

Bible Reading: 1 Timothy Chapter 3: v.8-13.

Title: Qualifications of Deacons.

⁸Likewise deacons *must be* reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, ⁹holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. ¹⁰But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being *found* blameless. ¹¹Likewise, *their* wives *must be* reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. ¹²Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling *their* children and their own houses well. ¹³For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Introduction

Last time in 1 Timothy we studied the Biblical background to Elders and also their qualifications as taught by Paul in v.1-7 of Chapter 3.

Today we are going to look at what the Bible teaches about Deacons and then highlight their qualifications as taught by Paul in v.8-13 of 1 Timothy chapter 3.

What the Bible teaches about Deacons.

1. Understanding the word “Deacon”.

The Greek word which is translated “Deacon” in our English Bibles, means servant, or somebody who serves.

The key to understanding this word is to understand the context and the officials who they were connected with.

In the New Testament, the “Deacons” were appointed to serve and support the “Elders”.

So the true understanding of this New Testament word would be people who are appointed by the Elders, in order to assist them, in the ministry of the Church.

Deacons are qualified approved assistants to the Elders.

We must not confuse the word “Deacon” with everybody who serves in a Church in some capacity.

At O.I.C. we have many servants of Jesus who serve in practical ways in order for the Church to function each week. Although we thank God for these people, and they are highly valued, they do not qualify for the office of “Deacon” as described in the Bible.

2. Understanding the function of “Deacons”.

Deacons are not Elders and they are not required to teach. (Although they can teach)

You will notice that Paul misses out one qualification from his list for Deacons compared to that of the Elders.

This is the qualification of being able to teach.

We will come to the qualifications of a Deacon later, but it is important to note that a “Deacon” is not required to be a Bible teacher in the Church.

It is the ability to teach God’s word that is the distinguishing feature that sets the Elders apart from the Deacons.

We now come to the function of Deacons.

Some Bible scholars point to Acts Chapter 6: v. 1-7 as the origin of the Deacons.

Acts 6: v. 1-7.

Now in those days, when *the number of* the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. ²Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. ³Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of *good* reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; ⁴but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”

⁵ And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, ⁶ whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.

⁷ Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.

However, there are problems with this connection.

Firstly, neither Paul nor Luke states such a connection.

No title of deacon was given these 7 men. These men were specifically chosen by the congregation to provide charitable relief for the Church members. Many were very poor.

There is no doubt that practical duties through appointed people came very early on in the history of the Church. However we can't connect directly the Acts 6: v. 1-7 as the actual origin of Deacons.

In reality it is much more likely that Paul, under God's authority, recognised the need for an official position within the Church to support the Elders in their ministry.

Deacons are definitely much more than just people who serve at tables feeding the poor.

When we come to the actual task that Deacons should be doing we have to be very careful.

There is no Biblical set of duties given for Deacons.

The work of the Deacons needed to be determined by the Elders in accordance with the Church's particular needs, size, and gifts of the individual members.

It appears from the New Testament that there is a **great deal of flexibility in how the Elders direct and utilize the Deacons.**

Every member of a Church is responsible for serving in some way, **but the particular role of Deacon needs to be clearly identified.**

So in order to make application to O.I.C. I need to identify some ministries in the Church which clearly must be the role of appointed, qualified Deacons, according to the qualifications listed by Paul.

1. Music is an important part of our worship to God on a Sunday.

Although there is a small teaching element in quoting the Bible, when a person is the worship leader, there is an important role in choosing songs that are Biblically based and that connect with the Bible teaching.

In our Church I have found this ministry to be well done, but the person who chooses the songs and runs the worship team should be an appointed Deacon.

In our case we would probably need more than one Deacon for this ministry.

Their ministry supports the Elder in the teaching of God's word.

There is no doubt about it, the singing of good Biblical songs, prepares people's hearts to hear God's word.

2. Pastoral visitation/ Hospital visits.

It is important that Elders pray for the sick, and when possible, visit them in hospital or in their home. This is O.K. when perhaps only one person is sick.

