

**Letters From My Father**  
**Week 8**  
**1 Timothy 3:8-13**  
**“Deacons: The Servants of The Body”**

**Introduction**

**In those days, as the disciples were increasing in number, there arose a complaint by the Hellenistic Jews against the Hebraic Jews that their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution. The Twelve summoned the whole company of the disciples and said, “It would not be right for us to give up preaching the word of God to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and wisdom, whom we can appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” Acts 6:1-4**

Godly deacons are an asset to any body of Believers. In fact, the ministry of preaching and teaching is nearly impossible without such faithful servants to assist the pastors by taking care of the everyday needs that arise within the body. When I think of the deacon ministry, I am always reminded of the story of Moses as he led the children of Israel into battle against the Amalekites in **Exodus 17**. The old prophet went to stand upon a hilltop overlooking the battlefield. And he held up God’s staff high over the battle. As long as he held up the staff, the children of Israel were winning the fight, but when he let down his arms for just a moment, the tables would suddenly turn and the Amalekites gained the advantage.

As Moses stood there for such a long time holding up the staff of The LORD his arms grew so weary that he could no longer raise them up. So two of the men came and offered their support.

**When Moses’s hands grew heavy, they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat down on it. Then Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side and one on the other so that his hands remained steady until the sun went down. Exodus 17:12**

Now *that* is the perfect description of what a deacon can mean to a pastor! They do whatever is necessary to help him remain in the fight, as it were. They are willing to do the menial tasks so that the work of The LORD can continue. They are self-less and faithful. And if a church is blessed to have such men as these in its company, then they have much for which to be thankful.

Unfortunately, over the centuries, the office of deacon has been confounded by many false teachings. It is not a place of leadership, but rather, it is an office of servitude. In fact, the very word that *The New Testament* uses for “deacons” (diakonos) literally means “one who serves”, or simply “server”. It is the very same word that would be used to describe a waiter (server) in a restaurant today. Remember the story of Christ’s first miracle in **John Chapter 2**? Jesus turned the water into wine at a wedding in Cana, and *The Bible* says that no one even knew what he had done except for the servants.

**When the headwaiter tasted the water (after it had become wine), he did not know where it came from — though the servants (diakonos) who had drawn the water knew. John 2:9**

So here we see the very same word for “deacon” being used to describe the servers at the wedding in Cana. The office of deacon is not an authoritative position, but rather, a supportive role. And therefore, the churches today that are run by a “deacon board” are committing grave Biblical error. Simple as that.

As Paul described in detail the qualifications for the servants of the church in his letter to Timothy, we are given insight into just the kind of person that God expects to serve His people within the body of Christ. The list of qualifications isn’t very different from those of the senior pastor, with the exception that deacons are not required to teach. So let us look together at the requirements that are necessary for someone to fulfill the role of “server” in the body of Christ. As we observe the deacon’s *Character*, along with a bit of “*Controversy*”, as well as, their *Consistency*.

**Character (vs. 8-10)**

**Deacons, likewise, should be worthy of respect, not hypocritical, not drinking a lot of wine, not greedy for money, holding the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. They must also be tested first; if they prove blameless, then they can serve as deacons.** **1 Timothy 3:8-10**

As stated above, the qualifications for the office of deacon are much like the qualifications for pastor/elder, with but a few exceptions, the first of which being that deacons are not required to preach or teach. However, this doesn't mean that deacons are not allowed to do so. Many deacons who serve in the church are excellent teachers. In fact, one of the very first deacons, a man named Stephen was a passionate preacher. You can find one of his sermons recorded in **Acts Chapter 7**. After preaching this particular fiery message, Stephen was stoned by the religious leaders of Israel, (in whose number included the soon to be Apostle Paul). So, needless to say *some* deacons can preach and teach extremely well, but it is not a requirement in order to serve as deacon.

Paul described those who would serve in this capacity as being “*worthy of respect*” (**vs. 8**). The word used here is similar in nature to the word translated as “above reproach” that Paul used to describe elders (**vs. 2**). The word here (*semnos*) carries with it the meaning of being “*serious or stately*”, meaning that deacons should live in such a way that they are perceived by all as honorable and respected. It is vital that those who would serve the needs of others within the body be the kind of people that everyone should aspire to emulate. In short, deacons must be the very best among us.

