

THE QUALIFICATIONS OF DEACONS AND BEHAVIOR IN THE CHURCH

1 TIMOTHY 3:8–16

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INTRODUCTION

Several words are used in the Greek New Testament which are translated by the English word *servant*.¹ Three major types of servitude may be distinguished among these terms. One of these is the concept of one who is hired and works for the pay (hired servant, from *misthios*, Luke 15:17, 19; hireling, from *misthotos*, John 10:12–13, et al.). A second term, *doulos*, carries the concept of a bondservant or slave. This term is used literally to denote a slave (Col. 4:1, et al.), but it is also often used metaphorically of Christians in their service to God or Christ (Rom. 1: 1; Phi. 2:7, et al.). The third type of service is that which is rendered free of charge, willingly, and it is the word *diakonos*.² This word is most often rendered “minister” in the English versions,³ but in two contexts it is rendered “deacon” (Phi. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:8, 12), the subject of this study.

Our word *deacon* is simply a transliteration of the Greek term *diakonos*, one of several such cases in the English New Testament (e.g., *baptisma*—“baptism”). Please notice that a deacon is not one who merely serves for the pay (although it is not inherently wrong to pay a deacon in certain circumstances), nor is he a slave who is working because of compulsion or because he has no choice. A deacon is a **willing** servant—one who does freely what he is assigned to do.

Every Christian is to be a “deacon” in this general sense (i.e., a willing servant of God and of men, Mark 10:43; John 12:26). However, there is a specific, “technical,” use of the term in the New Testament in reference to certain members of the church. This is made clear by the list of qualifications for those called “deacons” immediately after those of bishops (1 Tim. 3:1–7). “Deacons” are likewise linked with “bishops” as men specifically so recognized in the Philippian church (Phi. 1:1). Paul taught the same thing everywhere in every church (1 Cor. 4:17), indicating that every congregation, when it was sufficiently mature spiritually, appointed its own elders and deacons.

Outside of 1 Timothy 3 and Philippians 1, deacons are not specifically referenced in the New Testament.⁴ However, we correctly infer from the strictness of the qualifications (only slightly less stringent than those for bishops) that considerable importance is attached by the Holy Spirit to their place and work. There are eight of these qualifications in 1 Timothy 3:8–10, 12; five are in positive terms, and three are in negative terms.

EXEGESIS AND EXPOSITION OF 1 TIMOTHY 3:8–16

Chapter 3:8–12: The Qualifications of Deacons

Verse 8: Paul introduces the qualifications of deacons with the phrase *in like manner*.⁵

This phrase refers to the statement with which he introduces the qualifications of bishops at the beginning of chapter 3: “The bishop therefore must be...” (v. 2). The force of the phrase in verse 8 is that each deacon must meet the qualifications specified for deacons, even as each elder must possess each qualification for elders. First, one who would be a deacon must be **grave** (*semnous*). White quotes Trench and then adds his own comment as follows: “The word we want is one in which the sense of gravity

and dignity, and of these as inviting reverence, is combined (Trench)... The term is used in reference to women workers and old men.”⁶

The corresponding qualification for elders is “sober-minded” (1 Tim. 3:2). This does not mean a long-faced, pessimistic grouch with no sense of humor, nor does it mean one possessed of a stern, unmerciful personality. It does rule out one who is childish, frivolous, and flippant about the cause of Christ. It demands a degree of good judgment and common sense. To meet this qualification one must be serious about serving Christ and must consider the Lord’s work to be important business. Many church problems have been precipitated by a “smart-alec,” spiritually adolescent man appointed as a “deacon.”

A deacon must **not be double-tongued**. *Double-tongued* is from a compound Greek word (*dilogous*), meaning, “to speak twice.” This qualification prohibits all of the following: (1) Changing one’s speech habits in different crowds; (2) saying one thing to one person and saying something contradictory to someone else; (3) knowing what is true in a given case, but saying that which is not true about it; (4) taking both sides of an issue for the sake of advantage (cheap politics!). James describes the double-tongued Christian well: “Out of the same mouth cometh forth blessing and cursing” (Jam. 3: 10). There is no specific parallel in the qualifications for elders.

