

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

Qualified Servants for the Church: Deacons, Part 2

Scripture: 1 Timothy 3:8-12

Code: 54-26

Let's open our Bibles this morning for the study of God's Word to 1 Timothy chapter 3...1 Timothy chapter 3. And as you know, in looking at the first 13 verses of this great chapter, we have here the Apostle Paul giving qualifications for those who lead in the church. Verses 1 through 7 deal with those who are pastors, elders or overseers, all one and the same. Verses 8 through 13 deal with those who are servants in the church or as we know them deacons.

Now all of these qualifications, in a sense, whether for the one who is the pastor or the one who is the server or deacon in the church, really revolve around one category of truth. And in a sense we can simplify everything that is said in these passages as they qualify people for Christian service by recognizing that all the Lord is looking for is a heart that is right before Him. The qualifications for spiritual service are not so much what our talents might be or what we are able to do or what we are willing to do. The qualifications are all about what we are. They have to do with spiritual life more so than talent, effort or even willingness.

And when we ask the question: what kind of person is God looking for in spiritual leadership? We can answer that by simply doing a little bit of study of the Word of God and looking at the history of redemption. Going all the way back, for example, into the Old Testament we are met by a man of great familiarity to us, his name was Abram and became Abraham. But when God called Abram to be the leader of the nation Israel, the people that would come from his loins who would be the line of Messiah, He chose that man Abram, He chose him and he blessed him. Nehemiah 9:8 says, "Because He found his heart faithful before Him." The qualification for leadership that God saw in Abraham was a faithful heart.

When the Lord sent Samuel, a choice servant, to look among the sons of a man named Jesse and to identify the one of Jesse's sons who was to be the great king of Israel, the Lord gave Samuel a standard by which to measure his choice. In 1 Samuel 16:7 God said to Samuel, "Look not on his face, or on the height of his stature." And the reason God said that was because that is precisely the measuring standard that had been used on the king prior to David, a man by the name of Saul. In 1 Samuel 9:2 it says Saul was more handsome than any other man in Israel and he was taller than any man in Israel and on that basis he was chosen to be king. He turned out to be a disastrous king, an evil king, an unsuccessful king. So God says to Samuel, when you choose, look not on his face or on the height of his stature, "For the Lord seeth not as man seeth, for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart," 1 Samuel 16:7.

Abraham, a faithful heart and when you look for a man to be king, look to his heart. That man chosen was David who had a right heart before God. And later on at the end of David's life God gave him a son by the name of Solomon. It came to be David's task to pass on the royal throne to his son Solomon. And when giving him words of wisdom as to what God wants out of a leader, this is what David said, 1 Chronicles 28:9, "And thou, Solomon, my son, know thou the God of thy father and serve Him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind." And again the advice from King David to soon to be King Solomon had to do with his heart.

Hanani who was a prophet rebuked Asa king of Judah and he rebuked him because Asa in facing his enemies and the battles that he had to face as king of Judah relied more on Assyrian alliance than he did on the power of God. And thus he was a very ineffective leader, not really taking the available power of God and seeing it put to use, but trusting in the arm of man. And so in 2 Chronicles 16:9 the prophet said, "For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth to show himself strong in behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him." Then he says to Asa, "Herein thou hast done foolishly, therefore from henceforth thou shalt have wars." In other words, the prophet says you did not have a heart perfect toward God and you will pay a deep price.

King Jehoshaphat was an able leader of Judah. He led them to victory over enemy nations. And it says in 2 Chronicles 20 verse 32 that he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord. And the reason God blessed him and the reason God gave him victory as recorded in chapter 19 verse 3 where it says he had prepared his heart to seek God. The leadership again in its effectiveness is related to a heart that seeks God, a heart that is prepared to obey God, a willing heart, a faithful heart, a righteous heart.

One of the most familiar and beloved kings of Judah was a man by the name of Josiah. You remember he started to rule when just a boy and God used him to bring revival and reform, to bring a new spirit of worship, a new spirit of obedience to the life of the people of God. He repaired the temple. He restored the law of God. And he was a wonderful and effective leader. It says in 2 Kings 22:19 that God used him because his heart was tender and he humbled himself before the Lord and wept...sensitive, humble, tender hearted Josiah. And the qualifications of leadership again have to do with the heart.

