In addition to the poor translation of the Greek text, it's unlikely there'd be qualifications for the wives of deacons and not for the wives of elders. Also the use of "likewise" in verse 11 means Paul is introducing a new category, just as he did in verse 8: first overseers, likewise deacons, likewise women. The church is to recognize that there are women in the church who may serve in an official capacity.

To avoid confusion, why didn't Paul refer to those women as deaconesses? Because there's no Greek word for that. Phoebe is called a deacon in Romans 16:1 because there's no feminine form of *diakonos*. The only other word Paul could have used would have been *diakonos*, but we would not have known that he was referring to women. Clearly Paul introduced another category of deacons: what we have come to know as deaconesses. I prefer to call them women deacons because that maintains the New Testament terminology.

B. Their Qualifications (v. 11b)

These qualifications parallel those of deacons in verse 8.

1. "Grave"--Dignified

Women deacons are to have a sense of dignity and stateliness. They should command respect because of their spiritual devotion.

2. "Not slanderers"--Discreet

The Greek word translated "slanderers" (diabolos) is often translated "devil." The devil is the supreme slanderer. Women deacons are not to act like his children. They must watch what they say. Just as men deacons are not to be "double-tongued" (v. 8), the women are not to pervert the knowledge they are privileged to possess by slandering and gossiping.

3. "Sober-minded"--Sensible

The same Greek word was used of elders in verse 2, and it parallels the third qualification of deacons in verse 8--"not given to much wine." Women deacons are to be sober and sensible in their judgments. That's impossible if they're not sober physically.

4. "Faithful in all things"--Trustworthy

This qualification parallels that of deacons in verse 8--"not greedy of filthy lucre." If a deacon was greedy, he couldn't be trusted.

So the four qualifications for the women parallel the qualifications given for the men. God has ordained that elders be men, but among deacons there are to be both men and women.

Conclusion

Paul closes his treatment of men and women deacons in verse 1³ with a promise: "They that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good standing, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus."

A. A Good Standing

Those who serve well "purchase to themselves a good standing." The Greek word translated "purchase" means "to achieve" or "to acquire" By their effective and faithful service, they achieve a

good standing. The Greek word translated "standing" (bathmos) means "step." It came to refer to stepping above everyone else. It could also refer to a pedestal or an elevated platform. Paul is saying that when you serve well as a deacon, you are put on a pedestal. While at first glance that might seem sinful, it's not if you didn't seek to be elevated. If you serve humbly and faithfully, you will be lifted up. James 4:10 says, "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up."

Who exalts the deacon? Both God and men. If you serve well as a deacon, the people who have known about your faithful service will respect and honor you. That doesn't mean they'll give you some earthly award, but you will have gained spiritual respect from them. That is the key to being a spiritual example. When a person is respected, he is emulated. People don't pattern themselves after someone they don't respect. Further, God also will show you honor and respect. Some day you'll hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

B. Great Boldness

The second reward is "great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus" (v. 13). The phrase "the faith which is in Christ Jesus" refers to the Christian realm: Christian truth, salvation, and the church. If you serve God well, you will see His power and grace at work in your life, and that will energize you for greater service. Seeing God active in your life makes you more bold. Successful service builds confidence and assurance. The Greek word translated "boldness" (parrhesia) is often used of boldness of speech.

Two things accrue to the faithful deacon: respect and confidence. One leads to his or her becoming a model that others emulate, and the other leads to greater usefulness and effectiveness. The thing that allows me to accept another challenge in ministry; that prepares me to face a seemingly impossible task; and that gives me confidence, assurance, and boldness is to look back and see what God has done in the past. Because I know His hand is on my life, I can accept the future even though I feel inadequate. That's the confidence that comes from serving Christ. God needs faithful servants in His church. May God supply those people so they can be models for all the rest.

Focusing on the Facts

1. Why did God choose the men referred to in the section on models of spiritual leadership?
2. Describe a man after God's own heart.
3. How would you characterize a "grave" person?
4. How should a deacon speak?

5. How should a deacon view drinking?
6. Why is it important that a deacon be free from the love of money?
7. Define the "mystery of the faith".
8. Why is it important for a believer to have a pure conscience regarding New Testament doctrine?
9. How often should the church examine a deacon's qualifications for service?
10. In what ways is the moral purity of deacons to be like that of elders?
11. What should characterize the home life of a deacon (1 Tim. 3:12)?
12. Why is it likely that Paul was referring to a category of women deacons in 1 Timothy 3:11 and not the wives of deacons?
13. What are the qualifications of women deacons (1 Tim. 3:11)?
14. According to 1 Timothy 3:13, what do deacons achieve for themselves when they serve well? Explain.

Pondering the Principles

1. Perhaps you don't feel that God has gifted you with the ability to teach, but don't let that dissuade you from seeking to serve the church. Examine the personal character qualifications of a deacon (vv. 8-10, 12). How would you rate yourself in each of those areas? What kind of changes would you need to make to be known as righteous in those areas? Are you above reproach? That quality of life was an overarching qualification for an elder, and it is to be equally true of deacons. Are you faithful both in attitude and action to your wife? And are you a strong leader in your home? Do some serious self-examination in all those areas. As you do, realize that the outcome of your examination holds greater significance than a possible future role as a deacon. It means you will have a greater capacity for glorifying God.
2. If you're a woman, perhaps you've wondered what kind of role God might have for you in the church. As we have studied 1 Timothy 3:11, you have seen that there is a specific role you can fulfill. Yet as with the men, you must meet certain qualifications. How would you rate yourself in the qualifications for women deacons? What changes do you need to make in those areas? Begin today to make your life one that not only pleases God but also prepares you to serve Him in the church.

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