A deacon must **not be given to much wine**. Two grave flaws in interpretation are frequently made on this statement: (1) When some compare this passage on the qualifications of elders (“not given to wine,” 1 Tim. 3:3; Tit. 1:7, KJV), they erroneously assume that elders may not drink any wine, but deacons may drink some as long as it is

not “much.” (2) Some abuse this passage to justify “social drinking” of alcoholic beverages for every Christian.

Neither this nor any other context establishes a distinction between the amounts of alcoholic beverage elders and deacons are allowed to drink, respectively. “Not given to wine” (1 Tim. 3:3 [no brawler, ASV]) is from *paroinos*, meaning, “to be alongside of wine in the sense of lingering or tarrying with it.” The ASV places the secondary meaning (“brawler”) in the text, because one who drinks often becomes quarrelsome and pugilistic. “Not given to much wine” in reference to deacons is a totally different expression (more so in the Greek than in the English), referring to the hold (addiction) which wine has on those who freely imbibe it. The two passages represent two different ways of issuing warnings about the dangers and evil of drinking wine. It is passing strange that some profess to see justification for drinking in two passages which warn men of the evils of the same.⁷

The justification for “social drinking” that many brethren (even some elders and preachers) seek on the basis of this qualification for deacons is non-existent. Let us suppose (for the sake of argument) that a deacon is permitted by this qualification to drink some wine. Who is going to decide how “much” it takes to equal “much wine” or “too much wine”? The drinker himself cannot do so, for by the time he has taken a few drinks his judgment is too impaired by alcohol to know the difference between “little,” “much,” and “too much.”

If *not given to much wine* means that it is all right to drink moderately, consistency demands that Solomon’s warning, “Be not over much wicked” (Ecc. 7:17), grants permission to be somewhat wicked. Likewise, one may as well argue that when Paul

ordered, “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body” (Rom. 6:12), he was actually giving license to sin as long as one does not completely yield to it.

Some allege that this passage means that one may drink, but he is prohibited from becoming addicted. If it is permissible to drink “moderately,” is it permissible to steal or commit fornication “moderately”—as long as one does not become addicted to those practices? So must be the “reasoning” of those who, if they would be consistent, defend drinking in any amount from the words of 1 Timothy 3:8.

Further, if this passage authorizes “moderate” drinking (we deny that there is such a thing), it does not merely justify moderate consumption, but moderate addiction! Notice: If “not given [addicted] to much wine” means that one can drink some wine, it also means that one can be addicted to some wine. This obviously proves too much, and therefore proves nothing.

Any interpretation of this passage which makes it contradict many Scriptures that elsewhere condemn strong drink (Pro. 20:1), those who drink it (1 Pet. 4:3), and those who encourage others to drink it (Hab. 2:15–16) is obviously a false interpretation. There is no Scriptural authorization here for consumption of any amount of alcohol as a beverage for a deacon or for any other Christian.

A deacon must **not be greedy of filthy lucre**. He cannot be one who is covetous, greedy, and materialistic. This prohibition also rules out anyone who is involved in a dishonest or dishonorable means of profit. Greed will often cause a man to seek gain at the expense of righteousness, truth, and honesty, thereby rendering such gains “filthy.” Although some may not exhibit this trait by dishonorable profiteering, they may do so by refusing to give to the Lord’s cause as they have been prospered. The truth of the

qualification is to rule out any who are either materialistic or dishonest. Deacons must be men in whom spiritual principles have triumphed over material concerns to an observable degree. It is not surprising that the identical qualification is given for elders (Tit. 1:7).

Verse 9: One who would be a deacon must **hold the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience**. The mystery is one of Paul's favorite descriptions of the scheme of human redemption conceived in the mind of Deity. Thayer defines this use of the term as "God's plan of providing salvation for men through Christ, which was once hidden but now is revealed (Rom. 16:25; 1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:26)."⁸ "The faith" refers to the Gospel message through which the mystery was revealed to the Lord's inspired men (Acts 6:7; 1 Cor. 16:13; Jude 3; et al.). To hold to the mystery of the faith means both to understand and to be steadfast in the Truth. This requirement is parallel to "holding to the faithful word" for elders (Tit. 1:9). A man who is unsound in the faith must never be considered as a deacon, regardless of how kind, wealthy, or prominent he may be. The "pure conscience" in this passage refers to the practice of the Truth. It is not enough for a man merely to have a "book knowledge" of the Gospel and to be correct doctrinally. He must couple a pure life with his pure doctrine.