When Ezekiel in chapter 14 twice in verses 14 and 20 wanted to identify the three greatest leaders of the past, he identified Noah, Job and Daniel. And he said that God used them, in essence, because of their personal righteousness. Again, the issue is the issue of spiritual life of the heart.

God used a wonderful man by the name of Ezra. And God used Ezra to lead the nation Israel to repentance, to revival, to restoration. And it was not because Ezra had particularly great human leadership ability but rather, according to Ezra 7:10, Ezra had prepared his heart...and I love this...to

seek the law of the Lord and do it...to seek the law of the Lord and do it.

The father of John the Baptist was a priest by the name of Zacharias and in a sense Zacharias summed up the success of all Old Testament prophets when he called them in Luke 1 holy prophets, holiness of heart, holiness of life was the key to effective ministry. The son of that priest, Zacharias, was a man we all know as John the Baptist. He had the wonderful task, the supreme task of any Old Testament man, that of announcing the coming of Messiah. He was effective as a leader. He was effective in bringing repentance in Israel. All of Jerusalem and Judea was going out to see him. People were being baptized, readying their hearts for the coming of the Messiah. The thing that made John effective was his spiritual virtue. So widely known was his spiritual virtue that even Herod who beheaded him it says in Mark 6:20 feared him because he was a righteous man and a holy one. And again the mark of his leadership was the character of his spiritual devotion.

I think of the Apostle Paul. And we like to study the techniques of leadership used by Paul. We like to mark out the marvelous characteristics of his manhood, his strength of courage, conviction and so forth. But Paul in writing to 1 Thessalonians, the 1 Thessalonian epistle in chapter 2 verse 10 lays his finger on the real key to his effectiveness when he reminds the Thessalonians that his behavior was three things: holy, just and blameless. Therein lies the usefulness and effectiveness of the man.

Now such passages and a myriad of others had we time to look at them point out to us that when the Lord looks for a man or a woman to place them in spiritual service, and use them with maximum effectiveness, He looks to the spiritual dimension. He looks to the heart. That is the issue. When God chooses people for service, He chooses integrity. He chooses purity. He chooses virtue. So when you come to 1 Timothy 3 and Paul is writing to Timothy who is working in the church at Ephesus and endeavoring to place people in leadership, the issues are all spiritual. And all of the qualification given in these 13 verses whether for overseers or servants in the church, whether for elders or deacons, all revolve around spiritual qualification. They all have to do with the heart, with the purity of life, with virtue, with integrity, with honesty, with uprightness, with holiness, with blamelessness.

In fact, had we time we could go back through 1 Timothy and see again how many different places there are in this epistle where Paul speaks to the issue of a holy life, of a pure life, of a godly life, of a blameless life, of a righteous life. That is in every chapter...chapter 1, chapter 2, chapter 3, chapter 4, chapter 5 and chapter 6. It is of major importance to Paul that godliness and virtue be maintained among those who lead the church.

I think we all remember 1 Samuel 13:14 which says, "The Lord sought out for Himself a man after His own heart." The Lord sought out for Himself a man after His own heart. What is that? That's a man who thinks like He thinks, who feels like He feels, who responds like He responds, a man with a heart that beats like Christ's heart beat, whose heart loves righteousness and hates sin, whose heart loves the sinner but rejects his deeds, a heart that reaches out in mercy to those who are hurting, a heart

that cares, a heart that knows righteousness and obedience, a heart that is consumed with the extending of the Father's glory...that's the kind of heart that Christ had.

In Ezekiel 22 and verse 30 God said, "I searched for a man to stand in the gap for Me." Somebody to take My place and represent Me. And from David on, from Abraham even, God has always had in His heart to seek that kind of person. In fact in Acts 13:22 it says, "He seeks the person who is after His own heart who shall fulfill all His will." And you see, beloved, what God wants in leadership in the church is virtue, spiritual character. That's the key.

Now we've already looked at the first seven verses and the spiritual character of the overseers, the elders, the pastors. And now we're going to look at the servants. The word "deacon" is really a word that could be translated servant, probably should have been translated servant. But here they transliterate it and make up a word, deacon. And we have come to appreciate deacons as those who serve in the church, and rightly so.

