

Good morning, church family.

Beautiful day that the Lord has given us.

Reading for this morning is 1 Timothy chapter 3, verses 8 through 13.

Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued,
not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain.

They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.

And let them also be tested first, then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless.

Their wives, likewise, must be dignified
not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things.

Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well.

For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Jesus Christ.

Pulpit fits me pretty well, but I don't know about Kathy, so we'll have to figure something out moving forward.

We're talking about deacons in service and those who serve today, and one of the ways, I'm just going to start off with application, which you're not supposed to do.

We're actually supposed to read the Bible before we apply it, but I'm going to give you one way that we can apply this text today, and that's to...

Make sure that if you're going to be attending the breakfast next week to sign up as an attender.

And because the sign-up sheet's been in a new spot and change comes slowly to all of us, we're a little light on the sign-ups to help with breakfast too.

So if you could make it a point, in case you haven't figured it out, Easter's next week.

This is the last week to sign up.

for it so if you could make a point to sign up to let us know that you're coming so that we know how to prepare and then also if you're able and willing to make a dish or help with cleanup or setup or anything like that to make sure you sign up for that as well it helps those who serve you serve you better and not stress throughout the week so that would be great I know also you know we've got choir practice and we got KidSafe following the service and a lot of you are gonna be running to those things

But make sure that if you're staying in here for choir or if you're heading, I believe, downstairs to KidSafe, that you swing by the sign-up sheet right at the end of the service before you go to those things.

Don't forget to do that.

That would be really helpful.

All right, let's pray.

And we're going to dive into this next section in 1 Timothy as we preach through the book.

Let's ask for the Lord's help.

Heavenly Father, we are only able to serve and to give to others from a place of genuine and true love because you have served and loved us.

Lord, we love because you first loved us.

So Lord, I just ask that as we look at what's expected of those who serve,

and really how you serve those who serve, Lord, that we would be fully aware and have our eyes fixed on Jesus, the one who has met all of our needs, the one who satisfies us completely, the one who...

came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many, Lord, and demonstrated that on the cross and even in washing his own disciples' feet.

So, Lord, again, keep our eyes fixed on you, even as we talk about this office in the church and as we consider how we can serve one another and adorn your gospel with beautiful acts of service.

We pray all this in Jesus' name.

Amen.

So one of my favorite lines in movies in general comes, there's a guy who wants to be a good hockey player, but he's not, and he loses his hockey game, and he starts this big fight with the other team, and the teams are out there all fighting, and you kind of just hear in the background as they're fighting, he's like, you think you're better than me?

Right, as they're fighting.

One of my favorite lines, I love it.

I say it all the time.

You know, people cut me off in traffic and stuff.

I'm like, well, you think you're better than me?

Like, use it all the time.

And while it's funny to hear someone say it out loud, I think if we're honest, and really the reason that it's funny, is that we're all kind of evaluating people in this way at least a little, whether we admit it or not.

We're like, oh, they think they're better than me, I'll show them what I can do.

Or, oh, they think they're better than me, I'm going to knock them down a peg here or there.

Or we like it when they get knocked down a peg because we think that they think that they're better than us.

And ironically, this ugly attitude, admittedly, and I'm not condoning this attitude at all, I joke around about it, but it is ugly, often creeps into the good things that we try to do, and even in how we serve other people, in our attitude as we serve other people.

We're fine with serving others, as long as people see it and acknowledge our service,

Just, you know, we want them to see it, we want them to acknowledge our service just so they know how great we are, or in worst case scenario, just so they know that we're better than them, right?

If they start expecting it and they start treating us like a servant, if nobody says thank you, we're out, right?

We're done serving.

Or we'll only serve people that we believe deserve it, right?

People like us, people that work hard but maybe had a bad break, right?

But we're not going to serve the lazy people or the people that made bad choices because we're better than them and they should know that, right?

There's a real danger.

There's a real danger in the self-centered attitude that we feed in little ways all the time.