Verse 10: Would-be deacons must **first be proved or tested**, and only if they are found blameless are they to be appointed. Often, men are very careless about the appointment of both elders and deacons. We once moved to work with a congregation of about 250 members, and we thought it strange before moving there that it had 26 deacons, besides its three elders. Being rather young and inexperienced, we did not inquire about it before the move. We learned shortly after the move that their procedure

for deacon selection had consisted of calling every adult male in the church who was not an elder or preacher, inviting them all to serve as deacons. Admittedly, this was done in the hope that it would cause some to serve more faithfully. We can testify that it did not work! In light of the plainness of this qualification, respectful and careful Bible students will not make such an egregious blunder.

William Hendriksen made the following accurate comments on this passage:

No neophytes must be chosen. Only tested men should serve in this capacity. This does not mean that a prospective deacon must serve a trial-period, but rather that by means of a consecrated life he must furnish a demonstration of faithfulness and character. He must be able to sustain the test of having the eyes of the whole church (plus the outsiders!) focused upon him. If he succeeds, he is then blameless.... This method of selecting deacons is surely far removed from the one which is suggested at times, namely, "Maybe if we make him a deacon, he'll stop his criticizing. Let's place him on the nomination for deacons. If elected, we, can perhaps make something of him."⁹

This qualification is also parallel to that given for bishops (1 Tim. 3:2, 7). We do not understand this to mean that a man must never have any accusation or criticism of any sort brought against him, for no man could pass such a test. Rather, he must be blameless in regard to the qualifications listed. When new deacons are being sought, it is the responsibility of any member of the church to step forward with any information regarding a man's failure with respect to any of these qualifications. Sad experience teaches that it is much easier to "make a deacon" of one who is unqualified than to

“unmake” one! The church is subject to grave harm when it appoints untested men as deacons.

Verse 11: Were there women deacons (“deaconesses”) in the New Testament church? Those who so affirm often cite this verse as a list of their qualifications. They also affirm that Phoebe was an “official” deaconess of the church in Cenchrea (Rom. 16:1 [an ASV footnote suggests *deaconess* for *servant*, which is in the text]). Likewise, the “enrolled” widows in Ephesus (1 Tim. 5:9–10) are identified by some as deaconesses. However, we are not convinced that Phoebe or any other woman was ever a “deaconess” in the sense that certain men were deacons or bishops.

First, if Paul had been intending to list the qualifications for another specific class of workers in the church besides bishops and deacons (the subjects of 1 Tim. 3:1–13), he could as easily have used *diakonous* to refer to the women he mentioned in verse 11, as he did to identify the men to whom he referred in verse 8. Instead, he used a generic term which may be translated “women” or “wives.” If there were deaconesses in the first-century church having to meet certain qualifications similar to those of bishops and deacons, 1 Timothy 3:11 would surely have been the most appropriate place so to indicate. We concur with the following argument advanced by Hendriksen:

On the other hand, the fact that no special and separate paragraph is used in describing their necessary qualifications, but that these are simply wedged in between the stipulated requirements for deacons, with equal clarity indicates that these women are not to be regarded as constituting a third office in the church, the office of “deaconesses,” on a par with and endowed with authority equal to that of deacons.¹⁰

We suggest that Paul's reference to the women in the midst of the qualifications of elders and deacons is just that—a reference to women (or wives). We believe that he is referring to the wives of both elders and deacons, since both must be the “husband of one wife” to be qualified. Would merely being married to a wife of just any sort meet the demands of the qualifications of these men? Hardly. Would not the women described in 1 Timothy 3:11 be peculiarly suited to complement the qualifications and work of any elder or deacon? Therefore, these qualifications for wives are best construed as extensions of the qualifications for elders and deacons.

