

The Ministry of the Deacon

by Mack Tomlinson

This sermon focuses on the ordination of a new church officer, specifically a deacon, highlighting the importance of servanthood, character qualities, and the impact of faithful service. It emphasizes the role of deacons as servants who diligently meet the needs of the church and the community, embodying qualities such as dignity, integrity, sobriety, and faithfulness. The sermon underscores the significance of being proven, managing one's household well, and holding fast to the mystery of faith, ultimately leading to a good standing in the faith and a growing confidence in serving God.

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Scripture: 1 Timothy 3:8, Acts 6:1, Romans 12:6, Matthew 20:26, Philippians 2:3

Topics: "Servanthood", "Character in Leadership"

Description

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Transcript

Or maybe they had a sense, this is where we're supposed to be, but it's amazing what God does over the months and the years. He places the solitary in families, and we are the better for it as a church that the Courtney's have come our way. And I hope they are the better for it as well.

It's a special day for the whole Courtney family. We're honored that their parents are here today. We welcome you.

We thank you for the love and influence you've had with these children and grandchildren of yours. We honor you today. When you ordain a new church officer, it's fitting and helpful to preach on the subject.

Why? Well, it's a brand new, fresh exhortation to the one who's being ordained and set aside. And it's also a fresh instruction and reminder to the congregation. What are we looking at? How do we view this? What is an ordination of a new elder or a new deacon? So, this is important today, the ordaining of a new leader, because it changes a church for the better.

And it also, beyond that, think about this, as God builds His kingdom in different places, and we're not separate from, isolated from, the larger body of Christ. We're connected. The ordination of a new church officer is actually a tangible, real extension of the kingdom of God.

Isn't that amazing to think about? This has ripple effects for time and for eternity. So, 1 Timothy 3, let's go there. I won't read it again.

Jeff read it. But we will start an exposition, an exhortation, beginning in verse 8. But to set the context, the whole chapter virtually is about church officers. Paul addresses this to Timothy, as he does in Titus as well.

And so really, verses 1-7 are about the King James word, bishops. It's elder, shepherd, pastor. Verses 1-7 are about elders.

Verses 8-13 are about deacons. And then you have Paul shift gears in verse 14 and 15. He talks about his longing to come.

He's writing to the church about this, because he's not there and he wants to come. But he wants them to go ahead and get things in order. And to pursue the proper behavior, the proper living, theologically, ecclesiologically, practically, in the household of God.

And it's amazing, his mind just shifts to this verse 16. It seems there's no connection, but he summarizes this chapter on the ministry with this great statement. And without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness.

God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, and received up to glory. What does that verse have to do with the ministry? That's what ministry is all about. The coming of the Son of God, verse 16 summarizes the whole earthly life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And church officers are to be about the gospel. So, it's not a disconnect. So, let's go back to verse 8 and we will work our way through this.

And I want you as a member of the body, or if you're a member of another church, or a believer who's just shown up today, let us learn afresh and see what this ministry of a deacon is about. Now, we have to admit from the beginning that information about deacons in the New Testament is very scant. Nathan, what does scant mean? It's rare, not a lot of it, not a lot of information.

And it's amazing that nowhere does the New Testament outline specific duties for a deacon. It just doesn't do it. 1 Timothy 3 doesn't do it.

So, the church officers together work out, there's hints of it isn't there in the book of Acts chapter 6, though the word deacon or the office of deacon is never mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles. But there's these seed plants that grow up, and probably it's right to assume, to presume, that the ministry of a deacon grew out of the Jerusalem church. We'll refer to Acts 6 more in a moment.

But, while the material on deacons is very little in the New Testament, it is clear and important about the New Testament having an official office of a deacon. There are those who try to deny this in the body of Christ. You know, there's no designated man who are to lead, but it's just dishonest with the Bible.

And it's clearly ignorance of those who say that there is such an official office or position, like an elder or pastor, there is that of a deacon as well. The word is diakonos. That's the Greek word.

And obviously the transliteration we get diakonos, deacon, right out of it. That's brilliant exegesis, isn't it? It's obvious where the word comes from. Diakonos, what does it mean? It means literally one who executes the commands of another.

A servant, an attendant. You know, the king of England or the queen of England, those who are in royalty, always have a primary attendant to take care of any desire, any request, any command, any need. A deacon is a servant, an attendant, a minister.

