

3 Qualifications of Baptist Deacons

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So let's read this in unison, 1 Timothy 3:10 through 13. The Word of God says,

10 And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless. 11 Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. 12 Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. 13 For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

And let's pray.

Lord, we're coming to the scriptures now and we ask that you would give us insight, give my voice and body strength, and Lord, give us ears to hear and help us just to take a look at the Word this evening and see what the Bible says about the qualifications of a deacon. I pray that you would open the Word of God to us and give us insight and discernment and wisdom. And then, Lord, that all of us would strive, every single man, woman, and child could strive to the highest goals of the Christian life, that we could be Christ-like, that we could handle things like you would, that we would be your representatives in this world. And so, give us the desire to strive towards that and that we could see these qualifications. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

You may be seated.

And so this morning we preached on the Baptist distinctives, and I hope that was a blessing to you, but I had to go quick at the end and began speaking very quickly, and I had some questions throughout the day, good questions, happy to answer them, about the office of the deacon. And so I was praying about it this afternoon, and the Lord said, "Well, let's just talk about that tonight." The office of deacon is probably one of the most misunderstood concepts as far as church polity goes, and when we talk about politics or church polity, we're talking about how the church functions, a church government and 1 Timothy chapter 3 is vital to the New Testament church because it gives some qualifications of pastors and deacons. So the Bible says you need to have pastors, every church should have a pastor, but what kind of person should they be? Do you pick the funniest guy in the room? Do you pick the most charismatic person? And far too often

when churches pick pastors, it becomes almost like a personality contest or a beauty contest and the wise church has a process, a biblical process by which they pick a pastor, and I'll tell you what, Curtis Corner Baptist Church did that. When Pastor Kelly went to be with the Lord, this church had taken some time and got some real good counsel and had a process that they decided to go through, and that's very valuable and so, praise the Lord for that. But the qualifications kind of say, okay, you know generally the kind of person you're looking for, but let's get down to brass tacks and look at what a pastor should be. And then the office of a deacon is a very valuable office and important, but we don't just put anybody there. The average church takes the business people in the church or the most popular ones and they populate the deacon's office and this causes a lot of stress in the church because, and I'm talking generally, it's easy for you to have a pastor that wants to go one way and business-minded deacon or business-minded elder board that wants to go another way, and it causes a lot of friction. And so God said these offices are important, but we need to make sure that we're careful in who we allow to fill these offices.

And I look at these qualifications of pastor and deacons as a good goal for every Christian. Everybody in this room is not going to be a pastor but why not strive to have the qualifications of one? If God says, "This is the people that are qualified to lead my flock, these are the things I'm looking for," then obviously God holds those qualifications or those qualities in high regard. Would you agree with that? And so why not strive to be that? I may never be a pastor, but I can strive to be blameless. I may never be a pastor, but I can strive to not be a brawler or not a striker. And so this is so valuable, and I'll be honest with you, before I got saved and even before I was called to preach, the preacher did a good job of holding these qualities up in a regard that said, "You know what? Let's all strive to be acceptable." And Timothy talks about being a vessel meet for the master's use and so we want to be usable, we want to be acceptable, and if God says these qualifications make someone available or usable for the highest offices, then why not all of us strive to put these things in our lives? And so this really becomes goals for every Christian. I would say to every man in this room, God may never call you to preach, but it would be good for you to have the qualifications of a preacher. Or God may never call you to be a deacon, but you could have the qualifications of a deacon. Or God may never ask you ladies to be a pastor's wife or a deacon's wife, but you could strive for the qualifications.

And so this is vital for us and let me remind us that setting expectations is good. It's a good thing God did. The Old Testament has a lot to say about the priesthood being polluted, when they would just take anybody and throw them into the priesthood and God said, "No, that's not my plan, that's not my heart." And even the Bible warns us in the New Testament not to lay hands on someone quickly, that as we are ordaining pastors for churches and different things, that we don't just say, "Sure." You know, sometimes I've been asked to be on boards that are going to lay their hands on a preacher, and it's always a wonderful blessing to be considered and sometimes you can say, "You know what? I'm for that, I'll absolutely do it." But there have been times in my ministry where I've had to say, "You know what? I'm just...not this time." Just because I'm responsible to the Lord

for my part in that, and if someone's not fulfilling the qualifications of a pastor, then God warns me not to lay hands suddenly on any man. Does that make sense to you?

So, qualifications are so vital and by the way, the higher you get in God's ministry, the more expectations there are. So there are less expectations for someone that opens the door and greets you at church than there is for someone who's teaching a Sunday school class because the higher influence that the church gives somebody, and the church says, "I'm going to let you teach the Bible, or we're going to ask you to be involved in this ministry," then there's higher expectations. And we all know churches where, for example, someone might be at the bar Saturday night and they're up singing on the platform Sunday morning and I think that's unacceptable. And someone might be doing something unseemly, but they're in a Sunday school class on Sunday. I think that's unacceptable. And so these qualifications are good, and we ought to be thankful that God says, "Let me tell you where I want you to go. Let me tell you the direction I want you to be headed, and begin to knock some of these things out in your life." And so, praise the Lord for that.