And there's a real danger with the self-centered attitude even in serving.

And especially that, you know, when we bring that kind of attitude in our sinfulness, our selfishness,

to service, when you add to that the recognition and authority of a church office to the mix, you can kind of see why Paul is concerned about who the church recognizes as public leaders in service, right?

You can see why Paul

gives qualifications for deacons or those who serve because not all service is equal, right?

Not all service is Christ-like service.

There ought to be a level of Christ-likeness in a man's life before he's given the job of publicly serving the church.

So this is why Paul gives qualifications.

We're going to look at all the qualifications today.

And actually, we're going to run through the qualifications and then look at the two benefits.

We're going to zero in on those for at least half the time today.

The benefits that are given to deacons are those who serve in the church.

But we'll see today that deacons are men of biblical dignity who adorn the church with the assurance-building beauty of Christlike selfless service.

So we're gonna break that down into three points.

Uh, we'll just look at the office.

See, that's a dignified office.

We'll talk about selfless service a little bit, and then we'll see what I mean by assurance, building beauty, assurance, building beauty, not insurance, building beauty.

That'd be something else.

I don't know what that would be, but that's not what I'm talking about.

All right.

Dignified office, yeah, State Farm, yeah, like a good neighbor.

All right, dignified office first.

We see that most of the qualifications, just like elders' qualifications that we looked at last week, are virtue-driven, and they're talking about the deacons or the man's own virtues.

Let me read verses eight to 10 and 12 again for us here.

Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain,

They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience and let them also be tested first, then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless.

Skip it down to verse 12.

Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well.

All right, so the word deacon here literally means servant.

When it's clearly not referring to the office of deacon or when it's not clearly referring to the office of deacon in the New Testament, we translate it servant or service.

Like Jesus said of himself in Luke 22, 27, for who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves or one who deacons?

Is it not the one who reclines at table?

But I am among you as the one who serves or the one who deacons.

So the role of deacon is primarily that of service or performing acts of service for the body, as opposed to the office of elder that we looked at last week, which is marked by teaching and oversight.

But Paul also recognizes that, you know,

while there's a differentiation in roles and while that oversight is not primarily the role of deacons, Paul recognizes that publicly serving the congregation or being in a publicly recognized role of service within the congregation will bring with it an authority and a type of leadership by example.

So therefore, he wants the church to be careful about who they call to publicly serve.

So again, oversight not a part of the job description, but by default, by being recognized by the body to perform a specific task, there's going to be a certain leadership role built into that.

So that's why it says deacons likewise.

Deacons likewise refers back to the public office or the public role of elder within the church.

And similar, as they're similar in their public nature or their public leadership role, they're similar, you'll notice, in those first four qualifications, three of them are the exact same qualifications that were given to elders.

They ought to be dignified.

Addicted, not addicted.

I should have put not there.

Not addicted to much wine.

That's an important word.

And not greedy for dishonest gain.

Just as we looked at Os Guinness' quote last week, not drunk on wine, not drunk on money.

they're sober-minded.

But there's one qualification in there that isn't explicitly laid out in the qualifications for elders, which just kind of confirms to us that this is not an exhaustive list, right?

So Paul's not listing out everything that an elder should be and everything that a deacon should be, but he's pointing out

some specific things to remember that were in response to the false teachers that were in Ephesus, but also just some specific things that are going to be unique struggles or pressure points in those specific offices.

But he says that a deacon must not be double-tongued.

Double-tongued means that you say one thing to someone, or say one thing to someone's face, and then turn around and say something else behind their backs.

Nothing's gonna undermine any public office, any public role, and nothing's gonna undermine your credibility in that position quicker than being double-tongued.

Also, there's not much, whether you're a deacon or not, that's going to split a church quicker than dishonest and untrustworthy communication and leadership, right?

In any capacity, whether it's an elder, deacon, team leader, teaching a Sunday school class.