We saw last week in our study that the term deacon or servant is used in a very general way in the Scripture until you get to 1 Timothy 3 and by this time in the growth and development of the church there have grown up in the church certain people who serve in an official capacity. They are recognized as those who carry out official ministry in the church and they are the Servants of the church with a capital S called deacons here.

It is essential to the church that the people who come to those kind of positions of service be qualified. It is essential. Why? Because that's a leadership position. Serving in the church officially is a leadership position. Though you may not be a pastor or elder or overseer in the sense that you determine the direction and give guidance and leadership and publicly teach the Word, when you come along and serve that, that group of men, when you serve the Lord Jesus Christ by carrying out that design, you definitely are a leader in the church. You become a model and an example of service to Christ. And so qualifications are essential. No one ever is to be lifted up to any position of leadership in the church, elder level or deacon, who is not qualified by spiritual examination.

And by the way, the New Testament doesn't say a lot about the organization and the structure and the flow and who is accountable to who and who is to answer to who and what does the organizational chart look like. It leaves that to every different age and every different style of leadership. What it does say is that people who lead and people who carry out their leadership are to be qualified in the spiritual area. That's the issue. And that's really the only biblical issue. The style of structure, the style of leadership, the way things are organized, whether you have committees of one kind or another is not the issue. The issue is spiritual qualification. And again let me emphasize that those who serve as servants of the church whether men or women, and as we shall see both serve as deacons in that sense, the issue is spiritual life. And I want to emphasize it is a leadership responsibility. You are a leader in the church when you serve in an official way.

Now I just want to break down into five brief little categories the qualification of those who serve in the church. We're going to look at it just very very hastily this morning. Verse 8, "In like manner," now that simply means this introduces a new category. First came the overseers, now in like manner come the deacons. This is category number two in the discussion of church leaders. And the first set of qualifications have to do with personal character...personal character. And four personal qualifications are given.

Number one in verse 8, "The deacon is to be grave." The word is *semnos*, it means serious. It could be translated dignified. It could be translated stately. It has the idea of being serious in mind as well as serious in character. It comes from a root verb *sebomai* which means to venerate or to worship. It has the idea that this person has a stateliness about them that demands a respect. They have a sort of a...and I don't want to stretch the point...but they have a sort of majestic quality of character that makes people stand in awe of them.

Another word that is often a synonym is the word *ira propase*(??) which means to act like a sacred person. This is a person who by virtue of their life character spiritually has a certain mystic about them. There's a certain awe held in the hearts of those who know them because of the integrity of their spiritual life. It's a very beautiful word and a very important designation.

So, to begin with, one who serves as a deacon is to be one who could be held in awe as having a majesty of dignity, of life that comes to one who understands the seriousness of spiritual issues. This particular person would not be a flippant person, not be a silly person, not be a frivolous person, not be a person who makes light of very serious things, not be a person engaged in trivia as a way of life, not be a person who is trite...a person with dignity, a person who understands the seriousness of life. And I confess to you, as I've said before, that the older I get the more seriousness life takes on.

And then after that very positive affirmation of personal character, three negatives come in verse 8. The second of these four personal character qualifications is not double tongued. This is the only place in the Scripture where this word appears, *dilogos*. And it is simply what it says, two tongued...two tongued. Now what is a twotongued person? Well we might say this is a gossipy person, somebody who doesn't just have one tongue going but two tongues going which might indicate some kind of rapid fire discussion of things that perhaps ought not to be said. But the best way to translate this word, to keep it in its simplest meaning is to refer to a person who isn't saying one thing to one person and another thing to another. In other words a double tongued person is telling me something and someone else something quite the opposite of that to gain his own personal or her own personal goals. The idea here is integrity of speech. Because those who serve in the church are privy to very private matters, because they know well very grave spiritual issues, because they are dealing with things that people would like to keep private in their own lives, because they're a part of spiritual warfare at very intense levels, they need to be the kind of people who know how to

Speak when you should speak and to speak with integrity whenever you speak. There's always a high high premium on verbal honesty and integrity among spiritual leaders. Not to speak hypocritically but to speak consistently, righteously, honestly, uprightly. Had we time we could go through the New Testament and cover so many passages that deal with the tongue. We shall get to one when we come to the third chapter of James, as you know.

