

Becoming a Servant

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Introduction.

- A. In this congregation, we are committed to the idea of a living, growing church. We want this church to be as effective as possible in carrying out the commands of God. It needs to be the best edifying church possible, and it needs to be the best evangelizing church possible. Those are God's goals, and they need to be ours too.
- B. Of course, this task is not an easy one. God has given His people much, but He expects much from them too, and this work can be something we struggle with at times. Because this is so, we need to use every tool that God has given us to fulfill His plans, and a tool that this congregation does not now use is the office of deacon.
- C. Brethren, just like a congregation needs elders to be fully effective, so too a congregation needs deacons to be fully effective. "Deacon" is just a transliteration of the Greek word "servant," and that's exactly what a deacon does. He serves. He does all the little things that are necessary for the smooth function of the church. Without deacons in this congregation, our elders must often do the deacons' work in addition to their own, and believe me, brethren, the burden of the elder is heavy enough without adding more to it.
- D. The point is plain: we need deacons, and we need to do what is necessary to get them. Now, as far as I know, the elders have no plans to appoint deacons anytime soon, but that doesn't mean we can ignore the topic. God's word demands qualified men to be deacons, and these qualifications aren't just something we wake up and discover we have one morning. It takes a lot of spiritual effort to meet these qualifications, and each man in this congregation who is not an elder needs to be committed to making that effort. The qualifications for a deacon shouldn't just be a list that we trot out at selection time; they should be objectives for our lives. Let's turn to 1 Timothy 3, then, to learn about becoming a servant.

I. Dignity.

- A. We see the character of the deacon described in 1 Timothy 3:8-10, 12, and the first of these qualifications, in importance as well as in order, is dignity. Deacons must be dignified, and each of the other qualifications contributes in some way to that dignity. Sometimes, when we think of someone who possesses dignity, we think of a really pompous guy, who goes around looking down his nose at everybody, but that's not the Biblical concept at all. In Bible terms, a man who is dignified is one who deserves and commands respect, who has already begun to develop the moral authority that such a big part of the office of elder.
- B. There are many things that contribute to this aura of dignity, but perhaps one of the most important is developing the wisdom to think first. One of the things that marks an immature man is his failure to consider the consequences of his words and actions, and someone who wants to be a deacon cannot afford such poor judgment. Not only does it cause congregational chaos, but it lessens him in the eyes of the church. Nobody respects a loudmouth or a hothead, and if we want to ensure that we are men of dignity, we can be neither.

II. Things Not to Be.

- A. However, just thinking about what we say and do isn't enough to make us deacon material. In the rest of 1 Timothy 3:8, Paul brings up three things that anyone who wants to be a deacon cannot be, both because of their moral impact and because of their impact on the reputation of the deacon. Of these, Paul first says that a deacon cannot be **double-tongued**. This isn't a word we use a whole lot, but its meaning is fairly apparent. A double-tongued man is one who speaks to please his audience rather than to tell the truth. The best example of double-tonguedness in our day is the sleazy politician who will promise a crowd one thing on Wednesday, then hop on a bus, travel 200 miles, and promise another crowd the complete opposite on Thursday. Basically, the double-tongued man is a flip-flopper.
- B. The man who wants to be a deacon cannot behave in this way. He must remain true to himself and to the truth. He will say even what is unpopular if it is also right. The best example in Scripture of men who were not double-tongued is found in the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They have been commanded to worship a golden image of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, refused, and been brought before the king to explain themselves. We see what they say in Daniel 3:16-18. They tell the king that they believe God will rescue them from the punishment that awaits them, but even if He doesn't, they will still do what is right. If we want to be deacons, we need to have the courage of these three and be forthright in our speech.
- C. Next, 1 Timothy 3:8 reveals that a deacon cannot be **given to much wine**. Essentially, the deacon cannot be an addict. The instance that Paul had in mind was addiction to alcohol, but any sort of addiction is equally problematic. For example, I know a brother in Texas who was literally addicted to computer games. Instead of going to work in the morning, he would get up every morning and begin to play his favorite computer game, which was called Everquest. His wife would have to call him from her workplace, every morning, and browbeat him into getting ready for work instead of staying at the computer all day. Eventually, his boss