Now, so God gives these as qualifications for pastors and deacons and their wives, but also as a goal for every Christian. Now hold your place here, we'll come back. Let's look at Philippians chapter 1. Philippians chapter 1, we see the three parts of a church. Philippians chapter 1, verse 1, "Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi." So the saints are the saved people, amen, and then it goes on to say, "with the bishops and deacons." And so God's churches are comprised of saints, bishops or pastors and deacons. Now, the interesting thing is the only place God has to get pastors and deacons from are the saints. Right? In order to be qualified to be a pastor or deacon, you've first got to be saved. So that's the only pool God has to draw from is the local church and so when I was called to preach, God called me and I was a member of Blessed Hope Baptist Church. When you folks called and asked me to come be your pastor, I was a member, I was a saint. I'm a saint. I was a saint at First Baptist Church. And so now I'm a member of Curtis Corner Baptist Church, but I'm the pastor but I'm still a member of a church. So it's all saints that God has to deal with, and never forget this, every missionary, every church planter, every usher, every pastor, every deacon, every Sunday school teacher, every prison worker, every nursing home worker, children's worker, they all have to come from the local church. That's the only place God has to get them and so the fishing hole, if you will, or the place that God has to go to choose these folks is out of the local church.

Now, Catholic theology, and much denominational theology, has this idea of the priesthood and the laity. So it's this idea that the priests do all the work, all the spiritual work, and the congregation just kind of comes to watch and then tries to save their own soul. Baptist doctrine is very different from that. Baptist doctrine is that every saint is a worker, that every Christian has a job to do, and that's unique among churches. Now you'll go into some churches that have that idea, but as far as just a blanket statement of church belief, of the Baptist theology, Baptist doctrine, Bible doctrine, is that every saint is called to good works, that none of us get to hire someone else to be righteous for us, or to pray for us, but we all have a work to do.

Let's look at Ephesians chapter 4, and we'll see that. So we have the saints as part of the church. In Ephesians chapter 4, verse 11, the Bible says, "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers." Now where does he get these people? From the church. From the saints. Now, why does God call certain people out of the saints and give them special tasks to do? So a pastor comes out and shepherds, a teacher comes out and teaches, and so on, what's their purpose? Look at verse 12, "For the perfecting," or the maturing of who? The saints. So God looks at the saints, and he calls certain people out of the saints to help make the saints more Christ-like. Right? So he calls them out. So all the pastor is is a saint who's been called out, and he has a specific function trying to help the church do certain things. And we go on, look at verse 12, "For the perfecting of the saints," so we want to grow the saints or mature the saints. Why do we mature the saints? "For the work of the ministry." Now watch this: saints need to grow in grace so saints can get busy serving God. Right? And then why should saints get busy serving God? Look at the next phrase, "for the edifying of the body of Christ," to build up the saints.

So God saves someone, God calls someone out to be a teacher, pastor, so on. So those people that are saved can mature in Christ, so that they can get busy serving God, so God can add to the church, and now he's got more saints and out of those new saints, he calls pastors and teachers, and the process keeps going and going. Do we see that? So saints are to be busy. This idea that the pastor does all the spiritual work is not Baptist doctrine. It's all of us have a job to do. We can look at Titus. All of us are called to good works. Ephesians 2, verse 10, called to good works. All of these things are important. So we have the saints in church and then out of the saints, God has to call pastors and deacons to do certain jobs. Do we agree with that?

Now why does he call them out of the saints? To perfect the saints for the work of the ministry for the edifying of the body of Christ, and we see this beautiful, it's like a flywheel, once that thing really gets going, the more saints God has, the more pastors he can call, the more church planters we can have, the more missionaries we can have, the more churches we can start and it's supposed to be that self-perpetuating thing. What we often see in Christianity is churches stop the cycle so there's not an increase of saints, people stop growing in the Lord, the work of the ministry doesn't get done, the body of Christ stops growing, then the church gets old, and all the faithful people grow old and die, and that's how churches die because the process of growth stops somewhere. And it stops whenever saints say, "That's not my job." Might be their job, might be their job.

So each one of us have a job to do. Now, we're all not called to do the same thing. Everybody's not called to work in the bus ministry. Everybody, we don't want everybody to work with the nursery. We don't want everybody to work in the nursing homes. We don't. You know, we want to find a niche for your gifts and God use your God-given gifts for the work of the ministry. Amen? And then, of course, the pastors and others have lives set up to where they can be full-time, and then the people of God go about it at their daily life. And like someone mentioned earlier, "You know, I pass out a lot of tracts at work." Praise God for that. You ought to see your job as a mission field. The person you

work next to every day is going to heaven or hell. You're probably the only person at work that knows the truth. If you don't tell them who will, and so we know all of those things.

So when it comes to the qualifications, we see that God has a pool called the saints, but these saints are of all different maturity levels. Some of them are brand new in Christ, they know nothing other than that they're saved. Some of them have been saved for a long time, they've stopped drinking, they've stopped all the crazy stuff, they don't curse anymore, but more than that, more than just the outward sins, they're dealing with the inward sins, the anger, the envy, the jealousy, the bitterness. What happens is God sanctifies and purifies us so we look less and less like we used to and the rest of the world, and we look more and more like him. Amen? So those saints that are growing, God will call someone out and say, "Alright, I need you to preach, and I want you to do that with your life, and I need you to go be a missionary, and I want you to work in the bus ministry," and so God begins to call people to do specific things.