Second, there is no more ground to claim an official use of *diakonon* in Romans 16:1 than there is of *diakonos* in Romans 13:4. In the latter passage rulers are said to be “servants of God,” but obviously this does not mean they were official deacons in the church. Few were even Christians, much less deacons. Paul calls our Lord a *diakonon* (Rom. 15:8), and he often calls himself a *diakonos* (cf. 1 Cor. 3:5; 2 Cor. 3:6; 6:4; etc.). However, we know of none who would claim that either Christ or Paul was an “official” deacon. Why then assume an official use for this term concerning Phoebe? The 149 scholars who produced the KJV and the ASV rendered the term “servant” instead of “deaconess” in the text of Romans 16: 1, indicating their conviction that Phoebe was no “official” deaconess. We heartily agree with the following statement from Burton Coffman:

The New Testament word *apostle* is used in its both official and limited sense and also in a secondary and more general sense when applied to men like Barnabas and Silas, who were not, strictly speaking, “apostles.”

The view here is that *deaconess* as applied to Phoebe, in the same

manner, does not mean that she was officially a deacon in the church of the Lord.¹¹

Third, the “enrolled” widows (1 Tim. 5:9–10) were just that, and to assume that they were deaconesses is eisegesis rather than exegesis. The mere fact that one serves a church in some capacity does not make one an “official” in that church. We have explicit and specific statements concerning the **qualifications** of elders and deacons. That churches were to **appoint** deacons and that deacons existed in the early church are matters of record. Neither is true of deaconesses.

Verse 12: A deacon must be **the husband of one wife**. This phrase is identical (in both Greek and English) to the one relating to elders (v. 2). Remember that **must be** prefaces each of these inspired requirements for both bishops and deacons. This rules out deaconesses (women deacons), even as it excludes “elderesses” (women elders) because no woman can be the “husband of one wife.” This phrase also means that a deacon must be married, for one cannot be a husband without being married. Some take the position (regarding elders and deacons) that Paul means that if they are married they must have only one wife. However, that is not what Paul says. This qualification excludes all bachelors, polygamists, and men with unscriptural marriages from serving as deacons or elders.

Deacons must be those who **rule their children and their own houses well**. The parallel trait demanded in elders is “one that ruleth his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity” (v. 4). The children of a man who would serve as a deacon should show the effects of proper training by their father. When a man allows his children to run wild or to rule his home, he demonstrates a woeful lack of moral courage

or responsibility or both, and he fails this qualification, however much he may possess the others. Ruling one's own house includes wife as well as children.

All of the qualifications of deacons (as of elders) are practical, rather than arbitrary. By this, we mean that each of them relates in some way to insuring that the men appointed to serve as a deacon will have the integrity, morality, spirituality, and ability to perform the tasks assigned to them by the elders.

Chapter 3:13: The Role and Work of Deacons

Verse 13: There is no specific information in the New Testament to tell us the work of deacons. The nearest thing to a statement concerning their work is at the conclusion of the qualifications: "For they that have served well as deacons gain to themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 3:13). The key words here are **served well**; it is the work of deacons to serve well in whatever responsibility they are given. Also, remember that the very meaning of *diakonos* connotes "willing service." We agree with the statement of James D. Cox:

The implication toward that of being a servant would require that a deacon be always ready to carry out details unquestioningly and not disputing the job arrangement. In fact, they, like the rest of the membership, are to obey and execute their tasks in such a manner as to give joy to the elders (Heb. 13:17). The very fact that they are "servants" disposed to be in readiness for whatever they may be asked to do may give a reason for no more specific Biblical mention being made of their tasks.¹²

Those who serve well gain to themselves a good standing, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus. Deacons must have already gained a degree of "good

standing” **before** they can be appointed as deacons, as the qualifications prove.

However, they gain even more by serving faithfully. Increased exercise brings strength, both for the inner and for the outer man. Those who love the cause of Christ delight in the productive and diligent service of faithful deacons. Some profess to see in this “good standing” a reference to almost automatic “promotion” to the eldership. While those who are elders often come from among those who have served as faithful deacons, this is not necessarily that to which Paul is referring. One could as well argue that the deacons’ gain of “great boldness in the faith” implies an “automatic” progression to become Gospel preachers.

