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The Office of Deacon, Part 11

1 Timothy 3:8-13, Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. ⁹ They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰ And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. ¹¹ Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. ¹² Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. 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.

A major theme of 1 Timothy is church leadership. Paul's imprisonment on account of the gospel seemed to involve far more than the apostle. For while Paul was in bonds, many of the churches which he planted also became enslaved to false leaders!

The church in Ephesus was one of them. Though Paul was perhaps closest to this church and enjoyed a deep, loving relationship, nevertheless in the time he was imprisoned false leaders took hold of the church. So, upon his release from Rome, Paul took Timothy and together they went to Ephesus. Far from the warm reception he had enjoyed just a couple of years before (Acts 20), this time his presence brought conflict and trial. In order to stop the false teachers from totally undermining the church's life and doctrine, Paul excommunicated two of the leading perpetrators, Hymenaeus and Alexander (cf. 1 Timothy 1:19-20).

Now at this point and for unknown reasons, Paul then left Ephesus in order to minister in Macedonia. However, he left Timothy behind to continue the work.

1 Timothy 1:3-4, "As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus, in order that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than *furthering* the administration of God which is by faith."

A large theme of this epistle is that of leadership! In all, Paul devoted well-over an entire chapter (26 verses) to the subject giving us

- The Marks of a False Leader, 1 Timothy 1:4, 6-7, 19-20; 4:1-3; 6:3-5, 9-10
- The Qualifications of a Genuine Leader, 1 Timothy 3:1-13.

The primary thing Paul stressed when it came to leadership is character; the leader's character, their godliness! In the six verses in which he discusses the qualifications necessary for a deacon, Paul gives no less than eleven criteria, all of which concern themselves with the character of the servant of God! From this we conclude that THE primary requirement for church leadership is godliness! When it came to the leaders with which God someday would bless the church, the Lord said this:

Jeremiah 3:15, "Then I will give you shepherds after My own heart, who will feed you on knowledge and understanding."

This is truly the standard for God's leaders! Ezra seeing this and the gravity of the calling before him as a church leader responded accordingly:

Ezra 7:10, "Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord, and to practice *it*, and to teach *His* statutes and ordinances in Israel."

These are the men God uses in His kingdom: humble, devoted servants of the Lord. Paul exhorted Timothy this way:

1 Timothy 4:16, "Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things; for as you do this you will insure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you."

In fact, Timothy's godliness was so important as a servant of Christ, Paul exhorted him again:

1 Timothy 6:20-21, "O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding worldly and empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called 'knowledge'- which some

have professed and thus gone astray from the faith. Grace be with you.”

This is why David said these things:

Psalm 101:6b, “He who walks in a blameless way is the one who will minister to me.”

When it comes to caring for the people God, THE standard and qualification is (1) a heart wholly devoted to the Lord, (2) a life dedicated to His glory and service. Samuel Logan Brengle wrote this:

[Spiritual leadership] is not won by promotion, but by many prayers and tears. It is attained by confessions of sin, and much heart searching and humbling before God; by self-surrender, a courageous sacrifice of every idol, a bold, deathless, uncompromising and uncomplaining embracing of the cross, and by an eternal, unfaltering looking unto Jesus crucified. It is not gained by seeking great things for ourselves, but rather, like Paul, by counting those things that are gain to us as loss for Christ. That is a great price, but it must be unflinchingly paid by him who would be not merely a nominal but a real spiritual leader of men, a leader whose power is recognized and felt in heaven, on earth and in hell. (Brengle, 1978, p. 22)

And Robert Murray McCheyne added:

How diligently the cavalry officer keeps his sabre clean and sharp; every stain he rubs off with the greatest care. Remember you are God’s sword, His instrument- I trust, a chosen vessel unto Him to bear His name. In great measure, according to the purity and perfection of the instrument, will be the success. It is not great talents God blesses so much as likeness to Jesus. A holy minister is an awful weapon in the hand of God. (Spurgeon, 1979, p. 8)

Yet sadly it is so easy to neglect and lose this simple qualification. In a letter to a young pastor named Nepotian, Jerome rebuked the churches of his day for their hypocrisy:

Many build churches nowadays; their walls and pillars of glowing marble, their ceilings glittering with gold, their altars studded with jewels. Yet to the choice of Christ’s ministers no heed is paid. (Alexander Roberts, 1994, pp. Vol 14, 6:94)

This was written in 394 A.D.! We haven’t come very far as a church, have we? Today the focus remains on “bodies, bucks, and buildings” rather than the quality of the men who would serve us in Christ. Yet this must not be the case! Based upon the divine standard, we must allow only the man who “walks in a blameless way” to minister to us. Yet this raises a very important question: Upon what standard are we to gage the godliness of a minister? See, there are many false standards today! What will godliness look like in a man?

