

1 Timothy Chapter 3 (vv.8-13)

A Clarification of Terms

'Deacon' transliterates the Greek word *diakonos* (noun). It is rendered as 'minister' or 'servant' and is used of the *Lord Jesus* (Romans 15.8), the *spiritual ministry* of Paul and Apollos (1 Corinthians 3.5), the *hospitality* of Stephanas (1 Corinthians 16.15), the *women* who attended to the Lord (Luke 8.3) and even the *ministers* of Satan (2 Corinthians 11.15). *Diakonos* is the ordinary word for the basic duty of rendering service to others. It may derive from the preposition *dia* (through), and *konis* (dust), portraying a servant who creates a trail of dust by his haste to perform his duties. Alternatively, the word may derive from the verb *dioko* (to hasten after or pursue). Then the idea would be one of reaching out with diligence and persistence to render service on behalf of others. *Diakonos* is quite different to *doulos* (slave). It refers to a servant in relationship to his *activity* (rather than his *Master*). His service is rendered *voluntarily* and prompted by *love*. One of the important meanings of the *diakon-* word group is *agency* or *instrumentality*. Thus, fundamentally, deacons assist overseers in their primary role of taking care of the church of God.

In relation to the local church, deacons engage in *two* types of work – *material* and *spiritual*. This is clear in Acts 6 where the **verb** is linked to the handling of *material* things (v.2) and the **noun** to the *spiritual* work of teaching the word of God (v.4). In the church at Jerusalem, deacons were *identified* by the saints and *appointed* by the elders for the special public and practical ministry of 'serving tables', i.e. distributing food and money to needy widows. 'Both the seven and the twelve fulfilled their respective deaconships. As a result of one, we no longer hear of murmuring among the widows; and as the outcome of the other, 'the word of God increased, and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly' (William Hoste). **Jim Allen** captures the basic premise admirably: *The deacon has to be viewed in two separate spheres of service: 1. A physical, material, administrative level for the benefit of the company, by men chosen by, and responsible to, the company (Acts 6.5). 2. A spiritual work of ministry to saint and sinner which, though exercised within and through the assembly, is ministered by men fitted and appointed by the Lord for that responsible task. Paul used it of himself and others in the preaching of the gospel and in ministry to the saints (Acts 12.25; 2 Corinthians 3.6, 6.4).*

In conclusion, deacons may undertake a wide range of **public** activities in their primary role of assisting the overseers. This could be a *practical* and *administrative* service (Acts 6) or involve more *spiritual* activities connected with the teaching of the word of God (cf. 4.6), though that is the *primary* function of the elder (Titus 1.9).

The Character of a Deacon [v.8]

v.8: 'Likewise' or 'in like manner' indicates that similar spiritual qualities were expected of deacons as for overseers. First, they must be 'grave' (*semnos*), a word which carries the thought of being *serious* (not grumpy) and *dignified*. He has a weightiness of character which inspires respect and reverence. Such a person takes their responsibilities seriously and is not flippant in their attitude. Second, they must not be 'doubletongued', literally 'double' or 'divided', meaning saying one thing to one person and something different to another, or, saying one thing and meaning another. They are inconsistent in their opinions and change their view of Scripture to suit the audience. Third, they are 'not given to much wine', that is, not devoted (addicted) or occupied with 'much wine'. The deacon may use a 'little wine' for medicinal or health purposes (4.1), but he is not constantly thinking about or under the control of such things. He is therefore characterised by sobriety and self-control. Reject overindulgence! Fourth, 'not greedy of filthy lucre', a compound word in the Greek from *kerdos* (gain) and *aischros* (disgraceful). Thus, there must be no suspicion that the deacon's motive in service is personal profit. The gain becomes 'disgraceful' when 'a man makes the acquisition of money, rather than the glory of God, his prime object' (Wuest).