And it's probably a safe presumption that the office began potentially in the Jerusalem church in Acts 6. The epistles reveal the existence of the office itself officially from the earliest days. For instance, Philippians 1.1, Paul greets the church at Philippi. And he says to the bishops, or the elders, and the deacons.

So it's clearly recognized in the epistles. In Acts 6, the verb form of deacons, serve, is used three times in Acts 6. With those seven men who were chosen, who were to serve the tables and take care of things. But they weren't called deacons.

It just says they served. And Sinclair Ferguson argues that they were probably what he calls apostolic assistants. Why? Because think about this.

There was a dispute. There was an alienation. There was a frustration between the Greeks and the Jews over the widows.

And their needs being met. There was this division, if you will, between the two groups. So these seven men were called to oversee this and take care of it.

Right? So these men came in to assist the apostles, and to govern, to work out, probably to kind of pastor relationally, this separation between the Greeks and the Jews. It wasn't just, Hey guys, next Sunday you all start setting up the tables and chairs. No, it wasn't.

It was more than that. There in Acts chapter 6. As those seven men served to take care of future physical ministry, as well as initially the alienation of the Greeks and the Jews in that dispute. So that henceforth, from then on, the apostles, they were setting precedence.

The apostles could take care and be given to two things. Prayer and what? The ministry of the Word of God. Now the question is valid.

If the duties of a deacon are not clearly outlined in Scripture, what is taught about men who are deacons? And that is clear. The answer could be summarized this way. Their character, their godliness, and their life.

Their example. Their character, their godliness, and their life example, that is their walk. That is what is clearly manifested in chapter 3 of 1 Timothy about deacons.

That's what Paul gives in 1 Timothy 3, the qualifications for a deacon. And as you read those qualifications, you notice if you observe clearly, it's not the wealthy men. It's not a popularity contest.

You don't have to be wealthy. You don't have to be popular. You don't have to be outwardly greatly impressive, a mover and a shaker.

No. You don't have to have certain level of charisma, or a strong personality, or even be influential in the community. No.

But a deacon does have to be some things that are much more important than all of that. Paul mentions eight characteristics. Let's just peruse these.

Get them in our minds. Because some of you, in the future, God will raise up to be leaders in your church, whether it's here or elsewhere. So this is equipping.

And the fact is, every Christian ought to desire to have all these characteristics in their life. Every Christian should have these characteristics in their life. The ones for the deacon and the ones for the deacon's wife.

Every man and every Christian lady and young person should desire to emulate these things and build them in your life. As you young people read through 1 Timothy or Titus in the future, you come here, this is not unapplicable to you. You ought to say, I need this in my life.

I want to be this way. I want to grow in this grace and this character and this godliness. So what's here? Eight characteristics mentioned for such men.

And if they're married, and in our case, he is, if they're married, there are four qualifications, characteristics for their wife. So let's hear briefly, right from the lips of the Apostle Paul. Verse 8. Likewise must the deacons be, King James says, grave.

Some translations say dignified. They must be dignified. That is, they must be sober-minded and mature where they affect others when you observe them as being a mature, dignified, sober-minded, godly man.

That's the way their life must come across to others. Not immature. Not silly.

Not frivolous. Not inconsistent. But dignified godliness.

It's a positive term meaning this man has a serious mind about things. About the kingdom of Christ. About the body of Christ.

And has gained a level of spiritual stature and respect. Anyone should be able to look at a church officer and see them and observe clearly a serious-minded believer who is all in, all about the kingdom of God and the church of Jesus Christ and the Gospel. That's the first qualification.

Grave. Now the King James word grave has a negative connotation. It's not used today.

But it does mean serious-mindedness, sober-mindedness, a dignified man that conducts himself in an exemplary way. You look at him and you think he is that way. So, that's the first one.

Second, the deacon must not be what? Double-tongued. Things out of both sides of his mouth that contradict each other. He must have level, right, true, pure speech that is not hypocritical, that is not contradictory to the message of the Gospel or the living of the Christian life.

He can't talk one way at church on Sunday and talk another way six days a week. You know, there are church officers they shouldn't be, but they can sing the songs on Sunday and they'll cuss with their friends

during the week with jokes privately. Such a man is a dishonor to the office of a deacon or an elder.

Not double-tongued. A controlled tongue with controlled speech who when a guy cuts him off in traffic, he doesn't blurt out a cuss word. He doesn't say mean things under the heat of the moment.

