

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Qualified Servants for the Church--Deacons, Part 1

Scripture: 1 Timothy 3:8

Code: 54-25

Let's open our Bibles then to 1 Timothy chapter 3...1 Timothy chapter 3. This morning and next Lord's day morning we're going to be talking about a familiar subject in the church, the leadership role that the Bible identifies as deacons...deacons.

Now I grew up for the most part in Baptist churches. My father was a Baptist pastor in my years of growing up until he took an independent Bible church when I was in college. But prior to that we grew up in a Baptist church. And the standing line in the Baptist church was that the only kids worse than the preacher's kids were the deacon's kids. And if any of you have grown up with a Baptist background, perhaps you have been in the clutches of such an errant philosophy as well.

But the term "deacon" may conjure up all kinds of things to us. As I look back in my heritage on the term "deacon" I have all kinds of memories of certain rather austere men who grabbed me by the ear and marched me out of the Sundayschool class. I hate to admit that but on several occasions that indeed did occur. Deacons in my young life sort of represented authority in the church. In some churches they are the official leaders. In most of the churches in which I grew up the deacons were the spiritual leaders of the church. Very often they are the ruling body of the church and even the pastor may be employed by and work for the deacons.

In some churches the title "deacon" is something people seek to attain because with it comes a certain badge of honor and respect in the community. Though the title itself seems to signify no particular duty and no particular spiritual qualification. In other churches there are no deacons at all. They just seem to ignore the issue. In some churches deacons are identified, particularly in liturgical churches, as sort of a suborder to priests. They are a clerical order underneath the priests who carry out the duties of maintaining the facilities or administrating some tasks.

If you have in your life time been involved at all in the Masonic Lodge, you would know that in the Masonic Lodge there are also deacons. And they have a certain function in that order, as well.

We're all familiar with the word. It is not uncommon for someone who is particularly religious or spiritual or gives a Christian testimony at work or on an athletic team or among students to be called as a result of that deacon because that's sort of a byword for somebody who is really into church.

Deacon is a marvelous term. And somehow we would like to sort of suck out of that term everything that doesn't belong there and redefine it for you so you'll understand what the Bible means when it talks about the responsibility of a deacon. The term is mentioned here in 1 Timothy 3 verse 8, refers to the deacons. It mentions it again in verse 10, again in verse 12, again in verse 13. These are various forms of a Greek word, diakonos, diakonia, diakoneo being the three particular forms. One referring to servant, another to service, and another the verb to serve.

Now here in this section we're going to deal with the matter of the responsibility of the deacons in the church. And I want you to understand, this is very important, that in no sense does Paul in writing to Timothy present the deacons as an inferior group of people to the elders or overseers or pastors. In fact, you will find as we go through this the next two weeks that the qualifications for being a deacon are not in any sense inferior to the qualifications for being an elder. The function is distinct in some ways, not distinct in other ways. But the qualifications are basically the same. They both look at a man's personal life, character, home life, leadership capability and commitment to the service of the Lord in the church. There is no lessening of the spiritual standard, it is right up there alongside those in the leadership responsibility at the overseer or elder or pastoral level.

Let's look at verses 8 to 13. Let me read them to you so you have it in mind. "Likewise, or in like manner, the deacons must be serious, not doubletongued, not holding near to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre, holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proven. Then let them use the office of a deacon being found blameless. Even so women...implied women deacons...must be serious, not slanderers, sober minded, faithful in all things. Let the deacons be onewoman men, ruling their children and their own houses well for they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good standing and great assurance in the faith which is in Christ Jesus."

Now just from an initial reading of that you can see the lofty quality of the men and women, they're mentioned also in verse 11, who serve in the role of deacon in the church. There is no diminishing of spiritual quality. There is no less a premium on spiritual maturity and moral purity in the role of deacon when compared with the role of elder.

Now let's talk a little bit about what it means when it uses the term "deacon." It's very important for us to get an understanding of this. The term used here is basically a very familiar term, diakonos. It is diakonos meaning servant, diakonia, as I said, service, diakoneo to serve. Those terms are used at least 100 times in the New Testament. Very very familiar terms.

