1 Timothy 3:8–16 prt 9
MPS: Biblical Deacons help God's family operate as it ought to.

INTRO:

- Review: Last week we looked at the first of the two biblical offices, elders. **Biblical Elders lead God's family to operate as it ought to.** This week is the second office, deacons.
- There are two biblical offices: Elders and Deacons. We make the distinction between elders and deacons this way: **Elders are servant leaders and Deacons are lead servants.**
- Timothy is in Ephesus to deal with false teachers. **1 Timothy 1:3 (ESV)** ***3*** *As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine,*

- We have been saturated in these 2 verses from today's text throughout the whole series, so I won't belabor them, but let me at least address them.

Vs 14–15 *I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that,* ***15*** *if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.*

Three pictures in v.15:

- **Household of God:** a family, not a corporation. Families need people who notice when someone is missing a meal (Acts 6:1).

Ephesians 2:19 (ESV) ***19*** *So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,*

- **Pillar and buttress of the truth:** The church holds the truth up where the world can see it. A pillar holds up the roof; a buttress keeps the wall from falling.
    - Ephesus had a world wonder, the Temple of Artemis, with "more than 127 columns." Paul tells a house church: you are the pillar.
- **Church of the living God:** He lives here. Dearest place on Earth is what Spurgeon says

TRANSITION:

- Last week we said **Biblical Elders lead God's family to operate as it ought to.** But Paul's not done with the house. A house where everybody's sitting at the table and nobody's

in the kitchen gets real hungry real quick. So in verse 8 he says, 'Deacons likewise.' Here's the big idea:

- **Biblical Deacons help God's family operate as it ought to.**

OPEN:

- I'm afraid too many of us in this room have had negative experiences with deacons.

- "This is great, preacher, but I'm not a deacon. Why does this matter to me?" Because you live in this household. Healthy churches don't happen by accident. Paul says these qualifications are how you know "how one ought to behave." That's for everyone.

What a deacon is not:

- A board member of the organization of the church
- Part of the governing body of the church that leads the pastor and church meetings
- A good businessman who helps the church with decisions
- The most popular church members that ultimately make up the student council of the church
- A man who faithfully attends so therefore needs to be a deacon to uphold the aforementioned "nots"

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1. What is a deacon? (Vs 8a)

Vs 8a *Deacons likewise must be…*

- "Likewise" ties this paragraph to last week. Same household, same standard of character, different assignment.
- **A deacon is a servant.**
    - GK: diakonos [dee-AH-koh-nos]: servant, attendant, someone who waits on tables. (Strong's 1249)
    - It's the word for the servants at the wedding in Cana. **John 2:9 (ESV)** ***9*** *When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew)…*

    - The servants knew. The people who do the serving often get the closest look at what Jesus is doing.

- This is a time for all who are in Christ to remember: **We are ALL called to be servants!**

John 12:26 (ESV) ***26*** *If anyone serves [diakonē] me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant [diakonos] be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.*

- We want to call our lead servants what God calls them: Deacons. (reposition this)

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2. Who can be a deacon? (Vs 8–12)

Those who meet the qualifications of 1 Tim 3:8–13 and are deemed such by the elders.

- **Though all deacons are servants, not all servants are deacons.**

- Like last week, these are for every believer, not a standard for the elite. Every qualification here is something Jesus wants for every one of us. Paul says these must be **seen and tested** in the people we put out front.

Vs 8 *Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain.*

- **Dignified:** Deacons should be respectable and honorable in character.
    - The kind of person whose life makes you take God more seriously.

- **Not double-tongued:** They must be sincere, not deceitful or hypocritical in speech.
    - GK: dilogos [DEE-lo-goss]: literally "two-worded." Thayer: "saying one thing with one person, another with another (with intent to deceive)."

- **Not addicted to much wine:** They should exercise moderation, avoiding drunkenness or dependency.
    - Same heart as last week: "his life is not marked by alcohol and he doesn't have to have it."

- **Not greedy for dishonest gain:** They must be free from the love of money or unethical pursuits.
    - In Acts 6 the very first deacon-type job was a food and money distribution. You don't hand the distribution to someone who is greedy.

