

Deacons



FBCNP

1 Timothy 3:8-13

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

What Is A Deacon?

When many of us think of deacons we think of leaders, and in many churches this is exactly what they are. Deacons make decisions about money, pastors, committees, church direction, and a number of other things. While this has become the tradition for Southern Baptist churches like ours, it is not what we find when we learn about deacons from the Bible.

In the Bible, the word “deacon” is the Greek word “diakonos”. It simply means “minister” or “servant”. It’s the same word Jesus uses in Matthew 20:26 when He says, “Whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant.” In Acts 6 there was an argument in the church about whether or not food was being handed out fairly. The apostles responded by choosing seven men to handle the food-serving ministry. “It is not desirable that we should leave the Word of God and **serve** tables,” they said. So they found other men to serve food. That word, “serve”, is the root word in the Greek for “diakonos” – deacons. **A deacon is a servant.**

In the Bible, a deacon is never someone ruling with authority. While a deacon may oversee a project or situation, he is merely serving under the authority of others. He humbly works in the body of Christ, taking special interest in serving the needs of the church, whatever they may be.

A pastor (or elder), on the other hand, has a different

responsibility. In the New Testament, the Greek words used for a pastor are “poimen” (shepherd), “presbuteros” (elder), and “episkopos” (overseer). Just like every Christian, these men are servants of the Lord Jesus, but when it comes to describing their role in the church, the Bible uses words that indicate authority, guidance, leadership, and rule. These are the men tasked with guiding and leading the church, making crucial decisions, and overseeing the people and ministries of the church, including those who serve as deacons.

1 Timothy 3:2 says that a pastor must be able to teach the Word of God. Being able to teach is a pastoral qualification. If a man cannot teach the Word of God, then he cannot be a pastor. However, in the same chapter, when Paul gives the qualifications for a deacon, teaching isn't one of them. It would be wonderful if every deacon could teach the Word of God, but it is certainly not required. Deacons are servants, not elders or shepherds tasked with the responsibility of governing the church. Teaching is not a qualification for service as a deacon.

Paul also says that a pastor cannot be a novice. It would be very dangerous for a new Christian to begin leading a church as a pastor. A deacon, on the other hand, can be a relatively young Christian, because it is not his job to shepherd and oversee the members of the church.

So we find in the Bible that being a deacon is very different from how many churches actually operate. As Christians, we want to think of deacons as the Word of God describes them.

To be a deacon is to be a dedicated servant of the Lord in a local church. A deacon might mow grass. A deacon might serve tables. A deacon might visit those who are sick. He might pick up those in need of transportation. He might take food to those who are hungry. All of these things, and many others, are services that a deacon might be given to manage and perform. All members serve, but a deacon is specifically set aside for certain services.

When deacons serve well, the pastors are then free to devote themselves to the pastoral work that needs to be done. As a result, the entire church benefits. When deacons do not serve well, then pastors must act as deacons, overseeing the essential services that the local church requires. Over the long run, the church suffers from distracted leaders who are not free to minister in the Word of God as they are called to do.

So deacons are an essential part of every church. That's why God has given them to us, and that's why He has given us certain qualifications for appointing deacons. These qualifications are listed in 1 Timothy 3:8-11. Let's take a few minutes to look at each one of them.

Qualifications For A Deacon

Reverent

The word in the Greek can mean “grave” or “honest”. Probably the best way to understand this is by asking the question “Is this person honorable?” A deacon should be serious about serious things. He should not take his responsibilities lightly. He shouldn’t be flippant or silly when it comes to serving in the church. He should be a person who can be relied upon and taken at his word.

Not Double-Tongued

Being “double-tongued” is the idea of saying one thing to one person, and another thing to another person. A deacon should not be a manipulator. He should not be mainly concerned with keeping everyone happy. He should simply be honest and straight-forward in his conversations in a kind and gentle way.

