

CALLED TO SERVE 1 Timothy 3:8-13

Reverent – men of dignity, seriousness, stateliness. It is not that deacons do not have joy, that deacons do not have any fun in life. From Acts 6 we read that deacons were Spirit-filled men. And being so they had great joy in their lives.

But deacons were not flippant men, they were not silly men. They were too close to Jesus not to have His broken heart for a broken world. They were too busy being Jesus' hands and feet ministering to the broken and bruised to be the village jester.

Years ago I read the testimony of a well known Christian Bible teacher that I cannot relocate, but I want to share it with you as best as I remember it. I believe it was the testimony of Howard Hendrix, who was a long time seminary professor at Dallas Theological Seminary. And he told about a childhood memory that he had never forgotten. He grew up in a Presbyterian church in the Northeast. In that church was a prominent businessman who was also a dedicated Christian. Now, in the city in which they lived there was mob activity, and to fight the mob was to put yourself and your family in serious jeopardy. But this godly laymen didn't care, and he stood up to the mob in whatever way that he could. And Dr. Hendrix remembers that as a child he would sit in church with his own dad as this man would walk down the aisle with the other ushers to receive the morning offering. And he would remember his dad pointing that man out to him and with tears in his eyes saying, "Son, there walks a God fearing, courageous man". Beloved, that's the type of man that God is looking for to serve as a deacon. He is a man who is serious to his calling as a Christian, and by his Christ-like life he brings great honor to Christ.

Deacons also are not to be double-tongued. Are there many double-tongued people in this world? You bet there are. If you ask many people a question on a particular issue they will tell you what they think you want to hear and they will answer the same question from next person with what they think they want to hear. It might be what they told you and it might be something different. But the man of God, deacon or not, speaks the truth in love to everyone, the same truth. You can go to the bank on his word.

Deacons – men not "given to much wine". Now, the Greek words "not given to much wine" mean "to occupy oneself with", meaning to linger long at the wine, or as the NASB puts it, to be addicted to wine. And it is interesting that when Paul says that pastors are not to be given to wine in this same passage, the Greek language is really the same. And as you might suspect, this verse along with numerous others

spark a great controversy concerning Christians' use of alcohol. Is it OK with God for Christians to drink in moderation? Many say yes, many say no. What does God say? Well, first of all you will not find a verse in the NT saying, "Thou shalt not drink alcohol". So in this passage it appears that Paul allows for the moderate use of alcohol for pastors and deacons.

But if we are to come up with a correct answer to this huge question we must consider the whole of Scripture, and the answer we need is not what is permissible, but what is best. What brings the most benefit to man and what brings the most glory to God. Well, beloved, I'm convinced that if I want my life to bring the most benefit to man and bring the most glory to God, I will not drink, period. Paul wrote to Timothy just a little later in 5:23 to drink a little wine for his stomach's sake, and the strong implication is that Timothy was a tee-totaller and had to be encouraged to drink wine for medicinal purposes. But in 2012 Paul would probably say to Timothy, "Take a little Pepto Bismal for your stomach's sake.

Proverbs 20:1 says, "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise." All of us have had friends or loved ones whose lives have been destroyed by alcohol. And you may say, "But that's not me. I have no problem controlling my drinking". Well and good for you. But how about your friend, or even your son or daughter, who follows your example, begins to drink, and becomes a drunkard? Or just as bad, what about the unsaved man, who, even though he does not attend church, still believes that total abstinence should be a character quality of all Christians. And he sees you drinking or purchasing alcohol and says, "That's what I thought about people who go to that church. And I'm certainly not going there now". Paul writes in Rom. 14:21, "It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak." God have mercy on the Christian who leads someone else down the path of destruction by influencing them to drink!

And please let me say one more word about alcohol. Beloved, don't let the medical profession delude you. Alcoholism is not a disease. How do we know that? Very simply. God says in 1 Cor. 6:10 that drunkards will not inherit the Kingdom of God, and God never excluded anyone from Heaven because of a disease. We miss heaven because of our sin. But at Grant's Creek we believe that our deacons should live by the highest standard in the matter of alcohol, because we believe that total abstinence brings the greatest glory to God.

God has yet another condition for a man who would be a deacon. He should be a man who is not greedy for money. Friends, I don't have to tell you that we live in a materialistic world. Why, even the greedy admit they are greedy. There has been

a TV show on in recent years named American Greed. And may I sadly say that this mindset has pervaded the church. Depending on which survey you read, I have never seen any figure of the number of Christians who tithe to be over 10%.