Vs 9 *They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.*

- **Hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience:** They should have a firm grasp of the gospel for salvation and everyday life ("the mystery of the faith") and live in alignment with it, maintaining integrity.

- Deacons don't have to be "able to teach" like elders (3:2), but they do have to hold the truth. Belief and behavior go together. Paul will tell us what "the mystery" is in v.16.

Vs 10 *And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless.*

- **Tested first:** They should be evaluated or proven over time to ensure their suitability.
- **Blameless:** If they pass the testing, they should be above reproach in their conduct and service.
- Testing is not a hazing ritual. It's watching people serve without a title first.
- Most of our best deacons were "deaconing" long before we ever called them deacons.

Vs 11 *Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things.*

- The word for "wives" is also the word for "women."
- 130 of 231 times it's translated woman and 84 of 231 times it's translated wife.
- GK: gynaikas [goo-NIE-kahs], from gynē [goo-NAY]: woman or wife, depending on the context.

- This phrase is not in the qualifications of elder.

- **Not slanderers.** GK: diabolous [dee-AB-oh-loos], the same word Paul used last week for "the devil" (v.6, "the condemnation of the devil"; v.7, "a snare of the devil"). The slanderer does the devil's work in the household of God.

Does this mean women can be deacons?

Romans 16:1–2 (ESV) ***1*** *I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant [diakonos] of the church at Cenchreae (sin-CREE-ah),* ***2*** *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.*

- The word for 'deacon' in GK is used here, but it could mean 'servant.'
- The context leans more toward the office of deacon.

So, to answer the question: can a woman be a deacon?

- If the church is operating in such a way that deacons are playing the role of elders then no.
- In most of the cases above, women are already "deaconing" by leading in positions such as children's director, and staff roles.
- With biblical evidences supporting both cases, no matter which way we go, we may be in error.
- Eldership is reserved for male leadership. **1 Timothy 2:12 (ESV)** ***12*** *I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet.*
- Women and men are created equal in value and worth, but differ in roles.

Vs 12 *Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well.*

- Same as last week: a one-woman man.
- "Some of you are thinking, 'Wait, if women can serve as deacons, what about "husband of one wife"?' Good question. Paul uses that same phrase for elders back in verse 2. Most scholars agree it's about character, not marital status. It means a one-woman man, faithful and above reproach in his marriage. In Paul's day it was the normal way to describe a household, since the husband usually led it. It isn't a rule that every deacon has to be a married man; if it were, single men like Paul couldn't serve either. What sets elders apart isn't this phrase. It's that elders teach and exercise authority, which Paul covers in chapter 2, and deacons serve. So this is a character test for whoever serves, not a closed door."
- Same as last week: the home is the proving ground. "If he's not going to lay down his life for his wife and kids, what makes you think he'd ever lay down his life for you?" [3:1-7]

Who can be deacons? **Those who meet the qualifications of 1 Tim 3:8–13 and are deemed such by the elders.**

APPLICATION:

- **Every believer:** Go back through vv.8-12 with "I" instead of "deacons." Dignified, one story, not mastered by anything, generous, holding the truth with a clear conscience, faithful in all things.
- **Men,** the same call as last week: lead your home by serving it.
- **Women,** your faithfulness is not behind the scenes to God. Paul names it.
- **Everyone who talks about the church (all of us):** no slander. If you're about to tell a story about someone in this church family who isn't in the room, stop.

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3. What do deacons do? (Vs 13; Acts 6)

Vs 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.*

- Serving well isn't a dead end. It's where your faith grows bold. You don't get "great confidence in the faith" from the stands. You get it in the trenches.
- Back to the servants at Cana: they knew where the wine came from. Deacons, and everyone who serves, get a front-row seat to Jesus at work.
- **Matthew 25:21 (ESV)** ***21*** *His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'*

Acts 6:1-7: the first deacons (tell the story, don't read it)

- The church in Jerusalem is exploding. Thousands are coming to Jesus. But growth brings growing pains.
- The Greek-speaking widows are getting overlooked in the daily food distribution, and a complaint rises up. (6:1)
- The apostles don't ignore it, and they don't drop everything to run the food line themselves: "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables." (6:2)

- So the church picks seven men "of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom" to take care of the need, and the apostles devote themselves "to prayer and to the ministry of the word." (6:3-4)
- One of the seven is Stephen, "a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit." (6:5)
- The result: "the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly." (6:7)
- We'll learn more about Acts 6 in January. For today, three observations from the story:

A. Deacons meet specific needs. (6:1)

- Real people, a real problem, a real solution. Deacons see a need and step in.