However even this can be quite demanding.

When Mrs. Ono was in hospital, I visited her nearly every week, and Wendy and I even sang "Silent Night" to the nurses on Christmas Day last year.

After a day's work in the office it was quite exhausting to make a hospital visit of this nature.

However, there are times when lots of people need visiting, and lots of people need pastoral support. Therefore, a suitably gifted and qualified person needs to be appointed as a pastoral visitor, for visiting the sick, the depressed and people with needs.

Training in this area, perhaps with counselling qualifications, would be a good idea.

A suitably qualified deacon would definitely have a ministry that would support the Elders in their work at O.I.C.

3. Administration/Elders Secretary.

Administration is an important part of the functioning of a Church.

Many Pastors find that administration is really not their gifting and they really need help and support in this area.

Some people are gifted in letter writing, and in keeping records, and in managing administration in a Church.

Sometimes confidential letters need to be written, confidential information needs to be kept private, and all sorts of information comes to a Church secretary.

This definitely needs to be the role of a suitably qualified Deacon.

When I first applied to be the Pastor of O.I.C., I was amazed to discover that you had two wonderful secretaries. One to translate my sermons and one to manage the office, support me and do Church administration.

We need these two positions because of our unique Bi-lingual ministry here at O.I.C.

This is definitely a “Deacon” position.

It helps the Elder in his ministry.

I definitely couldn't function as a Pastor/ Elder/ Teacher unless I had these two secretaries.

I don't have time to talk about other Deacon ministries, but these are three key areas that would support my ministry at O.I.C.

People holding these positions need to be recognised and suitably trained and qualified to do these ministries, and hold these positions.

Just pulling anybody in to fill a gap in O.I.C. ministry is not the answer.

It is better to have less people, and more suitable people, than to go for numbers.

With this important but brief introduction we now come to discover the qualifications of these Deacons, whom Paul requires all Churches to have in order to support the Elders.

In a letter to a young Elder called ‘Nepotian’, Jerome, father of the Latin translation of the Bible, rebuked the churches of his day (A.D.394) for showing more interest in the appearance of their Church buildings than in the proper selection of their church leaders. This is what he said;

“Many build churches nowadays; their walls and pillars of glowing marble, their ceilings glittering with gold, their altars studded with jewels. Yet to the choice of Christ's ministers no heed is paid”.

quote from Jerome “Letters 52” in The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 6:94.

Qualifications of Deacons.

1. **Reverent/ Dignified.** – v. 8. The Greek word used here is ‘semnos’. It is not easily translated into English. It means a respectable and well thought of person.
The N.I.V. translates it as “worthy of respect”.
A good example of a man who was “worthy of respect” was Timothy.

Acts 16: v 1-2 (N.K.J.)

Then he came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, *the son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father was Greek.* ² He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium.

Today we might call that person a role model or an example of Christian character or living.

2. **Not double tongued.** V. 8. This qualification emphasizes integrity of speech.
This is an important qualification, because often Deacons are the point of communication between the Elders and the Church members.
Deacons need to be honest in their communications. They must not hide the truth or compromise the truth.

Eccl. 10: v.1. in N.L.T.

As dead flies cause even a bottle of perfume to stink,
so a little foolishness spoils great wisdom and honor.

3. **Not given to much wine**. – v. 8. This is not an absolute ban on drinking wine but any excess is not acceptable.

Proverbs 20: v 1.

Wine *is* a mocker,
Strong drink *is* a brawler,
And whoever is led astray by it is not wise.

Proverbs 23: v.29-30.

²⁹ Who has woe?
Who has sorrow?
Who has contentions?
Who has complaints?
Who has wounds without cause?
Who has redness of eyes?
³⁰ Those who linger long at the wine,
Those who go in search of mixed wine.

This is self -explanatory and doesn't need my comments.

4. **Not greedy for money**.- v. 8.

1 Timothy 6: v.9- 10. In N.L.T.

⁹ But people who long to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the true faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows.

