

Deacons, p.1

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Go to 1 Timothy 3, alright? 1 Timothy 3. I'm gonna do my best to shake this off. Um, you, you've, many of you have sat under me for decades, you know I stay with the text and preach the text but I'm not in a good way this morning.

Folks, our God is holy. He's holy. How dare we bring the filth of the world in and mix him up with the holy things of our God? Now look, we're, we're sinners around our God but to willfully embrace is just pure blasphemy. It's apostasy.

This morning, my father-in-law, Clifford Battles, is at a rehab center because his wife, Miss Helen, who's been one of our instrumentalists for 40 years, 40+ years, had a total knee replacement. Now she's real real private so don't tell anybody that, alright? She, she wouldn't want anybody to know about it, so if you're listening in Singapore this morning, in London this morning, and they are, don't say a word about it. She's doing great. She's coming along good but this morning he needed to be with her and, um, I've said this I think one or two times before, but when we first began to have elders at Grace Life Church, we as we always do let the church family nominate the men they thought should be in that office of oversight and leadership, and two men got the same number of votes, one of them is sitting here this morning. I won't mention his name. He knows who he is. And the other one was Clifford Battles. You, more of you said this man ought to be an elder than any other man in the church, and he came to me and said, "You're my son-in-law, you're the senior pastor, I just don't think it's wise that I be an elder too. Just could look bad. I'm gonna, I'm gonna request that you remove me from consideration. I'll just stay a deacon and I'll do the servant work of deacon in the church."

Now I want to say what I'm gonna say is 100% true. We have wonderful outstanding deacons in this church and you say, "Well, I'm not sure who they are." That's why they're so good. God didn't establish deacons to a position of notoriety and honor, they're the servants of the church, and I believe there has never been a finer deacon than Clifford Battles. Through the years he never used his relation to me in any way. Never. Never. Not one sentence. Not one word. "Jeff, don't you think this outta happen?" Never. I'm not exaggerating. Never. But over and over and over and over through the years, I'd get a call, I'd get a report, "You know your father-in-law came by and checked on me today. You know your father-in-law brought us a meal today. You know your father-in-law came over and fixed my bathroom today." Deacon work. He's just been the finest

example of selfless, serving, deacon service. So I wanted to dedicate this section of Scripture to him. I want to dedicate to the honor of God but I want to dedicate it to my father-in-law.

1 Timothy 3. Well, I'll just wait a moment and read the text, but let me talk about white blood cells. White blood cells are amazing. Biological scientists call white blood cells the first-responders in your body. Should there be a germ, a virus, a bacteria show up that could weaken, hurt the body, here they come, en masse, an army of white blood cells. They don't want any glory. They don't want any credit. They just want the body to be healthy and they attack what's hindering or hurting or holding back or disease that has come into the body. Matter of fact, at risk being a little more graphic than Sunday morning should be, when you have a pus coming out of a sore, those are white blood cells that went and died to try to cure the problem.

That's a great picture of what deacons do. Deacons are the first-responders to spiritual germs and spiritual viruses or spiritual bacterias that get in the local church body. They don't want to be known. It's not about position. Diakonos, the word in the Greek means servant. They just want to fix what's wrong so the body can go on healthy and give themselves to that end. In fact, it's a very biblical thought that should someone come to a church pastor and say, "Hey, there's a murmuring over here. I understand there's a conflict between Sister So-and-so and Sister So-and-so. I understand somebody has a need that wasn't met and some people are upset about it." The pastor's first thought should be, "Where are my deacons? They should be on that. They should be fixing that." That's their job to take care of those things, to knock those things back before they hurt the body of Christ. One of the marks of a mature church is the individuals in the church never weigh their wants or their hurts as more important than the health of the body of the local church.

