

Paul's Epistles to Individuals

Lesson 7 – 1 Timothy 3:8-13

I. Deacons and Their Role

Continuing the discussion of how Christians are to conduct themselves in the household of God (3:15), here the qualities of deacons are enumerated. In the religious world today, terms are greatly confused or altogether misused regarding “offices” in the church. Preachers are called pastors, deacons lead as elders, and the title of “elder” is bestowed on men and women as an honorary title. In the Bible, the Greek word for deacon, “diakonos” is a common word that is translated in the KJV mostly as “servant” or “minister” but in a few cases is transliterated as the English word, “deacon” (Phili. 1:1, 1 Tim 3:10, 13). Thayer defines the word as “one who executes the commands of another”. As such a deacon is not a ruler like an elder but is a servant who carries out work under the rule of an eldership.

II. Prototypical Deacons

In Acts 6, seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and wisdom (Acts 6:3) were selected to attend to the physical needs of widows so the Apostles could concentrate on the “ministry of the Word” (Acts 6:4). Although there is no certainty that these were deacons, their role was at least a prototype of the deacons we see described in 1 Timothy. The word, “ministry” in Acts 6:4 is the Greek word “diakonia” and in verse 3 of the same passage, the word “serve” is “diakonein”. So as the Apostles were to “minister” the word, those selected were to “serve” tables. Those who serve (diakonein) are servants (diakonos).

III. Qualities of Deacons (v. 8-13)

Deacons are to have certain qualities in order to serve in their role. In that regard they are “like” elders (v.8) and therefore care must be taken in their selection to insure they meet these scriptural requirements. The qualities required of deacons are listed in the following chart:

QUALITY	1 TIMOTHY 3
A. MEN OF DIGNITY	v. 8
B. NOT DOUBLE-TONGUED	v. 8
C. NOT ADDICTED TO MUCH WINE	v. 8
D. NOT FOND OF SORDID GAIN	v. 8
E. HOLDING TO THE MYSTERY OF THE FAITH	v. 9
F. WITH A CLEAR CONSCIENCE	v. 9
G. FIRST TESTED	v. 10
H. BEYOND REPROACH	v. 10
I. HUSBANDS OF ONE WIFE	v. 12
J. GOOD MANAGERS OF CHILDREN AND HOUSEHOLD	v. 12

IV. Qualities Defined (Overview)

A. Men of Dignity

The KJV here states “grave”. The word (Gr. “semnos”) means venerable or honest. One who has dignity such that it inspires respect and trust. The servants of Acts 6 were to be caring for the physical needs of those who had need to be able to trust those who cared for them.

B. Not Double-Tongued

To lie or deceive is one of the most obviously condemned conducts in the Bible and a favorite tactic of Satan, who is the father of lies (**John 8:44**) and deceives the whole world (**Rev. 12:9**). To do so is unacceptable for any Christian and certainly for any one entrusted with the work of a deacon. One who lies has a seared conscience (**1 Tim. 4:2**) and violates inspired commands (**Col. 3:9**)

C. Not Addicted to Much Wine

See the previous discussion about elders and wine (**v. 3**). The word “much” here does not indicate that deacons may partake moderate amounts of wine. A reminder that “wine” (Gr. “oinos”) in the Bible may be intoxicating or non-intoxicating depending on context. The Hebrew word “yayin”, which is analogous to “oinos”, is used to describe “wine in the cluster” (**Isa. 65:8**). See also **Gal. 5:19-21** and **1 Pet. 4:3**.

D. Not Fond of Sordid Gain

See the previous discussion about elders and sordid gain (**v.3**).

E. Holding to the Mystery of the Faith

Elders and deacons must be “holding fast the faithful Word” (**Tit. 1:9**). “Faith” here is what was “once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3), which was the Word or the Gospel (**Acts 6:7, Rom. 16:25-26**). The mind of God is a mystery to man except as He had determined to reveal it as described.

F. With a Clear Conscience

Linked to the previous phrase, a “clear conscience” is integral to holding to the faith. Paul sought to have a blameless conscience before God and men (**Acts 24:16**). Deacons, like all Christians will be tempted to abandon Godly principles and a strong conscience is a restraining force. A good conscience is an underpinning to good behavior (**Heb. 13:18**)

G. First Tested

Deacons are to have proven themselves prior to being placed in the office. The word “also” here refers to deacons as well as the others discussed in the context, namely elders.

H & I. Beyond Reproach and Husbands of One Wife

See discussion on verses 2 and 7.

J. Good Managers of Children and Household

See discussion on verse 4. Additionally take note that there is no requirement for believing children for deacons. There is also no requirement for deacons to be “apt to teach”. Both of these correspond with the differing role of physical service versus spiritual oversight.

V. Dignified Wives (v. 11)

The NASB reads here “women” while the KJV uses “wives”. In fact, the Greek here is “gune”, which can refer to either but the context demands it be referring to the deacons’ wives. Some attempt to create a special class of women here and cite Phoebe as their example (**Rom. 16:1**). Phoebe was no doubt a servant (diakonos) but only in a general sense and not holding the office of deacon. Of the 30 times the word is used in the NT, only 3 (as described earlier) specifically refer to the office defined here.