

1 Timothy 3:8-16 – “When The Church Gets It Right”

Summary Statement:

This passage outlines the qualifications for church deacons and highlights the profound mystery of faith and godliness in Christ that the whole church is to protect and uphold.

As we look today at the role of deacons, we have a lot of similar characteristics as were given to those serving as bishops/overseers/pastors in the beginning of the chapter. Again, not a lot is shared about their function, but more so about the type of person they are to be.

And though the overseer or leader of the church may be distinct in function, they are to be very similar in character.

- “Their qualifications are much the same as those for “bishops”; practical service (especially when recognized by an office) is leadership also. It is a mistake to see one office as more prestigious than the other, though “bishops” have more responsibility before God. Each is more a matter of *calling* than status.” (Guzik)

1. The Character of Servants – 3:8-13

3:8-9 - *Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, ⁹ holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience.*

This word **deacons** is the Greek word *diakonos*, which simply means at its core – a servant. We like to put titles on things and certainly a person walking around with the title of deacon may sound quite prestigious, but it’s really about being a servant. A deacon tends to the needs of those in the church.

- Now I will preface that by saying walking before the Lord as a servant for Him is the most noble or prestigious thing you can do, regardless of what the particular activity is you find yourself involved in. God sees the heart and that’s what He’s concerned with.

Now the first time we see this role of deacon pop up in Scripture is in Acts 6:1-6. Seven men were chosen by the disciples to attend to the needs of the church so that the disciples could remain devoted to prayer and the ministry of the word.

Stephen and Philip were two of the seven and they went on to have a great ministry in sharing the word too (although Stephen's ended a little prematurely). When these men were appointed to serve tables (to help with the daily distribution of food), the word **serve** in the Greek is *diakoneō*, the verb of the word for deacons. This is really what was to mark the deacon.

Now we don't have a list of deacons here at Riverside, but we got a whole lot of people deaconing! And we're thankful for the many people that serve here and help minister to the needs of the body of Christ in very practical ways. What a blessing you all are.

So, Paul reminds Timothy of the characteristic or qualifications that should mark those who are deacons.

Notice he begins with **Likewise**. Like what? Like those serving as overseers/pastors, the deacons are being held to a standard of conduct in a similar way.

They are to be **reverent**. This means that they are to be honorable people. They're to be people that others can look to and look up to. They should be worthy of respect. And that respect is earned in how they have a right respect for God and His people.

Not **double-tongued**... This is about being honest in your talk. You're not saying one thing to one person and the opposite to another. This person should be integral and trustworthy.

- Ill. A teenager just got her first tattoo and was showing her friend. It was a Japanese symbol on her hip so it would be kept from her parents who didn't approve. Her friend looked at it and asked what it meant. The girl responded "Honesty."
- That's how a lot of people roll. They can act one way with some, but be a little deceptive with others. Shouldn't be that way with deacons or anyone who calls themselves a follower of Christ.

Not given to much wine... The elder was not to be given to wine, but the deacon is not to be given to *much* wine. How much is too much? Let's not test things and see how close to the line you can get. Listen, it's hard enough to serve the Lord faithfully sober, why let alcohol make it harder?

Not greedy for money... This is something Paul always wanted to walk in utmost integrity and accountability in. He saw the charlatans that were at work in his day ripping people off in the name of the Lord. He certainly didn't want that to be a characteristic of serving the Lord.

- This is something Paul talked often about and revealed how there were times he laid down his right for support so the gospel would go out unhindered (1 Cor 9:18; 2 Cor 11:7-11; 1 Thes 2:9; 2 Thess 3:8-9).

Holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience.

This means that they were to have a good handle of God's Word. This is not holding a secret mystery no one else knows. Paul often talked about the truths of God being a mystery in that they were concealed in the O.T. but revealed in the N.T. Deacons need to know the truths of God's Word and deacons aren't to be keeping anyone in the dark of these truths. They should be speaking them forth and living them out.

That's the idea of having a pure conscience. In other words, they shouldn't be in dispute or disagreement with these truths. Their lives should reflect what they believe.

- "In the first century, the conscience was seen as the seat of the will. To hold truth with a clear conscience was not only to agree intellectually but volitionally as well. Intellect and mind must agree with life and purpose. Doctrine must penetrate to the person's will so that his conscience before God and others is blameless as he lives biblical truth in his daily life."¹

3:10 - But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless.

Like the elder (vs. 6), the deacon must not be a novice, or a newbie. Don't just grab someone after their first visit to the church and appoint them to some role before knowing them. Let them be tested. Give them opportunity to get to know the church and have the church get to know them. Find those that have a propensity to serve. Let them show that these other areas discussed are in place and that they're blameless or not guilty of conducting themselves contrary to what we've seen so far.

