

Title: A Mature Church Has Qualified Deacons

Text: 1 Timothy 3:8–13

What is an elder?

What is a shepherd?

What is an overseer?

What is a bishop?

What is pastor?

What is a deacon?

What is a trustee?

So many terminologies?

How is a church supposed to run? What is her structure?

There are a lot of denominations, and all have ecclesiastical structures. Some good, some not so good. How is a church supposed to be structured to be the most effective?

How is she supposed to function?

The Bible does have an answer. A Plurality of Elders overseeing the congregation - shepherding the congregation and helping it to grow in Christlikeness.

Deacons - Servants officially recognized as servants to take on administrative and other responsibilities so the Elders can be focused on the ministry of prayer and the Word.

Believe it or not, the structure we see in the New Testament isn't a structure of efficiency.

But when understood properly, it may not be the most efficient model of church structure, but it is the best - because it is designed by God Himself.

In [Acts 6](#), we see the newly born and significantly grown church face a dilemma. It wasn't a theological problem, but instead, it was a practical problem that needed immediate attention. The Greek widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food, while the Hebrew widows were not.

Remember, the church was living communally. They were taking care of one another's needs. But they had grown so much numerically that administrative things were being overlooked.

The Greek widows being disregarded instead of the Hebrew widows could have been a real problem racially, as there were already cultural tensions between these people groups.

The Apostles were doing all they could to keep up with the demands of communal church life, but they needed help.

Wisely, they called seven godly men to help them with the daily food distribution. I believe this event was the catalyst that birthed the deacons that would later be described in [1 Timothy 3:8-13](#).

Deacons are officially recognized servants in a local church who help the church function well.

Like the elder qualification list, the list in [1 Timothy 3:8-13](#) is primarily about character. These men serve the body of Christ and Christ Himself with a heart of joy and love.

The bottom line is, the godly deacon is a man like Jesus...

[Mark 10:45 \(ESV\)](#)

For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Main Idea: A Qualified Leader in Christ's Church is a Servant to All

There are six aspects to the role of deacon that I want you to see from Paul's letter to Timothy.

Remember, Paul is instructing Timothy on how the church should behave as the body of Christ. Having the proper leadership - whether it is elder leadership or deacon leadership, it is crucial that we get these roles correct so the organization can function well.

Let's take a look at the first...

1. A Servant Who is Dignified (vs. 8)

[1 Timothy 3:8 \(ESV\)](#)

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

The person that holds this recognized position of the local church must have the same character as the elders of the church. This is why Paul uses the term, likewise - or "in the same way" they must be dignified.

The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament 4586. σεμνός *semnós*
Venerable, reverend, reputable, dignified. *Semnós* represents not only earthly dignity (*kósmios* [2887]), but that which is derived from a higher citizenship, a heavenly one, which is the possession of all believers. There lies something of majestic and awe-inspiring qualities in *semnós* which does not repel but rather invites and attracts (Phil. 4:8; 1 Tim. 3:8, 11; Titus 2:2).

In other words, these that hold this position must have a mind that is focused on the things of God.

This is what Paul challenges the people in Colossae with in his letter to them...

[Colossians 3:2 \(ESV\)](#)

Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

Deacons (and elders) are to be heavenly minded! They are to be focused on things above! Their minds are to gravitate to the divine.

Steven, in the book of Acts, who functionally was a deacon, gave a profound and complete recitation of Old Testament history to a group of angry Jews who eventually stoned him to death. This guy, this deacon had his mind in the right place - biblical truth.

These men are not to be duplicitous in their speech. They are not to be given to double-talk - say one thing to one person and something else to another.

A godly deacon is the same in every situation. What you see (and hear) is what you get. They are not fake. They let their yes be yes and no be no!

In addition, like the elders, these men are not to be men who are slaves to the bottle. They are not to be men who indulge in much wine. In a culture where alcoholic wine was ubiquitous - deacons were not to be slaves to it. They, instead were to be self-controlled.

Another qualification is considering one of the responsibilities of a deacon is to help oversee the monetary aspects of the local congregation, they were not to be "greedy" men who will do anything to make a buck.

The text says, "dishonest gain" which means these men must not be obsessed with money to the place where they will do anything to gain more.