Now, the two offices mandated by the scripture for the church is that of pastor and deacon, and we know that the pastor leads, feeds, guides, and guards under the direction of Christ, and then God gives him helpers. Now, my pastor used to say that every Christian is either called to be a pastor or help a pastor. Now, that doesn't mean because the pastor is so elevated and high and all that kind of stuff. It's if the pastor is going about God's work, then why not help him do it? If you've got a good pastor, or if the pastor's going after sinners, why not help him? If he's trying to teach the Bible, why not help him? And so it's that concept but it's also the idea that none of us are spectators. We're either in the ministry full-time, or we're helping those who are, and we're involved. We're in the game. And so a lot of people watch football today, and I turned it on for a few minutes, and you see football, and you've got 22 people out on the field desperately in need of rest, and you've got 60,000 people in the stands desperately in need of exercise. And oftentimes that's the way church is. You've got a small group of people that are killing themselves, killing themselves. Missing church, doing all kinds of things during church time. They don't get to sit and enjoy a service as a family, or they're busy, or they're working, and they get here early and they leave late, killing themselves, while you have a different percentage of people, much larger percentage, that just kind of come in, you know, punch the time clock and leave. And so, that's something that we have to be mindful of, but that's not God's philosophy. God's plan is that everybody's involved doing something.

And so God calls out Christian workers out of the saints, and thank the Lord for that, and so he called out pastors but then the Bible gives pastors help. Some of those helps are the saints in the work of the ministry, doing various things. Then there is the idea of other pastors; these are other pastors who are involved in leading, feeding, guiding, all of those things. And then there is this idea of the deacon, and the deacon is to help the pastor care for the flock and the work of the ministry so he can give priority to the ministry of the word and prayer. So every church has this balance. Alright, the church starts to grow. Wonderful. We get more people. Wonderful. The new people that come in have needs because they don't know the Bible very well, usually their lives are in disarray, that's why

they know they need God. So they come in and they need a lot of attention. So there's this pendulum that swings back and forth where more people means they need more attention so the people helping, the people that need help, have less and less time. That make sense? So the only way that continues to work is if you have more and more people paying attention to the new people that need help. If new people don't get involved, new servants don't get involved helping the new folks, then what happens is people start to leave the church because they're not getting their needs met. That make sense to you? But the idea is every pastor, every assistant pastor, every deacon, every church member only has so much time in the day so something's got to give. Most of you work jobs, and so even though that may not be the highest priority in your life, I think you would all say that your marriage is more important than your job, but at the same time, your job requires more time. Most of you who worked 50 hours this week didn't spend 50 hours with your wife. That doesn't mean your wife's any less important, does it? It just means that that's the inequity of life. Right? So life takes us from the things that are often most important and it's the same thing sometimes in church. Even pastors and full-time assistants and full-time pastors, they only have a certain amount of time so they never get everything done, even a church our size. because even after all the administration's done, the paperwork's done, the business is done, everybody's counseled, everybody's called, everybody's texted, we gotta go win the world, and so there's never an end to what needs to be done and that's okay, that's the calling. So God's only answer is to involve more people. The more people that get involved, the more work.

So what we found, and we'll look at it in a minute in Acts chapter 6, is the church of Jerusalem is growing in leaps and bounds, but they're winning so many people to the Lord that people start getting neglected and the answer to that neglect was calling out people who would spend their time dealing with those new people, and specifically in that situation, widows that needed help. And remember in those days, they didn't have Medicare and Medicaid. Churches would take up collections, take in the money, distribute the money, go buy food, make people meals. Really, before government took care of everybody, the local churches had a big impact in taking care of the community. And so this was a full-time job. Matter of fact, if you study Acts chapter 6, we believe these were full-time men. The church actually supported them full-time, so the Bible calls it daily ministrations. It was daily work. It wasn't spare time work, it was daily work. And so, but why did they do that? So the pastors, the apostles, could continue in the Word of God and prayer, and what happened? The church grew. So every church has to constantly balance this idea of praise God for new people, but now something's got to give because somebody's got to take care of the new people and everybody who's already taken care of everybody else only has enough time, so if a church is going to grow, there constantly has to be an influx of new helpers helping take care of the flock. Does that make sense to you? And sometimes that's in the form of pastors, sometimes assistant pastors, and deacons and so, just getting a little background there.

And so let's look back at 1 Timothy chapter 3. So when it comes to, we can all agree that the idea of deacon is a biblical concept, we all agree that it's a biblical office, and we all agree that the ministry of a deacon is to help the preachers so they can go on doing the ministry of the word and prayer. So God says, you know what, as you're looking for new

people who are not just going to help, they're going to actually represent the church. And so this is a difference. Again, there's a difference between somebody opening the door on Sunday, and he's doing it there as a favor, or somebody that's folding bulletins, and someone that says, this is an official representative of our church, they have an official office. That's a different thing. And so God says, "I want you to know the kind of people to look for." And I find in the Bible three kinds of qualifications for a deacon, and we won't go in depth into these tonight, but I encourage each one of you to study these, look at them, do your own Bible study, and if you have any questions, we'll talk about them.

So let me say first when it comes to qualification of deacons, we see character qualifications. There are character qualifications to being a pastor or deacon. Look at, well, let's look at verse 2, "A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach." A lot of these things are character issues. Alright, what is the character of the person? Now, let's all realize that when we get saved, lost people usually don't have the character of Christ. Can we agree with that? The way Christ is is not important to us. We lie, we steal, we cheat, we do things to our own ends, we use people to our own purposes in varying levels. Maybe you can say, "Well, I'm not as bad as that guy." That's irrelevant. The issue is that we don't have the character of Christ. So as we begin serving the Lord, God begins to shape us in his image, and now we begin to work on these character issues. Amen?

