

# 1 Timothy

## I. Introduction

- A. **1 Timothy 3:8-13** . . . Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, [9] but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. [10] These men must also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach. [11] Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things. [12] Deacons must be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households. [13] For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.
- B. In **1 Timothy 3:1-13**, Paul describes the qualifications for overseers (elders, pastors), deacons, and deaconesses. As I pointed out last Sunday, these qualifications are primarily focused on the character and spiritual maturity of those serving in these positions.
1. You may find this part of 1 Timothy a bit boring, yet this list is vital for producing and protecting the spiritual health of the church.
  2. In fact, this list, if properly applied, will save you and our church from most all of the ills and evils and troubles and conflicts that have taken place and continue to take place in so many churches, denominations, and para-church organizations today.
  3. As you know, pastors, worship leaders, and youth workers have gotten involved in various forms of immorality. Embezzlement happens so often that it is offered as a line item on church insurance policies. Child sexual abuse by church child care workers is such a problem that churches are urged to do background checks before allowing a church member to work in a children's program. Power struggles within churches, unresolved conflicts between church members, and church splits are also common.
    - a. On a larger scale, we have just gone through the RZIM and Hillsong scandals, and now we are being made aware that the Southern Baptist Convention is facing a problem similar to that which plagued the Catholic church over the past 40 years – knowing about sexual abuse in their churches, mishandling or even hiding what they knew, having it all come to light for the world to see, experiencing shame and damage to their

- reputation, and having to spend millions of dollars cleaning up what should not have happened in any church.
- b. And yet, these kinds of things have happened, and probably will continue to happen within the Body of Christ –
    - (1) Not just because Christians are human and the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour (**1 Peter 5:8**),
    - (2) But also because churches either overlook a person's character and Christian maturity, or are so spiritually immature that they don't know how to measure it when deciding who should be in a leadership position or financial responsibility.
  - c. When churches primarily focus on a person's natural talents, spiritual gifts, education, work experience, and leadership abilities, they set themselves up to be spiritually unhealthy, which in turn leads to the kinds of troubles previously described.
4. The disciples believed the spiritual health of church leaders was so important that they made godliness in life, reputation, and wisdom the only requirements for those whom many think were the first deacons. **Acts 6:1-3**, "Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. [2] So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. [3] Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task."
5. But what if you are not in a leadership position or what if you don't want to be in a leadership position? Can these lists apply to you?
- a. YES! These lists contain character qualities that we all should aspire to have – for at least two reasons.
    - (1) **First**, because the pursuit of these character qualities will lead you further down the path of spiritual maturity.
    - (2) **Second**, because gaining these qualities will enable you to discern who is and who isn't worthy of a leadership position.
  - b. Think about this – in many churches, a committee narrows down the options for pastor, elders, and deacons and then presents those options to the congregation for a vote. Those who win the backing of the congregation, fill the position.

- c. The problem with this is that in most churches, the congregation is not spiritually qualified or spiritually discerning enough to make that decision.
- 6. Therefore, I am urging you to care deeply about the spiritual health of the church in general, and our church specifically. I am urging you to do your part to make this happen by pursuing godliness in your life. I am urging you to pray for wisdom when selecting leaders. And I am urging you to use the lists in **1 Timothy 3:1-13** to examine your own character and spiritual maturity, and the character and spiritual maturity of those you put into leadership.
- C. Last Sunday we looked at the qualifications for overseer (elder, pastor). Today we will look at the qualifications for deacons and deaconesses.
- D. Pray

## II. The spiritual health of the church and the role of deacons

### A. Deacons in history and deacons today

1. In many churches today, deacons are tasked with the care of the church's property. Therefore, it is often deemed that those with construction or fix-it abilities, and new Christians who need a place to serve, are the ones best qualified for the position.
2. This was not the case in the early church. Back then, and in some churches still today, the deacons' primary responsibility is caring for the people in a variety of ways.
3. However, caring for the people in the church is not the only reason to make one's spiritual condition the most important qualification for a leadership position. There are two more reasons that I believe are important.
  - a. **First**, every leader, regardless of their task, is seen by the congregation as a **church approved representative** of the Church and the Christian life. If the leader is a poor representative, it gives the people a **church approved excuse** to live a poor, or at best a mediocre Christian life.
  - b. **Second**, a leader's faithfulness, diligence, and quality of work comes from his character, and godly character produces the best character qualities any leader can have – regardless of his skills, abilities, education, and work experience.

### B. [8] Deacons likewise must be

1. **Men of dignity**,
  - a. Deacons are to be the kind of people whose life, speech, listening skills, compassion, respect for others, honesty with others,

leadership, and service is honorable, dignified, and worthy of respect and trust.

