

## 1 Timothy 3:8-16

**Intro:** It is important to remember that the New Testament Church only has two official positions or titles. Elders/pastors and Deacons. All other church titles or positions may be helpful to delineate specific jobs, but not to signify church structure. The two biblical positions are clearly delineated by two differing lists of qualifications.

--All other so-called church positions are either names for spiritual gifts (apostle, prophet, evangelist, etc.) or unbiblical man-made titles that separate rather than connect the body of Christ (pope, metropolitan, cardinal, friar, priest, executive, leader of vision, etc.).

--Paul had been gone from Ephesus for five to seven years. No doubt, part of the reason false teaching had infected the body was the wrong type of people were serving as elders and deacons. Part of the cure was establishing biblically qualified elders and deacons.

### Verse 8:

--**Likewise deacons.** . . The Greek word for **deacons** is *diakonos* which is most often translated *servant* or *minister* in the NT. Two times it is translated **deacons** as the title of an official church office. One being here, and the other **Phil. 1:1: To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons.**

--We often think of deacons as servants because the Greek word is most often used that way. In the Bible and ancient Greek writings, it had four main uses:

- 1) Those attending the table at a meal.
- 2) Those providing household service.
- 3) Those delivering messages.
- 4) Those assigned as official delegates.

--We see all those various facets happening with deacons in the Bible, but it is important that we do not make up roles for deacons that are unbiblical. \*Too many churches give deacons a ministry with too little authority or too much!\*

--The Bible doesn't give us a ton detail about deacons. In fact, Paul is the only NT writer to title them and explain anything directly. Doing so was a task fitting for him as the apostle called by God to establish the church in the Gentile world.

--Paul knew the importance of good deacons. He had plenty of helpers he described as deacons! **\*Rom. 16:1; 1 Cor. 3:5; 2 Cor. 3:6; Col. 1:23; 4:7\***

--Here is what we know about the position biblically.

- 1) Deacons are always paired with elders and always mentioned second.
- 2) Deacons are not required to teach, and their qualifications are not as strict as elders.
- 3) Deacons clearly serve **(10+13)**.
- 4) Deacons are serving and ministering under the authority of others.

--Deacons are not overseers/elders. They are a group that operates in connection with the elders (not a separate operating government). Specifically, they serve at the direction of the elders. They are not the overseers of the church, but they are an extension of the overseers, who have a unique position in the Body of Christ as delegated servants.

--This unique connection is played out in **Acts 6:1-7** and Paul's various epistles.

--A church can exist without deacons, as Paul made sure to appoint elders in every fellowship (**Acts 14:23 + Titus 1:5**), but says nothing about deacons.

--Those elders, when their job to shepherd, manage, and teach the house of God became too much, would establish deacons to help with the material and administrative tasks of the fellowship.

--In our fellowship, deacons are ministry leaders who serve alongside the pastors in various capacities.

--To be a deacon is to be an extension of the ministry of the elders of the church, and the individual's character should reflect that ministry as well.

--Here are the qualifications of a deacon, or ministry leader serving under the management of the pastors/elders in a church.

--***must be reverent***: Which is dignified or respectable. \***Acts 16:2; Phil. 4:8; Titus 2:2\***

--***not double-tongued***: A person who says one thing to one person and something else to another. In some honor-shame cultures, it is better to lie and save face than speak the truth and accept shame.

--***not given to much wine***: Means not *adhering to wine*. Deacons shouldn't be "connected" to it. Their name shouldn't bring up the idea of wine or alcohol in your mind.

--***not greedy for money***: They should not be a mercenary ministry leader. Their services shouldn't have a price.

**\*Jeremiah 6:13: *Because from the least of them even to the greatest of them, everyone is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even to the priest, everyone deals falsely.\****

#### Verse 9:

--***holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience***. No doubt the mystery Paul is speaking about here is the same he will speak about in **16**.