Not Given to Much Wine

A deacon should not be a drunk. He should not be given to drunkenness. Drunkenness, like any sin, is forgivable, but for a deacon involved in the essential work of the church, it is disqualifying. A deacon who is found to be given to drunkenness must be removed from his position.

Not Greedy for Money

A deacon will sometimes handle money, and a deacon will sometimes be trusted with valuable things. It is not

appropriate for deacons to be men who are after great earthly wealth.

Believing the Gospel in Sincerity

Deacons don't need to be able to teach or preach or conduct deep studies of the Scriptures in order to serve, but they do need to believe the gospel of Jesus Christ with all their hearts. Without this, their services would be powerless and even dangerous for the body of Christ.

Blameless in Testing

Like any other service work, it is natural that a deacon should be tested first. In our church this involves a minimum time period of three months. If there are concerns that surface during those three months, the testing period may be extended an additional three months or longer.

Having A Reverent Wife

It is reasonable to think that a deacon's wife will be present for much of his work. She might be in a hospital room with him, visiting a hurting family. She might be delivering food or money to someone in need. She might also be aware of some of the most pressing needs in the church. Because of these things, it is important that she be honorable in the same way that her husband must be honorable.

Not Having A Slandering Wife

Slander is the sin of saying things about others that are hurtful and untrue. This is a terrible thing for anyone to do, but for the wife of a deacon it could be particularly damaging to the church and to her husband's service.

Having A Faithful Wife

A deacon's wife should be faithful. She should not be casual with her commitments. She should honor her husband, and support his ministry to the church. A deacon will have a very difficult time serving if the unfaithfulness of his wife undermines his commitment to his responsibilities.

Having One Wife

Of all the qualifications given to us for deacons, this is the most difficult to interpret. A literal translation of the original Greek would simply read, "a one-woman man." In the Greek, the word "man" can also mean "husband", and the word "woman" can also mean "wife". Since we're not given any explanation of this phrase, it requires careful thinking.

There are basically two ways that we could come to understand this. This either means (a) having only one woman for his entire life, or (b) having only one woman currently in his life. So let's think about both of these options together.

The first option presents a number of troubling questions. If Paul means (a) having only one woman for his entire life, then we must immediately ask about widowers. If a man's wife dies, God's Word allows him to remarry (1 Cor. 7:8-9). So it would be very strange if remarrying were now a disqualifying issue for becoming a deacon. We don't believe this is the meaning of the text.

Some people think that Paul is speaking only about divorced men. Jesus makes it clear that the chief problem with divorce is that it causes adultery (Matthew 19:9). So if this qualification is speaking only of divorced men, then what do we say about the man who lived in an unmarried adulterous relationship for ten years, or the man who

had an affair with a married woman? Can they become deacons while the divorced man is excluded? Is his form of adultery worse than theirs? That would be a strange conclusion. We don't believe this is the meaning of the text either.

Still, others think that this qualification is talking about ALL previous adulterous relationships, but if that is the case, then a one-time mistake as a teenager would disqualify a fifty-year-old believer. Is someone permanently disqualified from becoming a deacon because of a sin they committed decades ago? Can deacons only be people who have never committed a sexual sin? We don't believe this is what the text means.

So what does it mean?

We believe that the best way of understanding this "one-woman man" qualification is that a deacon must have only one-woman in his life at the time of his service. In other words, he must be pure and holy in his current marital relationship (if he is married) in order to become a deacon.

If you notice, every other qualification is intended to be evaluated in the present, not the past. For instance, when Paul says that a deacon must not be given to much wine (drunkenness), he is talking about the present situation of the man applying to become a deacon. It is possible that a man once struggled with drunkenness, but no longer does. He is not disqualified because he used to be a drunk many years ago.

The same could be said for being greedy. Paul does not mean that deacons must be men who have never been greedy. After all, nearly every person struggles with greediness to some extent before becoming a Christian. Paul simply means that deacons must be men who are not greedy for money anymore.