Dishonest communication, being double-tongued will split a church, will split the class, will undermine credibility and faith and leadership really quick.

Verse 9, if you look at verse 9 too, marks an important difference between deacons and elders.

So they're not supposed to be double-tongued, but I think we can easily say that that applies to both elders and deacons.

But verse 9 points out a difference.

He says,

So they don't necessarily need to be able to teach, but they must be able to hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.

Deacons, again, aren't necessarily called to or they don't need to be able to explain

clearly and articulately, and they don't need to be able to teach the gospel and God's word.

However, they do need to have a firm enough grasp on the gospel and God's word so that they can be and demonstrate that they are wholeheartedly committed to it.

Clear conscience here means that there's a unity of heart, like heart, mind, and strength, right?

That what I want, what I desire, what I think is true,

and how I act in response to what I want and what I think is true are all kind of on the same page, are all committed to Christ and his gospel.

You're not saying that you believe in Jesus, but then hedging your bets with how you live, how you spend your time, and how you spend your money.

There's a unity, a consistency there between how you live and what you say you believe to be true.

Similar to elders in verse 10, Paul warns against putting new untested believers into this role.

Again, one more time in verse 10.

And let them also be tested first, then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless.

He's not talking about like a deacon SAT or standardized test, like, you know, have them fill in the bubbles first.

He's saying, let them live a little bit, right, as a believer, right?

If they profess faith in Christ, let them live a little bit, see how he handles difficulty, see how he handles serving others without the title before you give them the title.

And then in verse 12, we see that the same one-woman man or well-managed household qualification that we saw for elders last week.

Again, I made the case last week that we're not talking about never divorced, never remarried, but rather we're talking about a character trait based on how Paul addresses widows later in the book.

Go back and listen to that sermon.

I'm not going to relitigate that this morning.

Now, you may have noticed when we're talking about qualifications here that I skipped over verse 11.

So let's go back to verse 11 here.

Really quick, where Paul addresses, I believe, wives.

I remember wives, the word for wives and women, same word.

You just have to use the context to determine whether or not we're talking about wives or women.

He says, "...their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things."

So the big question that theologians talk about when it comes to this verse is, is Paul talking about deacons' wives or is he talking about deaconesses or women in the role of deacons?

Now, I think you can make the case

though I'm not trying to make it right now.

I think you could probably make the case that there have been women deacons.

Well, you could definitely make the case that there have been women deacons within church history or women that deacon within the church history.

So like Phoebe in Romans 16.1, Paul says, I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant deacon of the church of Centraea, right?

So

Phoebe was at least deaconing, right?

She may not have had the role or the office of deacon, but Paul's saying that she was serving, she was deaconing, right?

And in somewhat of a public way here in Romans 16.

Also, we have extra biblical literature that the early church, there were deaconesses that were actually in the role of deaconess within the early church about 100 years after Paul wrote here.

So

one case.

We have one instance where we have a few deaconesses listed.

So you can make the case, right, that the church, close to the time that Paul wrote, recognized the office or women in the office of deacon.

Not going to try to litigate that this morning, because I don't think Paul is establishing the role of deaconesses here in verse 11.

It's a bit awkward to

change who you're addressing, all right?

So to say that Paul in verse 11 is talking about women in the role of deacon or deaconesses, he would have to go from addressing deacons to deaconesses back to deacons talking about their wives, right?

And verse 12 is clearly talking about wives.

So it just kind of makes plain sense that 11 would also be talking about wives, right?

So I don't think Paul's establishing a role or a separate role of deaconesses here.

I think he's talking about deacons' wives.

So what we ought to take from that is that a deacon's wife is an important part of his qualifications.

Paul didn't say this about elders.

He doesn't tell us to consider elders' wives in this specific way, but it's also implied when he says that an elder must manage his household well, right?

So how

a husband and wife are relating there and what type of relationship she has with him and how she's walking with the Lord is a consideration there.