1 Timothy 3 lists eleven characteristics of a man of God and so the man called to be a deacon.

1 Timothy 3:8, “Deacons likewise *must be* men of dignity...”

The word rendered “dignity” could be translated “serious” or “stately.” *Semnos* contains the idea of being serious in mind as well as in character. It comes from a root word (*sebomai*) which means “to

venerate” or “to worship.” The word is a difficult one to translate. In fact, Richard Trent in his classic work, *Synonyms of the New Testament*, expressed frustration in trying to find the right English word to reflect this Greek expression:

The word we want is one in which the sense of gravity and dignity, and of these inviting reverence, is combined; a word which I fear we may look for long without finding. (Trench, 2000, p. 348)

A synonym of this word is *hieroprepēs* which,

expresses that which beseems a sacred person, thing, or act.” (Trench, 2000, p. 348)

This leads us to conclude that a person characterized by “dignity” has a majestic quality of character that leaves people in awe, not of the man, but of the God they serve! Thus a deacon must not be a silly, flippant person; one who makes light of serious matters, although not a cold, joyless person either, a deacon understands the seriousness of life, the gravity of sin, and that which hangs in the balance, eternity. Accordingly, he is a man characterized by “dignity,” and has a persona which evokes a sense of sobriety and/or reverence for the Lord.

1 Timothy 3:8b, “...not double-tongued...”

The word for “double-tongued” is *dilogos*, which only appears here in the New Testament. It is difficult to be dogmatic as to its meaning so some think it refers to a gossip. Others interpret the word to be a prohibition against saying one thing to one person and another thing to someone else—the word literally means “two worded.” However, most likely the latter is what is in mind here. A deacon’s speech must not be hypocritical, but be characterized by integrity, consistency, and honesty. A man who tells different stories to different people will quickly lose the confidence of God’s people, and manifest a duplicitous and manipulative motive.

1 Timothy 3:8c, “not addicted to much wine...”

The word for “addicted” is *προσέχω* (*prosechō*) which literally means “to turn one’s mind to” or “to occupy oneself with.” Here it is used as a present active participle which means that this is to be the deacon’s habitual practice. The deacon is NOT to be preoccupied with this Christian freedom. Drinking alcohol is not a sin. In fact we must keep in mind Paul’s statement on it where he criticizes the false leader for they were:

1 Timothy 4:3-4, “Men who forbid marriage *and* advocate abstaining from foods, which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with gratitude.”

So truly, the use of alcohol on the part of a church officer is in not prohibited. However, as soon as we say this we also note that “alcohol” must not in any way be a focus in his life. This is significant, for it involves balance. On the one hand we must not make light of that which God has given us “to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth.” On the other, we don’t want to make more of a freedom than we ought. Accordingly we must see that alcohol, like many other foods,

is simply a drink. The man of God therefore must not be one who makes it a mini-idol in his life. Truly we don't want in leadership any with an allegiance other than Christ!

2 Peter 2:19b, "...for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved."

The diaconate must be filled with men who are not enslaved to any substance, much less alcohol!

1 Timothy 2:8d, "...not fond of sordid gain (greedy of filthy lucre)."

The idea behind this phrase is that the deacon must not use his office as a means to make money or further his own interests. This remains a very important quality for this church office. Since deacons routinely handle money as part of their official duties, they must not be ones who have as a major component of their lives the acquiring of wealth. For it wouldn't be very difficult for a deacon to take some of the funds entrusted to his care, as did Judas (John 12:4-6). Alexander Strauch wrote this:

Such people may not actually steal cash. Instead, they may misdirect church funds to their own so-called 'ministry expenses': gas, car repairs, meals, travel, and home. This still is wrongfully seeking gain that belongs to others; it is 'sordid gain.' (Strauch, 1992, p. 99)

Paul used the expression when it came to elders that they must be "free from the love of money" (1 Timothy 3:3b)— that is the idea here! The goal is for all church officers to be able to say with Samuel:

1 Samuel 12:3, "Here I am; bear witness against me before the Lord and His anointed. Whose ox have I taken, or whose donkey have I taken, or whom have I defrauded? Whom have I oppressed, or from whose hand have I taken a bribe to blind my eyes with it? I will restore *it* to you."