Now the original sense of those terms had to do with serving, very general...any kind of service would be in mind. In our text the word are transliterated rather than translated. Only two places in the New Testament did the translators of the Authorized King James version choose to translate those terms...or rather choose to transliterate those terms into deacon rather than just translate them. The

word diakonos or diakonia means servant or service, that's its translation. To take diakonos and make it deacon is to create a word. To make diakonia translate into the office of deacon is again to transliterate it. It doesn't really translate it, it just takes the word and gives English letters to it. The words here really are simply the word servant...servant. And in its original meaning it had the idea of primarily serving tables. It probably was the basic word for waiter, someone who serves a table. But through usage it came to broaden until it meant any kind of service at all...any kind. It didn't matter what kind...wide, wide range of service.

Now it is nonspecific for the most part until it gets to 1 Timothy 3. And then the word becomes specific and that is why the translators chose for really only the second time in Scripture, the other being Philippians 1:1 where they must have believed it was specific also, referring there to the bishops and deacons of Philippi. Only in those cases, those two passages, Philippians 1:1 and here, do they transliterate it as if to set it apart so that we understand it is not now being used in a general sense but in a more specific sense to refer to a group of chosen and select people called to be the leaders of the serving of the church. But it is a very broad term in its general usage and only becomes specifically identified with a certain individual and certain qualifications right here in 1 Timothy 3. Until we get to 1 Timothy 3, with the exception only of Philippians 1:1 which may be an allusion to the office, every other use of these terms is general...non specific and doesn't necessarily refer to any specific office in the church.

In fact, the word diakonos, diakonia, diakoneo, are to us like the words servant, serve, serves, service. Very general, we go to a gas station and get service. We play tennis and serve. We serve our employer. We serve our nation. I mean, the words are very very general. And that is exactly the way they're used in the New Testament. And so, to get a little bit of an insight into them, I want to do a little bit of a word study so we have a bit of a grasp on what we have arrived at in 1 Timothy 3. And this, I said to my wife Patricia this morning, I said I think this is going to be more like a Sundayschool lesson than a sermon but I want to cover this ground so your understanding is clear.

For the most part, at least 100 usages of this term are always translated serve, or minister...servant or minister. There are a few exceptions. For example, there are some places where the word is translated administration because of the context. Some places, I'm thinking of Acts 11:29, it is translated relief because the service was giving some resources to people who were in a famine and they use it for the word relief and so that's the way they translated it. It does have a few other translations, but for the most part any of these three Greek words would come up with serving or ministering as their basic translation. But whatever you translate it, whether you want to give it a little nuance in the context that helps you to understand what it means or not basically is very very general in terms of meaning.

Now as I said, the root idea is that of serving food. And we perhaps need to grasp that for a moment. The original and limited meaning of it in its beginning comes through in John 2. Jesus, you know, is at

the wedding of Cana. And His mother comes and His mother said to the servants, John 2:5, and by the way the servants is diakonos, His mother said to the waiters, the people serving the food, and the drinks and getting the water and all of that, whatever He says to you, do it. And when the head waiter tasted the water which had become wine and did not know where it came from but the diakonos who had drawn the water knew, the head waiter called the bridegroom.

So here you have diakonos used for a group of waiters at a wedding, the people serving the food, serving the drink, and so forth and so on. That's its very root meaning.

And then there's a wonderful passage in Luke 4 that tells us a lot about a Jewish mother. Peter's mother-in-law, you remember, was very ill. In Luke 4:39 Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law and it says immediately she arose and began to wait on them. And the word there is diakoneo. She began to serve a meal. Typical fashion, she's been very ill, extremely ill. She's instantly healed and does what every good Jewish mother does, starts to cook lunch. I mean, that was the first reaction that she had. She served them. So again it's the idea of serving a meal.

You find three other texts at least in the gospel where the term diakonos refers to serving at a meal. John 12:2; Luke 10:40 and Luke 17:8. The word then started as a word related to serving a meal. It broadened to all kinds of general service. For example, in Romans 13:4, a soldier or a policeman is called a diakonos, a deacon, a servant. They serve the government. They serve justice. They serve law and order. They punish evil doers and reward those who do well.

