

Who IS A Deacon?

1 Timothy 3:8-13

Introduction

Today you will be asked to nominate 5 men in our church to be considered for the position of Deacon. As your Pastor, I do not want you to take this task lightly. Committed and faithful deacons are a vital asset to a healthy church.

Deacons were first recognized in the New Testament church in Acts chapter 6. The church was growing but it was also becoming somewhat divided over petty matters. The Apostles were being distracted from their ministry and preaching.

To solve the problems, the Apostles instructed the people to select men who were of character and trustworthy to handle some of the tasks. This God inspired approach to church leadership worked in the early church and it works today in our church.

In our text today, Paul writes to Timothy with specific instructions for building a healthy church with Godly servants leading the church family.

Scripture 1 Timothy 3:8-13

⁸*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. 1 Timothy 3:8-13 NAS*

Prayer

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We currently have six active deacons at Barnwell Baptist Church. Our church recently voted to increase the number of active deacons to ten.

Now, if you have grand ideas of deacons being a board of directors who make decisions for the church, you are mistaken.

The English word Deacon comes from the Greek word “diakonos” which literally means “humble servant.” Deacons are first and foremost servants. In our own church, our deacons do many tasks, some menial and time consuming, to help insure that our church operates smoothly.

How do you think all of these chairs get setup every single Sunday? Yes, deacons rotate this responsibility and spend their Saturdays getting the facility ready for Sunday worship.

I am thankful for our deacons. I am thankful for their commitment to God, their service to this congregation and their support and assistance to me as Pastor.

Deacons are servants. However, deacons are also leaders. Deacons are servants through their actions but they are also leaders through their example.

Deacons are not a board of directors and they do not control the church. It is you the members of this church family who make all final decisions about the matters of the church.

God’s Word is the ultimate authority in the New Testament church. The Pastor is the Shepard and leader of the church. However, deacons are vital to the existence of a healthy church.

Someone once said, “Everything rises and falls on Leadership.” This is true in the church as well.

Deacons do not become leaders because they are Deacons. Deacons become Deacons because they are leaders.

According to Paul’s instruction to Timothy, the qualifications of a deacon are:

1. Men of Character (vs. 8)

⁸*Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain,*

I don’t care what the world says, character and integrity are everything. Deacons must be men of character, dignity and worthy of respect.

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“Leadership is influence and without respect, there is no influence.” A deacon and every Christian for that matter should desire to be considered a person of character.

Respect and character have nothing to do with popularity, intelligence or money. They have everything to do with actions.

a. Not Double-Tongued - Deacons must be men who speak the truth, all of the time. We all know people who will say one thing to one person and something else to the next. We commonly say about such people that they “talk out of both sides of their mouth.”

The words of a deacon must be consistent regardless of who he is speaking with.

There is something else you do not need to miss here. The words of a deacon must be consistent with his actions. A deacon must be faithful to his words. If he says he will do something, he needs to be faithful in doing it.

The words of a deacon must be consistent with God’s Word. I have known deacons who were eager to tell you their opinions and ideas. But, it is not our opinions and ideas that count. It is what God’s Word says and what God’s Holy Spirit teaches us that gives us truly great leadership.

b. Addicted to Wine - Deacons must be under their own control at all times. Never under the control of alcohol or anything else. You may say well this is speaking of wine. Rest assured, this is speaking of any type of alcohol as well as any other thing that might consume one’s life.

I think we all know that alcohol when consumed more than mildly, can cause us to say and do things that we should not. It should be the desire of every Christian to always be living under the leadership of the Holy Spirit and never consumed with other lusts.

c. Fond of Sordid Gain - Deacons must be men who are determined to maintain integrity in all they do. A deacon must be one who will not bend his Christian convictions for the sake of personal or financial gain.

Illus: I once knew a Deacon who was also on the personnel committee of a large church. He would give raises only to the secretaries who asked for raises and those who did not ask did

not get a raise even if they out performed the others. This was greed in the disguise of stewardship.