¹ Larson, K. (2000). *I & II Thessalonians, I & II Timothy, Titus, Philemon* (Vol. 9, p. 188). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

3:11 - *Likewise, their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things.*

Now it's been debated whether or not Paul was speaking only of the wives of male deacons, or if perhaps he was speaking of female deacons – Deaconesses. The word for deacons in vs. 10 is a little different structure than vs. 8. It's the word *diakoneo* – it's in the verb form and it's in the neuter.

- The word **wives** can also reference women in general. So this verse could be interpreted specifically to speak of the wives of deacons, or it's speaking of female deacons. It seems like the latter is in view. This is why Paul uses the word likewise. He's referencing another distinction in the deacons.
- Note that there's no requirements for elders' wives. The fact that there's requirements given here seems to reference more than just wives.

Interestingly we are introduced to a female deacon in Romans 16:1, Phoebe, who was a servant of the church in Cenchrea. That word servant is *diakonos* in the Greek.

- **Romans 16:1–2**, *"I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, ² that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also."*

Now the qualifications for them is that they must be **reverent**. Again, living respectable and honorable.

Not slanderers... The Greek word for slanderers is used 38 times in the N.T. 3 of them is translated as slanderer, the other 35 times it's translated as 'devil'. This is the name for the devil. Revelation 12:10 says he is the accuser of the brethren. So a deacon, or deaconess, must not be going about accusing and slandering people. Really the idea is that they must not be spreading gossip, for that's the devil's work.

Temperate... exhibiting self-control, well balanced.

Faithful in all things... this is being trust-worthy in the church and outside the church.

3:12-13 - *Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. 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.

Again, as we saw earlier in the chapter, the deacon must be the husband of one wife. He must be a one woman man; faithful and loyal in your marriage till death do you part.

Again, there's a lot that the deacon needs to be accountable to. Part of that is to their own family and home. Their work in the church must not supersede their care in their own home.

This is not about ruling their home with an iron fist, it's about shepherding and caring for their family. Being sure they're living these same characteristics within the home which will ensure (for the most part) respect and honor there.

For those who have served well... There is a reward for faithful service. We see that with Philip and Stephen, two guys that were listed in the 7 servants chosen in Acts 6. And these two were faithful to serve, and the Lord broadened their spheres of service. And they became very instrumental in sharing the gospel. Paul says here that faithful deacons receive ***great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.***

- Living a life of godly character and serving well, as is pointed out in this chapter, is going to give a person boldness in their faith. How so? You're being genuine and true. What you profess is what you're living. There's no hypocrisy. It allows you to be confident in your service and witness.

2. The Conduct of the Church – 3:14-15

3:14-15 - These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; ¹⁵ but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

Paul left Timothy in charge of the church at Ephesus, though he planned to return. But notice these plans are held lightly as Paul knew his life was to be directed of God.

- It's how we should live each day. We may have our plans, but live in a way where God can interrupt those plans without being frustrated.

So again, verse 15 summarizes Paul's whole point in writing this letter. It's to instruct Timothy (and the church) how to conduct themselves. This chapter has

been about leadership and servant qualifications in order that the church is functioning properly.

Now notice three things we see about the church here in vs. 15:

It is ***the house of God***... This is about Him. It's the place we come to worship God and see Him exalted and glorified. And when Paul uses the term **house** (*oikoi*) he's calling to attention a household.

- A household in Paul's day consisted of parents, children, extended family, but also workers and stewards. Many who began as workers but became embraced every bit as family. This is a great picture of the church.
- We come together with different backgrounds; we may have different responsibilities and duties, but we are all operating together as a family. We're a household under God – we're the house of God.
- A household provided comfort and support through family. It's what the church is to be to the world and one another as we become a place of love, acceptance and forgiveness.

It is ***the church of the living God***...

The church is *ekklesia* – the gathering of the saints who have been called to come together in community. And who gives this call? ***The living God***! We don't follow after worthless idols, or worship a figure who has made an imprint in history but that's it. Buddha is gone, Muhammad gone, Confucious gone, Ghandhi gone. Every religion aside from Christianity has a system of works and beliefs but they're not based on anything that can actually provide life. We serve a living God. The church is not a building or an organization it's an organism that experiences ongoing life through the One we gather to worship.

It is ***the pillar and ground of the truth***...

What does a pillar do? It supports the structure. It provides stability and strength. The church is to be that with the truth. We are to be making sure that the truth is being supported and remaining strong.