In a general sense in John 12:26 Jesus said, "If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me." And what He said by that was anything you do to follow Jesus constitutes diakonia, service or ministry. So in this sense it's very very broad.

That leads me to say that as the gospel writers and the epistle writers adapt the term, they use it in a broad sense for all kinds of spiritual service. In other words, they took their cue from Jesus and when He said if anyone serves Me, let him follow Me, they pick up the idea that life for the one who follows Christ is service to Him. And they talk about spiritual service as a part of the Christian's life...in fact, the major part. Anything we do in obedience to God's Word is service...anything.

So in that sense, just to juggle words a little bit, we're all in the ministry, right? We're all in the diakonia, we're all in the service. And that's the first level you must understand because I wouldn't want for a minute that we should come up with some idea that deacons serve and everybody else watches. I don't want us to think for a moment that there is a leadership level, elders and pastors, there is a service level, deacons, and then there is a spectator level. There is no spectator level. There is no audience in the church really. We are all in the ministry. We are all in the service. We've all been called to submit ourselves in obedience to serving the Lord Jesus Christ. He says, "Where I am there shall My servant also be. And of anyone serves Me the Father will honor him." Again that's

from John 12:26. So we're all His servants, we're all serving Him. That's the way of life for all of us. And we have to keep that in mind. And for the most part, the uses of the terms in the Greek relate to that broad category of spiritual service that every believer is engaged in. All of us are serving...serving the Lord.

Now having started at that point, we remind ourselves of 1 Corinthians 12:5 that within this broad range of service, 1 Corinthians says there are varieties of gifts and manifestations and also varieties of diakonia. There are varieties of service. All Christians are in some form of spiritual service. All are ministers. All are deacons in that general sense because we all are to serve in a variety of ways. Paul refers in 2 Corinthians 4:1 to his service. He refers in 2 Corinthians 9:1 again to the serving that anyone does in behalf of the saints.

In 2 Corinthians 9:1 I just want to read it to you, I think it's well put. "For as touching the ministering to the saints..." he says. In other words, I want to speak for a moment about the serving of the saints that we're all engaged in. We serve God, Paul says in Acts 20 serving the Lord. Here he says we serve the saints. We're all engaged in service. We serve God...mark this...we serve God every time we obey His Word and every time we obey His Spirit, we are serving God. Every time I do that which is right, I'm offering service to Him. We serve one another in the meeting of needs. But we're all engaged in that kind of spiritual service. In fact, Ephesians 4:12 says that there were given to the church evangelists, and teaching pastors for the perfecting of the saints for the work of the service, the work of the diakonia.

In other words, our job as elders and pastors is to perfect the saints so they can do their service. All of us are called then as servants of Christ. That means we're under orders. He is our Lord. He is our master. We've been called into spiritual service. We serve Him, as I said, by obeying the Word of God. We serve Him by following the promptings of the Spirit of God, by coming under the authority of the church, by meeting the needs of those around us. We are primarily engaged in spiritual service.

It would be one thing to say, "I'm proud to be able to serve my country," or "I'm proud to have served this great cause," nothing even comes close to being able to say "I have been called into service unto the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, Jesus Christ Himself." That is our high and holy calling. That is the vocation, as Paul calls it in Ephesians 4, to which we are called. That is our high calling. That is our walk as servants.

Now having said that, that we are all involved in service, let me step up a bit from that to a second level. Look at Romans chapter 12. And here we find these terms used of something a bit more specific. In Romans chapter 12 there is a list here of varying gifts given to the body of Christ. We all know about the spiritual gifts, we've taught much about that through the years. It says in verse 6 that...verse 4 says we're all in one body but we don't all have the same function. We are many and we have differing gifts. They differ according to the grace, that is God's grace, God has graciously

given us differing gifts.

Then he goes on to discuss...prophecy and those who have that gift should operate according to the proportion of faith given for the use of that gift. And then he says, if the gift of ministry, then we need to be concentrating on our ministry. Now the ministry and ministering in verse 7 is again this same word group, diakonia, diakonos, diakoneo, it's the same thing. So he's saying here that there are special gifts of service, special gifts of serving. It would be parallel to his mention of the gifts of helps in 1 Corinthians. There are some people who are just a...I guess you could say a cut above everybody else because they are uniquely designed by God to serve. So you start with that broad level, everybody is in the service of Christ. There are some, however, who are specially gifted to function in that way. It doesn't mean the rest of us don't do it, it just means that they do it in a unique sense. They serve as a special way of life, energized by the Spirit of God.

