

## Qualifications For The Deacon

### 1 Timothy 3:8-13

#### Introduction

The Church requires servants. The ruling elders (vv. 1-7) and the serving leaders (vv.8-12) have character requirements; spiritual requirements and family requirements. The willing servant is promised great rewards (v.13). Charles Dickens famously wrote; “No one is useless in this world who lightens the burdens of another.” One of our Servants at Calvary South Denver described himself as a “lay-Pastor”. “What does that mean?” Someone asked. The servant replied; “Whatever the Pastors don’t want to do they lay on me!” William Barclay probably borrowing from John Wesley said; “In the time we have it is surely our duty to do all the good we can to all the people we can in all the ways we can.”

We are all invited to serve. Jesus said; “*But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant*” (Matthew 23:11). Peter’s instructions included “*If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ*” (1Peter 4:11).

The job description that Paul provides Timothy for servant-leadership in the Church is often ignored or neglected and results in great harm to the Church. **Who can serve in the church?** Those who are sincere and worthy of respect (v.8a; 9-13). Those who demonstrate personal and spiritual maturity (v.9). People with proven (tested) character and ability (v.10). Leaders are faithful to spouses (vv.11-13) and demonstrate godly character (vv.11-13). And like Pastors or Ruling Elders servants in the Church exercise sobriety (v.8b) and **must not be greedy (v.8c)**.

#### Personal Qualifications (v.8)

*1 Timothy 3:8 (NKJV) Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money,*

The word ‘Likewise’ gives us an important clue in Paul’s use of the term *deacons*. Like the ruling elder or ruling elder or overseer (3:1); the person who occupies the office and or serves in the functioning role of “Servant” requires minimum standards; important standards. The deacon assists the Pastor and the congregation in exercising various functions associated with Church life.

The word deacon means servant, server or minister. In the very genesis of the community we call church it included such mundane tasks as waiting on tables (see Acts 6:1-4) and grew into more complex functions like the administration and distribution of vital resources. The deacons served under the leadership and supervision of the elders in whatever spiritual or practical tasks required in the Church community. In the book of Acts (6:1-7) a disputation in the Church prompted the apostles to call upon the people to appoint gifted men to help with the ministerial and administrative duties of the Church (Acts 6:2). In part their job was to relieve the ruling elders of certain tasks who could in turn devote their time to prayer and the ministry of preaching

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and teaching the Word (Acts 6:4). Even a superficial reading of the book of Acts reminds us that some of the deacons also served in teaching and preaching roles. Stephen (a deacon) was said to be full of faith and power, and did great wonders and miracles among the people (Acts 6:8).

At the top of the list Paul writes that deacons must be reverent (*semnous*). The word carries the idea of being serious, honorable, or respectable. We may say “held in high respect”. It’s the opposite of silly, flippant or not respected. Paul then writes; *not double-tongued (dilogos)—forked tongue*. This is a person who has one report for one person and another report for another person—in an attempt to court favor with both! The Servant leader must have a reputation for honesty and straight talk. We might think of this another way. The person must not say one thing to a person’s face and another thing behind their back. **The Servant Leader has privileged information about sensitive matters in the lives of the Saints. The Servant must exercise maturity, integrity and speak the truth in love.**

Like the Ruling Elder the Servant (read deacon) is not given to much wine. What does that mean? Can never drink? Rarely drink? Wine with meals? Whatever else it means it must mean given to sobriety. Not greedy for money. Paul warns that certain people who medicate with drink and dedicate their lives to material acquisitions are not qualified for service. The person who is occupied with wine and money fall into all kinds of temptations and snares. The Servant Leader must not have clouded judgment or a divided heart.

### Spiritual Qualifications (vv.9-10)

*9holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience.*

*10But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless.*

Paul lists three important spiritual qualifications:

1. A Doctrinal Test
2. A Practical Test
3. A Community Test

What does Paul mean by holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience? Does the mystery of the faith here have anything to do with the mystery of godliness (3:16)? I think so. The mystery of the faith is a reference to the revealed teachings; to sound doctrine and sound teachings (see 4:1,6; 5:8; 6:10). Sound (healthy) doctrine is required for sound teaching. **The teacher or the servant does not invent truth or add truth or provide some new truth. The deacon holds to the unchanging truth of the gospel.**

The mystery of the faith does not negate the certainty of the faith. The servant or deacon believes and embraces the body of revealed truth (Ryrie). For the person who is tempted to