- Now the church is not the producer of truth (Catholics take a seat), but we are to be sure that the church is protecting it and staying true to the truth that has been given to us by the living God and through His Word.
- That's why we're going to stay faithful to teach the Bible at Riverside. This is the truth. Yet many assemblies have left the Word to focus on the latest fad,

or to pursue an experiential type service. This only makes the truth a secondary focus and leaves people unstable.

- **Ephesians 4:11–15**, *"And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, ¹³ till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; ¹⁴ that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, ¹⁵ but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—"*

And remember, Paul is writing this letter to Timothy who's providing leadership to the church at Ephesus. In Ephesus there was the great temple of Artemis, or Diana as referred to by the Romans. This temple had over 100 pillars each measuring around 54 feet tall. This thing was massive and these large pillars were intended for this temple to be seen from afar.

- This is what the church should be doing regarding the truth. Elevating it and allowing it to be displayed for the world to see.

The **ground** spoke of the foundation. And the church is to be the foundation for the truth. Again, not the producer of it, but the one that is giving it a solid platform. If the church is shaky in their witness or living compromised lives, this truth is not going to be well received. Any building is only going to be as strong as the foundation.

"Here then is the double responsibility of the church *vis-à-vis* the truth. First, as its foundation it is to hold it firm, so that it does not collapse under the weight of false teaching. Secondly, as its pillar it is to hold it high, so that it is not hidden from the world. To hold the truth firm is the defence and confirmation of the gospel; to hold it high is the proclamation of the gospel. The church is called to both these ministries." ²

Now again, to accomplish these things, Paul doesn't point us to a program or a particular protocol, he points us to a Person – Jesus Christ!

² Stott, J. R. W. (1996). *Guard the truth: the message of 1 Timothy & Titus* (p. 105). InterVarsity Press.

3. The Confession of Christ – 3:16

3:16 - *And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory.*

This verse appears to be an excerpt from an early hymn about Christ.

The mystery of godliness is no longer a mystery. A mystery was something once concealed but now revealed. It's been made known to those who are in Christ.

And what we see here is godliness doesn't come through some sort of religious reform, it comes through simply being connected to Christ. He transforms us and makes us new. We simply need to abide in Him (see Col 1:27).

- **2 Peter 1:3**, *"as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue,"*
- That is a wonderful truth! It's great and should leave us amazed. There's no controversy or disputing these truths.

God was manifested in the flesh... This also causes Christianity to stand out from other religions. It's not man trying to reach God, rather it's God coming down to man. God was made known through Jesus Christ.

- And Jesus experienced what we experience, He was tempted as we are tempted, He felt pain and sorrow, He went through suffering. We have a Savior that knows our frailty and what it's like to live in this world.

Justified in the Spirit... Now Jesus didn't need to be justified from any wrong or sin. But the idea here is that He was vindicated by the Holy Spirit, or shown to be truly the Son of God through the Spirit. That happened at His baptism (Matt 3:15-17), His transfiguration (Matt 17:5), His resurrection (Romans 1:3-4), and His ascension (John 16:10).

- **Romans 1:3-4**, *"concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, ⁴ and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead."*

Seen by angels... Not only were angels ministering to Jesus while He had His earthly ministry (Luke 2:8-14; Matt 4:11), but they've all been witnesses in the heavenly realm of the conquering victorious Saviour who defeated sin and death.

Preached among the Gentiles... From the day of Pentecost to today, Jesus has been preached to all people and all nations. He came for the Jew first, but all are invited in to receive the great grace and salvation of our Lord Jesus.

Believed on in the world... Aren't you glad that salvation is simple? I mean there's no hoops to jump through, no tests to pass, it's simply by believing in Jesus. Believing that He came as the Son of God, died on a cross to pay the debt incurred by your sins. And that by trusting in His sacrifice made for you, you can be forgiven of your sin and brought into a right standing before God. Many people all around the world have believed this and received this incredible gift of eternal life.

Received up in glory... No doubt this can refer to His ascension as Jesus was caught up in the clouds. But even more so, this reveals His permanent position in the Heavens. He is seated at the right hand of the Father. He is coming again and will enter into Jerusalem where He will establish His earthly kingdom and reign and will be received up in glory.

God has not only called His church to function well, but to reflect Him faithfully. Through qualified servants, a rightly ordered church, and a clear confession of Christ, the truth is upheld and displayed to the world. At the center of it all is not a program, position, or performance – but the person of Jesus Christ, who is the source of all godliness and the message we are called to live and proclaim.

Points to Ponder:

1. Christianity is not a spectator sport. Are there areas I could be serving in rather than just taking a seat?
2. Am I strengthening or weakening the church? Am I contributing to stability or adding compromise?
3. Is Christ central in my life? Godliness flows from relationship not religious action.