For example, to meet such a person, or more than one, look at 1 Corinthians 16. This is an interesting characterization. It says in 1 Corinthians 16:15, just a rather incidental thought here but it's germane to our point, at the end of this great epistle he speaks of a very specific family. "I beseech you, brethren, you know the house of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia," that is the first converts in the province of Achaia. And look at this, "And that they have devoted themselves to the diakonia of the saints."

Now it just may well be that here is a family in which all are serving and perhaps some are uniquely gifted. And so their whole family is characterized as those who serve the saints. So, beloved, then all of us are serving, some of us are uniquely gifted for that. We all are called to that. You can't say, "Ah, look, I'm not responsible, I'm not...I'm not anything special, I'm just a normal Christian, I don't have any obligation." You can't do that. You are obligated to serve as a way of life. Some of you are specially gifted for that. And that must be recognized as well.

So, the term can be used generally. It can be used a bit more specifically to refer to those who in the exercise of their spiritual gifts are placed in positions of faithful service assisting and helping others in menial and common areas of responsibility. Now that's really...that's really the sweep of everything that dominates the New Testament relative to the area of service. It's just very general and then especially those that are gifted.

But what about deacons? Well, deacons don't even appear in my judgment in any definition until 1 Timothy 3 and only in 1 Timothy 3. It is the only discussion of the specific office. So we would say then there's a third category. Everybody is serving on this level. Some people on the next step up are uniquely gifted and then the next step up would be those who are in the office of a servant in the church and we know them as deacons, though they well could be called Servants, with a capital S. So you have three levels of service in the church: that which is rendered by everyone, that which is rendered by those uniquely gifted by the Spirit for it, and that which is done by those who are officially

placed in an office of service and become the leaders and the models of service for everybody else in the church.

Now it is important to recognize that those people are deacons not because they're to do all the work but because they're to model the proper kind of service for everyone else. You see, as I've been saying all along and I want to say it again, the reason you have elders is not to set them apart as the more holy, and then some people believe, "Well, the deacons are less holy." I've heard people actually say, "Well he couldn't be an elder, he doesn't have his life together, let's make him a deacon." No, no, no, no...no, you don't say, "Well, this guy might be an elder but, boy, he's got so many problems we better make him a deacon and let him prove himself." Nono. And then you have people in group three who say, "You can't expect anything from me, I'm not an elder or a deacon. I just go here." See. "Don't...what do you want out of me? I just go here." Wait a minute. The reason you have elders is not to say, "Well, here's a spiritual standard, they're different," but to say, "Here's a spiritual standard, we're to all be like that." Same is true with deacons. Deacons are the models of spiritual virtue. They stand in that sense alongside the elders, there's no diminishing. You don't have elders here and deacons here spiritually. The elders have the authority because they carry the power of the Word of God in their teaching emphasis. But the deacons from the standpoint of spiritual modeling are equal. In fact, there's no difference between the spiritual qualifications of the two.

So, these are to be equally godly men. But men whose strength is not in the teaching area, that's the difference. That's where a pastor and an elder and an overseer steps apart. His overall responsibility is in the ruling of the church through the authority of the understanding and proclamation of the Word of God. But right along side him come those who implement what he teaches, who implement the ministry and whose lives are no less godly than his. And the reason is to pull the whole congregation to that level, not to set those people apart and say, "Well they're the abnormal pious ones, none of us could ever be expected to live that like." Quite the contrary. The message of what a deacon is to be is a message of what you and I are to be because they're there to model that for us.

So the first time you really even confront the idea of the office of deacon as such is 1 Timothy 3. Philippians 1:1 says that this letter is written to those at Philippi, including the overseers and diakonos. It may well be there that those are official deacons, we can't be dogmatic. It could be just the leaders and the followers in a general sense. But when you come to 1 Timothy 3, it is definitely specific.