But the person in leadership is to have great integrity of speech. Nothing is more devastating than to tell one person one thing and someone else the very opposite for your own personal gain, or to protect yourself. And thus begin the process of spinning lies among God's people. Truth is at a premium.

The third qualification is not given too much wine. That's the translation we have in the Authorized. The Greek would say "not holding near much wine...not holding near much wine." You say, "Why doesn't it just say not holding wine at all?" Well because wine was a matter of a common drink. Admittedly we know now very clearly that it was mixed with water. In fact, sometimes it could be tentone water. It was very very greatly and largely water. And the reason for that was, of course, to prevent intoxication. And they had to drink the fruit of the vine, the fruit of whatever they were able to get out of their land because that's the only basic drink they had. And so it was caution that had to be expressed in regard to wine. And anyone in spiritual leadership, as we saw with the elders, was not to give himself to wine. And that same qualification is expressed here.

Prosecho means to hold near, or if you use it in a metaphorical sense it means to turn one's mind to, or to occupy oneself with. The person is not to be occupied with much wine. Of necessity to drink some, given that it would be diluted with water, yes. But not to be indulgent. And the present active nature of the participle means this is to be his habitual practice. Habitually he is to be known as a person who is not holding near much wine. In other words, this is a person who basically does not allow drink to influence his life, or her life. And in this case, of course, we're talking about the male as we shall see the contrast in verse 11 when the female is introduced.

Now somebody's going to say at this point, "Couldn't the Lord have solved a real simple problem by just saying you can't drink it at all then none of us would be debating this?" No, it couldn't be that way because you have to understand as difficult as it is for a twentieth century American to understand and appreciate the society of Paul's day, you have to understand that they were not told to be total abstainers but rather to be temperate because this was the common beverage of the time. As I said, it was largely water but it was the common beverage. In our day today, frankly, the social stigma and the tremendous social evils that accompany drinking did not attach themselves to the moderate use of mixed wine in that day. And the fact that they do in our day to unmixed wine and all the other drinks leads me to believe without contradiction that if the Apostle Paul were writing today he would simply say...no wine at all. It isn't necessary anymore. And it is potentially dangerous. And it does set a pattern that causes people to stumble and so forth.

But the point is the same. This is to be a person who in terms of life pattern according to verse 8 is serious, a person who speaks with great integrity, and a person who is control of their sense at all times. And then fourthly, one who is not greedy of filthy lucre. In other words, who is not greedy for gain, for money. Why? Because in those days those who served in the church in an official capacity would be handling funds. They would be passing out money to widows, to orphans, to needy people. They would be making collections. They would be dealing with the funds, paying whatever they had to pay to this place or that place, providing meals and so forth. And there were no bank accounts and there were no audit firms and so forth and so on. So everything was a cash transaction and the people who handled the money actually had a little purse on their belt and in it was the money. And the temptation would always be there to stick your hand in the bag and use the money for your own purposes. And so they had to be those people who were not motivated by money who were free from the love of it.

Now those are all things about character...doesn't love money, doesn't linger by wine, doesn't speak dishonestly and has seriousness of mind and contact.

Let's go to second category just so we can divide it a bit, spiritual life. We'll go a little deeper in now, we're talking not just about personal characteristics but spiritual life. Verse 9, the person who serves in the role of deacon or official servant in the church is "one holding the mystery of the faith in a or with a pure conscience." Now we have looked at the word "mystery" many times in the years of teaching here and I don't want to go back over already plowed ground. So let me just say this. The word "mystery" musterion, Paul uses it very often and what he means by it is something that was hidden and is not revealed. In fact he gives that very definition in Ephesians chapter 3. Something which was hidden and is not revealed. And when you sum it all up, the mystery of the faith is that truth which was hidden and is now revealed. Therefore it equals New Testament revelation, that which was hidden from the past generations before the coming of Christ. It is God's redemptive truth revealed in the New Testament. The sacred things hidden from natural reason known only by the revelation of God, hidden from Old Testament saints known only by the revelation of God.