And so let's look at it here in the deacons, verse 8, "Likewise," and that's an important word, so just like pastors have these qualifications, deacons have qualifications too. And it's really interesting, deacons are, it's a lofty office and sometimes people think that the deacon, or even people think that I think the office of a deacon is not important, and that's not true. It's a high and lofty office. Matter of fact, pastor and deacon is used in the same sentence. It's a deacon is basically a pastor but not teaching and preaching every week. And so, I mean, it's a high and lofty office.

All right, so, "Likewise must the deacons be grave." Now look at these character issues. So grave means sober. They have to have the ability to be serious about things. Pastors and deacons deal with serious subjects. We deal with problems. We deal with adultery. We deal with abuse. We deal with drinking. We deal with drug addiction. We deal with pornography. We deal with hurtful and awful things. We deal with people who are in the cesspool of sin and you have to have some gravity about you to be able to deal with those things. You have to be able to look at a situation soberly and sincerely, but with a graveness, a gravity that says, "I'm going to take this seriously and we're going to deal with it." And you can't get all excited. You can't get overreacting. You can't go tell everybody else. I mean, it's a difficult situation that needs to be dealt with. Gravity. And so that's important. And honestly, we all know people that can't seem to do that. You know, they can't deal with things seriously, or if they have a secret, they've got to go tell three people in the next 30 minutes, or they feel like they're going to die, or, you know, they overreact about something. That cannot be the pastor and deacon because we deal with some pretty difficult things.

Alright, then it talks about "not doubletongued," and you can't tell one person one thing and somebody else another, and that's a killer in the ministry, and so they have to have this idea that not a gossip, not a slanderer, not disloyal, that they're going to tell you one thing and they're going to tell somebody else the same thing. And so that's important because, again, we're dealing with difficult things, and there's a lot of influence in the ministry, and so those things have to be dealt with.

"Not giving too much wine." Now, some people think that this means that deacons can drink some. Now, that's not what I believe, and that's not what this church believes, and we don't have time to go into that. I ought to preach a whole sermon on it. I haven't in quite a while. But we don't think that's what that means here. And so, by the way, I don't think any Christian ought to drink some. I read recently, just two weeks ago before I got sick, 80% of all crime in America is alcohol-related. Every fight, every rape, every car accident, every theft, every crime in America, 8 out of 10 of them have alcohol involved and we want to talk about why it's okay. And so, maybe I'll get to heaven and find out, hey, God said, you know, you could have had a glass a month. Well, I didn't need it. But I don't think so. And so, that's a whole other sermon, but we don't believe that's what this is teaching.

And so "not greedy of filthy lucre." They hold the things of God in more esteem than money. Some people will do anything for money, won't they? Can't be pastors and deacons. They have to have different priorities. Alright?

Verse 9, "Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience," and I believe this is talking about how you hold the gospel, how do you deal with the gospel. Are you a faithful witnesser? Are you a faithful soul winner? Hold your place there and look at Colossians chapter 1. Colossians chapter 1 and I had a question about this recently, which I love, because if one person had a question about it, then perhaps there's others that do and so let's go to the scriptures. Colossians chapter 1 and look at verse 25, "Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God." Alright, so he's a minister, verse 26, "Even the," what's the next word? "Mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints." So what's the mystery? A mystery is something that was hidden, and now it's being made known. So what was the mystery? The mystery was faith. In the Old Testament, a lot of people missed the fact that you could get saved by trusting the coming Messiah. And so let's see what the Apostle Paul says about this mystery. Verse 27, "To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." So what do we do with the mystery? Verse 28, "Whom we preach," we preach Christ, "warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." So that was the Apostle Paul's goal, he wanted to have the mystery but not keep it to himself like a lot of Christians do. He knew that God wanted the world to know the mystery so he preached Christ to who? To every man. This just wasn't preaching behind the pulpit, he wanted to get the gospel to every human being, and so he was getting out the gospel.

And then why? So that he could present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. We don't have time to go over that, but that's beautiful wording. The word present there is actually a presentation, and I personally believe that when we get to heaven, we're going to be able to present all the people that we've led to the Lord, to Christ, as a crown. The Bible says we're going to cast our crowns before him. The Bible calls the people we've won to the Lord our joy and our crown. I personally believe that we're going to be able to stand before God, and as we're casting our crowns before him, we'll be able to present all the people that we've won to the Lord. "And Lord, I know you know her, but I'm excited about this. I want you to meet Nicole. I won her to the Lord on a Saturday, and she was sitting in her car, and I want to give her to you." I personally think that's what the Bible is talking about here, this presentation that we can present every man perfect in Christ, right?

Verse 29, "Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily." So it's not his working that made all this soul winning possible, it's God working through him.

And so verse 9, back to 1st Timothy, we're talking about holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. I believe that's what we do with the gospel. Are we faithful getting out the gospel? And now we get into the spiritual qualifications. So we talked about character qualifications. There just has to be a level of character in dealing with people that some people don't have yet. All right, you can't get angry with people, you can't overreact, you can't gossip about people, you can't do all of these things. All right, under character qualifications, look at the wives. Verse 11, "Even so must their wives be grave," alright, again, they have to be able to deal with heavy things, "not slanderers," they can't gossip. Boy, gossiping deacon's wives have been the detriment of many churches and praise God, many of them don't do that, but it's just an honest fact. And by the way, same thing with gossiping preacher's wives. They destroy churches. And I thank God that my wife has never had that problem; whether she's sick or well, she's just never been that person, and praise God for that. And so, "sober, faithful in all things." And so, some churches think this is speaking of deaconesses, female deacons, but we don't believe that. It's not a Baptist position and if God wanted to have an office for ladies, he wouldn't just use the general word for woman. He could have used a feminine word of diakonos, or made it clear that this is another whole office. He didn't do that. What he's saying is that married people are one, and God understands that, listen, the woman has a large effect in the ministry of a man, good or bad. My wife has helped me immensely, even as sick, she's still a great help to this church and to the ministry and her ministry to me, even though it's not a traditional role. But every wife, and by the way, you wives, you help your husbands be better at his job, no matter what he does, or you don't help him be better at it, and he doesn't fulfill his goals. And so, God understands the synergistic power of marriage, and so there has to be qualifications that run through both.

