

Qualifications of a Deacon

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Date: 30 March 2025

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[0 : 00] 1 Timothy chapter 3, verses 8 through 13.

! 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 household well.

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.

May God add a blessing to the reading of his word. Would you please be seated? The word deacon and its related terms appear over 100 times in the New Testament and is translated in a variety of ways.

[1 : 20] Administration, cared for, minister, preparations, relief, support, serve, service, and servant. The original meaning of the word had to do with performing menial tasks, such as waiting on tables.

That's how it's used in John 25 when Jesus' mother Mary tells the servants, diakonos, who were waiting the tables at the wedding to do what Jesus told them to do as he performed the miracle of turning water into wine.

Luke uses a form of the word deacon in chapter 4, verse 39 to describe how after Jesus healed Peter's mother of her fever, she rose and began to serve them probably in reference to serving them a meal.

A lot of Southern Baptist churches and other churches have deacons, but often their deacons serve in a completely different way than what we see in the Bible.

Their role has morphed into this sort of half-elder, half-deacon position, and they end up doing a lot more leading or shepherding than they should and a lot less serving than they should.

[2 : 38] One commentator I read explained how a lot of churches view deacons. He said, In the mind of some Christians, deacons are those who meet together, sit in the front of the church, and talk poorly about the pastor.

Sometimes in some churches, deacons act as if their primary role is to shepherd or to protect the church from the pastor, who in their minds has the audacity to challenge the church's traditions and encourage the church to do something different.

When I've talked to other pastors with deacons who serve in that kind of a role, I've seen how it brings a lot of tension to their church. Instead of working together, they often feel at odds with one another, which creates disorder in the church.

There was disorder in the Ephesian church, which Timothy was pastoring. In Timothy's situation, a lot of the disorder was due to elders serving in leadership roles who did not meet the qualifications. They were false teachers teaching strange things, contradicting the truth of God's word, and seeking to lead the Lord's sheep astray. So Paul writes this letter to both encourage Timothy and instruct him in how to establish and promote order in the church.

[4 : 14] 1 Timothy 3, verses 14-15. Paul states his purpose. 1 Timothy 3, verses 14-15.

These men are deacons.

And like the elders, these men are needed, or I should say these men also need to be evaluated to discern if they possess the qualifications necessary to serve in this important role.

So the main idea for this morning's sermon is that men who aspire to serve as deacons must be evaluated to determine if they meet the qualifications.

Now this sermon, I'll tell you now, is going to mirror last week's sermon outline, but the content will not be the same.

[5 : 48] For some of you, depending on your background, the thought of having a plurality of elders, multiple elders leading the church was new to you, and it may have sounded strange to you.

But hopefully, if you've listened to the last two sermons that I've preached on that, you have seen from God's word that that is the model of leadership that he established for his church.

Now for some of you today, depending on your church background, what we're going to see about the role of a deacon may likewise seem strange to you.

So what I encourage you to do this morning, as much as you can, is to try your best to forget about the traditional picture or definition of a deacon you may have in your mind based upon tradition and listen to what the Bible says.

That's a good thing for us.

[7 : 16] That's a good thing for us.

That's a good thing for us. That's a good thing for us. That's a good thing for us. That's a good thing for us. That's a good thing for us. And the more closely we follow what the Bible says, the more we will thrive as a congregation.

That's something all of us should want. And for that to happen, we must do all that we can. We must do our part to ensure that our elders and our deacons meet the qualifications that Paul spells out for Timothy in our text this morning.

We must make sure that we have a biblical definition of these roles to prevent disorder in this place, which will distract us from our purpose and from our mission as the church of Jesus Christ.

And so today we're going to examine the position of a deacon in three areas of their lives that must be evaluated to determine if they meet the qualifications.

[8 : 42] In the first area, as was the case for elders, so is the case for deacons. We must evaluate their character. Verse 8 marks a transition from the qualifications for an elder to the qualifications for a deacon.

And just as Paul didn't share much about what elders do, besides that they're able to teach, so he doesn't share much here with us about what deacons do. His focus, again, primarily is on their character, not on their ability.

And as I mentioned last week, it is more important that a person possesses a Christ-like character that possesses any other ability that makes them seem like a great fit to serve in the church.

And though Paul doesn't list the duties of a deacon here, other passages in the Bible give us insight into their duties just as they do in other places for elders.