So if you could get a "taste" of the man who is qualified to serve in Christ's church, that which would come to your mind is NOT a preoccupation with drinking or money. No! It must be something else.

1 Timothy 2: 9a, "*But* holding to the mystery of the faith..."

The word for "mystery" is a key word in the Bible. First note that it does NOT denote something that is currently unknown or hidden. That is how the term is used in English. You know, "a mystery novel"- a book which keeps you guessing as to "who did it?" Amazingly, many Christians read this word in connection to tongues-speaking in 1 Corinthians 14 and conclude that the true gift involved a person speaking something that they themselves could not understand. That is wrong! The word in the Greek (μυστήριον (*mustērion*)) refers to a class of revelation which prior to the present had not been understood by God's people, but now, through revelation, has become clear.

Ephesians 3:4-6, "And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; *to be specific*, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel."

Ephesians 3:8-10, "To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the

Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things; in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly *places*.”

By “mystery” Paul is talking about something which heretofore has not been revealed as it now is! And what specifically is that? It is “the mystery of the faith!” Because Paul uses the article, “the,” we conclude that he is talking about the content and focus of the New Testament. This is what God has now made known to us. And it is this that is a major preoccupation of a man of God!

Who is the one who should minister to you? One who is NOT pre-occupied with his rights, liberties, or the various and sundry gifts that God gives in order for man to live on this earth- like money or drink! RATHER, the focus of his life is uncovering, understanding, and so coming to know the deposit of revelation which God in prior generations did not reveal as fully as He has in ours! That is his passion! Such things as:

- The mystery of the Incarnation of Christ (1 Timothy 3:16).
- The mystery of the indwelling of Christ in believers (Colossians 1:26–27).
- The mystery of the unity of Jews and Gentiles in Christ (Ephesians 1:9; 3:4–6).
- The mystery of the saving gospel of grace (Colossians 4:3).
- The mystery of lawlessness (2 Thessalonians 2:7).
- The mystery of the exaltation and glorification of God’s people (1 Corinthians 15:51–52).

These are the things which preoccupy the thoughts, attention, and focus of a man of God. This brings us to the sixth characteristic: he must be one who endeavors to grasp “the mystery of the faith.”

1 Timothy 2:9b, “...with a clear conscience.”

The idea behind this expression is that of “a conscience that does not accuse.” The “conscience” is akin to a referee. A referee’s job is to officiate a competition according to the rules of the game. He does not set the rules. But once he is told them, he then judges the match (cf. Romans 2:14-15). So it is with the conscience. It compares the motives, thoughts, desires and actions of a person against its “rule book” and either accuses or excuses the individual. As such, it EITHER produces guilt, shame, fear, remorse, and despair over sin, OR assurance, peace, and joy due to righteousness.

A “clear” conscience is a conscience which does not call a penalty on account of one’s actions. In other words, the man of God is one who is consumed with understanding the truth of God’s word- the mystery of the faith (v. 9a)/the rule book. And as he studies it, he endeavors to conform his thoughts, actions, intentions, motives, goals and the like to its teaching such that he never lives ignoring the whistle to stop (v. 9b). Dr. John MacArthur put it this way:

It is not enough merely to believe the truth (cf.. James 2:19), deacons must also live it. And the stronger the theological and biblical knowledge and obedience, the stronger the affirmation of conscience. Every deacon (and every Christian) should strive to be able to say with Paul, ‘For our

proud confidence is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you' (2 Corinthians 1:12). (MacArthur, 1995, p. 126)

Don't let this list discourage you in your walk. Rather let it inspire you. What you are seeing today is a picture of a man of God and so that to which God is going to grow you by and with His providence. IOW, don't read this, see where you have fallen, and then walk away in gloom. Rather, read this and see the snapshot of the man or woman that God currently is making you by grace!

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About the Preacher

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