They must also not be men who hoard money, but to use what God has entrusted to the church for the furtherance of the gospel and to minister to the needs of the people.

So what kind of man is a deacon?

Dignified men who say what they mean and mean what they say. They are not men who lack self-control and are enslaved to alcohol and, they most certainly are not men who will do anything for the almighty dollar.

To be a man of dignity is to be a man of character.

"Character is what a man is in the dark." D.L. Moody

Deacons, are you dignified? When people see you do they see Christ?

What would your wife say? Your closest friend?

Review - A Qualified Leader In Christ's Church is a Servant to All!

- A Servant Who Is Dignified

2. A Servant Who Is Strong In The Faith (vs. 9)

1 Timothy 3:9 (ESV)

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

But even more importantly than being a dignified person, they must be, without any compromise, someone who is STRONG in the Faith.

Paul tells Timothy, they MUST hold to the mystery of the faith...

What does this mean?

The word mystery means something that was hidden in the past which is now revealed.

Here are some examples of what was hidden in the past...

The incarnation of Christ

[1 Timothy 3:16](#) (ESV)

Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

Christ dwelling in the believer

[Colossians 1:26–27](#) (ESV)

the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

The unity of the Jews and the Gentiles

[Ephesians 3:4–6](#) (ESV)

When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

The Gospel

[Colossians 4:3](#) (ESV)

At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison—

Lawlessness

[2 Thessalonians 2:7](#) (ESV)

For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way.

The Rapture of the Church

1 Corinthians 15:51–52 (ESV)

Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.

The deacon of the local church should not be someone with just a strong back, but someone with a strong understanding of biblical truths. A strong FAITH!

But not just a strong faith, Paul insists on a clear conscience. What does this mean?

Paul is saying that they have nothing going on in their lives that is hindering them regarding the Lord.

They are not perfect men, but they are those that can pillow their head at night and sleep well because their conscience is clear. They are right with the Lord and those around them.

The church does not need weak men. The church needs men who will serve the Lord with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength.

It is a man who has rolled up his sleeves and is working - serving God and others!

While President Theodore Roosevelt is not talking about deacons, he is talking about the character of the one who accomplishes much with the time he is given.

"It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better.

The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat."

— Theodore Roosevelt

This is what a deacon's attitude should be...

Men/Deacons - are you strong in the faith?

Are you in the arena or are you a spectator in the stands?

Are you a servant working in the fields for Christ or are you an arm-chair-quarterback?

The Lord does not need advisors, He desires workers - servants for His glory!

- Could you lead someone to Christ?
- Could you disciple someone from beginning to end?

- Do you know the mystery of the faith that is rooted in Christ?
- Could you defend the faith if called upon to do so?
- What do you need to do to grow into the person God desires for you to be?

Review - A Qualified Leader In Christ's Church is a Servant to All!

- A Servant Who Is Dignified
- A Servant Who Is Strong In The Faith

3. A Servant Who Is Tested (vs. 10)

1 Timothy 3:10 (ESV)

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

Paul lays out some very good and very practical wisdom in this verse.

It is not a good plan to throw someone into a leadership position who is new to the faith.

They must prove their mettle.

I like the CSB translation.

1 Timothy 3:10 (CSB)

They must also be tested first; if they prove blameless, then they can serve as deacons.

If they prove themselves blameless, then we can use them in this capacity.

So, what does this mean?

We don't put someone in a leadership position to see if they will be a good leader, we find those who are leading and in this case, serving well, and then, once they have proven themselves, we put them in the position of deacon.

We watch and see who is deaconing and then we invite them to be an official deacon.

This is what Paul means. We do not bring someone on and hope they will be a good deacon, we ensure they are first.

Then we go through the official process.

Why?

It protects them - *"Where the sausage is made."*

It protects the church - Nothing worse than having a proud deacon who thinks he knows better than everyone else.

Or a lazy deacon, or a deacon who is on his own program and doesn't play nice with others.

They must be tested in the crucible of church life before they are brought into the church as an official servant.

Howie, sausage, too soon, too fast.

Leadership of the church - be careful regarding who and when you put someone into leadership.

People of the church, put yourself in the way of testing. The only way you will grow and become more like Christ is to jump in and start serving.

Start in little areas. Don't do it for recognition. Keep serving!