Now, many believers will tell you that tithing, which is giving God 10% through your church, is not a NT teaching. And it is true that tithing is taught mostly in the OT. If you want to know the NT teaching on giving, then you read passages such as the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus said to lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth, but lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven. But you must also remember that every time Jesus referred to an OT command in that great sermon, His instructions always exceeded that command. For instance, law said, "You shall not commit adultery", but Jesus said that just a look of lust was committing adultery in your heart. And beloved, I cannot imagine Jesus being softer than the law when it comes to giving. And I cannot imagine God's standard for giving being any less on this side of the cross than it was before.

But beloved, it really all boils down to this. You will spend your money on what is important to you; you spend your money on where your heart is. God has told us that we are to give to advance His kingdom, and we know the biblical guidelines. And when we set a standard of living for ourselves so high that we can't afford to give to God what belongs to Him, we are simply telling Him that our "stuff" means more to us than He does. That is one reason that later on in his letter Paul told young Timothy that the love of money was the root of all evil (6:12), and some who pursue money fall away from their faith and pierce themselves through with many sorrows. And Paul said, "Timothy, flee these things!" Flee the love of money. And deacons cannot be men who love money and the things that money will buy.

Well, we must move quickly. Paul said that deacons must hold the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. Deacons are to know the Word of God, but they are to do more than know it, they are to live it. Their conscience is clear, there are no hidden sins. With a deacon what you see is what you get.

We now come to a second criterion for deacons which cause many to draw up the battle lines. And it is found in verse 11. Now, this verse doesn't seem controversial, does it? No, not when you read it in your NKJV, your KJV, or your NIV. But if you have a NASB, your version reads, "Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things". Bible teacher John MacArthur holds to this translation, and takes the verse not to be speaking about wives of deacons, but of women deacons. And more and more churches in recent years are going in this direction, ordaining both women deacons and pastors.

Now, how did this controversy arise, and who's right? Well, from a linguistic standpoint both translations are actually right. The Greek word for "wives" and "women" is the same. It is used describing the woman with an issue of blood in Matt. 9:20. And it is used in Eph. 5:25 where Paul says, "Husbands, love your wives". So which translation is correct in this passage? Baptists had historically believed that the proper translation is speaking of the wives of deacons. For one, it would be unusual for Paul to break his teaching on deacons with one statement about another office completely and then return to speaking of deacons again. Secondly, if the early church understood that women deacons were status quo, why would it be necessary to point out that they should have the same standards as the men? That should be a given. Thirdly, verse 12 says that the deacons are to be the husband of one wife, and that speaks for itself. And fourthly, in Acts 6, where we have the precedent set for deacons in the first church, all who were selected were men. So while some Bible believing churches practice differently, we believe that the office of deacon, like the office of pastor, is reserved for men.

But let me hasten to add that few churches could keep open the doors if it were not for the women who, though they are not elected deacons, still serve their church as deaconesses, as servants, just like Phoebe. In Rom. 16:2 Paul said that she was a servant of the church. And the word he uses is the same Greek word that he uses for deacons in this passage. The only difference was that one term speaks of the office and the other speaks as the function. But the function for both is the same – they are both servants.

There is a final qualification for a deacon that Paul writes to Timothy about, and that pertains to the deacon's family life. First of all, he is to be the husband of one wife. And this is yet another hot button issue, and the issue is, can a deacon be divorced? For there are many fine Christian men who've been divorced but now they are certainly faithful to their present wife. They are not adulterers and they are not polygamists. Well, beloved, good, solid, conservative scholars are divided in their opinions. So who is right?

Well, first of all, the Greek language doesn't help solve the dilemma. We've already seen that the Greek word for "wives" and "women" is the same word. But the Greek word for "husbands" and "men" is also the same word. So the translation in your Bibles, "Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife" is correct, but it would also be correct to translate the verse "Let the deacons be the men of one woman". As some scholars have said, the meaning in the Greek is simply that a deacon should be a one woman man.

So which one is right? Well, beloved, I believe that the correct rendering of the Scriptures is as it is read in the NKJV, the KJV, the NASB and NIV, that the deacon is to be the husband of one wife only. For one thing, there is just too much ambiguity in the phrase “one woman man”. If a man has been divorced and remarried, how much time does it take for him to prove himself as a “one woman man” before he can be elected as a deacon? Six months? A year? Five years?

