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The Office of Deacon, Part 12

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.

In 1 Timothy 3, Paul describes the character traits we ought to look for when ordaining a man to ministry and behind it all is a life forged on account of love for an awesome Being! The qualifications referenced in this text are not just simply the character traits of a deacon; they are the character traits of a man of God! Paul is saying; *When it comes to choosing the one who will minister to you,*

choose a godly man!

You say, "What is that, Paul?" The Apostle here says, "Let me describe him to you..."

1 Timothy 3:8, "Deacons likewise *must be* men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain..."

It is important to note that what Paul describes is the ideal. Outside of Christ Himself we are never going to find a man who reflects this list perfectly. So what does that mean when it comes to the selection of church officers? Consider with me Paul's words.

Romans 7:18-19, 24-25a; "For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good *is* not. 19 For the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish... Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

Paul struggled in his life with sin. Yet notice that at about the same time Paul wrote Romans, He also wrote Corinthians in which he said this:

1 Corinthians 11:1, "Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ."

Truly we understand that while in the Kingdom we are called to follow other men and women (cf. also 1 Thessalonians 1:6, Philippians 4:9). Nevertheless we do not follow them because they don't sin; we follow them on account of the way that they deal with their sin! And this is the same with church leaders. When a man or woman falls short of 1 Timothy 3, we would expect them to say, "Oh, well no one is perfect." But Paul wants us to choose leaders to who say, "Oh God! Forgive me, change me, renew me, and use me unto your glory and praise!" This is what we are looking for when it comes to "the one who ministers to me" (Psalm 101:6b)!

With that, let's continue in our examination of this text as it describes "The Man" qualified to minister to our souls! We pick it up in 1 Corinthians 11:10 and the seventh characteristic or trait of the man of God called to be a deacon.

1 Timothy 3:8-10, "Deacons likewise *must be* men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, *but* holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let these also first be tested..."

The word rendered "tested" references a judgment based on observation. As such, it can be translated as "approve." Think of a piece of steel which is heated and beaten. In time it becomes "proven" or "approved for use." That is the idea here. Trench describes this word this way:

In *dokimazein*... lies ever the notion of proving a thing whether it be worthy to be received or not... (Trench, 2000, p. 278)

Now because the verb behind "let him be tested" is a present tense, the idea is one of an ongoing test. In other words, when it comes to choosing leaders, you don't say, "Today I'm going to consider

Frank's conduct in the church. If he performs admirably, I'll vote for him." Rather, the "testing" of this passage would encompass his entire Christian life before his service as an officer. As we consider the qualifications of a church leader, we must look at the big picture and find men who already are walking the walk.

We soon are going to begin the process of nominations for the office of deacon. And say, there is a man in this congregation who really wants the office and so all of the sudden begins:

- Walking the walk.
- Talking the talk.
- Doing the work.

Our consideration as to whom we nominate and/or select must NOT be on account of observation based on this past month. Rather we want to consider the man over the past couple of years. How has he lived? Does he reflect to some degree the snapshot given here by Paul? Now, what are we to be "testing" them for?

1 Timothy 3:10, "...then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach."

The idea behind "beyond reproach" is that they are not able to be accused of living in violation of Christ-likeness. The word is a legal term which means "unable to be arraigned." Accordingly, deacons must not have any unaddressed blot on their lives; nothing for which they could be accused, arraigned, and disqualified.

After this Paul turns his focus to the "wives of deacons." Paul addresses their wives because a deacon's ministry will involve their wife more than the ministry of an bishop/overseer. Overseers function in the realm of "the word of God and prayer" for these are the tools of their calling. They are concerned with teaching, leading, equipping, and encouraging. On the other hand, deacons function in the realm of "mercy" which involves going into people's homes, drawing by the bedside, and wiping the brow. Their ministry is more "earthy." Through the ministry of diaconal care, a person is going to get involved in the struggles of life which necessarily will involve their closest confidants—their wives!¹ Accordingly, the wife of a deacon must also manifest certain characteristics.

1 Timothy 3:11a, "Women [wives] *must* likewise *be* dignified..."

The word "dignified" that Paul uses is the same term used in 1 Timothy 3:8. It speaks of being serious in mind as well as in character. Like the man of God, a woman of God has a majestic quality of character that evokes a sense of sobriety in those around them! Thus the deacon's wife is not to be known as a silly, flippant person who makes light of serious matters. Rather they see life as God sees it, and know the seriousness of life, the gravity of sin, and that which hangs in the balance; eternity.

1 Timothy 3:11b: "[Wives must]...not [be] malicious gossips..."

The word used for "malicious gossip" comes from the Greek word from which we get the name, "Diabolos" (Matthew. 4:1). To slander a person literally means to "speak against" them when they are not present. "Diabolos" denotes this and a lot more. It is to speak with malice against someone.

Again, deacons minister for a prolonged time amidst the muck and mire of this sinful state. As such, they hear things and see things in people which are not pleasant. Imagine if their closest confident has an evil heart and so exposes that which ought not to be known to others? Truly, a deacon's wife must not be a "malicious gossip." They must not derive joy in the struggles of others.

1 Timothy 3:11c, "[Wives must be]...but temperate..."

This literally means "wineless," or "unmixed with wine." Just like the overseers (v. 2) and deacon (v. 8), the deacon's wife must not be preoccupied with drink. Her focus must be eternity, as opposed to the passing pleasures of life which are intensified through drink and/or money.

