



“SERVANTS IN THE CHURCH”

1 Timothy 3:8-13

Part 1

Theme: *The ministry of spiritual leadership in the church is so significant God has ordained spiritually qualified men to assist the Overseers.*

Introduction: God is genius. His design for relationships is glorious and efficient. In a variety of contexts, He has established partnerships in which different roles exist maximize efficiency and effectiveness. In the home God established fathers who are to serve the family as the “Head of the home.” In partnership to him, God has designed a unique “completer” – a helper suitable to him who will bring the completion what is lacking in the father, the perfect compliment. Fathers and mothers work together to rear the children with each role crucial to the health of the family and the benefit of children. The homes where either the father or mother is absent results in great societal harm – being played out within our culture with blatant cause/effect.

The church is no different. We’ve been looking at the office and qualifications of “overseers,” the elders of the church. These men clearly serve as those who are responsible for the spiritual welfare of the saints in the local church. However, even as God has established a complementarian completion of the father’s role by gifting his wife in such a way to provide a full-orbed ministry to the children, God has established assistants to the overseers whose roles are crucial to the health of the church. These “servants” or “deacons” are spiritually qualified men who are not to be viewed as spiritual leader “wannabes,” but as actual spiritual leaders like the elders. In our text this morning, we see ***“the ministry of spiritual leadership in the church is so significant God has ordained spiritually qualified men to assist the Overseers.”***

- I. The Role of Deacon – 3:8a
- II. The Regard for Deacons – 3:8b
- III. The Restraint in Deacons – 3:8c
- IV. The Reliance of Deacons – 3:9
- V. The Reliability of Deacons – 3:10
- VI. The Relationships of Deacons – 3:11-12
- VII. The Reward for Deacons – 3:13

I. THE ROLE OF DEACON – 3:8a

A. Understanding the Word

1. As Paul is seeking to provide instruction to stabilize the chaos caused by false teachers gaining influence in the church, he continues to emphasize the role that leadership has.
2. Paul introduces us to another aspect of leadership – servant leaders – or **“Deacons”** [διάκονος] – literally “servants.”
3. Unfortunately, the term **“deacon”** has been misunderstood by many through the history of the church.
 - a) *When I was a boy, my father pastored the Braintrim Baptist Church in Laceyville, PA where I had a difficult relationship with several of the “deacons” of the church (my Dad was the only elder).*
 - b) *In other churches, deacons are a bunch of men who take care of the physical needs of the church – even having this nuance here at Grace until very recently we’ve turned back to the Scriptures for a closer look.*
 - c) *In some churches it is an “honorific” title – a level of spirituality that provides status to the elite servants – those who distinguish themselves in serving others.*
4. The term has a very broad use in the New Testament (used over 100 times) – and unfortunately, has been greatly misunderstood when it comes to our text today.
 - a) *One of the first uses of the term is when Jesus performs His first miracle at the wedding in Cana – John 2:5.*
 - b) *The term is used of women – Luke 4:39; John 12:2; Luke 10:40.*
 - c) *It began a term used to describe even more than being a “waiter” – cp. Romans 13:4.*
 - d) *Any service to Jesus Christ is called a “diakonia” – cp. John 12:26.*
 - e) *There are varieties of ways to “serve” the Lord – cp. 1 Corinthians 12:5.*
 - f) *One can “serve” other saints as well – 2 Corinthians 9:1.*
 - g) *This is the goal of every Christian – to be equipped to do the work of “diakonia” or service – cp. Ephesians 4:12.*
5. We see that the term began as a reference to being a “waiter” and expanded to refer to whatever one does for Christ – cp. Romans 11:13 – even being an Apostle!
6. The same is true of the office of Pastor is called a “diakonia” – cp. 2 Timothy 4:5.
7. To summarize the uses of the term **“deacon”** we need to carefully

recognize the levels of “serving” the word carries:

- a) *First, all Christians are to be engaged in “serving” Jesus as “diakonos.”*
- b) *Second, some Christians are gifted with the spiritual gift of “diakonia” - [Romans 12:7](#).*
- c) *Finally, a few Christians are established in an office of “diakonos” - respected, faithful men who have devoted themselves to serving - cp. [1 Corinthians 16:15-16](#).*