He has controlled speech. He doesn't say one thing one day and another thing another day. He doesn't say one thing and do something different.

He is a man of his word, a man of true words whose words are consistent with the Gospel and one who is never ever given to slander or gossip. That's the qualification here. Not double-tongued.

Now all of us could use a dose of that. Right? You ever double-tongued? We're tempted to speak in a manner at times that is not becoming of being a real Christian. And that's what's in view here.

Grave, that is serious-minded, dignified. Not double-tongued. What's the next one? The third one.

Not given to much wine. Not addicted to wine. Not in any way controlled by strong drink.

It's not a call for absolute abstinence. That's not here. But addiction to.

Overuse of in any way. Interest in that stuff is not to be in the life of a deacon or an elder. Having no problem whatsoever with alcohol, but a life of purity in that realm and sobriety, obviously not only physically, but sobriety in how you view that subject.

You know, there's a big New Young Reform movement in the land. And these guys are setting up websites about they're bragging about their wine and this and that and the other. The Bible erects a completely different attitude with multiple warnings about what a trap this can be and what problems this can cause.

And so while this is not a standard of a church officer can never partake of alcohol, it is a standard of exemplary, blameless conduct in relation to that. That in no way does wine or strong drink have any influence or control over the man. Fourth.

What's the next one? Not greedy. Not greedy for unjust gain or improper gaining of wealth, but really at the heart of it is, you can't be a greedy man. Free from the love of money.

Pure and clean as far as desire for wealth or coveting money or coveting material things. The heart of a deacon has to be free from the love of earthly possessions and seeking after how they can gain. Not greedy at all.

These things have to be observable in a man's life that he doesn't live this way or he's not qualified. I'm going through these clearly, but Paul just doesn't comment on them. He states them and he's presuming the church and Timothy knows what he has in mind.

So my comments are brief. You could study this out, the words, and even in a commentary yourself to look at it more. But then there's another one.

Number five is verse 9. Now notice the language. I'm reading from the King James, so yours is going to be different possibly. Holding to the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.

What's he talking about there? Holding to the mystery of the faith. Holding to the full revealed body of truth about what Christianity is and what the gospel is and what the Christian faith is. He has embraced this.

He is solid in it with a clear, pure conscience. An utterly sincere man wholly given over to being solid about the Christian faith. Some people see others and they say they're way too radical about their faith.

They're way too serious minded. Well, did they have to make it an everyday thing? Did they have to make it all about their whole life? The answer is yes. Jesus Christ is our life.

The gospel is to be our life. The kingdom of God is the Christian's life. And those who serve in the church, whether a pastor or a deacon, is all about.

He's holding to the kingdom of God and the body of the truth about what Christianity is and the theology of the gospel and the Christian life. He's holding and embracing to that with an absolute, pure, committed mind and conscience. That's a qualification.

Now, it doesn't tell us that the deacon must be apt to teach like an elder. But he probably ought to be able to do so. You know, you meet a Jehovah's Witness on a plane.

Jared doesn't like planes very much. He's getting over that. But you meet one on a plane as a deacon, as a serious minded Christian man in a room, you ought to be able to give some correction to their error.

Any of us who are sounding the Scriptures ought to be able to do that. So holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience and utter sincerity, meaning this mystery of the revelation of the gospel and all related truth which has been hidden and now has been made clear in the gospel, in the Scriptures, the deacon is to be sound in that and hold consistently to it. That's a qualification.

And that's observable in a man's life. That's the fifth thing. Sixth, verse 10.

Let these also first be proved. That is, let them be proven. Let them be tested.

Let them go through spring training or two days, I remember, two days in football. You had to go through it to play. A deacon must be proven.

His life has to live out where it's observable and he's tested about living out the faith. So when a man is looked at, when a church is told, let's look out among ourselves and see who is qualified to be a deacon, that's what you look for. You look for the testedness.

You look for the provenness. You look for the walk. You look for the life.

You look for the consistent living out of the faith. That is what you look for. Proven.

This implies a process of time in the church, seeing their life, observing the life and experience so that you know they're not a novice. So that you know they're not inconsistent. He's not immature.

So that you can look at their life and you can say, he could be an officer. There are no issues going on with him that hinders him from serving. No issues.

But if you see something that's an issue, you say, you know, this is an issue. And you know that's a red light. That's a warning sign.

