

Text: 1 Timothy 3:8-13

Title: Qualifications & Rewards for Deacons

Truth: Men who meet who meet the qualifications for deacons may serve and will be rewarded if they serve well.

Date/Location: Sunday Evening, April 16, 2023 at FBC

Introduction

What is a Deacon?

- A. The word deacon comes from the Greek noun δίακονος, which means “servant” or “minister.” The word can be used generally refer to a person who is a waiter of tables, and in the NT it can also refer to a servant of a master, a servant of Christ (Col 1:7; 1 Tim 4:6; 2 Cor 11:23), a servant of the Lord (Eph 6:21; Col 4:7), a servant of the apostles (Col 1:7), a servant of the church (Col 1:25), and government authorities (Rom 13:1-4).
- B. The verb form means “to minister” or “to serve” (vb. διακονέω), and refers to one who “attends to the wants and need of others” (Mk 10:45; 2 Tim 1:18; Ph 13; 1 Pt 1:12, 4:10; see Mk 1:31; Lk 10:4, 17:8, 22:26; Acts 5:2) or “helps serve food or drink.”¹ The verb form is used in 1 Tim 3:10 to refer to service performed by deacons.
- C. As alluded to above, the noun form is often used in the NT to refer generally to anyone who functions as a servant (of someone or something) (Mt 10:26, 22:13, 23:11; Mk 9:35; Jn 2:5; Rom 13:4; 1 Cor 3:5; Gal 2:17; Col 1:7, 4:7). We must realize that general uses of the word *deacon* is distinct from the employment of the term to refer to men in the church who hold the God-ordained *office of deacon* (Phil 1:1).
- D. The office of deacon is what Paul has in mind when he uses this term in 1 Tim 3:8, 10, 12, 13. This office is reserved for those who meet certain qualifications in the surrounding context. In this sense, a *deacon is one who is appointed by the church with the responsibility to care for the needs of the church body.*

¹Rick Brannan. “διακονέω.” Lexham Research Lexicon of the Greek New Testament.

How are Pastors and Deacons Similar Yet Distinct?

- A. Like pastors/elders, deacons must also meet certain qualifications. These qualifications are very similar to those in verses 1-7, with a few exceptions. Because of the similarity, it demonstrates that the character of deacon is as important as the character of a pastor, as he must undergo the same careful scrutiny as a pastor before appointed as a deacon. Their responsibilities differ, however. Deacons are not required to be able to teach, though deacons can teach if that is how they are gifted. To distill it down, deacons and pastors are distinct in function but are to be similar in character.
- B. Just like the qualifications for a pastor, these qualities pertain to the individual's character, not particularly his duties as a deacon. Duties and responsibilities must be carried out well, but the Scripture plainly teaches that God's concern is not primarily ability, but spiritual virtue. God requires men whose hearts are right with him to hold these positions of church leadership.² This implies that Deacons performed a vital function in the church.

I. The Qualifications for Deacons (vv.8-10, 12)

1. **Reverent.** The word means to be worthy of respect/honor, noble, dignified, serious. It is not something that can be commanded but evoked through good character.
2. **Not double-tongued.** He is not to be "two-faced." He is to be sincere in what he says and does. He must avoid the sin of flattery and speak the truth in love. A deacon must be reliable in word and action, as he seeks to serve the needs of the church body—whether individually or corporately.
3. **Not given to wine.** Deacons, like pastors (1 Tim 3:3) are forbidden from drunkenness (Ephesians 5:18). Literally, he cannot "be devoted to much wine." Being intoxicated by drink clouds one's judgement and reason. Drunkenness often leads to violence and other sinful behaviors. Total abstinence is a wise practice for those

²John MacArthur Jr. *1 Timothy*. MNTC. Pg. 123.

in church leadership, as they are to model good conduct to the rest of the church.