- 8. It is in this last sense the term is used in **1 Timothy 3:8** - and it is a rare use of a description of an “office” of “**deacon**” - cp. [Philippians 1:1](#).
- 9. Generally, the term “**deacon**” is used to describe the activity of people who are doing a variety of tasks to promote the glory of Jesus - evangelizing, preaching, strengthening, edifying, serving, and pastoring ... all to the glory of Christ.
- 10. By the time Paul writes to Timothy, the church has spread, and individual churches had grown up and had been around for 30 years.
- 11. Paul emphasizes that it is necessary that those who are the “overseers” had to be men who were “beyond reproach” but there was more than they could do.
- 12. As a result, Paul here recognizes a second group of leaders who were to serve as assistants seeking to accomplish the spiritual ministries that the elders are identifying, instigating, and inspecting - the deacons are the ones who serve alongside the elders as their spiritually mature and qualifies partners.

B. Underscoring the Work

- 1. Someone might seek to contest this idea by drawing a hard and fast line between “**deacons**” and elders by appealing to [Acts 6:1-4](#).
- 2. In Acts 6, the men who were chosen are never called “**deacons**” - they are merely called upon to “serve.”
- 3. The attempt to say that this was the birth of “**deacons**” is as near-sighted as attempting to claim the ministry of Martha is the birth of the office.
- 4. The term there and in almost every other New Testament reference is to the general tasks of ministry and not to a particular task assigned to the office of “**deacons**.”
- 5. The “work” of a “**deacon**” is undeclared in the Scriptures and can refer to anything done in the “service” of Christ Jesus.
- 6. When you take the context of 1 Timothy 3:8ff, we note that the role of a “**deacon**” is to serve as the right-hand men of the elders (“assistants”) to

help accomplish the spiritual ministries for which the elders are responsible.

7. It is as though the *“deacons”* exist to make sure the elders are successful in the ministry of the Word and in prayer as their “assistants.”
8. This fits well the atmosphere of the text whereby the elders are called “overseers” – directly “overseeing” the ministries of the *“deacons.”*
9. It is for this reason that the term *“likewise”* [ὡσαύτως] is used here – “in the same way,” the deacons must be qualified to serve as assistants to those overseeing them in the “ministry.”

So What?

1. **Can I be considered a “servant” of Christ in the way I am engaged in the ministry of the Church?**
2. **What can I do to become more of a “servant” of Christ?**
3. **How are the overseers able to rely on me to assist them in the ministry at GBC?**
4. **Those who are in the office of deacon need my cooperation and help, how can I encourage the deacons?**

The ministry of spiritual leadership in the church is so significant God has ordained spiritually qualified men to assist the Overseers.

We see there are no explicit biblical duties assigned to the deacons – they are to assist the elders in whatever ways the elders need assistance to properly shepherd the congregation. We spent the entire message last time we were together on the essence of what a deacon is, and now we move forward to examining some of the qualities that must characterize a deacon.

II. THE REGARD FOR DEACONS – **3:8b**

A. The Temperament of Deacons

1. Paul addresses the qualifications of the deacons by using the term *“likewise”* [ὡσαύτως] – “in the same way” ... a term carrying forward the desire to serve and the blamelessness of a man’s character cp. vv. 1-2.

2. Immediately, Paul refers to those in this position as men by the masculine adjective “dignified” [σεμνός] – and translated *“men of dignity.”*
3. This term describes a person who is “worthy of respect” because they are of august or serious mindset.
4. As such a deacon cannot be a person who treats serious matters as trivial or is superficial when it comes to weighty matters.

B. The Treatment of Deacons

1. This quality is verified by means of how others treat him.
2. When a man is *“dignified,”* others will treat him with respect and honor.
3. Interestingly this word “... comes from a root word (sebomai) that means ‘to venerate,’ or ‘to worship.’ Those characterized by it have a majestic quality of character that makes people stand in awe of them.”¹
4. It seems that the essence of this quality is that others see these men as worthy of their respect and help – that is, they are not dismissed as an irrelevancy or as extraneous.

III. THE RESTRAINT IN DEACONS – 3:8c

A. The Restraint of the Tongue

1. A feature that is necessary for this respect is for a deacon to show an ability to restrain his tongue – *“... not double-tongued ...”*
2. This term emphasizes such a leader must mean what he says – he cannot say one thing to one person and another thing to someone else.
3. This would include the elimination of gossip, but it goes beyond just gossip and includes that he is not guilty of the “fear of man,” – telling people what they want to hear and then telling others what they want to hear also when it is contradictory.
4. It speaks to his integrity, honesty, and reliability – a man who can be trusted to tell the truth.