Now as we've looked at 1 Timothy, beautifying the bride, we're talking about how Paul is writing to his understudy Timothy who's overseeing the church at Ephesus. Paul spent a lot of time there. This is a more mature church but there was more work to do, and so he gives Timothy these instructions on how to fashion, structure and function in the local church. These are not suggestions, these are not, you might consider this, these are God's ordained structures and functions for his church for all time. So Timothy's been studying this as Paul has written it to him, and I'm sure he faithfully began to implement what Paul told him to implement.

Now he's just recently spent a long time talking about church pastors or elders. There's several Greek words but they're used interchangeably for the one same office. Whether it's translated bishop, whether it's translated overseer, whether it's translated elder, or whether it's translated pastor, the New Testament text is explicitly clear these are just various ways of describing the work of the one office of elder or pastor in the church.

Now I spent three weeks on this, the apostle writing to Timothy, spent a lot of time on that, and why do you think he spent a lot of time and spoke about elders first? Well, let me ask you this: it's because or rather this way, in a war who are the enemies' arrows

primarily pointed at? It's tragic when any Christian fails but a fallen pastor brings much more reproach and contempt on Christ's name, plus brings such pain and confusion to the body of Christ. Scriptural leaders have a greater potential to be tempted, slandered, maligned, and themselves sometimes act the hypocrite. God's aware of this and he's faithful to provide grace and strength to undergird his servant.

Spiritual leaders need accountability. They need grace and they need strength from other men. Much strength for the pastor comes through the support and prayers of his church family, but also much strength and health comes from faithful men serving in the office of deacon. If the local church body is to be healthy, it must be free from infection and disease. This health greatly depends upon the faithful ministry of deacons. They are indeed the white blood cells in the local church body.

Now look at 1 Timothy together and let's look at verses, ah, 8 through 3. 1 Timothy 3, verses 8 through 13. 1 Timothy 3:8-13,

8 Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, 9 but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. 10 These men must also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach. 11 Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things. 12 Deacons must be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households. 13 For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and a great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

Now in Baptist life and let's just take the last 100 years or so, we find that the word "deacon" has about as many connotations as there are churches to declare it or bestow it. For example, some churches view the deacons as an official board of legally recognized managers. The pastor is basically hired by them and accountable to them. He's, the pastor's supposed to marry and bury and preach as long as he doesn't preach anything the deacon board disapproves of. Others seem to appoint anybody and everybody that might want to serve. I know it's a very common practice in Baptist churches, you just list all the men in the church's names on a, on a piece of paper whether they've been there in the last 20 years or not, and then the church family votes or puts a check mark by the men they want to be deacons, and the ones that get the top votes, get to be the deacons in the church. This is really really old, but, ah, ah, there used to be a television show that had a, a character on it called Deacon Fry. Now remember some of you old people, remember that? And he, he wore his office of deacon position as a, as a, as a thing of honor and none of these are really right in the word of God.

It just seems to vary so much from church to church. When someone says they're a deacon, you actually have to ask several questions to find out what, if anything, they actually do. But Scripture while it's not very specific concerning what deacons do, Scripture is very specific about what qualifies a man to be a deacon and remember we found that out about church elders or pastors, at least in this section of Scripture the

qualifications for elder are what's emphasized. Now on in other places, we have the work of the elders spelled out clearly but not so with deacons. With deacons, the qualifications are very well spelled out but the role is not very well spelled out. Now there's a reason for that and we'll elaborate on that in a few moments. But the point is that the church is to be very concerned about maintaining high standards of purity and integrity in its overall leadership and specifically for our text today for deacons.

Now there are three primary words translated or come from the root word "diakonos" in the New Testament. One means servant. One means service. And one means to serve. Originally the word, ah, diakonos or diakonos was used literally for those who waited tables. It wasn't, it's not a spiritual word. It, it wasn't a word used in Israel for an official anything. It was just a word you used in the culture. The pagans would use it, the irreligious would use it, ah, the Jews would use it, and the, and the Greeks would use it just to talk about someone who is serving someone. That's all it meant.