4. **Not greedy for money.** Deacons are not to be greedy for financial gain or *fond of dishonest gain*. Greed for money can lead to all kinds of trouble (1 Tim 6:10). It could also cause one to lack generosity toward others, as one may perceive the benevolence to have little or no financial profit. Greed for money could lead to partiality, showing special treatment of the needs of those who are bigger givers to the church. A deacon must be someone who stewards the resources God has given the church in keeping with the priority of God's purpose for the church rather than the desire for gain (2 Cor 8:1-5). He is to demonstrate wisdom regarding wealth, not showing desire for or dependence in wealth (Prov 30:7-9; 2 Cor 9:8; Phil 4:11-13).
5. **Holds the ministry of the faith with a pure conscience.** A deacon must believe in the deep truths of the Gospel and live a life in conformity to those truths in which he professes to believe. A "mystery" is something that was once undisclosed but has not been revealed. Deacons are to hold these truths with a pure conscience. Holding "with a pure conscience" can be accomplished by submitting oneself to God's truth as revealed in Scripture (Eph 4:1). Just because deacons in some churches may be tasked to do more practical ministries, and may not be teaching, counseling, or on a church board, does not mean their spiritual life is irrelevant to their service. It may be tempting to appoint deacons who are skillful in practical ways of service (e.g., good with finances, handy man, etc.) and overlook their spiritual life. We are not to appoint a deacon based on these criteria, but on whether he embraces the truth of God's Word and whose conscience is free of guilt.
6. **Tested.** Deacons must first be examined before they are appointed. It is not an examination of oneself that Paul has in mind, but the church's examination of prospective and present deacons. The church is to test to see whether they demonstrate the necessary qualities hold the office and whether they are serving well presently. This test is not a one-time examination, but an ongoing assessment of their character, faith, and service to the Lord. This command parallels the instruction given by Paul to

Timothy to not hastily appoint elders, because their character must be tested first. We want to observe their life carefully, since some sins are not immediately apparent and take longer to surface (1 Tim 5:22, 24).

7. **Blameless.** Only upon being tested and found above reproach is the church to appoint a deacon to serve. Elders must also prove to be above reproach as well (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:6-7).
8. **Husband of one wife.** Or “a one-woman man.” A deacon cannot practice polygamy. It means more than that though, it means that he is to be faithful to his wife both in conduct and thought life—not an adulterous or fornicator. The same is required of Elders (1 Tim 3:2). As with elders, Paul is not addressing marital status, but moral character. Unmarried men are not prohibited from becoming Deacons.
 - a) Widowers are not prohibited from remarriage. If he was faithful to her to death, he is free to remarry according to Hebrews 13:4.
 - b) Divorced men are not (would no longer) qualified for the office.
9. **Leads the home well.** The verb “to rule” means *to exercise a position of leadership, rule, direct, be at the head (of)*.³ It carries the idea of leading, directing, presiding over his household. The same word appears in 1 Thes 5:12 (“are over you”) and 1 Tim 5:17 (“elders who rule”). His ability to rule his house well is demonstrated by the submissiveness of the children to the parents. As with elders, Paul is using a lesser to greater argument (not lesser in value but size). The home is microcosm of the household of God and one’s ability to lead the church is evident in his ability to lead his home.

II. The Qualification for Deacons’ Wives (v.11)

Does the Bible permit deaconesses?

- A. There are many churches who allow women to serve as deacons in the official sense. While we may not agree with their opinion, their argument rests on apparent biblical examples of

³BDAG, 3rd edition. 870.

deaconesses (Rom 16:1) and that the word γυναῖκας in 1 Tim 3:11 by itself doesn't tell us whether Paul meant wives of deacons or deaconesses, as the word can literally mean either "women" or "wives."

I find that the following translators notes from the NET Bible (Second Edition) provide a helpful summary of the arguments of both sides:

It is possible that this refers to women who serve as deacons, "deaconesses." [bold mine] The evidence is as follows: (1) The immediate context refers to deacons; (2) the author mentions nothing about wives in his section on elder qualifications (1 Tim 3:1–7); (3) it would seem strange to have requirements placed on deacons' wives without corresponding requirements placed on elders' wives; and (4) elsewhere in the NT, there seems to be room for seeing women in this role (cf. Rom 16:1 and the comments there).

The translation "wives"—referring to the wives of the deacons— [bold mine] is probably to be preferred, though, for the following reasons: (1) It would be strange for the author to discuss women deacons right in the middle of the qualifications for male deacons; more naturally they would be addressed by themselves. (2) The author seems to indicate clearly in the next verse that women are not deacons: "Deacons must be husbands of one wife." (3) Most of the qualifications given for deacons elsewhere do not appear here. Either the author has truncated the requirements for women deacons, or he is not actually referring to women deacons; the latter seems to be the more natural understanding. (4) The principle given in 1 Tim 2:12 appears to be an overarching principle for church life which seems implicitly to limit the role of deacon to men.⁴

B. In conclusion, I believe that Paul meant wives of deacons not deaconesses (1 Tim 3:11). Where Scripture seems to refer to some women as deaconesses (cf. Rom 16:1), it is not referring to those who hold a position of church leadership (deaconesses), but

⁴The NET Bible. Second Edition. Pg. 2270 in Logos Bible Software.

those who are characterized as “servants” or “ministers” in a church (cf. Rom 16:1); again, not the office (e.g., Col 1:7; 1 Tim 4:6). In Romans 16:1, Phoebe is being characterized as a minister of God to others. She has a servant’s heart, and she serves the needs of others. Such individuals are gifted in attending to the needs of others.