Jesus accused the Religious leaders of being “lovers of money”.
And He also accused them of stealing from widow’s houses.

Luke Chapter 16: v. 14. NLT

¹⁴ The Pharisees, who dearly loved their money, heard all this and scoffed at him.

Luke Chapter 20: v. 45-47. In N.L.T.

⁴⁵ Then, with the crowds listening, he turned to his disciples and said,⁴⁶ “Beware of these teachers of religious law! For they like to parade around in flowing robes and love to receive respectful greetings as they walk in the marketplaces. And how they love the seats of honor in the synagogues and the head table at banquets. ⁴⁷ Yet they shamelessly cheat widows out of their property and then pretend to be pious by making long prayers in public. Because of this, they will be severely punished.”

This qualification is very important because the love of money causes people to compromise and corrupts their behaviour.

5. **Holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience.** –v.9.

A Deacon must know the beliefs of the Christian Faith well.

The expression “the mystery of the faith” is a phrase that Paul uses to encompass the **distinctive truths of the Gospel**.

The Greek word “mystery” means a revealed secret.

In other words, in the Old Testament teaching the “Gospel” message was sort of hidden to the people. Paul is saying that he was called by God to reveal the gospel message to the Gentiles.

Romans 16: v. 25-26 in N.L.T.

²⁵ Now all glory to God, who is able to make you strong, just as my Good News says. This message about Jesus Christ has revealed his plan for you Gentiles, a plan kept secret from the beginning of time. ²⁶ But now as the prophets foretold and as the eternal God has commanded, this message is made known to all Gentiles everywhere, so that they too might believe and obey him.

Understanding the Gospel message from the whole Bible is important for a Deacon.

Every Church ought to have a training manual for Deacons.

This should include teaching of the Gospel from Genesis to the New Testament, and at least 20 Christian beliefs, which we call basic doctrine.

By reading and studying four books you should be able to at least get a foundation of things you need to know and understand.

1. The Bible – Read All of it.
2. By This Name - John Cross
3. Christian Beliefs – Wayne Grudem.

However, it is not enough to just know the truth about the Bible and what it teaches. Paul says that we need to know the truth with a **“pure conscience”**.

Q. What does Paul mean by this phrase?

God has given everybody a conscience. This is a self-judging facility, or inner voice that speaks to us of what we believe to be right or wrong.

This is actually a person's inner awareness of the moral quality of his own actions.

Our conscience both judges and guides.

So for a Christian believer it is **NEVER right to go against your conscience.**

Whenever we act against our faith, and do not seek forgiveness and correction, we defile our consciences, and that is sin.

Every time a Christian goes against his or her own conscience, there is a weakening of its power to convict that person.

1 Timothy 4: v. 1-2. (N.K.J.)

Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons,² speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron,

One of the characteristics of the last days is that people will not listen to their conscience. We only have to read the news to discover that reality today.

Sadly this affects professing Christians too.

Every believer must continue to educate themselves about the Bible as it differs from the beliefs of a secular society.

Last week Bryan Osborne made it very clear how far many believers have moved away from the clear teaching of the Bible concerning the teaching of Genesis Chapter One.

Bryan taught us what wrong beliefs in the age of the earth do to a person's faith and witness.

It also has implications for the Gospel Message.

A person who holds to the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience is somebody **whose life-style is consistent with Biblical teaching.**

The New Testament teaches us that we must live our lives in harmony with God's word.

6. Deacons must be “tested” first before serving.

This is a very important teaching point.

Many Churches fail to test people before appointing them. We heard last time about checking out Pastors/ Elders before appointing them.

However, this must also be done for serving Deacons.

The way in which this passage is constructed shows us that the testing is related to verses 8-9.

The Greek word that is used for “tested” means to make a critical examination of something. In ancient Greek literature this word was used in reference to the examination of a person’s credentials for public office.

Paul is saying here that a Deacon MUST be checked out fully before they serve in that position.

When Paul says that a deacon must be found blameless, he is not saying that the person is free from all faults.

We all have flaws in our character that annoy other people.