The word is used at least 100 times in the New Testament in many different contexts. For example, in John 2:5 and 9 it's literally used by those who waited tables. In, ah, John 12:26, it's used in a broad and general way about anyone who is serving and in Romans 13, ah, 3 and 4, those who are policeman are considered deacons or ministers, servants. And then it came over into the church and we find this over and over and over again where the early church leaders took a word just out of the culture and they brought it into the church to have its own special understanding within church life, and the word deacon is actually a transliteration. It's not a translation. They took the, the Greek characters, the Greek letters and just put it in close corresponding English letters and made a new word, deacon, because if you translate it, you'd just say servant. So instead of saying deacon body, if you really translated the original Greek, you'd say servant body. It's the same thing that happened to the word baptizo. When King James, who sprinkled babies into the Anglican church, when he had his translators translate the King James version, they came to this word baptizo. Uh-oh, problem because everyone knew that the Greek word always meant to dip or immerse in water. So they said, "What are we gonna do, King? If we teach this, we sprinkle babies, it, it just means we're unbiblical." And the king said, "Don't translate it, transliterate it. Just make a new word." So they made the word baptism. So when you come to the word baptism in your Bible, that's not a translation, it's a transliteration. They created a new word. It should be translated dip or immerse.

So that's kind of where deacon came from, it's a transliteration, it literally means serve or servant or to serve. So any believer in any form of ministry literally is a deacon. Did you hear me? Any church member in any form of service is a deacon. That means you're a servant and we're all to be servants.

Now we might talk about three levels of service. Ah, general service that we're all to be general servants. In Ephesians 4:11 and 12, we have this concept that all of us are to be servants. So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers to equip his people for the works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up. That's not New American Standard, Tommy, but we'll stay with it today,

alright? Go to verse 12, "To equip his people for the works of service." Now notice that, his people, the whole church, we're all, that's the word deacon, we're all serving.

So there's general service for all of us, so in other words, in no sense are deacons to do the service while everyone else watches, and there isn't a leadership level of elders and pastors, a service level of deacons, and then a spectator level made up of all other believers. Now some of you are a little bit spectator-like and you need to repent and get with it. There's no such thing in the New Testament church. You joined a body and we're all functioning members of this organism, this local church body. There is no audience in God's local church. We're all in ministry. We're all in some capacity servants. We've all been called to submit ourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ. He said, "Where I am, there shall also My servant be. If any man serve Me, him will My Father honor," John 12:26. We are all servants so in a general sense, everybody's a deacon because everybody is to be about service.

Then there's gifted service where in 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12 we have the spiritual gifts out, outlined in Scripture, and first you come into a church and you do whatever the leadership asks you to do if you can do it. Now we would not ask you to do something that you're insecure about or you're uncomfortable with, but you outta just find stuff and just do it. Don't worry about your spiritual gift. God wants to build your character before he wants to get you in your gift and some of you never learned that and you're frustrated and irritated today because of it. You focus on what you outta be doing instead of just doing what can be done, and then as you do what needs to be done in the body of Christ, God in his timing will put you in your role or your office.

I spent eight years as your student minister and associate pastor before I became the senior preaching pastor, and I needed those eight years. Ask Dr. Pittman. His office was upstairs. He was a big man. He didn't like going up and down steps. He'd often say, "Run up the steps and get my coat." I ran up the steps and got his coat because he was my pastor and I did what he said, and I expect the young men who are called into the ministry in this church to have the same attitude I had. If you can't yield and submit to somebody else and honor him, then you don't need to be the pastor of anything.

God gives you your spiritual gift and he'll get you there when you need to get there, and he'll get you there through the leadership of your church. You're not smarter than God. If God can move the king's heart like rivers of water, and he can, he can move the elders' hearts like rivers of water. Some of you need to bow your heart before God right now and say, "Lord, I surrender. Show me what I'm supposed to do and that's what I'll do." I often use the phrase cleaning toilets in the house of the Lord is a grand privilege for a man that outta be in hell. Ours aren't so bad. We've got some brand new ones over here. Those won't be so bad for a while if we can ever get them finished. We'll see what happens.