And there's much New Testament teaching on the mystery starting in Matthew 13, in the parables of the mysteries and then on right on through the whole New Testament culminating in the book of Revelation where you have mystery there as well. But it always means the same thing, truth which was hidden, unknown to human reason now revealed in the New Testament, the new covenant. So basically what it means is Christian doctrine, New Testament theology, New Testament truth, New Testament revelation and doctrine. It encompasses the mystery of the incarnation of Christ which was hidden and is now revealed, the mystery of the indwelling Christ, of the Jew and Gentile one in Christ, of the saving gospel, the mystery of iniquity, the mystery of the Rapture of the church. There were many elements of it illustrated through the New Testament Scripture but the body of content totally is all New Testament revelation. To put it simply, Matthew to Revelation...that is the unveiling of the

hidden truth now revealed in the New Testament.

So, the deacon then must hold to New Testament revelation. He has to be a New Testament doctrinally oriented individual who knows and understands truth revealed in the new covenant. This is of great concern to Paul. All the way through this epistle he makes a major point out of sound doctrine, good teaching. We saw it in chapter 1, particularly chapter 4 verse 6, he talks about good doctrine. Down in verse 16, take heed to the doctrine. Very very concerned about true doctrine. He even gets into it in chapter 6 as he speaks about the unwholesome teaching, the unwholesome doctrine and calls for laying hold on that which is true and right doctrine as given in the New Testament.

So, the spiritual character then of an individual who serves as a deacon begins, the spiritual life begins with an affirmation of New Testament doctrine. He holds to the mystery of THE faith, THE faith simply means the content of Christian truth. But notice, holding the mystery of the faith with a...what?...pure conscience. That's really the key. That's really the key, with a pure conscience. What does that mean? A conscience that's not accusing you. A conscience that's not bringing guilt on you. Why? Because you're holding the truth and you're obeying the truth.

Now let me say something that will be helpful to you, I hope. The stronger your theology, the stronger your conscience. The more you understand about the Bible and the stronger your faith and belief, the stronger your conscience. To say it another way, when a person who really has strong doctrine and strong theology and holds to the mystery of the faith with great strength violates that doctrine, they have a very strong conscience reprimanding them. You show me a person who is weak in conviction and I'll show you a person with a weak conscience. Because conscience reacts to the body of truth the person is committed to. If I am not committed to truth, if I just flow and vacillate, my conscience has no standard by which to accuse me.

We often hear someone say in looking at a terrible crime or a terrible sin or something that someone has done, we say, "Haven't they got any...what?...conscience? Has that person no conscience?" The answer is yes they have a conscience, but conscience responds to standards. The Apostle Paul writing to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 1:12 said, "He had the testimony of his conscience that everything in his life was right." Now that is a marvelous thing because that man had a very very strong firm theology. And all of the things that he believed were very set. And for him to say "my conscience is not accusing me" is to say a lot. Those of us who know and believe the Word of God, those of us who are holding the mystery of the faith firmly and strongly run the potential of having a very strong accusing conscience if we violate that because the standard by which our conscience responds and operates is so rigid, so strong.

So the idea then of a deacon is this is a person who in terms of spiritual life really holds strongly to the revealed New Testament faith, the whole Word of God and in so strongly holding to it can also

say I live by it therefore my conscience is pure. It is not defiled with sin. It is not accusing me. This is the required spiritual life for a deacon.

May I add a note? It's a required spiritual life for everybody else, but remember what I've been saying, deacons are models of what all the rest are to be. A pure conscience only exists where a person lives out his biblical convictions and knows no accusation against himself. And by God's grace and power and the confession of sin we can know that pure conscience. So a deacon in the church is tested by personal character, spiritual life.

Thirdly, Christian service...Christian service, look at verse 10 just quickly, "And let these also...that's an imperative verb, by the way...let these also first be tested," dokimazo, to approve after testing. Let them be tested. It's a present passive which means it's an ongoing test, not an aorist which would be some kind of a probationary period or a point in time in which they were tested. This is an ongoing thing. Let them continually be being tested, would be a way to translate it. Let them continually be being tested. And then...another imperative...let them serve as a deacon. And that's just one verb. Let them diakoneo. So in terms of Christian service they are to be being tested.

Now what test is this? This is nothing more than the ongoing general assessment of the church as they evaluate the service of this person. They are being tested at all times by the basis of their own service to Christ. It is not a one time test. It is not a written test. It is not a probationary period. It is the ongoing evaluation. Would you circle the little word "also" in verse 10 because this jumps back and makes application of this same truth to the elders. These also are to be tested which means that it is assumed that the elder or the pastor would be tested as well. We want to make that affirmation.