And so before I go into the qualifications of a deacon or the kind of man that a deacon is supposed to be, I want to spend some time looking at what deacons are supposed to do.

[9 : 51] After all, if we are to evaluate men to serve in this role, we must know something of what this role entails. The book of Acts records the actions of the Holy Spirit to establish the church of Jesus Christ first in Jerusalem, as he worked through the apostles and the members of the early church to spread the good news of Jesus Christ throughout the world.

After Jesus ascended back into heaven, the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus' disciples in a powerful and miraculous way.

They began sharing the gospel in many different languages, languages spoken by the many different visitors from distant lands who came to Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost, a festival that took place 50 days after Passover.

People were hearing the gospel in their own language for the first time. After this, Peter preached to them. The people were convicted of their sin.

They were encouraged to turn to Jesus as their Lord and Savior, and many of them did. Acts 2.41 says that about 3,000 people on that day were saved, becoming the first church and the only church, in the first church in the first church in Jerusalem.

[11 : 17] Many of those who came to celebrate the Passover from distant lands were saved, and so they decided to stay with the church in Jerusalem.

And to meet their needs, these first Christians pulled together their resources to help them, to help meet their needs. In chapters 3 through 5 of Acts, we read about how the church flourished through the preaching of the gospel and the miracles of the apostles, which verified that the message that they proclaimed was true.

And despite opposition from the Sanhedrin, the church continued to grow as more and more people were hearing the gospel, were being saved by God, and were joining the church.

But no church is perfect. Even the first church had problems that threatened its unity and order, problems that if not addressed would distract it from its purpose and from its mission.

We read about that problem in Acts chapter 6 verses 1 through 7. Now in those days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.

[12:36] And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty.

But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word. And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Tamas, and Parmenas, and Nicholas, a proselyte of Antioch.

These they set before the apostles and they prayed and laid their hands on them. And the word of God continued to increase, And the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

In Acts chapter 6, the Hellenists were Jews from the diaspora, the Jews who lived outside of Israel.

They perceived that their widows weren't receiving enough food or as much food as the others.

This was a problem. This was an opportunity for Satan to create disruption in the church by dividing its members according to their ethnicity, tempting them to pay more attention to what they didn't share in common than to the more important thing that they did share in common, which was their faith in Jesus Christ.

[14:11] The issue was distracting the apostles, who functioned as the church's elders, from preaching God's word. And so they instructed the church to evaluate and choose seven men with Christ-like character whom they would appoint to undertake this task.

And verse 7 records the result. The disciples weren't distracted from their task, from their duty to preach the word and pray. And these seven men resolved the issue.

And as a result of that, more disciples were made. The church continued to grow. The church continued to thrive. And so there's several principles about the deacon's duties here that we see that are important, I think, for us to stop and look at.

First, deacons meet needs according to God's word. In the Old Testament, which were the only scriptures that the first church had at this time, God commands that widows be cared for.

The disciples needed the deacons to help them execute, obey what God's word commanded as they focused on preaching God's word.

[15:34] Now, some areas of service, like passing out communion or helping people move, are not specifically mentioned in scripture, things that deacons here do, but they do fulfill a special need related to a scriptural mandate, which is that we are to love one another, we are to serve one another, and we are to help one another in the church.

Second, deacons lead by serving. They lead out in service. Again, the church in Acts, in Jerusalem, had over 3,000 members.

It would be difficult for seven men to serve every single member of the church by themselves. So I think we're safe to assume that these men also served by leading in an organizational and administrative way because all Christians are commanded by God to serve one another.

It's not just deacons who are doing all the serving. They help members of the church serve because we are all commanded to serve one another. We have all received spiritual gifts from God, from the Holy Spirit, that he commands us to use in service to each other.

1 Peter 4, 10 through 11 says, as each has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace. Whoever speaks is one who speaks oracles of God.

[17:07] Whoever serves is one who serves by the strength that God supplies in order that in everything, God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever.

Amen. Amen. The deacon's duty then is to lead by serving. So in our case today, it might look like setting up tables in the fellowship hall for a church event.

It might look like distributing communion, which we do the second Sunday of the month, and the deacons lead in that by serving. It might look like organizing trucks and trailers and workers to help a church member move, and we've done that before.

Deacons aren't the only members of the church who serve. They lead out by serving, by organizing, by communicating, by helping other members in the church, by serving alongside of them so that the needs of the church are met as mandated in God's work.