Alright, so, character qualifications. Look at verse 12, "Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife." So they have to have good marriages and some people believe this is one at a time. I personally believe, and our church believes, that this is husbands of one wives. Divorced people can do a lot of things. They can do just about anything under the sun for

God, but they can't pastor a church, or they can't be a deacon. And so a lot of people disagree with that, but I didn't make the rules. These are God's rules, not mine. And so we are faithful to what God says. Now, it doesn't mean that, as I said, divorced people can't do just about anything else, but they can't do that.

Alright, then it says, "ruling their children and their own house as well," and of course this is one for pastors too. We've got to have control of the house. If someone can't rule their own house, that doesn't mean kids don't do wrong or make stupid mistakes or grow up and go through a bad phase, but it's a general idea that the man's just not in control of his house. His wife's not in submission, his kids don't respect him. God says, if you can't control your own house, then you can't take care of the house of God. And so we understand that. Matter of fact, one of my heroes, Brother Bo, of course he won me to the Lord and he was bus captain, Sunday school teacher. One time I asked him, I said, "I don't think it's fair that you're not a deacon at church." And he said, "Oh Paul, I can't be a deacon." I said, of course, I loved him. He helped me. I said, "You're just as good as any of those guys." You know, I'm fighting for the one who I loved. And I loved all the deacons, but I was fighting for him and, "You should be a deacon. And you're helping a lot of people." And I'll never forget, it made a real impact on me, he said, "Paul, I can't." He said, "The truth is I'm not qualified." He says, "As much as I love the Lord and I love my wife, my wife loves me, she's never followed me in Christianity. My house isn't in order." He said, "I'm not qualified to be a deacon." I said, "Well, that's not fair!" And he said, "No, no," he said, "be thankful that we go to a church that's teaching you the right way and teaching you the Bible." And he says, "I'm happy being a..." And I remember thinking, I've thought about that many times over the years, the humility for that man to say, "No, I'm not qualified," but then also the humility for him to defend the preacher and the church when he could have said, "Yeah, it's kind of a raw deal," and gotten some sympathy because I was ready to go fight for him. You know, I'm just a young Christian, "Man, I'll fight for you." And so, but he understood that.

So we have character qualifications then we have spiritual qualifications, and we talked about the handling of the gospel, the handling of the mystery of the word. Turn to Acts chapter 6. Look at verses 1-5, "And in those days," this is what we spoke about earlier, "And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations." Now this is interesting. Yes, there was a problem in ministry, but notice there was an original issue. So oftentimes when someone gets bothered about something, it's usually because they're already frustrated about something else and we have to be careful of that in our own lives. If I'm frustrated about one thing, it becomes increasingly easy to be frustrated about more and more things. So already you see the tension between the Greeks and the Hebrews, which, by the way, could not get along before Christ came, but now they both get saved and God says they're all one, they're fighting against hundreds and hundreds of years of culture, already they're trying to mesh and now the Grecians say, "Hey, those Hebrews, you're taking care of your own Hebrew women, aren't you? Taking care of your own widows, what about ours?" And so what's interesting is the church here didn't say, "You know what? That's false." They looked at a situation and said, "You know what? That's right. Let's fix it." And that's the kind of

preacher I want to be, and that's the kind of church I want us to be, is that if someone brings an issue that's biblical and scriptural, that we're willing to look at it and say, "You know what? Let's deal with that." Someone brought me an issue earlier this week and said, "You know what? I think we need to pay attention to this thing." And I thought about it for a minute, and I said, "You know what? You're right. There's kind of a gap there that we need to pay attention to." And so, praise the Lord for that. Let's be moldable and flexible. Growing churches are always going to be in some form of transition. We have to be willing to yield to whatever the Lord's doing in our lives, in our church.

But then he says, "because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations." Now notice that these were daily jobs. This was not a Saturday thing. It wasn't a Sunday thing. It was daily work that the church was doing. Also notice in verse 1, they called the disciples. Now you have to understand the church was probably, we guess that the church was between 100,000 and 200,000 people around this time in Jerusalem and so, 100,000 people, let's just be conservative and say it's 50,000. Notice the Bible says they called the disciples together and so, I don't believe the whole church was there. I don't believe there's 50,000 people there. I think it was a gathering of the most committed of them and the most committed of them, they said, look out from among you and choose and so these were a group of people that already, most of them, if not all of them, probably were qualified biblically and scripturally. And so it would be my goal at Curtis Corner Baptist Church that we would have a pool of people that could be deacons, that we could have a pool of people that God could call into the ministry or to be church planters or missionaries and that happens whenever there's a group of people that says, "You know what? God may never call me, but I want to be the absolute best Christian I can be. I'm going to strive to these qualifications," and praise the Lord for that.

Alright, look at verse 2, "Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables." Now, by serve tables, they're talking about the food, the collection, all the care that went into taking care of these widows and in the service of it.