So everyone is tested and the testing is an ongoing process. We have done this for many years in Grace Church. We watch people and we see their spiritual service, their Christian ministry, how they live for Christ. And over a period of time as we evaluate their service to Christ we are rendering a verdict on whether they have been approved through that testing period. Those who are deacons are tested and proven people. It is a process.

So, qualification then is a matter of personal character, spiritual life and Christian service. Fourthly, moral purity, the end of verse 10 introduces us to a familiar word we met in verse 2, they are to be blameless. Being blameless...again the qualification is not lower for a servant, the service is different, the function is different, it is carrying out what the elders design. But the qualification is the same, blameless. And blameless is so comprehensive that we could go back to verses 2 and 3 and go through that whole list and apply that to the deacon because it's just an expansion of what blameless means. They are to be blameless. That is to be without reproach, no blot on their life, without spot, without blemish, nothing for which they could be accused and disqualified. There's...there's in a sense not only the moral purity of the heart but the moral purity of perception which renders them without blame.

You say, "Well if a deacon is also to be blameless just like an elder, what's the difference?" The difference is not in spiritual qualification, the difference is in function. And the one function note in verse 2 about a bishop or overseer or pastor is that he is to be a skilled teacher and that is never said of a deacon. Because the function of the elder is uniquely the public teaching of the Word of God and the function of the deacon is different from that. Deacons may teach, they may teach very effectively, they may be on their way to becoming those pastors and teachers but the primary function that they serve is the carrying out, the application, the personal application of the teaching being done by the pastors and overseers. The distinction is one is definitely and by definition and description a teaching function, the other is a serving function in areas other than the public teaching. But the spiritual character is the same and both are leadership responsibilities. We could say that elders major on teaching and deacons major on administration by carrying out the application of the teaching and meeting the personal needs of the flock. Skilled teachers need to be free to pray and study and so there are servers who come along and enable them to do that.

So blameless means without reproach, moral purity. Just to pick up one element of moral purity, go to verse 12. This was the first element of moral purity in verse 2 when speaking of the overseer. "Let the one who serves as deacon or server be...and here's the Greek...a onewoman man." Same moral qualification. He is not to be a man who is unfaithful either in act or in heart to the woman who is his wife. This doesn't say anything about his circumstances or status, it doesn't say how many times he's been married, has he been divorced in the past, that is not an issue. The issue here is is he a onewoman man? That is, is the man's heart and life totally devoted to the woman who is his wife? That is a moral issue. That's an issue of his sexual morality or lack of it that must be under scrutiny and examination. So the man who serves as a deacon is to be a blameless man and introduced into that idea is that he is to be a onewoman man which is so very often where morality gives way.

Personal character, spiritual life, Christian service, moral purity...a last category of qualification comes to us at the end of verse 12 and it's home life...home life. Just as the elder had to demonstrate leadership in his home, so does the server. He is to be a onewoman man. And then it says, "Ruling their children and their own houses well." Again they demonstrate their leadership just like the overseers do by how capably they handle their home. They are to manage the people in their home, the children in their home, the possessions of their home. They are to be stewards of their funds, their money, their servants. They are to show they have leadership ability. They have the capability to handle situations, to solve problems because that's what a deacon will have to do. They're not just people who serve the dinner. That is what they were in terms of the simple definition of the word, but that's brought over into spiritual service in the church and that involves some management and some administration and coordination and leadership. So deacons then are to have an exemplary model home life, totally devoted to the wife, ruling over their children and all of their possessions and resources well...well intrinsically and well extrinsically. They are models for everyone to follow.

So looking down the list, the qualifications are simple: personal character, spiritual life, Christian service, moral purity and home life. So far we've been talking about men. But notice verse 11, without looking almost we sort of skip by what Paul just dropped in there. I don't know why he put it in before verse 12, I'm not sure there's any way we can explain it, but he did. It's there. And I want you to understand verse 11 because it's such a wonderful one. "Even so" is the word "likewise" or in like manner, the very same word as verse 8, and that indicates to us that we are now coming to a third category of people. Now you will notice that it is translated in the Authorized with some italics, "Even so must their wives." Let me say that I think that is an inadequate translation. In the first place, there's no word in the Greek for wives, this is the word *gunaikaios* which means women. And it doesn't say "their women," it could say that in the Greek, there is a word for their and the Apostle Paul could have said that if the Holy Spirit wanted him to say it. But he didn't. It actually says "Likewise women," that's all it says in the Greek...likewise women. The question is, what women? Are they the wives of the deacons as some interpreters believe or are they just women who also serve in the church in a deacon capacity? That's the question we have to answer.