No issues. If they're weak in character, if they're inconsistent in conduct, if they won't make the meetings when they could, that would discredit the office of a deacon. It would discredit the office and the service because a deacon has to be exemplary in all their ways.

That's number six. Seventh, verse 11. I'm sorry, not the right verse.

I lost my place. Verse 12. Let the deacons be the husband of one wife.

We don't have time to go into this, but it literally means in the Greek a one-woman man. And so, does this address divorce? No, it does not. It literally means this man has a heart for his wife and his wife only.

He's not a womanizer. His life is exemplary and blameless in his marriage. He's a one-woman man.

That is a requirement. And as it says in verse 11, they're wives too. So there's qualifications for a wife along with a church officer here.

There's four things mentioned. They too must be dignified. They must be so reminded about the things of God and serving Christ.

Not immature. Not shallow. Not a bad example.

They must be dignified. They must not be slanderers. Not a gossip.

Not talking about others with others behind closed doors or privately or certainly not on social media. Not slanderers. Sober.

The third thing, meaning mature-minded, sober-minded. And I love this last one. Isn't this a great phrase? Think about it.

Faithful in all things. Shouldn't every one of us want to be that? Isn't it great to point to Josh Young and say, that guy, he's faithful in all things. Jake's dependable.

He's faithful in all things. Nick Wheeler, you can set your clock by him. He is consistent.

He's faithful in all things. Don't you want that said about you? As a Christian, we all should. And we all can be that way.

You young people, you may be 10 or 11, you may be 14 or 16 or 17. You too should be faithful in all things. Faithfulness.

This is what a deacon's wife is to be. What a beautiful phrase. What a beautiful picture.

She's faithful in all things. Every one of us should be. Lastly, number eight, it says, verse 12, ruling or managing their children and their own house well.

Being the head of the home that honors God. Managing things well. It's not talking about perfection.

It's talking about consistent managing of your home. Not negligent. Things aren't out of control.

If there's a problem, you work on it and you deal with it and you fix it and you lead and you get improvement. Not failing to manage and control the household. Where things about the home are exemplary and in good shape.

Not perfect, but blamelessness in relation to the home. Next, it strikes me as I've said that all these qualities every Christian ought to have. Every one of us should desire and pursue being serious-minded and not double-tongued.

Not addicted to wine. Not greedy. Doctrinally settled in the faith.

Tested and proven. Married men, a one-woman man. Married ladies, a one-man woman.

Managing our homes. We ought to pursue all these. All of us.

But there are two special promises given here, see verse 13, to a deacon. And this is unique for the ministry of a deacon. Paul didn't give these for an elder or a bishop or a pastor, but it is unique and it's a wonderful thing.

Number one, it says in verse 13, they that have used the office of a deacon well, those who are serving in this office well, a process begins to happen. Something kicks in where something starts happening when they enter the office of a deacon and they start serving well. Here's what happens.

It's the outward effect of their faithfulness in serving. They obtain a good degree or good standing in the faith. They gain a reputation of outstanding service that's observable.

This is developed. It's accrued. When Philip Neely started as a landscape architect, he was a rookie.

And he didn't have that, right? But now over these years, he's gained a good standing. He's gained a reputation. People all over this nation, Philip Neely, oh yeah, outstanding in his work, in his example.

As you serve as a deacon, you gain an increasing godly reputation of having a good standing in the church of Jesus Christ and among the saints. It's accrued. You obtain this good standing of exemplary life and leadership in the body of Christ and in the eyes of the Lord.

The King James says it, purchase to themselves a good degree. Well, that's the kind of degree I'd like to earn. It's not a BA.

It's not an MD. It's not a PhD. It's a good degree though.

That's the best one. Secondly, the second thing it says that's a true promise for the deacon is it says they obtain great boldness in the faith. Literally, the word is confidence.

This is an inward effect. The first one was outward effect. This is an inward effect.

The deacon, as he serves and as he gains the good degree or good standing, something inside his heart starts happening that's only unique to a deacon. They gain this boldness growing the right kind of boldness, a growing confidence, a growing maturing. It's the idea of gaining assurance and growth and divine strength that marks you out in the service of Jesus Christ as a servant of the church.

The example of Stephen comes to mind. He was one of the original seven. If they were called deacons, we don't know, but that's what they were doing.

They were serving, serving, serving. Acts 6 says. And here's Stephen who preaches in the synagogue.