Third, deacons don't operate as some kind of second leadership group outside of the elders' oversight. Unfortunately, that's how a lot of churches see their deacons. Again, men who supervise the pastor and the staff.

[18 : 23] But that's not their function according to the Bible. They lead by serving, meeting the physical, tangible needs of the church.

And so thus, fourthly, they alleviate tension within the church by making sure that unmet physical needs don't become opportunities for Satan to create spiritual disunity.

In Acts 6, church members were beginning to complain against one another. Deacons were appointed to squelch that tension and promote unity within the body, within the church.

Again, this runs counter to what we've unfortunately seen in a lot of churches, where deacons are seen more as the chief complainers instead of the lead servants.

In the Bible, deacons are to strive to promote unity in the church by making sure that the elders can stay focused on their task to shepherd the flock and ensure that the flock's physical needs are met in accordance with what God commands in the Bible.

[19 : 35] deacons function as models of spiritual virtue and service. Thus, we must evaluate the character of the men who would serve in this important role.

And so Paul says to Timothy that the first qualification for a deacon in verse 8 is that they must be dignified. The Greek word for dignified can also be translated as serious or stately.

The idea here is of someone who takes spiritual things seriously and conducts themselves in ways that aren't silly or that don't take the role of deacon flippantly.

For example, when we take communion, again, we have the deacons come around and they pass out the elements for those who maybe didn't pick them up on their way into the sanctuary.

If a deacon wasn't dignified, if they didn't meet this qualification, they might act as if they're a hot dog vendor at a baseball game, right? Who needs their communion?

[20 : 40] Communion! Got your communion here. That wouldn't be dignified. That would be flippant. That would be quality that is not fit for a deacon. Deacons are to take spiritual things seriously.

Paul then lists three negative traits that should not characterize deacons. First, he says deacons are not double-tongued. This describes not someone so much who gossips, but someone who says one thing to one person and another thing to another person and those things contradict one another.

Such a person lacks integrity, consistency, and honesty. A man who does this will lose credibility with others quickly. So a deacon must be a man who is trustworthy and who is trustworthy to receive tasks and to complete those tasks meeting the needs of the church members.

He must demonstrate that he is someone who is trustworthy to do it. Next, Paul says that a deacon should not be addicted to much wine. As with elders, deacons must be ready to serve.

They must be examples to others in the church that they are controlled by Christ. They are not controlled by substances. And so they don't abuse substances that would hinder their service to the church or their witness as a follower of Jesus Christ.

[22 : 05] Deacons are also not greedy for dishonest gain. In some churches, many, or maybe even in the early church, deacons would collect and they would help distribute the offerings received from church members.

So like an elder and like a church member, a deacon must be above the temptation to get rich for themselves to profit in sinful ways, to take things that don't belong to them, or to charge members of the church for services that they should give freely.

Instead, they should be generous with their time, their talents, and their treasures, just as all Christians should. In verse 9, Paul adds that deacons must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.

The mystery Paul talks about here is the truths previously hidden in God's word but are revealed now in Jesus Christ. The mystery of his incarnation, 1 Timothy 3.16.

The mystery of his indwelling believers, 1 Corinthians 1.26-27. The mystery of the unity between Jews and Gentiles in Jesus, Ephesians 1.9. And the mystery of the saving power of the gospel,

Galatians 4.3.

[23 : 21] The conscience is the God-given faculty of the human mind to warn us from doing things and behaving in ways that are sinful.

And so a deacon who has a clear conscience demonstrates obedience to the Lord, showing that he is ruled by Christ and isn't double-tongued, he isn't addicted to substances, he's not greedy for dishonest gain.

Thus, he is dignified and qualified to serve as far as his character is concerned. This takes time to evaluate as Paul says in verse 10.

And let them also be tested first, then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. Now again, unfortunately, I've seen many churches ordain men because they meet one qualification.

They show up to church more than other men do. That should be a given, not a qualification. So when you nominate men to serve in our church with the approval of the elders as deacons, evaluate their character.

[24 : 40] Do they possess these qualities? Then also evaluate this next aspect of their life.

Evaluate their care for their families. Verses 11 through 12 again says, their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things.

Let deacons be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. Now here is where there is debate among theologians about whether or not women can serve as deacons.