- C. A man cannot serve as a deacon if his wife does not exemplify godly conduct. Deacons’ wives must meet certain qualities. Notice that there is more to judge a woman on than her ability to perform duties in the home, there is also her character. No doubt these apply to wives of overseers as well. Wives of Deacons are to be...
1. **Reverent.** Like their husbands, deacons’ wives must be reverent. It means to be esteemed by others. Deacons’ wives are to have upstanding and righteous character which will evoke honor and respect.
 2. **Not slanderers.** She is not to engage in evil, malicious talk intended to damage or destroy another person (Ps. 31:13; 50:20; Ezek. 22:9).⁵ She is not to be gossiping (cf. 1 Tim 5:13). The same command is given of older women in the church (Titus 2:3). She is not to be like those who in the last days are characterized as slanderers (2 Tim 3:3).
 3. **Temperate.** The word means restrained in conduct, self-controlled, and level-headed. This same characteristic is required of elders (3:2) and older men (Titus 2:2). Deacons’ wives are temperate by showing control or moderation in their behavior by their words (e.g., not slanderers), appearance (1 Tim 2:9-10), and actions (1 Tim 2:15; in contrast see 1 Tim 5:11-15).
 4. **Faithful in all things.** The idea is that she is trustworthy in every respect. She shows herself as honest, reliable, and truthful to husband, children, and others in all areas of life— matters inside and outside the home.

⁵*Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc.

III. The Rewards for Excellent Service (v.13)

- A. Similar to Paul's encouragement to those aspiring to the office of elder (1 Tim 3:1), he concludes this list of qualifications with an encouragement to deacons. There are rewards for those deacons who serve well. Deacons who serve well gain for themselves 1) *a good standing* 2) and *great boldness in the faith* (Philemon 8).
- B. Deacons acquire these rewards through their actual doing of their ministry. In demonstrating their faithful service to the Lord in the church, they acquire for themselves an honorable reputation amongst the church body and acquire a greater confidence in the faith in Christ Jesus.
- C. Scripture teaches us that humility before God will result in exaltation by God (James 4:10; 1 Peter 5:6) and by the church (1 Thess 5:12-13). Through faithful service, deacons will obtain a standing that both elevates themselves and the office of deacon. What Paul is not saying is that we honor them with a ceremony—placing them in a position of honor, though some formal recognition may be appropriate—but that among God's people, deacons will obtain a good standing because of their faithful service. Good service generates a good standing.
- D. Deacons who serve well will also obtain for themselves great confidence in the faith. How does good serve result in greater confidence in the faith? Likely, Paul means that by serving well, deacons gain a greater boldness to act upon the truth as result of an increased personal faith in Christ Jesus, in which they already stand (Rom 5:1). Such progress in their faith will only further embolden them for greater service. Often in the NT, "greater boldness" means boldness or freedom in communication (of Jesus, Mk 8:32; Jn 10:24, 11:14; 18:20; of Paul, Acts 28:31; 2 Cor 3:12). This may mean that their greater confidence will not only be expressed toward God, but also toward others by speaking to others about spiritual matters with great boldness. God has given to us deacons who not only serve the church practically, but also demonstrate greater boldness in their faith through the spiritual wisdom they offer to the church members and the rest of the

church leadership. They demonstrate an un-ashamedness about spiritual truth and their own spiritual convictions.

Conclusion

Scripture has taught us that deacons are vitally important to the church. Therefore, they must meet certain qualifications. We do not hastily appoint deacons, but first examine them.

God is most concerned with the spiritual life of those in church leadership. If they fail to meet these criteria, they are unqualified to serve, no matter how they appear to be gifted.

There is no limit to the number of deacons that can serve, but they must meet the qualifications, as must their wives. Deacons who serve well will gain a good standing before God and the church and will have a greater confidence in the faith which will inevitably lead to more service and greater boldness in communicating the truth.