But I think Paul draws more attention to deacon's wives here because there's the expectation that the type of work that the deacon is doing and serving others within the body will more directly involve his wife than the teaching and oversight that the elders do.

So don't get me wrong, though.

As an elder board, we often go to our wives for input and feedback on plans and proposals that are to be made before we propose them to the combined board and the congregation.

But meal trains, helping with rides, raking leaves, all that stuff is going to potentially involve deacons' wives pretty directly, whereas the elder's role involves their wives a little bit more indirectly.

That's my speculation.

But Paul tells us here, again, that where his wife is at, where the deacon's wife is at, where she's at spiritually and where she's at with her relationship with the Lord and how she relates to others within the congregation is an important consideration.

So it seems that women have deaconed, you know, from some of this up here.

It seems that women have deaconed and served publicly within the church.

But Paul in this passage speaks in a way that assumes that men will be in the office or the position of deacon within the church.

So I kind of like where our church has landed on this.

And you guys came to this conclusion before I came here.

So I'm not patting myself on the back here.

I like our church structure, where we've landed on that, how we walk this line and kind of live in this tension.

We reserve the office of deacon for men, but women deacon or serve publicly as team leaders and team members, right?

So there is a public recognition of their service.

and help in specific areas.

And for that reason, I think we ought to expect that our team leaders meet the same qualifications spelled out here for deacons, because in holding that office or that position here at the church with Christ-like character, team leaders will also be experiencing the same benefits, I believe, as deacons do here in verse 13.

So if we expect that our team leaders are going to conduct themselves in the same way, with the same Christ-likeness, we also will see them, and I think by default, see them experiencing the same benefits that we see deacons experiencing here in verse 13.

Look at verse 13.

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.

Two things, two things that Paul says a deacon gains as he serves with Christlikeness and he serves well.

First is he gains a good standing for himself or good standing for themselves.

So in other words, it's pretty clear.

I think there's a lot hiding here.

The deacons who serve will build a good reputation.

You know, people see and appreciate the deacons as they serve them.

And as people see and appreciate your service, you gain a good standing and are blessed with a good reputation within the body.

And with that good reputation comes influence.

Kent Hughes puts it this way.

He says, because of his elder-like respectability, his informed beliefs as he holds to the mystery of faith, his living belief that issues in a clear conscience, his tested life oozes with character.

His helpmate is his best qualification, and he is graciously domesticated in relation to his wife and children.

All of this provides him an excellent standing with his people.

His authority goes far beyond words.

I think that's a great way to sum that up.

His authority goes far beyond words.

This good reputation that the Lord blesses him with as he serves well produces an authority that goes beyond words.

So this good reputation, though, is not for a deacon's own vanity or to puff him up in pride, right?

But it's given to adorn the church, right?

So yes, he says it's a blessing for you, and that's great, right?

So part of the motivation of serving well is that you will be blessed, right?

And that you will grow in character.

and that that character won't be hidden under a bushel, but that people will see it, and it will be a benefit of a good reputation to you.

But that benefit is not just for you.

It's not just for your own vanity, not just for your own pride.

The next phrase, I think, indicates that it's to adorn not just yourself, but the church, the whole church as well.

And I'll show you how I get there, because it's not clear, but I think it's implied, right?

So it's not said directly, but I think it's implied by the way that Paul says this last phrase.

He says, those who serve well will gain a good standing, but also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

Great confidence or assurance in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

That's a little bit of a weird phrase.

Like how does serving well, you know, the question here, big question, how does serving well lead to great confidence in

in the faith, right?

So serving other people is leading to me being sure that Christ died, was raised again, that my sins were atoned for on the cross, that I'm right with God, that he's for me, not against me.

that when I stand before him, I stand before him clothed in Jesus's righteousness, and I'm gonna hear, well done, good and faithful servant, not because of my own merit, but because of Jesus's merit.

How does serving well lead to that assurance or strengthen, give me that confidence?