And I think it can be simply answered. The best translation here is "women" because that's the translation of the word. The reason that I'm not at all convinced that this could possibly be the wives of deacons is manifold. Number one, why would there be qualifications for the wives of deacons and not qualifications for the wives of elders who have an even more important responsibility? Why would he isolate the wives of deacons and not say anything at all about the wives of the overseers? Secondly, the use of "likewise" in verse 11 means we have a new category because it was used in verse 8 of a new category. First overseers, likewise deacons, likewise women...and this is to say to me that the church is to recognize that there is a group of women who serve in the church. If he wanted to say "their women" he could have used the word "their" but he didn't use it.

You say, "Well why didn't he use deaconesses?" Because there's no Greek word for that. That's why Phoebe, a woman in Romans 16:1 is called a deacon because there's no feminine form. So the only word he could use if he had used...if he have said "likewise deacons" and meant women, we never would have known he meant women because the word is not feminine. There was no word for wives, so the only word he could use was women and the way he tells us this is a new category is with "likewise." So clearly he's introducing what I believe has come to be the deaconess in the church. I kind of prefer to call them women deacons because that maintains the New Testament terminology a bit better. Women deacons...he just drops this right in the middle of his discussion of deacons as a new category.

And I believe that we today honor that office in our church in a wonderful way. God has raised up women in this church who serve. Our women deacons serve in many ways, carrying for the poor, ministering to the sick, in the Lord's table, in baptism, providing meals for families, involving themselves in assisting people in funerals, counseling, hospital visitation, transportation, making calls

on the homes of people, discipling, teaching little children. In fact this morning I spent a little while reading through my wife's deaconess manual, just to refresh my mind. And it's a great thick thing about all of the ministries of the women deacons. It's a wonderful, wonderful thing and I believe its precedent is right here in the New Testament, the early church maintained it, it's come all the way down through history even to us today. And they are leaders in the church. They lead in the spiritual dimensions of service that we have identified.

Now notice their qualifications in verse 11. They parallel the deacons in verse 8. The first one is serious, the same word as in verse 8. They too are to have a sense of dignity and stateliness. They're to be respected. They're to sort of have an awe about them because of their spiritual devotion that makes everyone hold them in high esteem. Secondly, not diabolos, that's the word for devil, the devil. They are not to be she devils, somebody said. They're not to be slanderers, is the translation of the word. The Devil, of course, is the supreme slanderer, the chief slanderer and they're not to be his children. In other words, they're to control their tongue.

The second personal character qualification in verse 8 of a deacon had to do with a tongue and this is the second one for women, it also has to do with the tongue. They are to have a tongue that is not slanderous. Obviously they're not to pervert that knowledge which they have, that information they possess by slandering, gossiping and so forth. They are to be those women who have control of their tongue.

Thirdly, sober minded...literally that means to abstain from wine. It's used back in verse 2 of the overseer. And again it's a parallel to verse 8 of the deacon. He's not to be given to much wine, and the women deacons are not either to be given to wine. They are to abstain. In a metaphorical sense, to be sober in their judgment. And, of course, you can't be sober in your judgment if you're not sober physically. So the parallels are there.

The fourth one, faithful in all things. What does that mean? Absolutely trustworthy..absolutely trustworthy. You say, "Is that a parallel?" That is a parallel to verse 8. It says over there they're not to be greedy of filthy lucre. Why? If they were greedy of filthy lucre they couldn't be trusted with what? With money. So it's trustworthiness over here also.

So those four qualifications parallel the personal character qualifications of a deacon. That's another reason why I believe we're seeing the introduction here of a whole new office with the same kind of qualifications. So God has ordained in His church that elders, bishops and overseers be men. There is nothing dealt with here about women in that role. But that among the servers, the deacons, there are men and women.

