

Those Who Serve as Deacons

M. W. Bassford, 2009

Introduction.

Today is the day that the elders have chosen to appoint new deacons. This comes at the conclusion of a two-week process in which our three appointees, Brian, Chris, and Pete, had their names placed before the congregation for consideration. During that time, no one came forward with a single reason why any of these men were not qualified to serve. That's evidence, then, that the process of preparing for this day has gone on for much longer than two weeks. No one becomes a deacon by accident, and these three men are here today because they have set their hearts on serving God.

We see the value that God places on deacons in 1 Timothy 3:13. Clearly, when the Holy Spirit speaks of men who have attained a good standing in the faith, we must be sure to give them the honor and respect that their standing warrants. It's not easy to become a deacon, and it's no small thing that these brethren have reached the point where they are qualified to serve. We're recognizing their achievement this morning because they deserve to be recognized. What's more, during this time, the rest of us, particularly those men who are not yet qualified to serve, can give our attention to what it takes for a man to reach this point. The elders have said that any man who is qualified to serve will serve. If the Lord wills, it may well be that another few years from now, we'll be considering yet more men who have dedicated themselves to attaining this spiritual goal. Let's think about these things as we consider those who serve as deacons.

Their Qualifications.

The obvious place to begin this examination of what deacons are is by looking at **THEIR QUALIFICATIONS**. The only passage in the entire Bible that touches on this subject is 1 Timothy 3:8-9, 12. This paints a clear portrait of what a man of deacon caliber looks like. First, he is reverent. Some translations say "dignified" here. The idea is that deacons must be men who go through life with a sober and respectable demeanor, so that they won't take serving God lightly. Likewise, the deacon is not double-tongued. He doesn't give one answer in Bible class and a different answer in the break room at work. We can rely on him to stand firmly behind his convictions.

Third, the deacon must not be given to much wine. In a time and place where Christians should not drink at all, this one might seem a little strange to us, but there's a general principle here to be extracted. The point is that the deacon can't be addicted to or controlled by anything, be it alcohol, be it gambling, be it pornography. There must be nothing in his life that would compel him to place it before God. Similarly, the deacon must not be greedy for money. The idea here is that he can't be so fond of money and the things that it can buy that he would allow it to rule him either. For instance, the man who would swindle or defraud the old and helpless is not fit to serve as a deacon.

Fifth, the deacon must hold the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. He needs to know how God wants him to live, and he needs to live that way. Just like the deacon can't have a double tongue, so too he can't have a double life. He can't know all that the Bible says about faithfulness to one's wife, yet have a girlfriend on the side. In all things, he needs to be able to examine himself and his conduct and say that he's doing his best to live as a disciple of Christ.

Sixth, the deacon must be the husband of one wife. This is an idea that has caused enormous confusion, but the Greek here is useful in understanding it. Literally, the Greek text says that he must be a one-woman man. In other words, he must be married, and he must be monogamous. A man who is cheated on by his first wife, but who then remarries, is a one-woman man in this sense. However, a man who is unmarried, or who is with a woman he does not have a right to, is not a one-woman man. This points to faithfulness in the deacon's personal life.

Finally, the deacon must rule his children and his household well. He must be a good manager of what God has given him. Obviously, this verse only applies in situations where it is possible for the deacon to rule his children. If they are grown and out of his home, it is impossible for him to control their behavior. However, those who are under his roof need to be under his direction. Similarly, he needs to be a good manager of his household. He can't be a man who constantly lives above his means, who regularly finds himself in financial situations where he needs to be bailed out by his parents or by the church. Instead, he must wisely use the resources that providence has bestowed upon him.

When we take all of these things together, they reveal a man who is in control of himself and his situation, but lives his life under the control of God. In a godless and unrestrained age like ours, men like this are becoming rarer and rarer, but they are still what God expects. Brian, Chris and Pete are here before us this morning because they have lived up to these standards. If we wish to serve the Lord like them, we must devote ourselves to this goal like they have.