- b. And, a deacon's life, as much as his words, ought to inspire those they serve to continue growing in godliness and love.
2. **Not double-tongued,**
    - a. There is some reasonable debate as to what this means, partly because the Greek word used here does not appear anywhere else in the NT. So I will give you the two probable meanings and recommend we take them both seriously.
    - b. The **first** possible meaning is that a deacon is not to alter the truth to please or accommodate the hearer. In other words, he is to be sincere in representing the truth for what it is rather than saying it one way to this person and altering it for that person.
    - c. The **second** possible meaning is that a deacon is to speak so clearly that the hearer cannot miss what he is saying. In other words, he is to say what he means and mean what he says.
    - d. Both meanings are worthy qualifications that we can take for ourselves – even though we may not be a deacon or deaconess.
  3. **Not addicted to much wine,**
    - a. This requirement is especially popular with those who want to serve in the church and still have the freedom to drink alcohol now and then. But that is not the point of this qualification.
    - b. It is possible this requirement comes from **Leviticus 10:8-11**, “The LORD then spoke to Aaron, saying, [9] ‘Do not drink wine or strong drink, neither you nor your sons with you, when you come into the tent of meeting, (1) so that you will not die—[this] is a perpetual statute throughout your generations— [10] and (2) **so as to make** a distinction between the holy and the profane, and between the unclean and the clean, [11] and (3) **so as to teach** the sons of Israel all the statutes which the LORD has spoken to them through Moses.”
    - c. Too much alcohol alters your ability to think sensibly, exercise self-control, and properly relate to those around you. Therefore, too much alcohol, especially on a recurring basis, can create unnecessary problems for the deacon and the church, and is a bad example of godliness to those under the deacon's care.
  4. **Not fond of sordid gain,**
    - a. The essence of this requirement is that a deacon must not have a driving or excessive interest in gaining possessions that don't belong to him or gaining them through unscrupulous means.

- b. This qualification is especially important for deacons entrusted with the distribution of money and goods donated to the church for the needy.
  - (1) Judas is an example being fond of sordid gain. **John 12:6**, “Now [Judas] said this, not because he was concerned about the poor, but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box, he used to pilfer what was put into it.”
  - (2) Believers who are fond of sordid gain are often identifiable by their love for the world, their love for the things in the world, and their greed.
- 5. **[9]holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.**
  - a. Simply stated, a deacon’s life must be lived according to the word of God, and his speech must accurately represent the truths of God’s word.
  - b. In other words, a deacon is to be free of hypocrisy in his living and free of duplicity in his speaking – not just because that is what godliness demands, but also because of his close, intimate connection with the believers under his care.
  - c. For example, those who are physically needy often need more than their physical needs met.
    - (1) It is common for them to need comfort, a listening ear, encouragement to keep trusting God, prayer, and practical instruction about applying God’s word to their situation, their way of thinking, their attitudes, and their feelings.
    - (2) A deacon who lacks compassion or who spouts religious cliches that are of little help to anyone will do more harm than good to the spiritual health of those they serve.
  - d. It is through living according to God’s word and accurately representing God’s word that a deacon serves the church best.
  - e. The final four words in this statement are: **with a clear conscience**. This means that by listening to our conscience, we can know when we are living according to God’s word and when we aren’t.
- C. **[10]** These men must also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach.
  - 1. Not only are deacons to be selected on the basis of meeting the listed qualifications, they are to be tested to make sure they will handle themselves accordingly when under pressure.

2. Many can speak and serve well when the people being served and their circumstances are easy to deal with. But let trials, difficult circumstances, and unresponsive people come along, and these same deacons may not do so well. Hence, the reason for testing them before putting them into such a position.
  3. It is for this reason that Paul warned Timothy about being too quick to put a person into leadership. **1 Timothy 5:22**, “Do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily and thereby share responsibility for the sins of others.”
- D. Skipping down to verse [12] we read that Deacons must be husbands of only one wife, and must be good managers of their children and their own households.
1. We talked about this requirement when looking at the qualifications for Overseer, so I will only add two things.
  2. **First**, how we handle ourselves at home and deal with those in the home is a clear indication of how we handle ourselves and deal with others in the church.
  3. **Second**, who and what we are in the home is the most accurate representation of our spiritual health and Christian maturity, which in turn is an accurate indication of how far we can lead other believers toward spiritual health and Christian maturity.
  4. Therefore, when selecting a leader, we ought never overlook his or her home life.

### III. Conclusion

- A. As with overseers, these qualifications for deacons are primarily focused on their character and spiritual maturity – and this focus is necessary for protecting the integrity of the message and for promoting the spiritual health of the congregation.
- B. May we, as God’s people and members of the Body of Christ share God’s concern for the integrity of the message taught in our church, and the overall spiritual health of our church. And may we support our concern by our prayers, our own pursuit of godliness, and our support of one another in becoming all that we have been saved to be.