And then it closes in verse 13 with a wonderful promise to those faithful men and women deacons. "For they that have deaconed well," would be the best way to translate that, they that have served

well, they that have served well would be the purest translation, "have two promises, they that have served well, one, purchase to themselves a good standing; two, great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus."

Listen very carefully as I draw this to a conclusion. Here is the reward. It's just marvelous. One, those who serve well in this area purchase to themselves a good standing. The word "purchase" means to achieve or acquire...present middle voice means for yourself. They gain for themselves by their effective and faithful service, they gain for themselves...look at this...a good standing. The word "standing" is marvelous. It means a step and it came to mean stepping up above everyone else, in fact it could even be translated...bathmos is the word...it could be translated a pedestal or an elevated platform. What it's saying is this, when you serve well as a deacon, when you serve well in the service of Jesus Christ in that official capacity in the church, you are put on a pedestal.

Now you say, "Isn't that sinful?" Not if you didn't seek it. If you served in humility and you served in submissiveness, you will be lifted up. Doesn't it tell us in James that whoever humbles himself, the Lord will exalt him? Now lifted up by whom? It could be by God, it could be by men, the answer is it's by both. You serve well as a deacon and I'll promise you that the people who have known your service will lift you up, will they not? They'll respect you. They'll honor you. I don't mean they're going to give you an award, I don't mean that it's all going to be earthly, but I do mean that you will have purchased in their eyes spiritual respect. And you want to know something? That is essential because that is the key to spiritual example. It is when a person is respected that they are emulated. Did you get that? People don't pattern their life after people they don't respect. So when you purchase for yourself a good standing before men, you put yourself in a position to be their model and their example and they'll follow you and that's what God wants. And furthermore, I believe even God...even God will grant you a measure of respect. I believe even the Lord will reward that. Not only will men grant you a good standing but so will God and some day you'll hear "well done, good and faithful deacon...good and faithful servant."

So before God and the community of the faithful, one who serves well in this area gains a good standing. And then the second great reward, great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus. The faith which is in Christ Jesus simply again refers to the Christian realm, the Christian truth, the sphere of salvation, the church, the body of Christ, the family of believers. And you will gain not only respect and a good standing, but you will gain great boldness. In other words, because you are serving well and God is blessing your service, you're seeing His power, you're seeing His grace, you're seeing His movement, you're seeing what He's doing, He's using you, things are happening, your life is purposeful, it will energize you for greater service. That's the idea. It will make you more bold. You'll say to yourself, "I know I'm a Christian, I've seen the power of God...I know my spiritual gifts can be effective, I've seen God use them...I know God can use me to win the lost, I've seen Him do it...I know God can use me to serve the saints, I've watched Him do it." So that as you serve the Lord successful service builds confidence and assurance, that's what that word means. It is often used of

boldness of speech, parrhesia means a sort of comprehensive confidence.

So two things accrue then to the person who is a faithful deacon. One, respect by which he becomes the model that others emulate. Two, confidence which even a snowballing effect spins you on to greater usefulness and greater effectiveness and greater resource. I can say in my own life, the thing that allows me to accept another challenge in my ministry, the thing that makes me say yes when faced with something that seems impossible to me, the thing that gives me confidence, assurance and boldness is to look in the past and see what God has done in the past. And on the basis of knowing His hand is on my life, I can accept the future, even though I feel inadequate I know He's there. That's the kind of confidence you get from faithful service.

Well God needs those kind of people in His church. And it's a wonderful thing to aspire to be this person. And may God help us to have these people so they can be the models for all the rest. Let's bow in prayer.

We love Your church, Lord, and we desire for it the best. The best of leadership at the level of the overseers and the pastors, at the level of the servers, the deacons, men and women, may all those who lead in Your church purchase for themselves great respect and great confidence for greater service that Your Kingdom may go forward. Thank You for the clear word on the standards and, O God, may it be that the leaders here and those who serve in every sense might meet these qualifications, by grace alone we're so unworthy. And, Lord, we know that each of us in order to serve in any position must be tested by the qualifications. Being the wife of a godly deacon doesn't make a godly woman deacon, being the husband of a godly woman deacon doesn't make a godly man deacon, each is individually to stand the test. And raise up, God, those who can lead in the church to accomplish Your work in Your way and we'll praise You for Christ's sake. Amen.

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