Now let me say something that's a very important point for understanding this. I don't believe that until you get to 1 Timothy 3 you meet anything specific about deacons at all. In fact, I don't think there are any deacons named as such in the Scripture. Some people have wanted to say that Paul was a deacon. In fact, that's been a major point with some who want to advocate that deacon rulership, that Paul was a deacon. Paul was not a deacon. The best explanation of that would come from Romans 11. And I could give you a lot of Scriptures that emphasize his apostleship, but I think this one is

perhaps as good as any. Romans 11:13, he says, "I speak to you Gentiles," and then he tells us who he is, "inasmuch as I am the Apostle of the Gentiles." Now if you want to know who he is, then ask him and he'll tell you. He's not a deacon, he is the Apostle of the Gentiles. Now watch this, "I magnify my office." Interesting, the word "office" here is diakonia. I magnify my ministry. I magnify my service. Yes he is a deacon in the general non specific sense that all of us whatever our ministry involvement is a service to God. But his office is that of an Apostle. So he is only a nonspecific deacon and a specific Apostle. He makes that very very clear. He talks about his ministry, his service many times and uses the word diakonia but always clear to say his office is the office of an Apostle. So, Paul was not a deacon. In fact in 2 Corinthians 10,11 and 12 it clearly lays out the fact that he is defending there his Apostleship.

Now some people also feel that Timothy was a deacon. In 1 Timothy, where you are, you'll look at verse 6 of chapter 4. First Timothy 4:6 Paul says to Timothy, "If you put the brethren in remembrance of these things, you'll be a good diakonos." So some have said, "You see, Timothy was a deacon. He was even a good deacon." Which is even better than being just a plain deacon. He was a good deacon nourished up in the words of faith and good doctrine to which he attained. But the point here again is we know that Timothy was not a deacon in the traditional sense, obviously. In fact, in 2 Timothy 4:5 Paul says to him, "Do the work of an evangelist and then make full proof of your diakonia." In other words, his diakonia generally was the role of an evangelist, his office was an evangelist, his office was a proclaimer, a preacher in many ways distinct from the office of a deacon.

Some feel that Tychicus in Ephesians 6:21 who is called faithful diakonos must have been a deacon. But not so. In Ephesians the word diakonos is used three times and never in a technical way, always of general service. Some people feel Epaphras, Colossians 1:7, called faithful diakonos was a formal deacon, it's very unlikely that he was. We have no reason to assume that. So we don't have any specifics about the office of deacon at all until we get to 1 Timothy.

Now somebody immediately is going to say, "What about Acts 6?" So let's turn to Acts 6. This is a fascinating account. And most people who have advocated the diakonate in the church have felt that Acts 6 is where it was born and that you have in Acts 6 the first deacons. But there are several things to note. The one thing I want you to remember here is this. In Acts 6, the seven men chosen by the church for the work here are never called deacons. They are never called deacons. Let's start at verse 1. "In those days, the days of the early church," and frankly, it was actually the Passover time, the number of the disciples was multiplied in excess of 20 thousand people now believed, many of them are pilgrims, they've come into the city. They've believed in Christ. The church has been born. They've stayed. So they've got a lot of foreigners on their hands, Hellenistic Jews. There were two kinds of Jews, Jerusalem Jews and nonJerusalem Jews...I mean, Palestinian Jews and non Palestinian Jews. There were the Jews who lived in the land of Palestine and those who had been scattered in the dias(?) fora(?) who lived out in the Greek world. But at Passover the pilgrims all came in so you had both the Palestine Jews and the Hellenists, as they were called from the Greek term

meaning Greek. So they were all together there.

So what happened was, as they were all there, this huge group of Christians now in the multiplying church, there is a murmuring, and that's an problem, being surfaced by the talk of people. It's comforting to know they did it even in the early church. So there arose a murmuring. And the griping, basically, came from the Grecians, or the Hellenistics, the nonPalestinian Jews, against the Palestinian Jews because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations.