The role of deacons in the local church is subject to considerable misunderstanding. This is especially true regarding the relationship of elders and deacons as respective groups. Some have the concept that elders and deacons are somehow coordinate with each other; deacons are thought of as sort of “co-elders” or “junior elders.” I know of some cases where elders and deacons have regularly met together in a local church, making decisions wherein everyone present had an equal voice. Obviously, where there are more deacons than elders (the usual case), the deacons could control any or every decision, or one elder and a few deacons could overrule the thinking of the majority of the elders. This procedure is palpably unscriptural because the elders are overseers (the meaning of bishops) of the local church (Acts 20:17, 28), and every member of the congregation must submit to their rule (Heb. 13:17). Deacons are servants (the meaning of *diakonos*) and must submit to the rule and oversight of elders like every other member. A servant has no authority except that which is delegated to him by his overseers.

Others have the concept that elders and deacons are independent of each other. Such people argue that elders have oversight of “spiritual” matters, while deacons have oversight of material, physical, and financial matters, and that neither has any authority in the field of the other. In the first place, it is impossible to divide the business of a local church into neat, separate “packages” of “spiritual” and “material” interests. Everything pertaining to the work of the church should be considered “spiritual” because it has a spiritual purpose behind it (or, at least, it should). In the second place, such a concept of “independence” is anti-Scriptural. The church in Antioch sent its famine contribution to the elders, not the deacons, in Judea (Acts 11:30). Further, elders are charged with all of the oversight of all of the work of all of the church (Acts 20:28).

Yet another false concept of the relationship between elders and deacons sees them as dependent on one another. This concept goes beyond the normal dependency all Christians should feel toward one another, viewing the elders and deacons as somewhat like the House and the Senate in Congress, respectively. Such would require the elders to pass on the ideas of the deacons, but also the deacons to pass on the proposals of the elders before any action could be taken. The aforementioned Scriptures expose the fallacy of this view, as they do the errors already discussed.

While we believe that there is no warrant for identifying the seven men appointed to serve in Jerusalem as “deacons” (Acts 6:3), the work of service performed by them may be considered typical of tasks that would be assigned to deacons. It seems obvious in the nature of the case that elders would want to assign and delegate to deacons many of the tasks relating to “physical” arrangements and “busywork” in the local church, thus

leaving them more free time for matters peculiar to the work of elders. So did the apostles with the seven men in Jerusalem (Acts 6:2–4).

A failure of elders properly to assign and delegate various tasks to deacons produces a sad state of inefficiency and waste in the local church. It leaves elders doing work which they should have assigned to deacons, preachers trying to get their own work done plus doing the work neglected by the elders, and deacons with no assignments, wondering what they are supposed to be doing. The work of a deacon may be to supervise the church property, to administer a program of benevolent work, to organize and select men to serve at the Lord's table and lead prayers, to coordinate the Bible class program, or to plan and supervise a visitation program. Any work that the elders assign that is Scriptural and is within his ability to perform should be willingly and diligently performed by a deacon.

Chapter 3:14–16: Behavior in the Church

Verses 14–15: Although Paul hoped soon to join Timothy in Ephesus, he realized that this might not be possible. In case he could not immediately come, he wrote this letter to Timothy with the instructions that he would need to be able to teach the brethren how to “behave themselves” in the church. The implication is clear that not all behaviors are appropriate in the church. Contrary to the declarations of some, God **does** have rules and regulations for His people, and we “**ought**” (are obligated) to respect them. He has never and does not now accept whatever men may choose to offer Him. Behavior in the church involves worship, which may be either true (John 4:23–24) or vain (Mat. 15:9). Behavior in the church involves moral conduct (1 Cor. 5:1–

13). Proper church behavior also involves knowing, loving, declaring, and defending the Gospel Truth (John 8:31–32; 2 Tim. 4:1–4; Jude 3).