Paul goes on to say that they must not be “*hypocritical*”. The Greek word employed here is *dilogos*, and it literally means to be “*two-tongued*”. The thought being that deacons should do as Christ commanded to let their “yes be yes” and their “no mean no”, as it were. In today's vernacular, we would say that deacons do not “talk out of both sides of their mouths”, meaning they do not say one thing to one person and tell a different story to another.

Imagine how damaging it would be to the body if a deacon served someone who was in need, pretending to care about them, and then spoke badly about those same people behind their back! Those who would serve in the body must treat everyone the same and say what they mean and mean what they say.

And in addition, no one who is called to serve as a deacon can be motivated by any form of greed. After all, it was these men who were entrusted to take from the church treasury and provide for the needs of others within the body. How reckless it would be to have a man such as Judas, who, because of his greed, frequently stole money from the disciples of Jesus! *The Bible* is perfectly clear on this matter; greed is idolatry (**Ephesians 5:5**). Jesus also made it plain that one cannot serve God, when his heart is set on riches.

**No one can serve two masters, since either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.** **Matthew 6:24**

As well as having the absence of greed in their lives, the deacon also must be firmly established in the faith. Paul describes this as “*holding onto the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience*”. This means that not only do those who serve as deacon have a firm grasp upon the gospel of Christ, but that they also live out their lives according to their faith. In the simplest terms, *they practice what they preach*, so that their own consciences do not condemn them. It is one thing to know the Biblical truths of Christ Jesus and His sinless life, atoning death, burial and resurrection, and yet, it is quite another thing to exemplify these truths not only in our words, but in our deeds.

And in order to prove out these character traits, Paul commanded Timothy to examine (test) any would-be deacon candidates over a long period of time to see if they consistently lived out these truths. To be a deacon in the church is a serious calling, and before being ordained into such a worthy position, everyone must be carefully proven in their character. For an unqualified and unfaithful servant can do great harm to the body. The Church at Ephesus had its fair share of troublemakers. What was needed was some godly men to step up and live out the faith they so boldly professed. When it comes to deacons, make no mistake, character counts!

**Controversy? (vs. 11)**

**Wives, likewise, should be worthy of respect, not slanderers, self-controlled, faithful in everything.** **1 Timothy 3:11**

In **verse eleven** of the text, Paul shifts the topic from the men serving in the church to the women. The original Greek that he used has often been translated “*Their wives*” or simply “*wives*”. But nothing in the original text actually supports the inclusion of the word “their”. A better rendering would actually be “*the women*”. It is possible that the translators were concerned that the use of this translation would go against Paul’s previous statements regarding women having leading roles within the church (**1 Timothy 2:9-15**). So the safest translation of this passage is generally accepted to be a description of deacon’s wives and how they too are to conduct themselves with dignity and holiness, being able to control their tongues (not gossips), being faithful in the service of The LORD.

This passage has been the subject of much controversy in the Church, however, for one could actually make a very strong case for the fact that Paul is not referring to deacon’s wives here, but rather, to women who are chosen to serve as deacons themselves. My personal opinion on this subject has changed over the years as a result of my own experiences in ministry. And I now am persuaded that Paul is speaking hear of women deacons.

There are a few reasons for my “departure”, as it were, from my previously held position that only men can serve in this capacity. Firstly, as I have come to understand the Scriptures more in my own maturity, I have come to realize that the position of deacon is most certainly *not* an authoritative position, even though many churches have tried to make it so. The office of deacon is a position of service, and not leadership. Therefore, why would serving others be regulated to only men within the church?

I, for one, am eternally grateful for all the godly women who have served faithfully within the body of Christ. In fact, were it not for the women, many times the work of the church might have ceased entirely. And if we regard the role of a deacon as we should, rather than how it has been misconstrued, then we wouldn’t be nearly as concerned about women serving in this capacity.