The Conscience of a Deacon [v.9]

v.9: Fifth, he 'holds' or is 'actively committed to preserving' the fundamentals of the faith. The 'mystery' is 'the faith', i.e. the divinely revealed body of objective truth as contained in the word of God. In the context of such false teaching as there was in Ephesus, the deacon must hold to the undefiled and unifying truth of God. This must be done in a 'pure conscience' – life and doctrine *cannot* be separated, so he lives in accordance with the truth of the word of God. this keeps his conscience 'pure' and void of any offence. Teaching what one knows to be error defiles the conscience (1.19). *Allen: Conscious of a divine standard through believing the word of God, the Christian so acts in conformity with this that no accusing voice is raised within his moral being to point to fault or default.* This is a commending inward testimony, that his life corresponds with the doctrines of the faith.

The Confirmation of a Deacon [v.10]

v.10: The word 'prove' (*dokimazo*) was used of testing metals in the fire before stamping as genuine. This is no kind of formal examination (as if in the *aorist*) but the constant evaluation (*present* tense) of a man's character and contribution to the assembly (vv.8-9). Thus, before a deacon serves in a public capacity, he will have already proved his fitness to do so before the saints. As with the overseer (v.6), it is good for believers to be observed, and perhaps given small responsibilities to prove themselves trustworthy and faithful (Acts 6.3; 16.1-2). Such individuals are to serve, with the recognition of the assembly, as those who have been found 'blameless' (a synonym of the word in v.2). The word is a legal term describing the believer's justified position before God (Colossians 1.22). Here, in the courtroom of human evaluation, no proven charge of doctrinal or moral error can be laid against them (Gromacki). They are, morally, beyond reproach.

The Complement and Children of the Deacon [vv.11-12]

v.11: The opening two Greek words of this verse literally read 'even so women'. Some commentators believe Paul is referring to a separate class of female deacons, but this is highly unlikely. Paul could have used the word 'deacon' in the feminine singular if he wished to do so. In addition, it would be strange to discuss women deacons in the middle of a section about male deacons; more naturally they would be addressed by themselves. Also, Paul indicates clearly in the next verse that only men are deacons. It is much more likely Paul is referring to the 'women' (*gyne*), i.e. wives of deacons, and quite possibly overseers too. In keeping with ('even so', *hosautos*) the high spiritual calibre of both overseer and deacon, their wives must exemplify the same. Perhaps Paul has mentioned wives at this juncture, because the somewhat material character of the work of deacons was more inclined to involve their wives (see 1 Timothy 5). The wives of these men are so important because they have a strong influence over his *character* and *capacity* to serve (cf. 1 Kings 11.3; 21.25). These wives must be 'grave' (see v.8), not 'slanderers' in the sense of passing on false and malicious gossip designed to injure the reputation of others. The same word in the masculine singular is used as a title of the devil (*diabolou*) in vv.6-7. 'Sober' is the same word translated 'vigilant' (v.2) and carries the metaphorical sense of being self-controlled, and spiritually 'watchful' or 'clearheaded'. She is 'faithful in all things' in the sense of being trustworthy and dependable in every sphere (Proverbs 30.10-11). She is therefore worthy of confidence. **v.12:** Again, if a deacon is married (the common expectation), he must be a paragon of marital fidelity (see comments on v.2). If he has a family, he leads and directs by example, maintaining a high standard of expectation and authority.

The Compensation of a Deacon's Service [v.13]

v.13: The deacon who serves commendably is promised *two* rewards. First, he 'purchases' (cost is involved) or 'secures (obtains) for himself', in an *ongoing* sense, a 'good degree' (or step, *bathmos*). That is, the deacon acquires an excellent standing (reputation) in the esteem of the assembly which lends additional authority and influence to their ministry. Second, he will grow in 'boldness' (confidence) in 'the faith which is in Christ Jesus'. This probably suggests the strengthening (deepening) of the deacon's personal relationship with Christ, which, in turn, would lead to further courage and assurance in proclaiming the truth concerning Christ (cf. Acts 28.31).