Paul refers to the church as “the house of God.” *House* is from the common word referring to a dwelling, but here used as a figure (metonymy) to refer to “the members of a household or family.”¹³ Thus the church—those who make it up—are the household or family of God. None others are besides those who have heard the Gospel, confessed their faith in the Christ, repented of their sins, and been baptized for remission of their sins (Acts 2:37–41). The Lord has added all such to His church, and the Scriptures know of none others He has added. All who are part of our Creator’s family should rejoice daily at the very thought of such privilege and honor (1 John 3:1)!

The church is intimately related to the Truth of God’s Word. It is to the Truth as a column or pillar is to a building, supporting and upholding it. God’s family members (the church) have the responsibility to maintain and support the sound doctrine of Truth in both their words and their deeds. The church is also the “ground” of the Truth in the sense of its being a bulwark, a stay—a steadfast and firm force. Any congregation of the Lord’s people that compromises and sacrifices the Truth for any reason violates both its “pillar” and its “ground” obligations toward the immutable Word. If the church does not preach and defend the Truth, there is no one else who can or will.

Verse 16: Paul’s beginning words of this verse are axiomatic—that which no one can successfully contest or contradict. From the great concept of the church’s obligation to support the Truth, he now turns the reader’s attention to the Truth itself and to its greatness. Paul calls it “the mystery of godliness.” *Mystery* in the New Testament does not refer to that which is mysterious and undecipherable, but to that which is secret until

it has been revealed. Godliness refers to piety or religion. True religion was indeed a mystery that neither angel nor inspired prophet in former ages could figure out, though they possessed an earnest curiosity about it (1 Pet. 12:10–11). Since it has now been revealed (Rom. 16:25–27; 1 Cor. 2:7–10; Eph. 3:3–5), God’s people must preach it to the entire world (Mark 16:15–16).

Various commentators have theorized that Paul is quoting a first-century hymn in this passage. However, it shall ever remain just that—theory and opinion, with no objective evidence to support it. Those who point to the rhythm and balance of the remaining phrases as hymn-indicators forget that Paul used similar “rhythm and balance” in his opening phrases of the Romans letter, yet none have suggested that it is a hymn. We view it as simply a somewhat poetic arrangement of salient and magnificent concepts of “the mystery of godliness.” Note that there are six statements, three of which relate to our realm below (“flesh,” “nations,” “world”) and three which relate to the Heavenly realm (“spirit,” “angels,” “glory”).

He who was manifested in the flesh is a forthright reference to the incarnation of our Lord. The Eternal Word accepted humanity and servanthood (Phi. 2:5–8), and by means of the virgin birth (Mat. 1:21:23) “became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). Though He suffered all manner of humiliation and finally the death of the cross, He was “justified in the spirit.” *Justified* most often refers to the sinner’s being acquitted or declared righteous. However, it cannot mean that in reference to the sinless Christ. This word can also refer to vindication, which it must mean here. *Spirit* is capitalized in the King James Version, and rightly so, we believe: the Spirit vindicated, attested to, His claims by the profusion of miracles He worked (John 20:30–31), and in climax, by

raising Him from the dead: “Who was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead; even Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 1:4).

Seen of angels calls attention to the service the angels rendered to the Lord while He was living among men. Burton Coffman well described this phrase:

Angels announced His birth, warned Joseph to flee into Egypt, ministered to Him in the wilderness, strengthened Him in Gethsemane, rolled away the stone from His grave, announced His resurrection, escorted Him to glory, and prophesied His return in the Second Advent. Twelve legions of angels stood by ready to rescue Him during the Passion, and ten thousand of His holy angels will accompany Him in the Second Coming.

Yes, He was seen of angels.¹⁴

The Lord was “preached among the nations.” A striking element of the “mystery” of the Gospel was that it and its attendant blessings were not to be confined to one family or to one nation, but that it was for “the nations”—all of them (Eph. 3:1–6). The apostles received the order from their Master to do this very thing (Mat. 28:18–20; Mark 16:15–16), and they did it (Col. 1:23). This is the unending task of every generation of the Lord’s people until He returns.

That He was/is “believed on in the world” is the result of the Lord’s being “preached among the nations.” The Word is powerful and produces faith in hearers (Rom. 1:16; 10:14, 17); it is living, active, and sharp (Heb. 4:12). In spite of all of the wickedness in the world, when the good and honest heart hears the Word, it produces faith.