Deacons must not have a greedy spirit and should never use their position for personal gain or power. Deacons must be sincere and above board in all they do, “on and off the field” so to speak.

Deacons must be men of character.

2. Men of Spirit (vs. 9-10)

⁹but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.

¹⁰These men must also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach.

Deacons must be proven men or the Spirit. Our text says they must be “*holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.*”

A deacon must be doctrinally sound. His beliefs must be based on God’s Word rather than popular tide of the day. He must stand firm to the teaching of God’s Word.

The word translated mystery in our text means, “truth once hidden but now revealed by God.” Deacons must take hold of the Truth and obey it with good conscience.

They must base their decisions on the Word of God and they must back up their decisions with godly lives.

Know the Word - A deacon who does not know the Word of God cannot lead in the affairs of the church or God. Deacons must hold fast to the deep truths of the faith giving them a clear conscience. Again, their decisions should not be based on tradition or opinions but on the Word of God.

Illus: Professor who signed letters, “Without Wax.” We should all have sincerity and never be waxed over, clear conscience.

Participate in Worship - Effective deacons lead by faithfully engaging in worship. They must not only attend but participate and enjoy being a part of worship.

Illus: I have known men who were deacons who sat on the back row with their arms crossed. They didn’t sing, pray or fellowship with others. But, let them get in a deacons meeting and out of the turtle shell pops a tiger ready to scratch and claw.

Others are always watching the deacons. Deacons are leaders by example and that leadership may be good or bad. Men who do not attend worship are teaching the congregation that it is not important to attend worship on a regular basis.

Deacons should have a godly spirit about them as their lives are influenced by the Holy Spirit.

3. Men of Godly Homes (vs. 11-12)

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.*

Just as a deacon must participate in congregational worship, he must also be a worship leader in the home. I believe the neglect of this is destroying our homes today.

Spiritual Leaders - Many men and yes some deacons simply are not spiritual leaders in their homes. They leave it up to the wife and children to pray, read God's word and all other spiritual matters.

I'll never understand this idea that men are too macho to pray or speak of their faith.

I want to make it clear what verses 11 & 12 imply. They tell me that the life of a man's wife and the lives of his children is a reflection of his spiritual leadership. Now, take a moment to dwell on that thought and then tell me you aren't comfortable praying or reading the Bible.

A deacon must be one who is dedicated to the truths of God and dedicated to leading his family in discovering those truths.

A deacon's wife is very much a part of his ministry. The wife of a deacon is critical to the effectiveness of the deacon's ministry. Just as this church considers my wife an important part of my ministry, the same is true of a deacon.

Illus: I once knew a man who had all sorts of problems with his wife and children. His family life was a wreck. However, he was a very faithful person in everything related to the church. The church made him a deacon ignoring the instructions of 1 Timothy. Later, it became apparent that he had some serious problems with jokes and pictures of the pornographic nature.

One Wife - The phrase translated "husbands of only one wife" literally means a "one-women men." I know you are just waiting to hear my opinion of whether or not deacons can be divorced men. I have found that too many people have their interpretations of this text influenced by the wrong things.

I know some people who want to interpret this text to mean the man can not be polygamous (having multiple wives). These people often form this interpretation because they are divorced or their husband may have been divorced. Their interpretation may be based on the desire to conform to the trends of society where divorce is now so widely accepted.

Others interpret the text to mean a man can never serve as a deacon if he has ever been divorced. Often, those people derive that interpretation based on tradition or what they have been taught in the past without thoroughly studying God's Word for themselves.

The bottom line is that it is not my opinion that matters. What is important is that you search the scriptures and come to your own understanding with the leadership of the Holy Spirit. As Baptist, we believe in the "Priesthood of the Believer." This means that every believer has the ability to interpret the scripture and decide for themselves what God is saying to them.

