

Series: Body Essentials: Imperatives for Church and Leaders

Today's Message: To Cultivate and Evaluate Leadership in the Church; 1 Timothy 3:8-13, pt.3

Deacons. The last two weeks we studied the divine imperative given to the church to cultivate and evaluate the spiritual, moral and personal qualities in a man to make him ready to serve the body of Christ. Today we will consider the office of deacon.

So, what is the difference between an overseer/ elder/ pastor-teacher and a deacon? You can't say that one is more important than the other. But you can say, and maybe it is too simplified, but an elder is occupied with "heart work" when caring for the Church. He does this through preaching, teaching, ruling, and directing. A deacon cares for the flock in a more practical way. Nevertheless, care for the physical needs of the church body entails possessing a deep love and concern for the well-being of the Church on a heart level. The role of a deacon is very important to the church.

More than skills or talents the most important quality a man must possess to serve Christ and His body is a heart devoted to Him. We see this so clearly in 1 Samuel 16:7 where God directed Samuel to avoid external appearances and to learn that "the Lord looks at the heart!" This differs significantly with the choosing of Saul as king. The people were attracted to his physical appearance. We are tempted to avoid looking at the heart and judging readiness to serve in the church and focus merely on the "outward appearance."

Let's begin by looking at the origin of the office of deacon in the church. Turn to Acts 6.

I) **(Acts 6) The origin of the office of deacon in the church.**

- A) The Earliest Church: Jerusalem: A growing church experiencing growing pains.
 - 1) Acts 2:41 (3,000 added in one day); Acts 5:14 (more and more were added) as the gospel was taught.
- B) Conflict: The office of deacon originated due to a deepening conflict
 - 1) (v1) Jewish believers from the diaspora (Grecian Jews) and the hometown Jewish believers in conflict.
 - (a) Grecian Jewish believers felt that their widows were being overlooked in food distribution.
 - (i) Keep in mind that there was a language and cultural barrier between the two groups.
 - 2) (v2) Neglect of the Ministry of the Word. The apostles were feeling the pressure.
- C) Solution:
 - 1) Choose men that possess fullness of the Spirit and wisdom. Men that would be "waiting tables" were to be men of God possessing spiritual life abundant and wisdom from God.
 - (a) **APPL: The Lord does not want men that can get the job done. He wants men that will get His work done in service to His body, the Church!**
 - (b) **APPL: What are you doing to prepare yourself to do the Lord's work in serving His Body?**

II) **Cultivating: Deacons aren't men who are simply elected. Deacons are built from the inside out.**

- A) Becoming a deacon.
 - 1) The word Deacon comes from a word meaning "servant." More to the point, "one who executes the commands of another."
 - (a) Think of Nehemiah. He lived to serve God by serving King Artaxerxes. (see Neh. 1:11)
 - (b) The word is used of the Lord Jesus in Romans 15:8ⁱ
 - (c) Also of Paul, Timothy and anyone who serves the Church.ⁱⁱ
 - 2) Cultivating a servant heart in children (future adults) begins at home.
 - (a) Fathers teach and train your children. (Eph. 6:4) **see also 2 Timothy 3:14-15ⁱⁱⁱ**
 - (b) Husbands and wives model serving each other. If you can't serve your spouse...
 - (c) Fathers demonstrating joy in the sacrifice of time and energy for the welfare of family, neighbors and church family.
 - (d) Mothers demonstrating joy in the sacrifice of time and energy in caring for family, young mothers, older women in need, and others including neighbors and church family.

- (e) Grandparents demonstrating Christian maturity in how they spend their time in service.
- 3) Learning and applying Biblical principles of self-sacrificing service of others on behalf of Christ Jesus.
 - (a) Mark 10:45: “For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.”
 - (b) 2 Corinthians 8:9: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.”
 - (c) Philippians 2:3-4: “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.” (Follow up with Philippians 2:5-8)
 - (d) Hebrews 6:10: “God is not unjust; He will not forget your work and the love you have shown Him as you have helped His people and continue to help them.” (What a promise!!!)
- 4) **APPL: Deacons are built from the inside out and from the ground up! What are you doing to teach and demonstrate what Christian service is to look like in the Church and the world?**

III) **(1 Timothy 3:8-13) Evaluating fitness for the office of Deacon in the Church.**

- A) The Church’s responsibility in establishing a man to serve in the office of deacon.
 - 1) The Church should readily agree on these established attributes in a candidate for the office.
 - (a) (3:8) He has the respect of others; That he is sincere in his service to others; that he is not known for wild living outside the church; that he is honest and trustworthy with his finances.
 - (b) (3:9) That he is a student of the Scriptures and holds firmly to the Truth without compromise.
 - 2) The Church must continually test or evaluate the man who holds the office of deacon.
 - (a) (3:10a) This is not a one-time evaluation. The same would apply to elders as well!
 - (i) (3:10) In most translations it mentions “beyond reproach.” The ongoing evaluation includes making sure that his life continues to be beyond reproach. This is an evaluation of consistency!
 - (ii) (3:11) His wife’s conduct should be a model of godliness as well.
 - (a) Her reputation factors in to his fitness: respectable, not malicious talkers (not a slanderer or accuser of others), temperate (practices self-control), trustworthy.
 - 1. A man’s wife will most often be serving with her husband. Whether Paul has in mind that she is considered a deaconess is debated. But the principles apply.
 - (iii) (3:12a) “Husband of one wife.” A one woman man. Sexual purity. Pure interactions.
 - (iv) (3:12b) Ongoing evaluation of his home life. Does he manage his home well? If his house is in disorder, then he is not fit to hold the office of deacon.
 - (a) He must be diligent at home, leading and directing his home in an orderly manner.
 - 1. 1 Tim. 3:5: “If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s Church?”
 - 3) **APPL:** How can you come along side those men and their wives to help them continue “pursuing righteousness (1 Tim. 6:11)” and to be strengthened “in the grace that is in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 2:1)”?

IV) **(1 Tim. 3:13) The Rewards of faithful service. A promise to those men who serve well in the office of deacon.**

- A) “They gain an excellent standing”
 - 1) They will be exalted by God! “God gives grace to the humble! (James 4:10; 1 Peter 5:6)
 - (a) God gives more grace to the faithful man. They will have abundant provision to serve!
- B) “And great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.” Boldness in Christ, and the trust of the Church!

ⁱ Romans 15:8: “For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God’s truth, so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed.

ⁱⁱ Philippians 1:1: Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all God’s holy people in Christ Jesus, together with the overseers and deacons.”

ⁱⁱⁱ 2 Timothy 3:14-15: “But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.”