Alright, verse 3, "Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men," and now we get into spiritual qualifications. So there's not just character qualifications for pastor and deacon, there are spiritual qualifications and here's what we find, "men of honest report." This is men that you just look at them and say, "You know what? They're honest. My dealings with them have been honest."

And then, "full of the Holy Ghost." Now, this is really interesting because it's easier to look at someone and say, you know what, they've got good character, they've got the character of Christ. It's more difficult to look at someone and say, you know what, they're filled with the Holy Ghost. And so it ought to be our hope and prayer that every day we could be filled with the Holy Ghost and people could look at you and I and say, you know what? She's filled with the Holy Ghost. He's filled with the Holy Ghost. And have that confidence. And so these are spiritual qualifications.

And it says "wisdom," and wisdom, or the wording there is full of wisdom. So wisdom is applying God's Word to their lives. They are people that, they're honest, they're full of the Holy Ghost, they're yielded, they have spiritual victory and power, and they're full of wisdom. They have a track record of applying God's Word to their lives. If you go to them and ask them a question, they're going to give you a Bible answer. "Hey, what do you think about this?" Bible answer. "Hey, what do you think about this?" "Well, the Bible says..." It's that type of idea.

Alright, and then it says, "whom we may appoint over this business." So the deacons help with some of the business of the church, taking care of the flock. We won't get into that right now.

Verse 4, "But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word." So a pastor can't do everything. The more he begins helping people, which is wonderful, and I'm happy to do it, and everybody, we're happy to do it, but understand, the more we do that, it cuts into Bible study and prayer. Every Christian wants a pastor that prays four hours a day and reads the Bible four hours a day but do you understand that even though we have a lot of control over our schedule, we don't have a lot of control over our schedule? And so something's got to give, and when we go through difficult times, it's easy to have that cut into, and then the whole church suffers.

And so look at verse 5, "And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost," see, they said this guy's got the spiritual requirements, and then they chose, "and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them." Now notice, this is a big deal. This is an ordination, the same type of ordination that would take place for preachers is now applied to deacons because, again, this is not a low office or an unnecessary office, this is a high and lofty office. This is something that God holds in high esteem and so, intensely spiritual thing, and we set hands on the deacons signifying that we believe God's hand is on you and we're sending you forth with God's authority and our blessing and our authority to go do the work of God. So again, there's that identification with the church and with the name of God.

Alright, now look at the results in verse 7, "And the word of God," what's the next word? "Increased; and the number of the disciples," what's the next word? "Multiplied in Jerusalem," next word? "Greatly." So this is the key in Christian growth, in reaching the world. It's not addition, it's multiplication. So first the Word of God increased, and so when the opportunities of preaching and soul winning increase, what happens is more people get saved, and the more people get saved, now the saints get bigger, now God has a bigger pool to call more preachers and teachers and deacons out of for the perfecting of the saints, the work of the ministry and the edifying of the body of Christ. So now we see the church at Jerusalem ballooning and this process increases but notice the church had to go through the process of getting more help so that the church could continue to grow. Do we agree with that? More help equals more opportunities, equals more people being saved, and on and on. And so this is vitally important.

Now let me say, under these spiritual qualifications, we see that these men, they had an important work to do, but they were spiritual people. And I have friends that believe that the deacons are full-time positions, where the churches will actually hire deacons just like they hire assistant pastors to do the work of the ministry because they believe that's what the Bible teaches. And I said this morning that it's very difficult in the scripture to find the line between what we would call an assistant pastor and what the Bible would call a deacon. If there is a difference, I think it's in the teaching and preaching and the handling of God's Word, where a deacon would be more about the people and doing the people side of things and getting the things behind the scenes set up and done, and the pastor and the assistant pastors would be more focused on the teaching and the preaching. And again, the more people you get involved, the more the Word of God gets out and the more people get saved.

But there's these spiritual qualifications. No one would think about having an unspiritual pastor, and neither should they think about having an unspiritual deacon. And so, a one accord spirit, a deacon must agree with church philosophy, must agree with ministry philosophy, must have the same concept of church work, must have a personality that's Spirit-filled so they can deal with people and problems in meekness and all of these things. So the idea of a deacon is an intensely spiritual thing, but also remember, they're put on level with preachers. So, before we hire an assistant pastor, we deep dive into things that normal church members don't talk about, because we have to know that we agree on certain things. And so, he knows how my wife dresses, I know how his wife dresses. I know what he thinks about smoking and drinking and pot and all this kind of stuff, he knows what I think about it. He knows what I think about all these sins, and I know what he thinks about it because there has to be an agreement. There can't be such a close-knit relationship...it's like marrying someone that disagrees with you about everything. None of us really knew how much we disagreed with our spouses until we got married. Would you agree with that? And you get married, and you're like, "Boy, I knew we had some disagreements, but goodness, I should have asked you that, or I should have asked you about that." And so the more we delve into that ahead of time, the less friction there is and I think you ought to do that with your spouses, get to know them a little bit. And so, same thing.