B. Deacons lead by helping elders. (6:2-4)

- Elders are freed up for prayer and the Word; deacons serve so elders can lead. It's a partnership.
- Notice "full of the Spirit." Serving tables is Spirit work too.

C. Deacons help the church flourish, and disciples multiply. (6:7)

- "Disciples Making Disciples, Leaders Developing Leaders and Churches Planting Churches."

- For those who are wondering why you'd want to serve as a deacon, read vs 13 again.

- Two fold blessing: Gain a good standing, and see gospel fruit up close and personal (wine at cana)

What do deacons do? **Meet specific needs, lead by helping elders, help the church flourish and as a result disciples are multiplied.**

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CONCLUSION:

Vs 16 *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.*

- "We confess": the church confesses this together. Many scholars think v.16 is an early Christian hymn or creed. Paul is quoting what the church already sang.

- **"Great indeed…"** In Ephesus the crowd chanted: **Acts 19:28 (ESV)** ***28*** *When they heard this they were enraged and were crying out, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"* Ligonier suggests Paul's "Great indeed" "may intentionally echo" that chant. Ephesus said "Great is Artemis." The church says "Great is the mystery of godliness," and the mystery is a Person.

- Six lines
    - **Manifested in the flesh:** the incarnation. **John 1:14 (ESV)** ***14*** *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*
        - "He that made man – was made man." – Charles Spurgeon.
    - **Vindicated by the Spirit:** the resurrection proved He was who He said He was.
    - **Seen by angels:** heaven watched and worships.
    - **Proclaimed among the nations** and **believed on in the world:** that's us. The gospel came to South Georgia.
    - **Taken up in glory:** He reigns now.

- The "mystery of the faith" deacons must hold (v.9) is the "mystery of godliness" the church confesses (v.16).
- The thing the household holds up is… Jesus.

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- **Jesus is the true Deacon.** The One in the hymn who was "manifested in the flesh" came to serve.
    - **Mark 10:45 (ESV)** ***45*** *For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.* (GK: "not to be served [diakonēthēnai] but to serve [diakonēsai]")
    - He was never double-tongued. Every word He spoke was true. He wasn't greedy for gain; He gave everything. He held the mystery of the faith because He *is* the

mystery of godliness. He was tested and proved blameless, and then He was put on trial for us anyway.

- We don't serve to earn a place in the household. We serve because the Servant already gave us a place at the table.

- Some of you walked in burned out on church, or burned by church leaders. Hear this: the head of this household is the One who served you first.

- Our aim is to not err in following Scripture, call lead servants what God calls them in His Word, and commission deacons to help care for the church, behaving how we ought in the household of God.

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We are about to sing “In Christ Alone” and “Come Behold The Wondrous Mystery”

- v.16, "Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness," is the "wondrous mystery" we’re about to sing. Both songs walk through v.16’s story: He came in the flesh, went to the cross, rose again, and now reigns. The tag lands right on "taken up in glory."
- The early church likely sang this verse together as their confession. In a moment we’re going to do the same thing. We’re going to stand and confess the mystery.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUPS:

1. Paul says deacons must not be "double-tongued" and women must not be "slanderers," which is the same word as "devil" in v.6-7. Where are you most tempted to tell one person one version and another person a different one, or to talk about someone who isn't in the room (at work, in your family, online, or in this church)? What would it look like this week to "set a guard" over your mouth (Psalm 141:3)?

2. Jesus said, "I am among you as the one who serves" (Luke 22:27), and v.16 says this same Jesus is now "taken up in glory." How does seeing Jesus as the true Servant change the way you look at the "small" or unseen jobs in your home and in our church? Name one specific need you could meet for someone in our church family this week.