Review - A Qualified Leader In Christ's Church is a Servant to All!

- A Servant Who Is Dignified
- A Servant Who Is Strong In The Faith
- A Servant Who Is Tested

4. A Servant Who Is A Woman Too (vs. 11)

1 Timothy 3:11 (ESV)

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

This is an interesting passage for a couple of reasons.

1. The word wives in the greek γυνή *guné* - *can mean* woman or wife...
2. In fact, the LSB, one of the most literal translations of the scriptures translates the word γυνή, "Women."

1 Timothy 3:11 (LSB)

Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things.

3. The elders do not have qualifications for their wives, but the deacons do?

So, does this mean that there are women deacons.

Remember what the word "deacon" means

The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament (1247. διακονέω diakonéō)

διακονέω diakonéō; servant, deacon. To serve, wait upon, with emphasis on the work to be done and not on the relationship between lord and servant.

So, the word simply means servant.

And, there are examples of female servants in the New Testament.

Romans 16:1-2 (ESV)

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae, that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well.

Some translations even use the word, deaconess.

Romans 16:1 (AMP)

NOW I introduce and commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deaconess of the church at Cenchreae,

There is no question in my mind that there are female servants in the church. This should be no controversy because women, as a part of the body of Christ are called to serve.

But what is Paul talking about in verse 11? Is he talking about women or wives?

Honestly I have gone back and forth on the proper interpretation of this passage and I think contextually, in other words reading this passage in its setting and trying to understand the plain meaning, I think it is talking about wives not women in general.

I'll give you some reasons for this, but first I want to say, it is a legitimate understanding of this text to say that Paul is talking about women not wives here. If you hold that position, it is a reasonable one. I just think the context supports the idea of deacon's wives better.

Why do I think Paul is talking about wives.

1. Because it best fits the flow of the text - Saying what the LSB says (Women) makes me wonder why Paul would say something so specific, in such a general way. In other words, He specifically speaks about men as official servants of the church and then he speaks of women in general? *"Women likewise must be dignified..."* It seems more reasonable for Paul to have said "deaconesses" rather than "women" if that was what he was intending.
2. What about Elder's wives - I mentioned earlier that I thought it was strange that there was a category in this for Deacon's wives and not for Elder's wives. Why is that?

I do think there is a reasonable answer for this. The deacons are servants and they are to serve faithfully in the local church. If they have wives, those women are to serve along side of them (as deaconesses).

This is perfectly acceptable and there are no limitations on women for serving in the church.

Regarding elders, as we talked about two weeks ago, the elders are not to share their responsibilities as an elder to rule or to teach in an authoritative way with their wives. This is the elders responsibility, not their wives.

Certainly the wives of the elders are to serve in the church in how they are gifted, but they are not to function as a co-elder, co-pastor in the church.

While the wives of deacons can and should function as partners with their husbands, hence their qualifications are listed as well.

The church can't have deacons whose wives are undignified, slanderous, not serious, and faithless.

3. I think this passage is specifically talking to the wives of deacons. And in this sense, we have deaconesses who are officially recognized.

But other scriptures indicate as well that women, who are not the wives of deacons can serve as deaconesses. These women supplement the work of our deacons and serve the church in ways men cannot.

My conclusion on this issue - The idea of female servants within the church makes good sense. They can be the wives of deacons according to this passage. And they can be not wives of deacons within the body of Christ. Women servants can serve and assist the deacons of this church to be better and stronger than we would be otherwise.

If deacons are not imbued with the authority to lead the congregation in the way elders are, but instead are servants who supplement and allow the elders to function as shepherds and overseers, then servants can be male or female.

Application - Women of ABC serve, serve, serve. Find out your spiritual gifting and start to put that gifting to work!

Review - A Qualified Leader In Christ's Church is a Servant to All!

- A Servant Who Is Dignified
- A Servant Who Is Strong In The Faith
- A Servant Who Is Tested
- A Servant Who Is A Woman Too

5. A Servant Who Is Committed To His Wife and Kids (vs. 12)

1 Timothy 3:12 (ESV)

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

What kind of man should the Deacon be? Much the same as the Elder. They are men who are committed and faithful to a monogamous relationship with a woman.

