

Armagh Baptist Church – 22nd May 2010
The Life and Times of Timothy 7
1Timothy 3:8-16
A Word to the Deacons

Introduction

Last week we looked at the Biblical Qualifications for Elders from 1 Tim 3:1-8, and we also looked at the work of an elder from Acts 20 and 1 Peter 5.

Today we come to look at the second half of 1 Timothy 3, and this time we are looking at what Paul had to say about the Qualifications for Deacons - another office in the local church. We have 11 deacons in this church already so we should be quite familiar with this material, but it will do us, and them, no harm today to refresh our memories about the standard God expects of his servants in a local church. That's what the word "deacon" means - "a servant".

We saw that Elders were responsible for the spiritual life of the church esp. preaching, teaching, visitation, pastoral care and prayer ministry, etc. Deacons on the other hand, are responsible for the practical side of church life. They look after physical needs in the church. In this church deacons welcome you at the door, they serve at the Lord's Table, they meet together quarterly to make decisions about financial matters and they look after the fabric of the building and any other work needing done in the grounds, etc.

1. WHERE DO WE GET THIS DISTINCTION IN ROLES FROM? (Acts 6:1-7)

In the very early days of the church, a practical need arose.

It was the daily distribution of food to the widows who were in need.

The 12 Apostles (fore-runners of elders) couldn't do everything, so 7 men were appointed to look after these practical needs while the apostles continued with the spiritual work (vs.2-4).

In other words these 7 men were appointed to look after the "business" affairs of the life of the church. (v.3), to release the elders to carry on the spiritual ministry of prayer for God's work and the all-important ministry of God's Word. N.B. In Acts 6 these "deacons" were still to be spiritual men even though they were involved in practical tasks! (v.3,5,8).

The local church congregation appointed these men (v.5) under the guidance and approval of the Apostles (v.6), and as I said last Sunday, as a result of the right men being chosen, God's Work was enabled to prosper (v.7).

(I got the following from an article by Benjamin Merkle on Mark Dever's '9 Marks of a Healthy Church' web-site):

'The Bible does not clearly indicate the function of deacons. Yet based on the pattern established in Acts 6 with the apostles and the Seven, it seems best to view deacons as servants *who do whatever is necessary to allow the elders to*

accomplish their God-given calling of shepherding and teaching the church. Just as the apostles delegated administrative responsibilities to the Seven, so the elders are to delegate certain responsibilities to the deacons so that the elders can focus their efforts elsewhere. As a result, each local church is free to define the tasks of deacons based on their particular needs.

What are some duties that deacons might be responsible for today?

They could be responsible for anything that's not related to teaching and shepherding the church. Such duties might include:

- *Church building:* The deacons could be responsible for managing the church property. This would include making sure the place of worship is prepared for the worship service, cleaning up, or running the sound system, for example.
- *Compassion Ministries:* Similar to what took place in Acts 6 with the daily distribution of food to the widows, the deacons may be involved in administering funds or giving assistance to the needy.
- *Finances:* While the elders should probably **oversee** the financial business of the church (Acts 11:30), it may be best left to the deacons to handle the day-to-day matters. This would include collecting and counting the offering, keeping financial records, and so on.
- *Stewarding:* The deacons could be responsible for distributing church bulletins, seating the congregation, or preparing the bread & wine for communion.
- *Logistics:* Deacons should be available to help in a variety of ways so that the elders are able to concentrate on teaching and shepherding the church.

Whereas the Bible charges elders with the tasks of teaching and leading the church, the deacons' role is more service-oriented. In other words, they are to care for the physical or temporal concerns of the church. By handling such matters, deacons free up the elders to focus on shepherding the spiritual needs of the congregation.' (Benjamin L. Merkle is Associate Professor of New Testament and Greek at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in North Carolina. © 9Marks Website: www.9Marks.org). I think he has given us a lot of food for thought there, as to how we could develop the role of deacons in this church.

But let's come back to 1 Timothy 3, and ask another question:

2. WHAT QUALITIES SHOULD A DEACON POSSESS? (vs.8-13).

Paul has just dealt with the qualities of eldership in v.1-7, and then in v.8 he says...

*"Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect."
i.e. there will be a lot of similarity!*

Again we see that Deacons are to be spiritual men, just as much as Elders.

But the gifts of deacons will lie in more practical matters, rather than in an ability to preach or teach, or to provide pastoral care.

So an Elder must not to be seen as just a promoted deacon!
(Although he might have been a deacon before becoming an elder, he doesn't *have* to be). We're not talking about a hierarchical structure here, where for good behaviour and good effort you get another rung or two up the ecclesiastical ladder. No, Elders and Deacons are 2 distinct offices in the life of a local church. Both are worthy offices, but with distinctly different roles.

Personal Qualities

(v.8) *"men worthy of respect"* - "reverent" - Can you respect him?

"sincere" - "not double-tongued" - Can you trust him?
i.e. not a tale-bearer or gossip, not somebody who is two-faced.

"not indulging in much wine" - "not given to much wine"

Again this does not demand total abstinence, but it is pleading for wisdom to prevail, remembering that even as a deacon he is to set an example in the local church that others coming after him will be able to look up to. You want to set a good example; not lead others astray. (cf. Romans 14:21).

"not pursuing dishonest gain" - "not greedy for money".

Deacons have to handle sums of money in church business, so they must not be easily tempted to pocket it for themselves, or any such thing. At the back of it all you have to ask the question is he content with his lot in life, or is he grasping after more?

Spiritual Qualities

(v.9) *"They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience."*

In other words a deacon is to be as doctrinally sound as an Elder, even though he doesn't have to be able to teach. He should still know what he believes and why he believes it. He should have a good grasp of Biblical knowledge.