But there is another reason that I believe deacons should be the husband of only one wife. And that is because of the plague of sexual promiscuity and divorce that has pervaded the culture of practically every generation of humanity. The church is called to be different and to reject this sinful lifestyle, and for a man to be faithful to his wife for life. And if there is no example of God’s ideal in the two ordained offices of the church, pastor and deacon, the church will be no different than the world. Church members who are struggling in their marriages will be much more likely to bail out, because after all, their pastor or their deacon is divorced, and they’re still good Christians.

But this still leaves one unanswered question. What about men who’ve been divorced but have not remarried? Does the Scripture disqualify them from serving as a deacon? Well, beloved, the Bible says very little about this specific situation, but what it does say indicates to me that it does not disqualify them. The only word we have at all that we can apply to divorced men who’ve not remarried is the case of the Old Testament prophet Hosea. Hosea’s wife Gomer left him and God told Hosea to pursue her until he won her back, and that’s what Hosea did. But when Gomer left Hosea it did not disqualify him from being a prophet. And as long as a man remains the husband of one wife and meets all the other qualifications of being a deacon, I do not see his divorce as being biblical grounds to prevent him from serving.

Now, beloved, this is not in any way condemning those who’ve been divorced. Some of the most godly people in this world have suffered through a divorce, and they have a tremendous witness for Christ. Chuck Colson, who was one of the spiritual giants of our generation, was divorced. I have several friends who’ve been divorced, including some of you, and I would draft you to go to war with me against the devil in a heartbeat. But none-the-less, God desires that His ideal for marriage be modeled in the office of pastor and deacon.

So we can see that God has set the bar high for the qualifications of a deacon. And we can see the summation of that bar most clearly in v. 10, where he says that they are to be found blameless. The word means “unreprovable, unaccused”. It is certainly not saying that a deacon is perfect, for there is none perfect but our Lord Jesus Christ. But the Bible says that Noah was blameless in all his generation (Gen.

6:9). The Bible says that Job was a blameless man (Job 1:8). And when Paul says that a deacon should be blameless, he saying that he should live in such a manner that as Paul said in Titus 2:8, where he said that we should live in such a way that our opponent will be ashamed because he has nothing evil to say about us that anyone would believe.

So we have taken a brief look at the qualifications of a deacon. But I have a question for all of us at this point? Why do you think that God ordained that there be standards for church leadership? Because God takes the work of His church seriously. We are not playing spiritual games on Sunday morning and Sunday night. We are not here for a weekly conscience cleaning. We are here building the kingdom of God. We are here doing battle with principalities and powers, with the rulers of darkness of this world, with spiritual wickedness in high places. And we don't do it on Sundays alone, but we do it seven days a week. And God has ordained that the leaders in this battle be committed.

But men, God did not place these qualifications for a deacon in His Word to intimidate you or discourage you. He has put them there to convict you and to challenge you. These are not standards that are above your capability to live by. In fact, these are things that every child of God should be living by through the power of the Holy Spirit. And God does not want you to shirk away from being a deacon because you don't feel that you can live up to these criterion, but God wants you to step up and live by them instead. But do you know what it will take? It will take commitment. It will take sacrifice. I'm asking you men today, are you willing to make the sacrifice?

But I want to broaden this exhortation for just a moment. This matter of commitment and sacrifice goes not only for deacons, but it goes for everyone who would be in service of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. It goes for Sunday School teachers, it goes for choir members, it goes for nursery workers, it goes for Wednesday supper volunteers and ushers, and prayer warriors. It goes for greeters, it goes for committee members. Beloved, there is no job in the Kingdom of God that does not call for total commitment. And please remember two things. Any church, and organization, period, will be weak and faltering without committed leadership. And, there is no success without sacrifice.

You know, we gladly make sacrifices for things we deem important.

So I want to ask our men as we close, what is going on in your life right now that you would say should take priority over being a deacon? What responsibilities

do you have that God has given you at this time that would make it impossible for you to serve your church if you were chosen as a deacon? Are there any? Could God be calling upon you to make a sacrifice for His Kingdom and serve Him as a deacon?

But what about all of us, in whatever calling from Christ we have today? Are we willing to sacrifice our time and energy for the glory of God and the building up of His church?