So we serve eventually according to our spiritual gifts, and then there's official service. In other words, God has ordained that there's a collectivity of people that come together with special authority to get certain tasks accomplished. Now according to 1 Timothy 3, elders are to focus on teaching the word and overseeing the church and deacons are to

focus on implementing and applying what needs to be done to keep the body healthy. So in the church there's a plurality of godly men, first in the office of elder or pastor, they oversee the work and then they are assisted in their work by deacons.

I think one of the beautiful things to me that pictures this as we're all serving together is when we take the Lord's Supper together, the Lord's Table together, because you have all these men down here and most of you aren't sure who's who. They're all either elders or deacons but we all together just serve the body of Christ. Now Coach Stagem is our vice chairman of the elders. He leads in organizing that and, ah, I lead out in the worship service, but all of us just worship together and serve together, and I think that's a beautiful picture of where it's not all of this ultra-structured, "Well, I'm this. Well, I'm that." No, we just do what needs to get done for the glory of God in his church.

Now we come to our text. Let's talk about the qualifications for deacons and I'm, I'm watching our time. This'll be at least a two-parter, okay? First of all, the qualifications for deacons beginning in verses, ah, ah, 8 through 13, and I'll not say much because these are practically identical to the character qualifications for elders that we just looked at in the last three sessions.

But he says in verse 8, "Deacons must likewise be men of dignity." The word dignity means worthy of respect. They can have a sense of humor, of course, but they're known as serious men. They're not clowns. Sometimes I say goofy. That doesn't mark them. They're honorable. They're respectable. They're stately. That's what the word dignity means.

In verse 8 he also says they are not to be double-tongued. That means there is a sincerity about them in the fact that they're not hypocritical or dishonest. They have a consistency in what they say. They're not saying one thing to one person and something else to someone else.

Thirdly, verse 8, not addicted to much wine. Now again I've gone over this quite thoroughly. Wine was used, a very watered down weak version because water, it was almost impossible to keep water pure. The fermentation content of the wine made it cleaner and so they almost always used wine in some capacity, but from the balance of biblical truth, they made real efforts to make sure the intoxicating effect was as minimal as possible. What we have as wine today would be considered hard liquor in Bible days. His point in when he says not addicted to much wine, he means this is not the guy who uses wine or intoxicating things as a beverage. The idea he's to have clear thinking and good self-control and alcohol leads toward the opposite. He's not one who's known to frequent the happy hour or the bar setting. He's not addicted to much wine.

The last one in verse 8 is not fond of sordid gain. He has no pattern or reputation of being a greedy chaser of dishonest gain. He's upright in his business practices. Men who run businesses lose a deal, lose money before you will compromise on your ethic in a business deal. Well, a man who's known to do that should not be considered as a deacon in God's church.

Verse 9, holding to the mystery of the faith. Now again this word mystery in the New Testament doesn't mean things that are mysterious, it means things that were hidden from the Jews. They only grasped a little of the truth of God's plan because God unfolded it in types and in shadows to them, but now in the New Testament, the plan came because the man came, Jesus Christ. You can't understand the plan of God until the man of God who is going to carry out the plan of God appears, and he has appeared. Jesus Christ lived the sinless life, taught the truths of grace and redemption, gave his life on Calvary to pay for the sins of his children, was buried in the grave, was raised for their justification, ascended back up into heaven where he's seated at the right hand of the Father, where he ever is faithful to intercede for his own. That was a mystery at one time, now it's unfolded. What it means is these are men who know what sound doctrine is and they stand on it. These are men when their pastor says what your pastor said this morning about who we're gonna fellowship with, something in their heart says, "Amen! I'm with you." That's the kind of man that makes a good deacon, holding to the mystery of the faith, doctrinal soundness. Brothers and sisters, there are things in the Bible we don't fight over. There are many many many things we can disagree on but there are some things that we cannot back up on. A deacon needs to be the kind of man that knows the difference and the things that matter, and he's got a backbone like a saw log and he's not moving.