"with a clear conscience" - His life must also back up what he believes. He shouldn't believe one thing in his mind and practice something else in his everyday life. He must try to live consistently with what he believes.

Obvious Qualities

(v.10) *"They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons."*

This is a bit like Paul's warning not to be hasty in the laying on of hands as far as elders are concerned, likewise a deacon should be well-known and well tested **before** he is put into a position of responsibility by his church. He should have these qualities and a good testimony before he is appointed, we shouldn't just hope he will develop them after he has been appointed!

Again there is an emphasis on his home-life.

(v.11) *"In the same way their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything."*

The character of a man's wife has a large bearing on his own standing in a community, and therefore it is important that a deacon's wife be worthy of respect, just as much as her husband.

They should be a good support to their husbands, and if they happen to be aware of some matters of church business, the last thing they should do is to gossip about it around the countryside, but be *"trustworthy in all things."*

(v.12) This verse goes on to say, the same as for elders, that *"a deacon must be the husband of but one wife"*.

This is stressing that the Christian church was not to practice polygamy, as perhaps the society of the day in the 1st C might have done, or indeed in some cultures today where the Gospel might go to on the mission field. (e.g. The Uduk Tribe in Southern Sudan, that I preached to in a refugee camp in Ethiopia a few years ago. They practised polygamy in their tribe, until they got saved, and became Christians. But those who still had more than one wife could not be considered for positions as elders or deacons in the churches. The new generation coming up was taught the Biblical view of marriage.) Whatever the practice there beforehand, leaders in the church must practice monogamy and be completely faithful to their wives, at all times.

It also says that he *"must manage his children and his household well."* Again as for elders, the one place where a man's Christian principles must be seen in action more than anywhere else is in his own home. In God's sight the husband and father is to be the head of his household. If he can't control and manage what is going on under his own roof, then he should not even be considered for looking after what goes on in God's Household - The Church! After all this was why Paul wrote this whole section of this letter to Timothy - (v.14,15) So that if he was *"delayed, they would know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household...the church of the living God."* As far as God is concerned the church is to be *the pillar and the foundation of the truth* in society today. That is why it is so important that the guide-lines of this chapter are adhered to in churches today. If we ignore the teaching of

these passages then we shouldn't be surprised if our churches do not have the impact they should have on the world in which we live.

So the principle in v.12 & 14 is very clear - learn to look after your own household, before you presume to try to look after God's household!

However, though the standards for deacons are just as high as for elders, this section ends with a very encouraging promise for good deacons. It's in v.13:-

“Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance / boldness in their faith in Christ Jesus.”

In other words if they serve well they will gain greater respect in the eyes of God's people and in the eyes of God himself. And they will gain greater confidence, strength, and maturity in their own Christian faith as a result of faithful service for the Lord.

This is a tall order, but God always sets a high standard - It's up to us to continually strive towards that standard. It is usually whenever we decide to lower God's standard that things begin to go wrong. Anything God says in His Word he says for a reason!

3. ONE FINAL MATTER - CAN A WOMAN BE A DEACON?

There are 3 brief points I want you to think about:-

1. In our studies on Eldership, we saw that a woman could not be an Elder because Elders have to be *able to teach*, and they also *rule over*, or *have authority over* a local church. Women were not allowed to do either of these things according to 1Tim.2:12. However a Deacon does not have to do these things - (teach or have authority), so from that point of view it could be possible for a woman to be a deacon.

2. If you look at v.11, the word for “wives” (gune) from which we get gynae, can also be translated “women”. The verse would then literally read, *“Likewise **the women** are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.”* Some see v.11 then as instructions about any women who might be deacons in the local church.

3. There is one other piece of evidence that you need to be aware of as well. It's in Romans 16:1 where Paul says, *“I commend to you our sister Phoebe...”* - obviously a woman - but look what he says next - *“...a servant...”* and the word is “deacon” (m) *“...of the church in Cenchrea.”* He uses the masculine word *diakonon* (m) instead of the feminine *diakona* (f). So the church in Cenchrea, a town just outside Corinth had a female deacon.

And look what Paul goes on to say about her in v.2 :-

“I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many people, including me.”

Paul stresses that the Church in Rome is to welcome and receive her in the same way as they would welcome or receive the deacon of any church.

She was to be treated with respect, and not to be looked down on just because she was a woman.

She had been a great help to many people including Paul himself.

We would be very ungracious to say the least if we didn't acknowledge all the faithful work that the ladies of this church have done behind the scenes over many years. They may not hold an official office in this church, but this place could not function without them: e.g. the catering that they do, the Sunday School teaching, the playing of the music, the women's ministry, etc, etc... The list goes on and on.

Maybe our problem is that we have taken the idea of a deacon, which was originally waiting on tables to relieve the plight of widows in Acts 6, and we have made it something very limited – welcoming at the door, serving at the Lord's Table, and looking after a church building. Maybe if we got back to the idea of deacons ministering with compassion to help those in desperate need, maybe in an outreach ministry to those less well off than ourselves, we would have no difficulty seeing female members involved in such a role? (I wonder?)

But this reference to Phoebe, reminds us that whether we hold an office in church life or not, is not the most important issue. The question is, are we all serving the Lord together, whether we be male or female, whether in office or out of office. Are we using the gifts that God has given us, are we all pulling together to see this church go forward, and to see Christ's Kingdom extended in this area in the days that lie ahead.

There is plenty of work to be done, and there's a job for everyone to do, so let's get on with it together. May the Elders oversee, may the Deacons serve, and may we all work together for the extension of Christ's Kingdom in Armagh.

I finish with another very helpful summary that I got from the 9 Marks website: From Jamie Dunlop (associate pastor, Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, DC.)

‘Elders lead ministry, deacons facilitate ministry, the congregation does ministry. That, I believe, is the New Testament model.’

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