Another way to put it is how does sacrificing our own time, our own energy, our own money, our own comfort, our emotional well-being sometimes, how does that produce assurance that the gospel is true and Jesus is good and who he said he is?

I think a clear connection or a good way to make the connection here

is in Jesus' high priestly prayer in John 13.

He says, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, just as I have loved you."

I'm sorry, it's not high priestly prayer, but Jesus talking to his disciples.

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, just as I have loved you.

You also are to love one another.

By this, all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

People, all people, us included, will know, have assurance, be confident that we are Christ's disciples if we love one another.

Because

We can only love one another selflessly from the heart, genuinely, if we've been loved by a real and good savior who is who he says he is, right?

I can give up my time, my energy, my money, my comfort, my emotional wellbeing with joy, right?

That's that important part.

I can give up those things, not begrudgingly, not so that people think I'm better than them,

I can give that up with joy only if I have something that's far more valuable and satisfying than spare time, not being tired, money for stuff I want, ease and comfort, or a carefree state of mind.

I can only give those things up if I have something that's more valuable than those things.

And we do have something that's more valuable than those things.

If I can give up any of those things to experience and know more of Christ, not just know him up here, but to really know him like Paul prays for in Ephesians 3.

If I can give up those things to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge,

Done, right?

Deal.

I want more of that.

And if I can exchange those things to have more of Christ, I'm doing it.

It should be, but it isn't always a no-brainer, right?

The church is adorned with selfless service that reflects the beauty of Christ when we give up those things for, sorry, go back.

when we give up those things because we want more of Christ.

So let's put it this way.

If service is only making about you look good, if you serving others is only so that people think that you're better than them or that you're better, right, and it's all about you, you're going to go one of two ways.

You're either going to overextend yourself because you want people to know that you're better than them, right, and you're the best, and you're going to burn out

and you're gonna be super tired and exhausted and mad that nobody recognizes your service.

Or you're gonna underextend yourself and just decide, eh, it's not worth it, right?

It's just, I'm not getting what I want out of this.

But if we serve with our eyes fixed on Jesus, and it's all about bringing him glory and seeing and experiencing more of his glory in our life and seeing more of his glory at work in the lives of others, there's no telling where that goes, right?

There's no telling where that goes and what kind of acts of greatness we could witness.

If service is most importantly about God's glory, it also frees us up from the burden of trying to produce things that we can't control.

Sometimes we go into a certain ministry or we get to know someone and start serving them and doing things for them, expecting certain results out of it.

Often we serve people because we want to fix them, we want good results for them, and then when we don't see that, or when people don't acknowledge our service,

or the service doesn't seem to have the effect that we hoped it would, we get discouraged, we give up.

Elizabeth Elliot wrote a great book.

If you're serving in any way, if you're serving in any way, this book is for you.

But especially, you know, if you're in vocational ministry, missionary, pastor, Christian nonprofit, like this is, I would say this is a must read.

Elizabeth Elliot, one of the most godly women I've read.

She wrote a novel.

So this isn't like a textbook.

It's a novel.

It's a story about a missionary in Ecuador, which she was for a time.

And she talks a little bit about this missionary who gives her life to bring the gospel to this tribe in Ecuador.

And in the end...

I gotta give you the spoiler alert because you need to read the book with the end in mind.

She ends up killing the only guy that will be able to translate the Bible and bring the gospel to the tribe that she's trying to reach.

She accidentally kills him by giving him this weird vaccine and he ends up dying.

So that's how the book ends, right?

She fails in her mission to bring the gospel to this tribe.

In this book, she writes,

Whether therefore you eat or drink, do all to the glory of God.

St.

Paul had recognized even the common things.

Of course I knew that.

I had heard sermons on it.

But I saw now that if my task was far smaller in terms of the effect it was to produce, it was far larger in the terms of my own life involvement.