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believe that this means a body of hidden or concealed truth available only to a select spiritual elite; undermine the very purpose for having visible qualifications! Church leadership is not a secret society for people with secret knowledge. Pause for a moment and consider the simple phrase **holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience**. In chapter 2:4 Paul wrote concerning prayer and the power of prayer to accomplish God's plans and God's purposes; the God of the Bible "desires all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth". You cannot grasp or hold the knowledge of the truth unless you believe the truth. Paul wrote; "for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle—I am speaking the truth in Christ and not lying—a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth" (2:7). Paul is speaking of essential Christian doctrine that constitutes the Christian faith. What are some of those essential doctrines? None could be more essential than the incarnation of Christ; the substitutionary atonement of Christ on Calvary's Cross and Christ's resurrection from the dead. There are other essential doctrines. The deacon cannot compromise essential Christian teachings. The servant must hold these beliefs with a pure conscience. What makes a doctrine essential? These are doctrines that fundamentally define historical Biblical Christianity. In essentials unity; in nonessentials, liberty; and in all things charity. The deacon must know and be able to articulate the difference between essential teaching and nonessential teaching. All Christian doctrine and teaching are built on the solid foundation of the Gospel as it is revealed in the Bible.

The Apostle Peter wrote; "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;" (1 Peter 3:15 NKJV).

Can the servant define and defend the gospel? Can the person present the gospel and then urge others to accept the Gospel because they have accepted the Gospel in their own life? Can you present the problem of sin and God's solution to sin in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus? Can you easily defend Christ's Deity; His Humanity; His ministry; His sufferings; His message; His priesthood and His return (1 Thess. 4:13-18; 2 Thess. 1:7-10)? Can you speak with ease of the grace of God—the source of salvation; of redemption—the meaning of salvation; prayer in the Spirit—the language of salvation; and hope—the outlook of salvation?

The deacon does not simply know the truth; the deacon believes the truth and live the truth in real life. And what is the outcome of that knowledge and belief and life? A clear conscience. Do your beliefs match your behavior? What has changed in your life? Do your actions reflect your beliefs about Jesus? What about joy and peace and humility and meekness and maturity? Are these the things that mark your life?

The deacon's life is marked by Biblical understanding, maturity and humility. The deacons in Acts 6:3 were men "known to be full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom".

**Tested (v.10).**

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**Test first.** In what way? Should the servant be able to articulate essential Christian beliefs? I think that is important but I suspect Paul means a person with a proven ministry of service. The test consists of observation by the ruling elders or elders as they observe a life lived in the crucible of pain, suffering, difficulty, persecution and trouble. A man—who has proven both character quality and family living and spiritual gifting. These may serve in the office of deacon. To put someone in leadership without evaluating their doctrine and life can prove a disaster in the Church.

Like the ruling elder the deacon is not a novice or a newbie. Proven in the sense of having a testimony; that is being able to articulate what Christ has done in their life and the changes brought about by Christ. A Christian who is rooted and grounded in God's Word; spiritually mature and authentically humble. Known and respected by peers and able to minister to people and assist the Pastor and ruling elders. We all face tests. No one has a perfect record. It can't mean—and has never failed a test or has always been found faithful. People must be given the opportunity to exercise gifts and make mistakes before given the title and responsibilities of leadership. Warren Wiersbe writes; "The deacon's office is to be used, not just filled. Church officers who are faithful and will acquire a good standing (degree) before God and men, and thus are able to further the work of Christ" (see Wiersbe's Expository Outlines; pp. 627-628).

### Blameless

Blameless does not mean sinless (insert sigh of relief). The servant is above reproach. It means there is nothing in the servant's life that Satan can seize and use as a reason to bring accusation against that person and the Church or the Gospel. The outside world—that is those outside the Church can find no reason to refute the person's claim that they know and love Jesus or moral or spiritual failure. The meaning (v.2) literally is "not able to be held" in a criminal sense; no valid accusation of wrongdoing can be reasonably made. The person can serve as an example to follow. It cannot mean simple accusation since Paul himself was accused of all kinds of crimes.

### Family Qualifications (vv.11-12)

*11 Likewise, their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things.*

*12 Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.*

Verse 11 is the subject of much debate. The phrase "their wives" might mean several different things. The text includes the term likewise (in the same way)—*gyne or gune (women)*—and is used for women and wife. The original language allows for both meanings.

It may mean the wives of the deacons. In the text the word "their" (possessive article) is absent. It may mean their wives—and it may mean—women. Some scholars argue that the context does not fit that meaning—that is an additional qualification for the wives of leaders.

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I think the New Testament can make an overall reasonable argument that Church leaders must have their own house in order. Paul does not allow women to teach and exercise authority over men but I don't think Paul is restricting women from serving in the Church. **If women are in fact prohibited from serving in the Church we are doomed.**

Whatever the meaning and the application we are left with the impression that women in leadership were to be serious (same word as verse 8). Once again this means distinguished, dignified, worthy of respect.