I'm not going to spend too much time on this, but there are good pastors who love the Lord, who trust in His Word, and think that women can serve as deacons.

And this is why they believe that. They say that when Paul uses the word likewise, he's making a transition again. In this case, they say making the transition from male deacons to female deacons. And they believe this is the case because they ask why would he address deacons' wives and not elders' wives? You notice you look up there's no mention of the elders' wife and her character.

[25 : 57] Also they say the Greek word translated as wives in the ESV can also be translated as women. And since a deacon does not have the duty of preaching the word, they say women can serve as deacons.

Now here's why I don't think that's right and also why I don't think it matters. Men are designed by God to be the spiritual leaders in the home and in the church.

So it makes sense that deacons who lead out by serving as examples to the church are men. Also in verse 12 Paul says let deacons each be the husband of one wife managing their children and their household well but he doesn't say anything about if he's intending it to be a woman deacon he doesn't say anything about her being the wife of one husband or also training her children to know the Lord.

And again I think he mentions that because the family is the proving ground man is fit to lead. Whether that be as an elder or as a deacon.

If they can't do it at home they won't do it at church. If they don't do it for their family members they won't do it for church members. And here's why I think it doesn't really matter.

[27 : 23] In the long run and the big picture it doesn't really matter because all of us are called to serve and you shouldn't need a title to do that.

In Matthew 23 Jesus addressed the crowd and he tells them not to be like the Pharisees who pride themselves on positions and titles.

Matthew 28 8-12 He says but you are not to be called rabbi for you have one teacher and you are all brothers and call no man your father on earth for you have one father who is in heaven neither be called instructors for you have one instructor the Christ the greatest among you shall be your servant whoever exalts himself will be humbled and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

While elders oversee the church and deacons lead the way by making sure the physical needs are met in accordance to God's word and so that all of us can serve again we're all called to serve and all of us at times or many of us I should say at times function as leaders under the elders supervision Hannah leads our children's ministry and she does a great job other women in our church lead our women's ministries they teach those discipleship groups they teach in Awana they teach in children's sunday school classes and in the nursery they help organize a lot of other important things that we do as a church we have a lot of women doing deacon type things and so I

think we should evaluate them based upon what we read here in Paul's instruction to Timothy that they be dignified also that they not be slanderers but sober minded and that they also be faithful in all things and deacons and elders wives should be Christians who act like Christ we don't need that written here I think for us to know that that should be a qualification but it helps the elders in the church to have men who set the example of service in the church and who model that example in their home by caring for their families and for all of us we should serve and we shouldn't serve just because of a title again Jesus is our ultimate example of this who didn't need a title to do what he did Philippians chapter 2 verses 1 through 11 or I should say who wasn't aspiring for a title but who was aspiring to serve so if there is any encouragement in Christ any comfort from love any participation in the spirit any affection and sympathy complete my joy by being of the same mind having the same love being in full accord of one mind do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit but in humility count others more significant than yourselves let each of you look not only to his own interest but also to the interest of others have this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ [30 : 48] Jesus who though he was in the form of God did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant being born in the likeness of men and being found in human form he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death even death on a cross therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ as Lord to the glory of God the Father the one title I guess we should say that we should all aspire to have is servant slave we should all seek to be deacons to one another now the third area of evaluation evaluate their commitment to Christ 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 those who serve well as deacons Paul says serve well because they don't do it for themselves they serve others because they want to serve the Lord and as a result they receive the blessings that come from God for being obedient to performing the duty that he's assigned to them again this should be true of all of us it's good to do good for the glory of Jesus the confidence Paul talks about here is a confidence that comes when you serve God well and when you see his power and his grace at work through you to others that emboldens deacons and all Christians for greater service when I first came to Highland Park about eight years ago remember for those of you who are here we had engage events remember the engage events that we did and COVID kind of put a halt to that and we still do some of those things but just not with that name we're being intentional but back then we were really intentional about going out into our community together spreading out and doing things in service to them to show them love but primarily we did it because we wanted to show them the love of Christ and we wanted to share the gospel with them and I remember when we did those things as we've done other things when we gathered together as a church to serve we enjoy it we enjoy serving alongside one another as we serve the Lord together being salt and light remember when we were doing some demolition in the nursery and doing some work down there and I'd see you guys down there working and there's just something different about doing work with other Christians for the Lord isn't there than just doing work there's enjoyment in it because we know that we're doing something good not primarily for ourselves but for others and ultimately for the Lord when the church orders itself according to God's design with a plurality of elders multiple elders overseeing the church shepherding the sheep meeting the spiritual needs with deacons leading the way by serving keeping us organized so that we can meet the physical needs that we have as a church in accordance to God's word the members will be blessed by that the needs will be met and the world can't help but notice and there's results