B. The Restraint in Temptations

1. Additionally, a *“deacon”* cannot be *“addicted to much wine”* – [προσέχω] – “pay close attention to ...” or “be concerned about ...” indicating the constant thinking about one’s next drink.
2. This speaks to the temperance of soul that avoids being mastered by anything – cp. *1 Corinthians 6:12*.

¹ John F. MacArthur Jr., *1 Timothy*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 126–127.

3. Leadership must be particularly careful in the use of intoxicants if they use them at all – cp. *Proverbs 31:4-5*.
4. Additionally, they cannot have a covetous or greedy affection for being enriched so that he uses his position to make money – “... *or fond of sordid gain.*”
5. There are many times that deacons would be engaged in handling money as a routine part of their responsibilities – caring for the poor, widows, orphans, etc ...
6. Like Judas who pilfered from the treasury, a deacon must have the kind of trustworthiness that they can be entrusted without suspicion.
7. These qualities can be generalized in application to other vices and temptations – they are not “mastered” by anything.

IV. THE RELIANCE OF DEACONS – 3:9

A. The Reliance on Conviction

1. Deacons must be men who are committed to the truth of the Gospel and the authority of the Word of God – “... *holding to the mystery of the faith ...*”
2. The use of the term “*mystery*” demonstrates that Paul is here speaking of the Church and the truths of the New Testament which were unrevealed in the Old Testament.
3. It involves various elements that the Old Testament does not address:
 - a) *The Incarnation of Christ* – *1 Timothy 3:16*
 - b) *The Indwelling of Christ* – *Colossians 1:26-27*
 - c) *The Inclusion of Jew & Gentiles together* – *Ephesians 1:9*
 - d) *The Influence of the Gospel* – *Colossians 4:3*
 - e) *The Impedance of Lawlessness* – *2 Thessalonians 2:7*
 - f) *The Imminence of the Rapture* – *1 Corinthians 15:51-52*
4. “*holding*” [ἔχω] – conveys the idea that deacons must be possess convictions on all these doctrines that have been revealed in the New Testament as uniquely possessed by the Church.

B. The Reliance on Conscience

1. They must be men who are wholly devoted to these doctrines without duplicity of wavering – “... *with a clear conscience.*”
2. It describes how they are “*holding to the mystery of the faith.*”
3. They believe these truths to the point where it dictates how they live their lives.

4. They do not say they believe something but contradict that believe in their hearts which causes their conduct to reflect the denial of these convictions regardless of their profession – cp. *Proverbs 4:23*.
5. It is through the ministry of the Spirit of God pointing us to Christ for cleansing that the conscience becomes trained in righteousness and a reliable guide – cp. *1 Timothy 1:5*.

V. THE RELIABILITY OF DEACONS – **3:10**

A. The Testing of Deacons

1. Deacons must be men who have been observed serving faithfully in caring for the needs of the saints before they ever become deacons.
2. Paul teaches that *“These men must also first be tested ...”* [δοκιμάζω] – lit. – “But even be testing these men first.”
3. It refers to carefully observing the effectiveness of the men’s convictions, conduct, and ministries to see their true desire to serve as deacons before you elevate them into the office of a deacon.
4. This is consistent with the warning to avoid elevating someone into an office of leadership prematurely – cp. *1 Timothy 5:22*.

B. The Testimony of Deacons

1. When a man demonstrates that he is *“beyond reproach”* – *“then let them serve as deacons.”*
2. The point is that the church must not ever place a man into an office with the hope that he will rise to the challenge and begin to function as he ought.
3. Rather, we need to observe those who are functioning with competency and fruitfulness that demonstrates a Spirit-filled ministry and then elevate them into an office of leadership.
4. This is a different term than what is used in v. 2 for elders:
 - a) Here the term is *“beyond reproach”* [ἀνεπίλη(μ)πτος] – from *lambano* – meaning to grab or take – emphasizing *“without handles”* of accusation.
 - b) In v. 2 the term is *“above reproach”* [ἀνέγκλητος] – *irreproachable* – or *unindicted* or even *“not arraigned”* with charges.
5. The emphases on the elder deals with the teaching of the Word and the emphasis on the deacon is on the application of the Word in light of the elders’ teaching – both requiring that their reputations be free of accusation or indictments which would invalidate the reality of the truth.