Paul uses the strong word “not slanderers” (*me diabolos*). *This is a tale bearer—a gossip*. This is the person who makes it a practice to talk about others with a view towards meddling and stirring up strife; making mischief or generating drama or creating a disturbance. The presence of persistent gossip among either men or women is a red flag for leaders. “A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy man keeps a secret” (Proverbs 11:13). **Those who talk about others to us will talk about us to others. There are three basic rules when speaking about others; is it true? Is it kind? Is it necessary? My grandma was fond of saying; “Why do dogs have so many friends? They wag their tails and not their tongues!”**

Paul then uses the term “temperate” (see 3:2). The word means moderate—marked by appropriate limits; boundaries, not given to exaggerations or extremes or excess; the absence or opposite of extravagant. Faithful in all things. Paul values faithfulness. “*Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful*” (1 Corinthians 4:2). The preceding verse reads “Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God” (1 Corinthians 4:1).

Do you sometimes or even often say things that are hurtful and harmful? Do you constantly say you are sorry and that you didn't really mean those hurtful words? I think it is safe to say that many people do not realize the scope of damage done by speech. Their failure to see the scope and harm might simply be immaturity or lack of discernment.

**A persistent problem with harmful speech disqualifies a person for spiritual service in the Church of Jesus Christ.**

**(v.12)** Deacons must be the husbands of one wife. Literally a one woman man. The issue is not the servant's marital status but the issues of moral and sexual purity. John MacArthur writes; “A “one-woman man” is one totally devoted to his wife, maintaining singular devotion, affection, and sexual purity in both thought and deed. To violate this is to forfeit blamelessness and no longer be “above reproach” (Titus 1:6-7).

**Righteous Results (v.13)**

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*13 For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.*

Why such strict standards for such a low job? After all—the deacon only serves! What may seem menial and unattractive to you—God sees very differently. You are entrusted with the care and service of the King’s children. Those who serve—and serve faithfully—and serve honorably—earn a good standing with fellow believers who recognize and appreciate their service. The Deacon or Server or Minister—receives good standing—a word that can also mean record or diploma. D.L. Moody famously said; “We may easily be too big for God to use, but never too small.” It was William Wordsworth in a verse written for children said;

Small service is true service while it lasts:  
Of humblest friends, bright creature, scorn not one:  
The daisy, by the shadow that it casts,  
Protects the lingering dew-drop from the sun.

The expression *great boldness* can also mean *great assurance*. The honorable and faithful servant speaks with confidence—because what she does is appreciated by the Lord Jesus Christ. Obedience to Christ produces assurance and confidence. The servant of Jesus can provide help in time of need, strength in time of weakness, cheer in time of deep doubt or ever increasing despair, guidance in perplexity; peace in trouble; joy in sorrow and power in service.

Humble faithful service to Jesus on this earth to His people may generate little earthly or material reward—but there is an eternal reward. The personal and spiritual qualifications for service are rigorous and demanding. **All false teachers fail the standards. Even if they live a moral and exemplary life (few do) they fail the doctrinal test in their self appointed service.** Their self-appointed service is not simply wood, hay and stubble. It is far worse. It is worthy of judgment and eternal punishment by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. In the Church at Ephesus they had several self-appointed leaders but few righteous servants. Paul provides much needed instruction. In the Life Application Commentary we read; “*There was too much meaningless talk (1:6) and too little purposeful living. Doubtless the apostle would have endorsed James’ plea, “Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly” (James 3:1 NIV). Paul knew that a future supply of faithful teachers would only be available with a present renewal of faithful believers” (p.70).*

## Conclusion

In summary; the deacon must be:

1. Grave—serious—not in the grave but full of joy and grace. The servant can have a sense of humor and a love for life—but should be taken seriously and held in high regard.

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2. Not double tongued; two faced; a tale bearer; having something to say to a person's face but something else behind their back. The person must be honest and sincere.
3. Not addicted to drugs or alcohol that might cloud reason or judgment.
4. Not greedy or preoccupied with the accumulation of wealth.
5. Able to articulate and defend the Gospel; know, explain and defend the essential teachings of the Gospel and the Bible.
6. Maintain a clean conscience or a pure conscience.
7. Tested, proven, both inside the Church and outside in the community at large.
8. Blameless, not sinless—but not having anything hanging over their head that would harm the testimony of Jesus or the ministry of the Church in the community it serves.
9. A godly wife and well behaved children. A reputation for purity and honesty and in the home and outside the home.

How will you serve? The head grows by taking in ever increasing information. The heart grows by giving out to others in humble, selfless service.