I'm going to read the results again from Acts chapter 6 verse 7 there was a problem they addressed it in the right way they had order in the church and as a result of that the word of God continued to increase and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith when we do things according to God's word and we do them according to his ways God works through that in ways that glorify him so how should we adjust to what we've heard this morning again be cautious as you consider who is qualified to serve the church in the role of deacons and the role of many other things we should be cautious as we consider and make sure that those who are leading are doing it for the Lord and not doing it for themselves when I in college know you've heard me share many of my old stories about being a

college baseball player and I'm sure I present myself as being a lot better than I truly was that happens as you move along in life as you remember the good and you forget about some of the bad don't you but I was a pitcher and you know it's unfair in baseball because pitchers get credit for the win and they get credit for the loss

I mean you could pitch nine innings and give up one run and if your team doesn't score at all you get the loss you could pitch five innings and give up ten runs and if your team scores eleven you get the win and as pitchers we pride ourselves on those W's you know and certainly when we're the one on the mound there is a little bit of man rooting a little bit harder for your teammates to score runs some of us were better at hiding it than others one guy was terrible at it he would if he wasn't pitching he would sit in the dugout and he would just cut it up not really pay attention to what was going on but if he was on the mound he was out front of the dugout he was cheering everybody on he was you know slapping people on the back and giving them all kinds of attaboys if they were playing well using the team to get the win instead of working with the team to get the win and there's a difference we need elders deacons and church members who are in it for Christ and not in it for themselves who work together who support one another as a team that Christ will get all the glory that Jesus will win winning lost souls winning our community we

[37 : 59] I think as a church in many ways we're we're we're doing this and praise God for that praise God for those who have established this order long ago but we can excel still more can't we Hebrews 10 24 through 25 says and let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day drawing near we work together encouraging one another serving one another that Jesus will win and here's the thing Jesus has already won amen man what a great thing to play if we're talking about sports to play in a game and knowing that you're already gonna win still gotta play but it's so much more fun to play when you know that victory is certain for you here this morning you're not a believer hear me say that Jesus has won and Jesus shares the victory and he wants to share his victory with you he came he emptied himself taking on the form of a servant to live the sinless life that we couldn't live to die the death that we all deserved and who rose again victorious over the enemies that we could never defeat and if you would turn to him an acknowledgement of your sin and your need for him to be your savior he will save you he will give you his victory and whom the lord saves he keeps and he gives them eternal life and he gives them the privilege to be one of his disciples to be a part of his church to be a part of the greatest purpose and mission that there is in all the world to share the good news of Jesus

Christ I'll be here after I pray you can come find me sometime afterwards I'd love to speak with you I'd love to answer any other questions that you might have about anything that you've heard in the word in the message today or any questions you might have about Jesus who is the good shepherd who laid down his life for his sheep let's pray Lord we thank you again for this time that we've had to meditate on your word to analyze what it says to analyze our lives and our church and to see if it matches and God I'm thankful that in many ways for us at Highland Park it matches but Lord we know that there's always wolves wanting to infiltrate disguise the sheep and so Lord we must always be on our guard you told us to do that and Lord we must always make sure that we are doing what you've told us to do as laid out to us in your word and so

God help us to continue to do that to strive in doing that to thrive in doing that that you would be glorified and Lord help us also to keep in mind who you were who you are and what you did that Lord you didn't aspire for certain titles when you came you aspired to be a servant and you did so by giving your life to atone for our sins and Lord you've told us that the greatest among us is the one who doesn't seek to be great as far as titles or positions go but to seek to be a servant of others a servant of all and so Lord I pray for all of us at Highland Park that we would all seek to be deacons in that way that we would never see a task as being too above us or unimportant for us Lord but that we would love one another in the ways that you've enabled us to and that as a result of that Lord our light will shine more brightly and I pray that through that Lord more people will be saved and that all of it

Father would give you glory we ask these things in Jesus name Amen . Thank you.