VI. THE RELATIONSHIPS OF DEACONS – **3:11-12**

A. Collaboration with Female “Servants”

1. The question of to whom is being referred here has been debated for centuries.
2. The text reads: *“Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things.”*
3. There are good reasons to see a third office, subjected to the deacons specifically, to be in view here; and office of “deaconess.”
4. The *“women”* [γυνή] – referred to here is the word for an adult female – sometimes with a special reference to a “married woman” or “wife,” however the context does not require this.
5. It suggests that despite the fact that Paul has clarified that the role of a woman is be primarily focused on the home in chapter 2, there is a role for women to come alongside deacons to help them even as the deacons themselves come alongside the elders to help them.
6. This would remove the notion of “authority” from the women and see them as serving in such a way as to enable the deacons to be successful.
7. This position is built primarily on the term “likewise” to suggest that it is an office being recognized.
8. The argument for it merely being a reference to the wives of the deacons include:
 - a) *The term “deacon” is not used in reference to these women in this context.*
 - b) *Women were to not seek to provide leadership but were to focus on serving the Lord within their families – cp. 1 Timothy 2:15.*
 - c) *Paul’s return to the deacons in the following verse argues that he hasn’t left the qualifications for deacons when mentioning these women, but they would naturally refer to their wives.*
9. There is a precedent for having female deacons – cp. Romans 16:1.
10. We shouldn’t get lost in the argument so that we lose the point – those who are assisting the deacons, whether they are their wives, or godly women in general, should be qualified to serve even as the deacons are:

- a) *“Dignified” [σεμνός] - the very same word as used of the deacons.*
- b) *“... not malicious gossips” [διάβολος] - slanderous or a person who speaks to another’s detriment.*
- c) *“... temperate” [νηφάλιος] - restrained in conduct - the same term as used of the elders.*
- d) *“... faithful in all things” [πιστός] - trustworthy, dependable, and inspiring trust; paralleling [v. 9](#).*

B. Commitment to Monogamy

1. Even as monogamy was required of the elders, it is required of these men as well - *“Deacons must be husbands of only one wife ...”*
2. There is an absolute standard of faithfulness to one’s spouse, or if they are unmarried, they must not be constantly on the prowl for female attention.
3. This speaks to men around whom women can feel comfortable and confident in their fidelity to their wives.

C. The Competence with Household

1. Additionally, the deacon’s children must also demonstrate his competence in leadership - *“... and good managers of their children and their own households.”*
2. Like the elders, there must be an ability to stand before their families and inspire confidence and cooperation, extending beyond parenting abilities and extending to the stewardship of their money, possessions as well as the spiritual values in the home.

VII. THE REWARD FOR DEACONS - **3:13**

A. The Commendation of Deacons

1. Paul clearly states that those who serve well as deacons or deaconesses gain esteem from the saints - *“For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing ...”*
2. This *“high standing”* [βαθμός] - refers to a platform or pedestal that provides an elevation of the one who stands upon it.
3. There is an elevation of those who serve the Lord as deacons - they gain for themselves the respect and gratitude of the saints in the church.
4. A truly godly person does not serve to gain such a station above others in the church, but they are worthy of it in God’s eyes and in the eyes of the godly - cp. [1 Thessalonians 5:12-13](#).

B. The Confidence of Deacons

1. Additionally, an outcome of faithfulness in serving is that they *“obtain for themselves ... great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.”*
2. Successful service emboldens greater service still - “confidence” [παρρησία] - outspokenness and fearlessness in serving - cp. *Ephesians 6:19*.
3. The effect of faithful assistance of the elders is the confidence *“in the faith”* - a fearlessness in ministry that enables one to represent *“Christ Jesus”* faithfully.

So What?

1. God’s grace powerfully exhibits itself in the transformation of sinners into exemplary believers.
2. To what am I able to point for demonstration of this transformation?
3. Am I purposefully “holding to the mystery of the faith” in order to have truth influence my daily living?
4. Do I respect and appreciate those who come alongside the elders to assist them in the work of ministry?
5. What can I do to join them?

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