Now they were trying to serve all these widows that there were, there might have been several hundred widows who had come from the outside and others who were from Palestine and widows were the care of the church. The church, by the way, had inherited that from the Jews. The Jews had a very very strong commitment to the care of the poor and the needy. They had gotten that, of course, from God's instruction in the Old Testament. And, in fact, they had very very sophisticated means for doing this. To put it into a little pattern, every Friday in every Jewish community some men went around the marketplace and around the houses and they collected money from everybody to give to the poor and the needy. They got all the donations they could get. This was then distributed to those in need by committees of no less than two people, for obvious reasons, they didn't want anybody stealing the money. And when they went to the poor of the community, they would only give them enough for fourteen meals, that's two meals a day for seven days. And if they already possessed a week's food in the house, they couldn't get anything. This distribution was called the *koopa*(?), which means the basket. They would disseminate it out of typically a basket.

In addition to this, there was a daily collection of food from house to house for those who were in an emergency situation and needed food for that very day and this was called the *tamwi*(?) or the tray. And they went around offering this to people in need.

Well, the church coming out of Judaism picked up on this. The Jews didn't even emphasize one person giving to another in need, they emphasized giving it to the synagogue, let the synagogue disseminate it so that the responsibility is in the hands of wise men who were doing it properly. So here they've got this responsibility. And there's an argument going on in the church because the Hellenistic Jewish widows don't feel they're getting a fair shake in the provision of food that is being distributed, the church obviously having picked up this wonderful ministry from their Jewish roots.

How they going to solve it? Verse 3, pardon me, verse 2, "The twelve called the multitude of the disciples to them and said, It's not right or fitting, proper, that we should leave the Word of God and serve tables." Now here is a line of demarcation. Some people in the church need to be doing the Word of God and other people need to be taking care of the business. That line of demarcation does stand when you get to the pastoral epistles. We've got to do what we've got to do and we've got to find somebody to do the rest. It was not the Apostles' priority to leave the Word to serve food. They've got thousands upon thousands of people. Remember this, they're all brand new converts. They're

from all over the world and these twelve men are trying to get them all disciplined before they leave.

They had a tremendous task on their hand. And they really didn't want to get stuck trying to figure out how to bring equity and parity to the matter of food distribution. So they wanted to get somebody else to do that, verse 3, "Wherefore, brethren, look among you and find seven men who are honest." Obviously they're going to have a lot of money on their hands. "Full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom." Why do they need the Spirit and wisdom? Because they're going to have to discern where real need exists. "And we'll appoint them over this task...over this task." Notice that they were appointed for a specific task. There's no office here. There's no ongoing function here. We're going to get them to figure out how to do this task. This, may I be so bold?, one task. "And we," verse 4, "will continue to give ourselves to prayer and the diakonia of the Word."

The only use of the term diakonia here is in reference to the Apostles. And then back in verse 1 in reference to the daily diakonia of serving the widows. Nowhere does it call these men deacons. The Apostles were doing their deaconing, their serving and the people passing out food were doing their serving, too. But these are not called deacons specifically. It is interesting to note that in the early church in Rome, I shouldn't say the early church, the postapostolic church of Rome only allowed seven deacons. They picked up on this and made it the standard. And they had seven deacons in the church at Rome for the purpose of passing out goods to the poor. But I don't believe that this is intended by the Spirit of God to establish some kind of ongoing order. I don't think these seven men chosen were deacons. Look at verse 5, "This saying pleased the whole multitude and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit," that was the qualification. "Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch."

So, they chose seven men. "They set them before the apostles, when they had prayed, they put their hands on them and ordained them to the ministry." What ministry? This service, this task, this business of carrying for the widows and their food.

Now with that in mind I want you to kind of grasp the thought. It isn't a major issue but just so you have it in your mind. The reason I don't think these are actual deacons is number one, the term is general and it's just a general speaking here of service. The only reference to actual diakonia connected with the certain individuals is in verse 4 and the diakonia there is connected with the apostles. The New Testament, watch this, never again refers to these seven as diakonate, as a group of deacons. In fact, the book of Acts never ever mentions the word deacon. They never appear again. If this was some kind of new order of deacons, they should have popped up again and again, particularly in chapter 11 when the famine went on and when they wanted the food to be cared for in the famine it says they were to give it to the elders, Acts 11:29, not the deacons cause there were no deacons.