In today's culture we would say that a deacon is a biological male married and committed to a biological female. He is a one woman man committed to caring for and ministering to his wife.

But also, if they have children, they are to lead them well. All men of the church are to provide for and protect their family.

According to this verse, the deacons must lead the way in this mentality. They are to manage their children, which means they are to discipline them.

I want you to understand something fathers, this is your job. You are the one's held to this responsibility. You, fathers must ensure that your children are under control.

In addition to this, you are responsible to manage your house well too!

The greek word for manage is "lead."

They are to "lead" their Children - in the ways of the Lord.

They are to "lead" their home in the spirit of Joshua.

Joshua 24:15 (ESV)

And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."

A man who is not committed to serving and caring for his wife and children first and foremost, should not be considered for the role of deacon - or any leadership role in the church for that matter.

Service starts in the home. And men, we are called to serve our wives and children as we lead them.

"Woman, get me a sandwich" should never come out of your mouth.

Deacons, love your wives as much as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her.

Review - A Qualified Leader In Christ's Church is a Servant to All!

- A Servant Who Is Dignified
- A Servant Who Is Strong In The Faith
- A Servant Who Is Tested
- A Servant Who Is A Woman Too
- A Servant Who Is Committed To His Wife And Kids

6. A Servant Who Is Growing (vs. 13)

1 Timothy 3:13 (ESV)

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.

A deacon is someone who is in a constant growth pattern. They are not content with their level of spiritual maturity. They hunger and thirst for growth in Christ.

Paul says, *“For those ‘who serve well as deacons’”* is two words in greek. They are favorable in their serving as deacons. And because they are, they gain two important benefits...

A good standing for themselves - servitude from the world’s perspective is menial and not profitable. Service from God’s perspective is Christlike and godly. You are no more like Christ than when you serve others. It is the servants that are the prominent ones in the Kingdom of God.

Great confidence in the faith - This is an interesting result or benefit for the one serving as a deacon. Their confidence or boldness in the faith increase. The text says they “gain great confidence in the faith.”

Faith in what? “in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

This Jesus is the founder of our faith.

Hebrews 12:1-2 (ESV)

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Friends, we, as long as we are alive in this body, are to NEVER stop growing in our understanding of the one who saved us. Jesus is at the center of our faith.

He is our faith! He is the author and finisher of our faith!

The deacons, according to Paul should be leading the congregation, along with the elders by being men who are growing in Christlikeness.

Deacons, are you growing in the faith?

Are you mastering the Scriptures so they will master you?

Are you disciplining yourself in prayer, scripture memory

Are you participating in Equipping Classes and Connection groups?

What happens teaches. People are watching you (elders too). What you prioritize they will as well.

Are you putting yourself in the place of purposed, godly growth?

All growth that is not towards God is growing to decay.

George Macdonald (Scottish Novelist and Poet)

Deacons and elders - we must be the best disciples and disciple-makers here at ABC.

Our congregation will grow no deeper than her leadership.

Review - A Qualified Leader In Christ's Church is a Servant to All!

- A Servant Who Is Dignified
- A Servant Who Is Strong In The Faith
- A Servant Who Is Tested
- A Servant Who Is A Woman Too
- A Servant Who Is Committed To His Wife And Kids
- A Servant Who Is Growing

Conclusion

What is an elder?

What is a shepherd?

What is an overseer?

What is a bishop?

What is pastor?

What is a deacon?

What is a trustee?

So many terminologies?

How is a church supposed to run? What is her structure?

God has called the structure - we must simply follow it.

He has placed only elders and deacons in place to enable the church to function properly.

Elders: A church elder holds the authoritative office within the church as an overseer, responsible for guiding the congregation. In this capacity, they play a vital role in overseeing both congregational care and governance, ensuring that the spiritual and administrative aspects of the church function harmoniously in accordance with her vision, mission, and values.

Deacons: Deacons are invaluable to the function of the church but are not an authoritative office of the church in the same sense as the elders. Deacons (servants), by the definition of their name are to assist the Elders and serve the congregation in meeting practical and material needs. They are ministers of mercy who keep their finger on the pulse of the church...

I wonder if the evangelical church in America would stop shrinking if she simply followed the structure God has laid out in His Word?

In my experience, doing it God's way is always the best way.