Now, this doesn't mean that they're yes men. This does not mean that the people that work on staff here just say, "Yes, pastor, whatever you want." We have some pretty interesting conversations, and they challenge me on things, biblically and politely. There's no animosity or disloyalty, but challenge things, and I'll challenge them on things, and we'll talk about stuff, and that's okay. And the same thing with deacons. Deacons and pastors ought to agree philosophically about ministry things, but that doesn't mean that they can't challenge one another and say, "Well, I thought the Bible said this, and what do we do with this because the Bible says this, and I'm not sure we're doing this right. What do we do?" All of that is perfectly in order, and by the way, that helps the church to grow, but it all has to be done Christ-like. Most people, when they disagree, get in the flesh, right? And we don't have that. I often say as a pastor, I don't have the privilege of having a bad day. You can't come to my office and I say, "What do you want?" And you say,

"You know what, preacher?" I say, "That's stupid. Do you know what I have to do on my desk? Do you know what I have on my mind? And you're bringing me that? Get out of here." What in the world? I don't have that privilege. Now, unfortunately, some of you treat your spouse that way, or the kids that way, or such and such, but we don't have that privilege. Sometimes people come to you and say, "You know what, preacher, can I talk about something? Yes. I hate you and I think you're the devil." And we're like, "That's a good point. Give me three reasons why you think I'm the devil," you know? "And I think this reason, this reason." "You know what? I agree with number two. Maybe I am the devil." You know what I mean? It's like, now I'm being facetious here, but there has to be that ability to deal with difficult things. We don't get that luxury. And by the way, as Christians, we all ought to strive not to have bad days. The idea that you're just going to have a bad day and everybody in your house is going to suffer for it ought not be a part of your vocabulary. And so, so often, but I digress.

Alright and so then let's talk about, we talked about character qualifications, spiritual qualifications, and remember, God's pulling pastors and deacons out of the flock and the mature and the qualified, and praise the Lord for that. Now, let me say under these qualifications, we're not looking for perfection any more than you could expect to have a perfect pastor, you'll never expect to have a perfect deacon. Your pastor makes a mistake, you call him on it. You say, "Hey, I think you made a mistake here." You know what? Maybe I did. You know what? Let's not do that again. And so your pastor makes a mistake, call him on it. If he makes enough mistakes, get rid of him. But you're never going to have a perfect pastor, and you're never going to have perfect deacons. They make a mistake, we deal with it. They make enough mistakes, we don't have them as a deacon. But perfection is not the goal. Sincerity is the goal, and going forward is the goal, and I think that's important.

Alright, so let's look at this last one, and this is commitment qualifications, and let me just say a word about this, and that is, as we said, the deacons in Acts chapter 6 were full-time and there is an incredible commitment that comes with the office of a deacon, and this is where many churches, I think, get it wrong. The idea of having a deacon or being a deacon is not just as a placeholder. You'd be amazed at how many pastors have deacons, but the deacons don't want to help. Now, I also know pastors that have wonderful deacons. I'll be honest with you, the deacons at Blessed Hope Baptist Church were really helpful to me. Brother English and the rest of them. Brother English was an electrician. One man had a farm. They were all men from different ways. And by the way, none of them were perfect. There were all times when they did some things wrong or mishandled things, but they were faithful and they handled the Word of God and they helped and praise the Lord for that. But there has to be a commitment. There is a commitment to being a deacon. And so, in my mind, the word diakonos has the idea of ministry. It's applied to Christ, it's applied to the Apostle Paul. It means more than just, I'm going to work for a couple days. It implies a life of service.

So here's the way I think about the commitment of a deacon. Just like a pastor, whether he's a full-time pastor or he has to work a job, he lives for God. I mean, that really is his mindset. His mindset really is, "I need to get done with work so I can take care of my

family and we can go help this person. Or I need to get this done so we can go mow the church lawn. Or I need to get this done so we can go visit the widows." I mean, it really is a purpose of life. And honestly, most Christians don't live that way and the truth is, deacons have to be a notch above in commitment than the average church member. They have to be more focused. They have to be more committed and dedicated. And so, just like there are lay pastors that have to work and pastor a church, they have to stay committed on the main thing. They might be working a job to feed the family, but ministry is the goal. Ministry is the life. And thus, I believe it is with lay deacons that, yes, they take care of their families, they have their jobs, but they're committed. You know, it's discouraging sometimes when we have a business meeting how few people come because they're just not interested or they're too busy. And I value that. I understand that. Some people really do. It's discouraging sometimes when we have a work meeting at church and so few people come. The truth is there are a lot of people that care about God's work mentally and emotionally, but they're not dedicated to it to say, "I'm going to show up when something needs done." That's just a fact. And I don't hold that against people, but you've got to understand that the mind and heart of a deacon is, "Listen, this is important, and I might have to rearrange my schedule, I might have a weird job, I might have weird shifts, but preacher, you let me know what you need." And the truth is, right now, it's either Brother Brent or I that's mowing the lawn. I don't mind mowing the lawn. Paul helps me, I think it's good for him. I think it's good for Brother Brent to mow the lawn. We don't mind it, but I've got to tell you that sometimes my time would be better spent doing other things. We don't mind cleaning the bathrooms and do it. The kids and I wash the buses once a month and the church van because nobody else can do it. That's fine. I think it's good for them. I don't mind doing it. But the two or three hours that takes, is my time better spent doing something else? That's for other people to decide. It's not a matter of, are you too good to do it? You've got to understand the heart here. It's a matter of something has to give and so that is where people can step in and take on a role and say, "You know what? I want to be able to help."

But let me say this, the idea of a deacon, the position of a deacon is not something that you say, you know what, let's make someone a deacon and now they're going to have time. That's not the way life works. Let's make someone a deacon and now they'll have time to come to meetings. Let's make someone a deacon and now they have time to come to a men's meeting or a planning meeting. Let's make someone a deacon and now they have time to come help on a work day. It doesn't bother me if you men can't come. Don't misunderstand what I'm saying. All I'm saying is the pool that we have to choose deacons from shrinks because everybody doesn't have the time to commit to the work. Does that make sense to you? And so it's not just a matter of character qualifications. We've got wonderful people, character people. It's not just a matter of spiritual qualifications. We've got wonderful spiritually people. It's not just a matter of commitment qualifications. It's all three together. And any one of those things, it's difficult.