- couldn't take it anymore and fired him—all because he enjoyed his computer game so much that he couldn't quit. I daresay that Everquest did as much damage in his life as Everclear has done in another man's.
- D. The problem with this kind of uncontrolled, addictive behavior is that it makes a man unreliable and useless, and it also makes the congregation see him as unreliable and useless. Who can respect a man who would rather drink, or smoke dope, or play computer games, or whatever else, rather than providing for his family and working for the Lord? If we struggle with addiction in our lives, we can't be deacons until we fix it.
 - E. Third, the man who wants to be a deacon cannot be **greedy for money**. The problem with being greedy is that the temptation doesn't just end with greed. Instead, love of money opens us up to a number of other temptations as well. Look at Paul's words in 1 Timothy 6:9. We can be spiritually drowned by the desire to get rich, and the deacon who desires to get rich can drown the church too.
 - F. First of all, deacons very often have dealings with the church finances, and a deacon who loves money may well be tempted to embezzle. Don't think it doesn't happen, brethren, because it does. Second, just like any other church leader, deacons are expected to set a good example, not least of all in attending services regularly. What kind of example does the money-loving deacon set when he regularly chooses to be at his workplace five miles from the church building instead of at services? In such a circumstance, the deacon is leading by example, but he's leading the congregation to put God second and money first. The weak may be enticed to follow such a man, but the strong will reject him. Any man who wants to be a deacon needs to make sure that his character is free from the love of money.

III. Things to Be.

- A. Although these things are true, the character of the deacon is not entirely defined by the things which he is not. Indeed, Paul goes on to define several things a man must be and do to be qualified as a deacon. The first of these is that he must be **holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience**. This means that the would-be deacon must understand and accept his accountability to the word of God. He must hold the mystery of the faith—that is, he must know what God expects him to do. Second, though, this knowledge must be accompanied by a pure conscience. The deacon must be able to consider his life in the light of the word without guilt. This doesn't mean that the deacon must be perfect. After all, there is no man on earth who does good continually and does not sin. It does mean, though, that the deacon cannot be in sin, that he must be a man whose mind is set on the spirit and not on the flesh.
- B. Sadly, if a man does not meet this standard, it does not always come out during the deacon-selection process. It is possible, for a time at least, to practice secret sin that is unknown to everyone but the sinner and God. However, we would all do well to take note of the admonition of Moses in Numbers 32:23. It is almost a certainty that sooner or later, the evil that we practice in secret will become publicly known. Our sin will find us out, and the public discovery of a deacon's sin can do terrible damage to a church. All of us, but especially men who wish to become deacons, must remove secret sin from our lives.
- C. Second, the deacon must also be engaged in **ruling their children and their own houses well**. Sometimes, we read this as just saying, "A deacon must have a child," but it's really much more restrictive than that. Really, this qualification is about capacity for stewardship. God has blessed each one of us with material possessions. How do we deal with them? Are we wise or are we foolish in the decisions we make? Similarly, God has blessed many here, most recently Chris and Bekah, with children, and the way that a man deals with the responsibility of parenthood also tells us a lot about his fitness for the deaconship. Are the children wild or out-of-control? Or do their lives show the leadership of a man who may well be suited for a leadership role in the church as well? These things are a measure, not just of responsibility, but of respectability. The would-be deacon with wild children forfeits the respect that he must possess.
- D. Finally, the deacon **must first be tested, and then be found blameless**. In other words, before he becomes a deacon, he must accept some responsibility, and then show that he is worthy of it. At the recent men's communication meeting, the elders appointed a number of men to do a number of tasks, and they just wouldn't be doing their jobs as elders if they weren't watching these men to see how they performed, both for the sake of the present and for the sake of the future. As Jesus says in Luke 16:10, he who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much. A man who does a good job in some minor role for the church may well be ready for a more important role. If we want to be deacons, here's what we need to do. We first of all need to take on some work for the church, and then we need to do well in that work.
- E. Clearly, the work of a deacon is not a work that is lightly prepared for or lightly assumed. It's something that requires a tremendous investment of effort on our part. Nor are the earthly rewards for being a deacon particularly impressive. You might get your name on the bulletin every week, but that's about it. So why be a deacon? Paul explains in **1 Timothy 3:13**. The deacon does the work of the Lord, and he gains the rewards of the Lord. There's no requirement saying that every Christian man must become a deacon. Nobody gets withdrawn from because they aren't deacons. But there is this: that the man who becomes a deacon and serves well pleases the Lord. If we want to please God, this is a work for which we need to prepare ourselves.

Conclusion. God is also pleased with us when we obey His gospel and are saved.