1 Timothy 3:11d, "[Wives must be]...faithful in all things"

The idea here is that she is "able to be trusted" in and with all things! There is an element of loyalty here which is very important. Ministry in Christ's church means ministering to sinners. Now sinners can arrive at all sorts of false conclusions and observations. That is why there is a need for ministry. This means that ministering to hurting people will involve listening to the gripes and complaints of sinners against Christ, His church, His leaders. Accordingly, you don't want someone in ministry who is easily "tossed to and fro by the waves" (Ephesians 4:14). Rather, you need someone stable, dependable, trustworthy... faithful! Calvin put it this way, speaking of deacons:²...

They may thus be on their guard not only against the impostures and frauds of those who are far too inclined to begging... but also against the [slanders] of those who are constantly making disparaging remarks, even if there is no occasion for doing so. For as well as being full of difficulties that office is also exposed to unjustified complaints.

That is the idea here. Deacon's wives must not listen to the nay-sayers who opine, "*You are the only decent family in this church. Everyone else has abandoned me. The other deacons and elders... they are worthless. Did you know what so and so said?*" Deacons and their wives must understand that sinners sin. As such, they must reflect a character which can be depended upon!

Now moving on from their wives, Paul returns to the deacon proper and gives two more character-qualifications.

1 Timothy 3:12a, "Let deacons be husbands of *only* one wife..."

The concept is that they must be a "one woman man." Some have taken this statement to mean that a deacon must be married AND the marriage must be the only one he's ever had. That is not what is meant by the expression. The idea is that whether they be single or married, the man must not be a skirt chaser, entering into vulnerable discussions or situations with multiple women. And so as with the overseers, the issue is moral character, not marital status. They must be models of sexual purity.

1 Timothy 3:12b, "...and good managers of *their* children and their own households."

The idea behind "good manager" is not that of a dictator or military leader, but that of a shepherd. They must be proven/effective care-takers in the home, both of their children and the entire

household.

Now what manager is there who doesn't face difficulty from time to time? This is a state of sin and misery; as such good managing won't preclude difficulty. But when difficulties come, a good manager will address it in a way that is Biblical and pastoral. Accordingly, what Paul is after is NOT perfect families, BUT faithful shepherding in the good and difficult seasons of life. This of course will be discovered as we watch NOT ONLY the man as he (1) ministers to his wife and children and (2) addresses their spiritual needs, BUT ALSO the fruit of the man's labor in the lives of those entrusted to his care. Is his family growing in grace? Do they live at the base of Mount Sinai or Calvary? Is his wife's soul cared for? Or does he bark orders and make her submit?

This is why qualification for leadership always involves an examination of the fruit of the man's ministry in his own home (cf. 1 Timothy 3:4-5; 12; Titus 1:6). Truly, our first congregation is our family. Look at how a man cares for his family. Consider his fruit and you will see how he will care for the family of God!

This is what we ought to look for when it comes to those whom we allow to minister to us! They must be men of God who serve out of love for an awesome Being! They have a passion and longing for understanding the Kingdom of God. He is quick to repent when he discovers that he is out of accord with God's standards and teachings.

Yet as we consider this office, there is one more element that is quite important. We must see that there is a facet to the qualifications listed here that are "relative" as it relates to the particular congregation electing leaders.

On his first missionary journey, after planting a host of churches, Paul visited each of the congregations on his way back home where he "appointed by show of hands" elders in each of the congregations (cf. Acts 13-14). This means that the elders Paul "appointed by show of hands" had been believers for no more than a year, but most likely less. Yet 1 Timothy 3:6 says that one of the qualifications for the office of elder is that they must not be "a new convert."

I dare say that in most congregations in the United States today, a one year old Christian would be considered a new convert. Yet this is where the standard for church office has an element of relativity to it. When an entire congregation has been saved for less than six months, a one year old Christian is "not a new convert." Likewise, when a congregation is comprised of young families, a "man of dignity" will look completely different than in a congregation where the average elder has walked with God for forty years, is seminary trained, and frequently teaches/preaches the word.

Accordingly, as we consider the calling and qualifications for the office of deacon, there is a need to keep in mind the congregation for which we are nominating men for the office. The question is NOT are they qualified to serve in that congregation or that congregation. The question is: Are they qualified to serve in this one. May God give us the grace to proceed with caution and care as we consider the men whom we are going to allow to minister to us!

End Notes

¹ A loose metaphor could be drawn between the differing work of a doctor and a nurse/therapist. While the goal of both a doctor and nurse are the same, they have different approaches. Right? The doctor addresses the physical illnesses of the patient. In contrast, the nurse/therapist does the dirty job of attending to the recovery of the sick person- which involves bed pans, the care of oozing wounds, smelling rotting flesh, wiping the brow of someone in severe pain, and much, much more. Now don't misunderstand: Doctors address some pretty gross things when it comes to the body- but they do not live there. They treat it and move on to the next patient in the next room. It is the nurses and therapists who walk with and beside the ill. They get to know them in a way that doctors do not! The analogy is going to break down, but I hope you get the idea. Diaconal care is going to involve a man and his wife in the lives of God's people in a way different from the elder and his wife. Both have the same goal- they necessarily use different approaches.

² Acts, 1:162.

Sources Cites

Trench, R. C. (2000). *Trench's Synonyms of the New Testament*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishing.

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About the Preacher

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