My own opinion is that this text means a man must not be involved in polygamy. I also believe it means a deacon must be someone with whom there is absolutely no question about his faithfulness and commitment to his marriage relationship.

Clearly the emphasis in this entire text is about a deacon being someone with whom there are no doubts concerning character, commitment and motives. I believe that is the emphasis in verse 12 as well.

In a few weeks you will hear a sermon from me on divorce and you will find that I hate divorce. However, I do not believe divorce is somehow the unpardonable sin when it comes to being a deacon. I am a sinner and I cannot ever imagine God's grace as not being sufficient enough to wash away all sin and change a person's life. Completely!

At the same time, I do not believe a man should be a deacon if there is any question whatsoever about his faithfulness and spiritual leadership within the family.

Illus: I know a man who cannot be a deacon in his church though his wife left him and he has proven his spiritual leadership for over 30 years. He has taught Sunday school, led the church in building programs and long range planning but he cannot be a deacon. On the other hand, I know a doctor who is a deacon who dumped his wife so he could marry his nurse. In my opinion, both situations are wrong.

The bottom line is that you the individual believer has the right and responsibility to make your own interpretation and nominate men accordingly.

Deacons must be men with homes in which one can observe their spiritual leadership. If a man is not a spiritual leader in his home, he has no business being a spiritual leader in the church.

4. Men of Service (vs. 12)

¹³For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

Please remember that a good candidate to be a deacon is a man who is willing to serve. Too often men are elected to be deacons because of their business success or standing within the community. This does not assure the person will be a good deacon.

A deacon must have the heart, time and willingness to serve. Deacons are ministers through service. There are ways in which a caring deacon can minister that mean more to a congregation than what a paid pastor can do.

Being a deacon is an honor but it is also hard work. The humble service of a deacon lacks the rewards the world deems valuable. Being a deacon always proves to be a real test of a man's motives.

Verse 12 tells us that those who "serve well" obtain a high standing and great confidence in their faith. Do you understand what this means?

It means a deacon who serves well will be given more opportunities for ministry. In other words, his ministry will grow. People will call upon him for more leadership because of his valued service.

Deacons must be men who are willing to serve the congregation as a result of their relationship with God.

Conclusion

As you consider nominations for deacon, look for men of proven character, spirit, godly homes and service.

James said, "Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindles!"

Deacons are the individual fires that spark renewal and revival within a congregation.

May we all aspire to have the Christian qualities that Paul instructs us to look for in deacons.

Illus: I read a true story about a conservative church located near a college campus. The church desired to reach out to the college students but was somewhat unsure about the best way to carryout this ministry.

A young man named Bill began attending worship services but would often come in late and be dressed extremely casual for the more conservative church.

On one Sunday, Bill came in late and the church was packed. He was dressed more for a college fellowship than Sunday morning worship. With wild hair, a t-shirt, raggy-jeans and flip-flops, he made his way down front looking for a seat.

By this time, the entire congregation is feeling pretty uncomfortable as they watch Bill search for a seat. When Bill gets to the very front, he just sits down on the carpet.

Then an elderly deacon gets up from the back and slowly makes his way towards the front. The silver hair deacon walks forward with his cane fully dressed in a suit and looking quite refined.

Everyone knows the elderly deacon is probably uncomfortable with Bills dress and casual approach to worship. Everyone wonders what will take place when the deacon finally makes it down front.

By now the tension is really high in the church, so much so that the pastor is unable to continue his sermon. Everyone just waits in silence for the elderly gentleman to reach the young man.

When the elderly deacon reaches Bill, he drops his cane and with great difficulty he lowers himself and sits down next to Bill. He says, "I don't want you to feel alone up here."

Everyone chokes with emotion. When the pastor regains his composure, he says, "What I am about to preach, you will never remember. What you have just seen, you will never forget."

1 Or *to double-talk*

a 2 Tim 3:3; Titus 2:3

a Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:8

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