Another reason that I believe Paul is talking about the women, who faithfully serve within the body, is that it would have been so easy for him (in the Greek) to link in these women possessively to the male deacons. The use of the word “*likewise*” suggests that Paul is referring to a completely separate group of individuals. And not only this, there is no possessive pronoun or definite article in the original Greek linking these women to the men previously mentioned.

And finally, we know from Paul’s other writings that he had no problem identifying other women as female deacons. For example, in his letter to the Romans he states:

**I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant (diakonos) of the church in Cenchreae.** **Romans 16:1**

So perhaps we should think more of deacons as servers in the body and less as having authority over the body, and we would have less problems within the church. After all, it is elders who are called to lead, and the servers, who are called to “hold them up” so that they can lead. And one thing I know for certain... we need a lot more “servers” and a lot less “observers” in the body of Christ! Can I get a witness?

**Consistency (vs. 12-13)**

**Deacons are to be husbands of one wife, managing their children and their own households competently. For those who have served well as deacons acquire a good standing for themselves and great boldness in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.**  
**1 Timothy 3:12-13**

Just as those who are called to be in leadership, deacons are to be faithful to their wives. They are to be “one woman kind of men”, who only have eyes for their own wife. After all, a man who will deceive his own wife with his adulterous behavior will have no problem deceiving literally everyone else! I find that to be a good rule of thumb, when I go to the polls to choose a candidate for political office as well. Those who cheat on their spouses cannot be trusted to deal fairly with anyone. This personal opinion has often been the source of political arguments with others, but I stand by it nonetheless. And I certainly believe that it is imperative to choose faithful people to serve within the body of Christ! And for that matter, so does God. These men’s home lives must be consistent with their public image. Else they be seen as hypocrites.

The deacon, similar also to the pastor, must be the head of his household, and his children must respect his authority. For as we have stated previously in regard to elders, no one knows a man’s consistent character better than his own family. And if they are not persuaded of his faithfulness to The LORD, then why would we believe he could be faithful in the church?

Paul goes on to say that **“those who have served well as deacons acquire good standing for themselves and great boldness of the faith that is in Christ Jesus” (vs. 13)**. I believe that this is actually a reference to those who begin as deacons then go on to acquire higher offices of leadership within the church. Many who began as deacons have gone on to become pastors and teachers. Their experience in serving others as they follow Christ has allowed them to mature to the point of leading congregations of their own.

Those who are found faithful are often exalted/elevated within the ranks of the Church. And this is as it should be. Many times churches send out “search committees” looking for a gifted man to lead their congregations, when such a man may have been overlooked while sitting in their own pews! I firmly believe that when God establishes a church, He also equips it with just the right individuals to do the work thereof. But sadly, often times, we overlook the assets we already have within our midst and go looking for them somewhere else. I once heard a business man say, “An expert is someone from someplace else, carrying a briefcase!” I have found this to be true more often than not. And it should not be so.

Those who faithfully serve within the church should be respected and honored. We should remember not only to encourage them personally, but to thank God for them. Everyone needs to know on occasion that they are doing a good work and that their efforts have not gone unnoticed. I cannot tell you how many times that I have been discouraged only to have The LORD send an encourager my way! I thank God for those people in my life, for they have given me the strength to go on many, many times.

The word “*encourage*” literally means to “*pour courage into*”, and how important it is for those who are serving on the front lines to be refreshed by a godly encourager. So make it your goal to do just that, be an encourager. You may never realize the difference that such a person can make in the lives of others. Serving faithfully in the church is not only rewarding and a great honor, but it can also be both demanding and discouraging. So be on the lookout for those who have grown weary in the fight and pour courage into them. Paul commanded pastors, deacons, men and women, to all be faithful and righteous in all that we say and do, because we represent The LORD Jesus Christ. And He must be glorified in our service so that others will see Christ in us, and long to have Him as Savior. And this is why we do what we do! And as Paul would say:

**Let us not get tired of doing good, for we will reap at the proper time if we don’t give up.**  
**Galatians 6:9**

**TRUTH!!!**