Then he says a clear conscience, simply that as a pattern his conduct does not contradict his profession. As a pattern, he lives what he says he is. Now again, be careful, you put our good deacons under a strong enough microscope you'll find some flaws, but I don't believe, I've known these men, many of them for decades, I don't believe you'll find open patterns that would cause them to be disqualified. And I'll be honest, through the years we've had men step down on their own initiative and I didn't know exactly why but just felt like, "Hey, you know, this, this might, might hurt the Lord's reputation a little bit, it may even not be sin but I'd be better off not being on the elder body or the deacon body." And I respect that kind of godliness.

Then he says in verse 10, they have to be tested. It's the same word you would use in the chemistry of the day for testing of metals. It means he's proved himself faithful in the service of the Lord. He's proven his maturity over time in the ordinary activities of life. He's faithful in little things therefore he'll be faithful in much.

I'll close with this story. Years ago Dr. Adrian Rogers, I'm so thankful I got to know him personally before the Lord took him home, and if I might backtrack a little bit, if leaders, former leaders in the Southern Baptist Convention were still here, even though I disagree with some things but nevertheless they were good and godly men, if Adrian Rogers I believe were alive together, he'd be denouncing boldly the stuff we're seeing go on. We just don't have men like that anymore. Well, not in Southern Baptist ranks.

Dr. Rogers tells a story of a young executive who had joined a big company and this young executive was very effective. He had all the gifts and the company president had watched him and been watching him and thought, "This guy's gonna be something." He

had decided, "I'm gonna promote him to vice president. He's young but he's special." And so he was going to tell him that day at lunch and they went to the company cafeteria for lunch and it was one of these where you'd go through the line and you'd pick out from the buffet what you want, and it was back in those days when butter came on a little square white pat. Y'all remember those little pats of butter? I remember those from going to the, um, the cafe in Nashville, Tennessee back when we'd drive from Lawrenceburg to go to Nashville to find culture or find something, and, and we'd go through there and, and so the man in, in this young executive that he's going to promote to vice president are there in line, and they go along and the young man got a couple of those little pats of butter, they're 2 cents apiece, and he took his little finger and he pushed his napkin over those pats of butter. It's something he'd learned from his father. It didn't amount to nothing but he found out you just push your napkin over it, they won't charge you for it, they won't see it.

The company president saw it out of the corner of his eye. They went through the line and paid for the meal and they sat down and the company president looked at the young man and said, "You're special. You have unique gifts. You're valuable but I saw you slide that 2 cent pat of butter under your napkin and you didn't pay for it, and if you'll steal 2 cents from me, you'll steal 2 million from me if you get the chance. I was gonna make you vice president and today you're fired." All over a 2 cent pat of butter.

A deacon has to be the kind of man that his profession and his conduct line up. Now anybody in here 100% not guilty somewhere, sometime? Then you be a repenter and don't let that be a pattern and God forbid, I'll take you up behind these buildings and beat you with a 20 foot rod, don't teach your children and your grandchildren that kind of nonsense because you know what, dad, are you listening to me? Granddad, are you listening to me? They'll take it from you if they watch you take it wrong from others.

Now let's expand this out and I'm done, at least for this morning. We're all servants. Don't think, "Well, those qualifications, Brother Jeff, dealt with the last three weeks, that's just pastors and now this servant stuff, that's just deacons." Well, it includes them but you're all to be faithful servants with integrity and dignity, holding to the faith, your conduct and your profession lining up. Let it not be said in this community, "Yeah, I know old Joe So-and-so, I know Sally So-and-so, she's a member of your church and at work she dah, dah, dah, dah." Don't let it happen. Let's make sure as God's servants our conduct and our profession always line up.