Received up in glory refers to the Ascension of our Lord to be enthroned over His great eternal kingdom, the church (Dan. 7:13–14). He disappeared from the sight of the apostles into a cloud on His ethereal journey to the glory that awaited Him (Acts 1:10) and for which He prayed (John 17:1). God enthroned His Son at His right hand until such a time as all of His enemies shall be subdued, the last of which is death (Acts 2:34–36; 1 Cor. 15:24–26).

In these six points we have a miniature view of the Gospel itself—that wonderful “mystery of godliness.”

CONCLUSION

A deacon does not merely have an office or a position to fill, but a work to do. Far too often a congregation looks upon deacon appointment as mainly an honor to be conferred. We heard of one elder who proposed that since brother _____ was growing old, if they were ever going to honor him, they should soon confer the office of deacon on him! While there is true honor related to serving faithfully as a deacon (1 Tim. 3:13), the Scriptural concept of a deacon goes far beyond a mere honorary title. Deacons are servants in the kingdom.

In the course of rendering “honor to whom honor” is due (Rom. 13:7), let us not forget “deacons that serve well.” They are men to whom every member of the church owes much.

Let us all continually learn how God wants us to behave as His children. We should all bow in humble thanksgiving for His marvelous “mystery of godliness,” by which we are saved.

ENDNOTES

1. Portions of this chapter originally appeared in a slightly different format in *1 and 2 Timothy and Titus*, ed. Curtis A. Cates (Memphis, TN: Memphis School of Preaching, 1986), pp. 101–12.

2. W. E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1966), 2:222; 3:347–49.

3. To use the term *minister* as a synonym for *preacher* is similar to equating *pastor* with *preacher*—in both cases Scriptural words are being used in an unscriptural application. In the New Testament, *minister* (from *diakonos* and its cognates) is applied to **any** who serve the Lord and his purposes, including women (Mark 1:31) and unbelieving rulers (Rom. 13:4, 6). When Paul speaks of a “minister of Christ” or a “minister of the Gospel” (Col. 1:7, 23), he is not using “minister” as a synonym for “preacher” or “evangelist.” He simply means that he is a servant of Christ and of the Gospel. Every faithful Gospel preacher is “a minister” (not “**The Minister**”), but not every “minister” is a Gospel preacher. Every Christian is to be a “minister” (servant) of Christ and the Gospel. For further study of *minister* see the author’s chapter in *Studies in 1 Corinthians*, Dub McClish, ed. (Denton, TX: Valid Publications, Inc., 1982), pp. 112–13.

4. Some refer to the seven men chosen to “serve tables” for the Grecian widows (Acts 6:1–6) as “the first deacons.” We do not concur for the following reasons: (1) Luke does not so refer to them. Some argue that the word for the serving they did is *diakonein* (v. 2). However, the word in the same context describing the “ministry” the apostles continued to render is also *diakonia* (v. 4). If the word in verse 2 makes the seven men “official” deacons, then the word in verse 4 also makes the apostles such. (2) The qualifications for the men in Acts 6 are vastly different from those for deacons in 1 Timothy 3. (3) If the seven were deacons, we have the strange circumstance of the existence of deacons in a congregation before that of elders. If it was thus in Jerusalem, could not an argument be made for deacons before and without elders in every generation of the church? That which proves too much proves nothing, and to consider the seven as deacons “proves too much.”

5. All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.

6. Newport J. D. White, *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, W. Robertson Nicoll, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), 4:114.

7. For fuller discussion of this point, see Jim McGuiggan, *The Bible, The Saint, and the Liquor Industry* (Lubbock, TX: Montex Publishing Co., 1977) pp. 126–127.

8. Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York, NY: American Book Co., 1889), p. 420.

9. William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1957), p. 132.

10. Hendriksen, pp. 132–33.

11. James Burton Coffman, *Commentary on 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus and Philemon* (Austin, TX: Firm Foundation Publishing House, 1978), p. 183.

12. James D. Cox, *With the Bishops and Deacons* (Tustin, CA: James D. Cox, 1976), p. 23.

13. Vine, 2:236.

14. Coffman, p. 188.

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