We believe the same is true with the "one-woman man" qualification. It does not mean that a person has never committed adultery, or that a person has only ever been

with one woman. It means that the deacon must be living purely before the Lord right now.

A deacon should not have more than one wife. A deacon should not have an affair. A deacon should not have an adulterous relationship. Not only are these things sinful, but they are extremely compromising to a person's ministry.

Now, it is possible that a man may be a member of the church and have an affair. If he repents, he will be forgiven as the Bible commands (Mat. 18:15,22). But such a man could not be a deacon in the midst of that sin. He is not qualified as long as he is obviously compromised in that area of his life.

Similarly, if a deacon in the church were to have an affair, he would need to be immediately removed from deaconship. If he repents, he may remain a member of the church according to the forgiveness offered to him through the blood of Jesus Christ. But he would no longer be qualified to be a deacon, and that would be the case for quite some time, and possibly for the remainder of his life.

So a person applying to become a deacon is not immediately disqualified because of some past sin in his life that he is far removed from. A divorced man could become a deacon if he is no longer an adulterous man. A man who once lived in an unmarried relationship may also become a deacon if he is no longer an adulterous man. Determining whether or not a man is truly free from these things is the responsibility of the pastors and church where the deacon is called to serve.

Ruling Their Children and Houses Well

If a deacon is going to have responsibilities that involve managing various tasks for the local church, then he

should be a man who has his own house in order. If his own household, which God has given him responsibility for, is not in order, then he is not ready for dedicated service in the church. He should first focus on the responsibilities that God has already given him before turning his attention to the responsibilities of a deacon. Once those are in order, then he will be free to pursue the service of a deacon in the church.

Becoming A Deacon At FBCNP

If you believe the Lord is leading you to become a deacon, then you should take it very seriously. It is the Holy Spirit of God who gifts Christians in the church and calls us to serve. Here is the basic step-by-step process for deaconship:

Step 1: Talk to a pastor about becoming a deacon.

The pastors will discuss your candidacy and meet with you for an evaluation.

Step 2: Be announced as a deacon candidate.

If you are qualified, they will make your candidacy known to the church during a members meeting.

Step 3: Be approved during a time of testing.

During this time you will perform the services of a deacon and be evaluated for a minimum of three months.

Step 4: Have a vote of affirmation.

If the pastors approve of your testing period, they will move forward with your candidacy. The members of the church will vote to affirm the pastors' approval. If the pastors are satisfied with the affirmation of the congregation, you will be ordained as a deacon in our church.

Final Thoughts

We hope this booklet has helped you better understand what it means to be a deacon. Being a deacon isn't easy, but it should never be thankless, and it should never be joyless. Paul writes, "For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus." (1 Tim. 3:18)

We want to serve Jesus with deacons who serve well.

If you'd like to know more about becoming a deacon, or if you have questions about anything you've read here, please don't hesitate to contact a pastor. We would be happy to sit down and discuss God's Word with you, and we would ask that you pray for God's wisdom to be granted to us in His church.

Contact information can be found on the last page of this booklet. May the Lord bless you, and may He bless His church.

FBCNP Leadership

Elder/Pastor Contact Information

Steve Whalen—Full-Time Pastor

207 South Washington Street
New Paris, OH 45347
Email: steve@fbcnp.com

mobile 937.336.0625

Justin Murphy—Pastor

110 Nelson Street
New Paris, OH 45347
Email: justin@fbcnp.com

mobile 937.533.6485

Nathan Osborne—Pastor

306 East Main Street
New Paris, OH 45347
Email: nathan@fbcnp.com

mobile 937.336.6135

Reggie Osborne II—Preaching Pastor

613 South Washington Street
New Paris, OH 45347
Email: reggie@fbcnp.com

mobile 937.336.0717

Rodney Reynolds—Pastor

9334 Sandra Drive
New Paris, OH 45347
Email: rodney@fbcnp.com

mobile 937.336.2214



First Baptist Church
NEW PARIS



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fbcnp.com | (937)437-1171