You say, "Well if they aren't deacons, what are they?" They're just some men chosen for a specific task. Honest so they could handle money, full of the Spirit and wisdom so they could discern where the needs were. They were seven men chosen for a onetime crisis, not necessarily installed into a fulltime office. If they were being instituted as deacons here, you could be sure they would have appeared later on in the book of Acts someplace...and probably, as I said, in Acts 11 in dealing with the famine.

Another interesting thing is all seven of them have Greek names. If they were an ongoing group of deacons for the church at Jerusalem, it would have been a little bit strange that they would have all been Greek Jews. But if they are appointed for one specific task to relieve Greek Jewish widows, then it makes sense that they would choose Greeks to do that. That would move toward equity.

So, special task...but keep this in mind. There is a preliminary sense here in which we're getting a look at what deacons will be like because you have Apostles here whose thing is the Word and prayer and deacons who take care of implementation of certain tasks. And that kind of structure does carry into the church. The elders of 1 Timothy do emphasize the Word and the oversight and the deacons do emphasize the implementation and application. So that kind of...that kind of relationship continues to exist.

The comparison of these things then shows us that deacons did have I guess what you could say a historic precedent in Acts 6 but that they were not in specific actual deacons. In fact, in many ways they were more like elders. Let me show you why. Look at verse 6. They prayed, laid hands on them, then verse 7, "And the Word of God increased." Now why did it increase? Well first of all I think it increased because the Apostles were free from serving tables to make it increase, right? The Apostles were free to do what they felt they had to do and that was spend their time in the Word and prayer. The number of disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly, a great number of the priests were obedient to the faith. But another reason why it multiplied was not just the work of the Apostles, but look at this, "And Stephen who may well be representative of the other six, full of faith and power did great wonders and miracles among the people." Now could it well be that the other six did the same? Could it be that these were anything but deacons in the traditional sense, these were holy Spirit empowered evangelists who went out into that city doing signs and wonders and mighty deeds, teaching, preaching, evangelizing, full of faith, full of the Spirit, full of power, performing wonders. Now we know that at least one other of them was a powerful wonderworking preacher and that one was Philip, for he's mentioned as such as you come over to chapter 8. Two of the seven we know were powerful preachers. It may well be that the other five were involved in such a ministry also. So they would be more like apostles, more like evangelists then they would be like the actual role of deacon as we understand it in the pastoral epistles.

So having touched all those bases, let's go back to 1 Timothy chapter 3 and just briefly touch that chapter in our thought. When you come to 1 Timothy 3 it's about 64 A.D. in the church. The church

has been around long enough. Christ has been crucified just after 30 A.D. The church has been around for 30 years. Its grown, its developed. Paul's had his effective ministry. Others have ministered. And the church at Ephesus to which Paul is writing this letter really to them through Timothy, Timothy is there trying to set things order in the church...but the church at Ephesus has grown, its developed, it's had its leadership trained by Paul for three years, according to Acts 20. It's a well developed church. It had become very apparent in that church that they needed not only teachers of the Word who were the overseers and elders, leaders of the church, those with the authority, but they also needed implementors, and administrators and workers to carry that out. And so by now there is a growing number of people who rise to places of official service. And what Paul is saying to Timothy here is, "Look, you can't just let anybody do that."

There is a level of service we're all engaged in, there is a level of service for those with spiritual gifts. But there is a level of service in representation of the church which carries the authority of the elders and the authority of the pastors for which people must be properly qualified. And so here, and it's really obscure as to when the actual transition took place in history, we don't know, but by the time you come to 1 Timothy there has developed the recognition that a church must have a group of servers who are recognized as models of spiritual virtue in the role of a servant. And again I go back to what I said at the beginning that the purpose of servants at this level is to be examples. They set the spiritual standard of what service ought to be that all the rest of us are to follow.

And again, there's nothing said here about specific duties. No duty of a deacon is given here. It doesn't say anything. All it talks about is characteristics. You say, "Well what did deacons do?" Well they did whatever the pastors directed them to do. It's a pretty simple task. I mean, if you want to ask me how to define my task I could sum it up, I guess, very simply in this, win, teach, train, send...win, teach, train, send. You just keep cycling people through that all the time. Nobody needs to work very hard at figuring out what we're supposed to do, we teach the Word of God. Why? To win people to Christ. Why? So they can grow in the faith. Why? So they can be trained to do that very same thing and we send them out to do it. Very simple, it's just that constant cycle. We know the task very well.