Being found blameless refers to the qualifications in v. 8-9.

It was very likely that Timothy had the help of the congregation in checking people out for the position of a deacon, although he was ultimately responsible.

7. Deacon's wives – v. 11.

When we come to verse 11 we are immediately confronted with a theological difference between Bible professors.

In the N.K.J translation and the N.L.T. a plain reading of the text indicates that Paul is talking about the wives of male Deacons.

However, there are several other views which argue the position of a women Deacon.

It is clear to me that Paul is talking here about the wives of Male Deacons.

I argue this point based upon the context of the passage.

The most important human influence upon a man who is married, is his wife.

If you are not married, you will just have to trust me on this point, I have been married for nearly 43 years!!!

The following verses of scripture show us the importance of a good wife.

Proverbs 12: v.4

⁴ An excellent wife *is* the crown of her husband,
But she who causes shame *is* like rottenness in his bones.

Proverbs 19: v. 14

⁴ Houses and riches *are* an inheritance from fathers,
But a prudent wife *is* from the LORD.

Proverbs 31: v.10,12

¹⁰ Who can find a virtuous wife?
For her worth *is* far above rubies.
¹² She does him good and not evil
All the days of her life.

So the Bible says that a good and godly wife will enhance her husband's reputation as a Deacon. She will be one of the most important influences on his development of Christ-like character and his work in the Church.

In v. 12, the only qualification concerning the wives that we have not covered so far is in relation to Deacon's wives is the word, “**not -slanderers**” (N.K.J.)

This word is sometimes translated as “**Gossips**”.

The Greek word used here for slander is the same Greek word that is used for the devil.

The reason for this is that the devil is the father of lies. (John 8: v.44)

A Slanderer is a person who spreads rumours or false implications.

It is very easy to pass on a half- truth or an opinion or impression that you might get.

Many a time a wrong impression can be received by even looking at a person's expression. Then a person can pass on that wrong impression and it turns out to be wrong.

Gossip is a terrible thing. It can destroy a person's character, and it must never be done by a person who is married to a Deacon or an Elder.

8. **A Deacon must be a good manager of his family, sexual behaviour, and faithfulness. – v. 12.**

The first thing that I need to do is to explain the phrase, "**husband of one wife**"

There are lots of arguments about this phrase, and have been for over 100 years.

This phrase is an "idiom" that only Paul used here in 1 Timothy chapter 3.

It is actually made up of three Greek words.

It means a man who is totally faithful to his wife, both sexually, and also in his behaviour to other women.

This is a character qualification, and not as some people think a way to disqualify a person who has been divorced in a legitimate way, according to the Bible.

The final qualification concerns the need for a Deacon to manage his children well.

We have already covered that qualification in the passage concerning Elders.

It naturally follows that if you can't manage your own children and take an interest in them, then you are less likely to be able to manage a group of diverse people in the community of believers in a Church.

As I said before, it is not easy to bring up children. My wife Wendy and I have had four children and we are still supporting them and their children, from 5,000 miles away. (7,000 K.M.)

We are now learning how to be Grandparents on Skype.

Conclusion and Application

So what can we learn today from our teaching on this passage?

1. We don't have any appointed Deacons at O.I.C. However, we should have.

I know change is always difficult, but if we seek change to obey scripture, God will bless us for our efforts.

2. By checking out people well before they are appointed into positions, we are less likely to have problems in the ministry at O.I.C. We are in a spiritual battle and we are always going to have challenges, but we don't want to give the devil an advantage or footholds in the lives of leaders and servants at O.I.C.

3. Serving as a Deacon is a great responsibility, but it is a ministry that God requires of some people. Is God calling you today to be a Deacon at O.I.C.?

In order to have Elders and Deacons at O.I.C. we do need Men to be willing to take those responsibilities and Men who qualify from scripture to be approved by God to act responsibly in those positions.

So the challenge is to pray for God to raise up people to take responsibilities at O.I.C. to serve as Deacons and Elders, if the congregation and present leadership are willing for such a change?