Their Wives.

Just too as the text describes what deacons must be like, so too it points to a standard of behavior for **THEIR WIVES**. This standard appears in 1 Timothy 3:11. First, they too must be reverent. This is the same word we have

already looked at, and it means the same thing here. Deacons' wives must be women who take themselves and their position seriously, so that they will take the things of God seriously. They must also not be slanderers. Simply in their role as the wives of church officers, deacons' wives will become privy to a lot of information that is not known to the whole congregation. They need to be women who will keep their mouths shut, rather than spreading sensitive details, or out-and-out falsehoods, throughout the entire church. These deacons' wives must also be temperate. They can't have a quick temper or be given to angry over-reaction. It's bad enough when an ordinary woman in the congregation flies off the handle like that. It's worse still when the wife of a man in an important position behaves that way. Finally, deacons' wives must be faithful in all things. These must be responsible women, who live up to their commitments to others, and above all, live up to their commitments to the Lord. They need to be reliable, trustworthy, and righteous.

When we consider these things, we see that today marks an achievement not only for Brian, Chris, and Pete, but for Tami, Bekah, and Jill. First of all, no man rises to any office in the church without the support, encouragement, and help of his wife, and all three of these women have helped their husbands a great deal. Nor is that all. These women have attained a good standing themselves as women of God, so that they will help and not hinder their husbands' work.

Their Testing.

Nor is this all that the Bible says about deacons. It also describes the **TESTING** process that they must undergo. We see this in 1 Timothy 3:10. I'm here to tell you, folks, it's not just a spur-of-the-moment thing that these men were nominated as deacons. The elders have been evaluating Brian, Chris, and Pete, in some cases for years, and are satisfied with the results of what they've seen. They've seen that these three men will faithfully attend the assembly whenever it is possible for them to do so. They've seen that they handle well whatever responsibilities are given to them. Chris has been helping prepare the duty roster for several years now. Pete has been responsible for taking the weekly contribution to the bank. Brian, even in the short time he's been a member here, has shown his eagerness to serve.

Furthermore, all three of these men have shown a willingness to grow in the Lord's service. Pete is teaching a Bible class on his own for the first time this quarter. Chris continues to expend a great deal of time and effort in becoming a better songleader. I can remember Brian saying, years ago, before he was even a member here, that one of the reasons why he wanted his children to remain faithful was so that one day he would be qualified to serve as an elder. That's an attitude that these three men all share. They are all three dedicated to excellence in the Lord's work.

Their Work.

Indeed, it's appropriate for us to conclude our consideration of the deacons with a consideration of their work. Believe it or not, there is not a single passage in Scripture that defines the work of the deacon. All we have to go on is the word "deacon" itself, which means "servant". Deacons serve. It has not yet been determined what these new deacons will do, although I know the elders have some ideas already. However, I'm certain that their service going forward will prove just as useful and important to the church as the service rendered by the deacons we currently have.

Much of what our deacons do is behind-the-scenes, but let me tell you, brethren, this church would not be what it is today without their work. James hosts and leads the only outside-the-assembly Bible study that I'm aware of here, and I wish there were half a dozen more men who were as willing to do that as he is. John Hamon manages a number of projects dealing with the physical church building itself, from configuring the heating and air conditioning to seal-coating the parking lot. Matt Sterba also handles some building projects and operates our website to boot. Jeff is behind the redesign of our visitors' cards and bulletin, and constantly works on ways to make us more welcoming and appealing to our visitors. Josh helps coordinate our young people's activities, Saturday morning studies, and duty roster. This is hardly an exhaustive list. In addition to these things, all of our deacons also serve in whatever way the elders request.

Deacon is not some kind of honorary position. It's a real work with real responsibilities, and it demands a great deal of time and effort on the part of those called to serve. All of our new deacons are about to find that their busy lives are going to become even busier. I'm thankful that despite this commitment, we have men willing to serve.