Well what do the deacons do? Well the deacons help you implement the task. That's the function of serving...of serving. So the Bible doesn't really specify the task because the task is simple. If we're going to evangelize the world, and the elders and pastors give some direction as to how that's to go, the deacons implement. The distinction is their primary emphasis is not in teaching. Now let me say this. That doesn't mean they can't teach or don't teach. Quite the contrary. They may teach and they perhaps should teach...they should certainly be strong in sound doctrine. And if they're doing any kind of spiritual service, that service ought to be controlled within the parameters of their understanding of sound doctrine. And their interface with people ought to be controlled by their understanding of sound doctrine. They ought to be as those men were in Acts 6, full of faith, full of the Spirit, full of power. They ought to be honest people. They ought to have integrity of life and all of that. To say that they are not the primary teachers of the church doesn't mean that they are ignorant theologically. Not at

all. Verse 9 says, "They hold the mystery of the faith, not only holding it right but holding it in a pure conscience." Which means they not only know the truth but they live the truth.

So the issue again here is the character of the person's life. Now let me sum up what we've said. Everybody in the church serves. Some people serve with very unique gifts and some people serve in an office. That can be men or as verse 11 indicates also it can be women. In Grace Church we have hundreds of deacons and deaconesses. I'd be interested, how many of you this morning are deacon or deaconess at Grace Church, put your hand up. You look around, you see them everywhere. Okay, and it was equally so in the first service. I don't know exactly but my guess would be between four and five hundred, would that be close? I think so...deacons and deaconesses. And just each year we have a list of them that we believe are qualified to serve in those areas. They are not the only people at Grace Church who serve, if they were they couldn't accomplish their goals. In many cases they are trying to network the service responsibility through the whole congregation, that has been laid down by the elders under the Spirit's direction. But everybody serves. Everybody serves. These people become the models.

And as I said, you don't look at it and say, "Well, there's a guy with a messed up life we better not make him an elder, we'll make him a deacon." That isn't it at all. The people from the spiritual standpoint are at the same level. The qualifications are the same. It is that they carry out the function that is designed by and led by the overseers in the church. It's a beautiful beautiful way that God has designed their leadership. And may I hasten to say that I believe with all my heart that deacons have to be and whether they're male or female, considered as leaders in the church. They are leaders. They lead by example. They lead by function. They are leaders in the church. Every church needs not only the pastoral leadership but the servant leadership. We couldn't get anything done if it weren't for these marvelous deacons, men and women, who carry out the administration, the implementation, and the application.

I believe, for example, that you can have a group of elders who spend all their time studying the Word of God and under them all the administrators of the church can be deacons. It is our custom and policy as a church that anyone who serves on the church staff in any capacity be qualified by these standards as a deacon or deaconess. We use the term deaconess though there's no Greek term for that. Anyone who is employed at Grace Church in any function of ministry where they serve under the direction of the elders must qualify as a deacon or deaconess because that is the group of people that set the standard for spiritual service. It is a premium standard. And the only issue in the text here is not their function, it's not their duties, it's their character. As always, and you can boil it down to this, as always the whole thing in the church is example, godly examples for the rest to follow.

Well next Lord's day we're going to look specifically starting at verse 8 digging into the characteristics of deacons. Let's bow together in prayer.

Thank You, Lord, for calling us into Your service. We think of the words of Paul who said that he was a blasphemer, and injurious, but You were gracious and merciful and put him into the diakonia. You put him in Your service. O what a joy to be in Your service. We bless Your name for such a holy privilege. Father, help us all, everyone of us, to know the accountability that we all have to serve You. Lord, bless those who specifically have the gifts of serving, the gifts of helps. And Lord God, bless those who are deacons, deaconesses who stand as the examples to the whole church of what a spiritual servant is to be like. Help us, Lord, not to be content to say, "Well, I'm just on the edge, I'm on the fringe. Not much is required of me." But, Lord God, help us to follow the spiritual pattern of those who set the example that the church may be all that You would have it to be which is to be like Jesus Christ. We pray in His name. Amen.

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