--A deacon cannot be unbelieving, or unsure of the faith. They need to be biblical in belief and biblical in behavior. The opposite of **1:19: *having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck.***

--Anyone "deconstructing" does not meet the qualifications of a deacon, let alone an elder! They should step down and figure out what they actually believe before ministering in the name of Jesus Christ. \*How many sheep have been subverted because someone with a shipwrecked faith has crashed them into unbelief as well?!\*

### Verse 10:

***--But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless.***

Only tested and proven men and women should serve as deacons! They should be blameless regarding these qualifications. There should be no clear reason to reject them. \*In some ways, all believers should reflect these virtues, but this examination takes into account the realities of babes in faith, prodigals, and rebellious or sinning saints.\*

--This testing is important for a number of reasons:

1) Because Paul knew it would be easy to treat the qualifications of deacons as less important than those of elders, therefore needing less enforcement. \*Filling ministry positions is not as important as obedience or Christian character. Better no elders or deacons than disqualified ones!\*

2) Because Paul knew good-hearted people would make the mistake of using ministry as bait.

*\*Make him a deacon, and maybe he will come out to church. Or, They won't come anymore unless they can serve.* Ministry as bait is a major tactic in the seeker-church movement, etc.\*

--God cares more about what we *are* than what we *do*. The two always work together, but it is possible to mask one or the other for a time. \*Think the Pharisees!\*

3) Because Paul knew that if he didn't command an examination of elders and deacons, churches would just ignore the character of their leaders. They still do!

--The church father Jerome, about AD 394, wrote: *"Many build churches nowadays; their walls and pillars glowing marble, their ceilings glittering with gold, their altars studded with jewels. Yet to the choice of Christ's ministers no heed is paid."*

--A deacon must meet these qualifications originally and continually.

### Verse 11:

***--Likewise, their wives must be.*** . . Here is a debated section. Your Bible may say **wives** or **women**. The reason is because the language in Greek is a bit vague. The Greek word for **wives** is *gyne*, which is the word for an adult woman or a wife. In Greek, context decides which.

--If it is **wives** then the passage is speaking about the qualifications of deacons' wives.

--If it is **women** then the passage is acknowledging the place of women as deacons, and Paul is making sure women deacons also meet a certain standard of Christian maturity.

--I am going to give you five reasons I think this is clearly speaking about women—not wives.

1) There is no possessive in the language. Paul could have made it clear he was speaking about deacons' wives by saying *"their gyne"* but he does not.

2) There is clear repetition in the language regarding qualifications. There is a **must be (2)** for elders; **likewise must be (8)** for male deacons; **likewise must be (11)** for female deacons. Where the deacons' wives view would not be a new category, it would another qualification for the male deacon, and therefore wouldn't require another **likewise must be**.

3) There is no qualification mentioned for the elders' wives. If deacons' wives need it, why not elders who are held to a higher standard?

4) Paul names a woman deacon in the New Testament. Pheobe.

**\*Romans 16:1: I commend to you Pheobe our sister, who is a servant (diakonos) of the church in Cenchrea,\***

5) Lastly, and I think most overlooked in this discussion, is the fact that the Bible never puts the responsibility of another (a wife) on my account. A godly deacon cannot be disqualified by the acts of someone he cannot control. \*This would be equal to saying a godly man couldn't be a deacon in the church if his wife were unsaved, prodigal, or abandoned him. A wife's ungodliness doesn't not necessarily disqualify a husband's godliness.\*

--The simplest and clearest reading is that Paul is acknowledging women deacons, but insisting they too must pass the test of blameless and mature Christian character. \*This is why we recognize women deacons—ministry leaders serving under the pastors—here at CCPhilly.\*

--**must be reverent:** Feminine version of **8**. Dignified and respectable.

--**not slanderers:** Not *diabolos*—accusers like the devil. This is important as ministry leaders are involved in people's personal situations. **Prov. 10:18: whoever spreads slander is a fool.** \*In person or online!\*

--**temperate:** Self-controlled, well-balanced. They cannot be emotionally or mentally unstable.

--**faithful in all things:** Trustworthy, dependable, reliable. They cannot be a flake, or a question mark.

--There should not be a single woman serving as a deacon or ministry leader in our fellowship who doesn't meet these requirements and isn't faithfully attending and serving the body.

#### **Verse 12:**

--**Let deacons be the husbands of one wife.** . . having spoken of women, Paul now moves back to the men and their homes. I see a natural transition back, as women are not the head of the home and therefore don't have the same responsibility of management. That is why Paul doesn't give women this same qualification.