He's described how as a man full of faith and full of the Holy Spirit. You're to be full of faith and full of the Holy Spirit. It says about him as they came to persecute him, Stephen being full of grace and power.

He wasn't a coward. He obtained great boldness in the faith. He grew into that as a result of faithfully serving in the Jerusalem church.

A true, faithful, God-called, godly man who as a deacon was the first martyr. Was he before James? Right. Get your Scripture right.

Tom Linson. The first martyr of the Christian church. A deacon.

What an example he was. Attaining a good standing. Great confidence in the faith in the service to Jesus Christ.

But at the heart of this, what is a deacon? It's what every one of us are also. Being a servant. Being a servant.

And it's often hidden. Nobody knows. They just see the effects and fruit of it.

You as a congregation, you as a part of Providence Temple, you reap the benefits week in and week out all the time of the service of your deacons and half the time you don't even think about it. Give them all a big hug today. At least in your heart.

Being a servant. What is greatness according to Jesus? He who would be greatest in the kingdom, let Him be the servant of all. In honor, preferring each other.

Not slothful in business. Serving the Lord. Serving the Lord.

Distributing to the needs of the saints. Giving hospitality. Every Christian ought to see the needs of the saints at times.

Right? You should. We all should. When we see needs, we should try to meet them.

But deacons have their radar up looking for needs. They pursue it. They think about families.

They have their radar up. Now who might be in need? What about this family? They've been through a hard time. The deacon's radar is up to see and find needs and to initiate meeting those needs.

Looking for them. Watching for them. To serve the brethren.

Servanthood. The deaconate is servanthood. Having then gifts differing according to the grace given us.

Let us use them. He who serves, let him serve faithfully. Doing what we can, when we can, where we are as often as we can.

Deacons do that. Friday, I had a strange experience. I was driving from Philip Neely's house back to my house.

I came in front of Walmart on University. And there was this motorcycle guy, rough looking guy, in front of me. And the helmet on the back of his motorcycle falls off and tumbles off and rolls to the side of the road.

He never knew it happened. So I thought, man. I said, I'll see if he stops somewhere.

I'll tell him. So I follow him. He pulls in the bank parking lot.

Pulls up. I pull up behind him. Hey, did you have another helmet? He looked and he got all upset.

Cast down. And apparently he was trying to get in the bank before it closed. I said, hey, listen.

I'll go back. I know where it landed. I'll go back.

And I'll try to get it. And I'll bring it back to you. And he was just gushing with embarrassment and thankfulness.

I go back. I get it. I come back.

The guy's gone. He didn't even wait. I thought, why was I kind? But you know what? You serve.

When you can. Where you can. And it counted.

Friday night, Linda and I met our oldest son and his wife and their children for dinner. It was our youngest son. Youngest, right? Jackson.

Grandson. It was his birthday Friday. So we met for dinner.

I came out to the car to leave. They were not out there yet. And this very sweet African American woman, probably 60, comes up to me with a bag and a backpack.

Really sweet. And I sensed she was genuine. She said, do you have \$6.50 I could have for the homeless shelter tonight? I took a \$10 bill out of my pocket and gave it to her.

And she was grateful and she walked away. And as she walked away, I just watched her walk through the parking lot. And my heart was filled with compassion.

Because I saw this, what looked like a wealthy lady getting in her nice car from the restaurant. And the wealthy lady was walking and this African American woman was walking. Contrast.

Totally. And my heart went out to her. It was a simple thing to do for her.

Doing what we can, when we can, where we are, as often as we can. That's what deacons do. And it's a glorious thing.

There are no big shots in the Kingdom of God. You want to be a big shot? You won't get used by God. There's no self-importance and there's no place for high-mindedness in the Kingdom of God.

The lowly are the great ones. It's the lame that take the prey. Not waiting for the big stuff.

Not wanting notoriety. But wanting to serve. And that's why today we have the privilege and the great, great joy to set aside Jared Courtney for the office of being a servant in the body of Christ.

Let's pray. Father, thank You for the truth that Paul gave to Timothy about this office. Seal it in our hearts and in our minds.

Work these character qualities really in all of us as Christians. And we thank You that in real measure and with progression You've worked these things in Jared and Joanne and we're thankful today. So Lord, we

rejoice in this occasion that You're building our church.

You're equipping our church through every good work. We praise Your name so much. In Christ's name, amen.

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