If there were times when I must be willing to pay any price for what is called the advancement of the kingdom, there were also times when I must be willing to let such a price, climbing a mountain, for example, in rain and mud and darkness, be paid in vain.

This too was a place to glorify God.

You see what she's saying?

She's saying, if I'm only willing to pay the price, to sacrifice my time, my energy, my money, my emotional well-being, all that stuff, if I'm only willing to sacrifice that stuff for the results I want to see, right, and not the results that God chooses to give me, I'm serving myself.

I'm doing it for my glory.

And that produces pride in me.

But if I'm willing to pay the price and accept whatever results God gives me,

then I'm truly at that point serving others and I'm doing it for his glory and it produces Christ-like submission and beauty in me.

I'm going to do what's right and I'm going to pay this price because it magnifies the worth of Jesus, that he's more valuable to me than this other stuff, whether or not he does anything great with it at all, whether or not he advances the kingdom in ways I think he should at all.

And I'm going to pay that price and trust that the Lord will,

be honored by it, and that he will glorify himself and change me, right?

And change me in the process.

Only God seen clearly in the gospel is that trustworthy and great.

He says, give me everything.

I'm not going to tell you what I'm going to do with it.

I'm not going to tell you what kind of results it's going to produce.

I'm not going to tell you, and I'm not even going to sometimes let you see right now if it's worth it or not.

Trust me with it all, and it will be worth it.

We know that one day when we see him face to face.

and we see his glory fully revealed to us, I'm not even sure I'm going to need to know who got saved or what kind of fruit my ministry had here when I see him face to face.

I'm going to know.

I'm just going to know it was worth it.

Deacons are men of biblical dignity who adorn the church with assurance-building beauty of Christlikeness and selfless service.

So deacons, like we said to the elders last week, being before doing, right?

Who you are, your main job as a deacon is to walk with the Lord and to grow in godliness and to serve your family.

That's priority number one.

If you're not doing that, you can't be a deacon, according to Paul, right?

You're not qualified to be a deacon.

And then serve the body, right?

Serve the body for God's glory.

And let's strive, all of us, this goes for any of us.

This isn't just deacons here, although deacons lead the charge.

Let's strive for maximum greatness.

Let's adorn the proclamation of the gospel with radical acts of service that can only be explained by a great God who satisfies our every need and longing.

There's a, yeah.

They'll know we're his followers if we love one another.

They'll know, right?

They'll know we're his followers if we love one another.

There's more at stake here than just being nice and doing good stuff, right?

Our assurance and our confidence in the truth of the gospel and that Jesus is who he says he is is tied here to the fruit of that gospel in our acts and in how we love one another.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, you have served us beyond our hopes, our dreams, even our wildest imagination.

That the God who made the universe, the God who spoke this world into existence, the God who endured our rebellion,

The God who endured being spit on and flogged and mocked, who rode in on this Palm Sunday on a donkey, not a white horse, but a donkey, and who was crucified a week later, Lord.

Yeah.

Lord, we can't even begin to understand the depth and the level to which you have served us.

And Lord, as we gaze upon the beauty of your humility, of your majesty and meekness, Lord, I pray that you would help us to know that humility and majesty by living it out to one another and to our community.

Lord, would you make us a people marked by love and acts of service to each other, but Lord, to others,

all of the people that you have made in our community, all of the people that you desire to know you and to be in relationship with you.

Lord, we just want to know you more and experience you more.

Lord, thank you again for your love and your mercy that's new every day.

And Lord, we can serve with freedom and with confidence knowing that even our lack of service, even the ways that we fall short of this, Lord, are covered by your grace and your mercy.

But Lord, again, we're not doing this out of guilt, not doing it out of a need to measure up so that we know that we're better.

Lord, we're already better in you.

And Lord, we ask that you would...

Just help us to give us a hunger to know your love and the way that you expressed your love through service in an experiential way that produces acts of service and love towards one another.

Pray all this in Jesus' name.

Amen.