--A deacon needs to be a one-women type of man, just like an elder. He cannot be faithful to the Bride of Christ and unfaithful to his own bride.

--**ruling their children and their own houses well.** Deacons cannot come into God's house and take care of it and welcome God's children while ignoring the needs of his own home and children. That is utter hypocrisy. God doesn't need that type of service.

--What is a father's job? **\*Deut. 6:6-7; Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:21; 1 Thess. 2:11-12; Heb. 12:9\***

--A man must display faithfulness and responsibility in his own house before he takes any responsibility in God's house.

#### **Verse 13:**

--**For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.**

--The Holy Spirit inspires Paul to add a blessing here, and it is unbiblical for us to refuse to recognize biblical motivation and reward.

--Paul doesn't want anyone to look down on deacons as servants because they are not elders who oversee and manage. God has a blessing for them!

--In fact, Jesus has both terms/offices applied to Himself in the New Testament.

**\*Mark 10:45: *For even the Son of Man did not come to be served (diakoneo), but to serve (diakoneo), and to give His life and ransom for many.\****

**\*1 Peter 2:25: *For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd (poimen) and Overseer (episkopos) of your souls.\****

--Either role—pastor or deacon—is a living expression of the heart of God for His people and the heart of Christ for His Bride. That is why Paul can say they will have **good standing** before the Lord and His body, as well as **great boldness** or confidence in the faith.

--I don't know the specifics of how this blessing will work out for each individual, but I know that God will not be out given!

**\*Proverbs 11:25: *The generous soul will be made rich, and he who waters will also be watered himself.\****

#### **Verses 14-15:**

--Paul clearly wanted to get back to Ephesus but was writing in case he couldn't.

--Even though he might very well be delayed, Paul wanted Timothy to be clear ***how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God.***

--Now, the **house of God** is never the building, but always the people. The Greek for **house** is the same as in **4, 5, 12**. The church is God's house, and is therefore to be managed His ways, not our ways.

--***which is the church of the living God.*** . . . The temples of the day were filled with "dead" idols who could not speak, hear, see, or act. But the house of God, the church, is inhabited by the Living God! It is His very presence that makes it His house, not religious actions or display such as crosses, dressed up ministers, altars, or incense. \*What made the tabernacle, temple, or our church gathering today special? His presence!\*

--The church is ***the pillar and ground of truth.*** Is Paul writing this just for Ephesus? Was Ephesus alone the pillar and ground of truth? Certainly not! These things are apostolic instructions for the house of God and the church of God for all time.

--A **pillar** supports the weight of the building. The **ground** is a foundation or bulwark of support. The churches job is the hold and support the truth of God—the message that gave us life and keeps the church alive!

**Verse 16:**

--Here is a worshipful summary of the truth we hold. Some see this as an ancient hymn with either three groups of two or two groups of three. I would lean toward three groups of two which seem to be contrasting heaven and earth.

--***And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness:*** The work of God in this world is a great mystery! But what do we do with this mystery? Moses was drawn to the mystery of a bush, burning yet not consumed. What did he do? He went and looked at it.

--What we see in Jesus Christ is mysterious like the burning bush, God in human flesh, the I AM of the bush in the form of a servant, broken and a bruised before Pilate, resurrected and sitting on a shore, ascending into heaven, sending down His Holy Spirit, and seated in glory.

--How can we turn from that mystery in boredom? Our hearts are so hard and so cold! We should linger and look at this great mystery!

--To speak other truth, or ideas, or ways into this mystery is pride and heresy. Christianity is God's reality, not our system to bend and mold as we will. We do not define it. We hold the faith with a pure conscience. Then, we take the shoes off our feet, and look in worship.

--***God was manifested in the flesh. . .*** Son of God and Son of Man born in a manger.

--***Justified in the Spirit. . .*** He went about doing good in the Spirit without measure.

--***Seen by angels. . .*** Heaven's attention was on Him.

--***Preached among the Gentiles. . .*** Earth's attention was on Him through the gospel.

--***Believed on in the world. . .*** Received by the hearts of men.

--***Received up in glory. . .*** Received by heaven.

--This is the great mystery, the good news, the church keeps alive! It is the truth that has made us alive. It is the good news that God loves you and has forgiven you of your sin in the work of Jesus Christ.