And so the work of the average deacon would be taking care of shut-ins and taking up the collection. We have a hard time finding guys who have the time to stay and count the offering after church, I'll be honest with you. That really is, if we had deacons, that would be their job. I remember the deacons at Blessed Hope, they stayed after every single

service counting the money and the family waited, and the kids waited. That was just something that they did. But we have trouble finding... I thank God for the guys that do it, but do you see what I'm saying? The pool shrinks when there's work to be done and people say, "Well, I don't have time for that." Time doesn't automatically appear whenever an office is given.

And so things like visiting the shut-ins, things like distributing funds, that verse 8, Acts chapter 6 talks about among the people, Stephen was among the people. It's not that the apostles and the pastor doesn't want to be among the people, it's that there's only time for so much, and the more people you get, the less time there is. We find that Philip actually was preaching revivals, and so there were spiritual qualifications. Listen, we've got some good men in this church, and you know the Bible, and you're qualified to teach the Bible but let me just be honest with you, a few people the last couple times I've asked to teach a Sunday school lesson or fill in for a sermon have told me no. Now, some have told me, yes, and I'm thankful, and we're getting ready to incorporate more men in that, because I think we've got good men that can give forth some things of the scripture but, listen, a deacon's position would be, as far as the spirituality would be, hey, you know what, pastor's sick, and the pastors are gone, or Brother Brent's not available, they could step up and handle the Word of God with confidence.

And so there's a lot that goes into this that is so vital and important and let me also say this lastly, as far as the work of a deacon, nowhere in the Bible do you see the deacon as a board, a governing board. This is where a lot of churches get this wrong. Deacons have great influence because of the position. They have greater influence. The truth is, the only power I have as a pastor is influence. It's the only thing as a pastor I have. I can say, "I think we ought to do this," and you can say, yea or nay. Deacons have no other power than influence, but they do have influence and so the Bible says they purchase to themselves a good degree. God elevates their influence, but he does not give them power over every other member. When we do have deacons, they'll have one vote just like you do and so it's not anything about power. And I've been asked over the years, do we not have deacons because you want to be the guy or you don't want anybody controlling you? It's not about that at all to me. That's not what deacons do anyway. That's not their function. But they do a great job and a great help.

Let's look lastly here at this last verse, 1 Timothy chapter 3 and we'll be done. So they have a greater influence. That's why it's so important that they're the right kind of person, and that they're qualified, and they have the time and commitment to fulfill responsibilities. Alright, let's look at 1 Timothy verse 10, "And let these also first be proved," that means that these qualifications are self-evident. And the truth is, we can look around this church and we know pretty much who's close to being a deacon and you might even look around and say, "Well, why can't that person be a deacon? Why can't that person be a deacon?" And that's between them and the Lord and me in some cases. But the truth is, these things are self-evident. You can kind of look around and say, "Well, that guy's the right kind of guy." And I would agree with you. But the qualifications need to be met.

And so, they need to first be proved, but then look at the rest of the verse, "then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless." The office of a deacon is to be used. So the greater influence means greater opportunities to serve. The greater influence of the office of a deacon means they can help more people and they have a greater influence, and praise God for that.

Look at verse 13, "For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus." Now listen, good deacons are hard to find and are prized, just like good pastors are. You know, a pastor can make or break a church, can't they? A pastor can ruin a church that fast or they can help the church. I'm hoping that I'm the kind of pastor that's helpful. And deacons can help a church and make the work multiply, or they can do a lot of damage because they have greater influence. And so the goal here, all of these qualifications, I want to tie it up like this: I would like each of us to kind of take stock of our lives, let's look at our lives, me, and say, you know what, could I be a preacher? Now, God may never call me to be a preacher, but could I be one? Do I have the character qualifications, spiritual qualifications, and the commitment qualifications? Could I be a deacon? Could I be a deacon's wife? And here's my challenge to you. If there's an area where you say, you know what, really, maybe not in that area right now, don't take that as a, well, I guess I'm not good enough. Take it as a challenge that says, you know what, God, why don't you help me with these couple areas and let's just see, maybe I'll never be one, maybe I'll never be a deacon's wife, maybe I'll never be a missionary, but I want to be qualified. Would you ask the Lord and say help me to be qualified and help me to do these things? And I'll be honest with you, several times in my ministry, I'll go back and look at these qualifications of a pastor and say, just because I am a pastor, I still want to be qualified and sometimes it's a gut check. Sometimes you realize, hey, you know what, I haven't been handling this right, or I need to pay more attention to this. So the qualifications of a deacon are goals for every Christian and will help us all.

Let's bow our heads and close our eyes.

Lord, thank you for the attention you spend to this in the Bible. There's a lot more we could discuss and go deeper into the biblical words and word studies and all that, but I pray today just a general overview of the subject would be helpful and that you would give us a lot of grace. Lord, I want to be qualified still to be a pastor. I want my kids to look and strive to be qualified for the ministry. I want every church member of Curtis Corner Baptist Church to say, you know what, I know I'm not perfect and I've got things to work on, but I want to be qualified. And Lord, I pray that you'd raise up some amazing new people, that you'd take the great people we have. I look around and see good Christians and I pray that you'd make us grow and help us. And then, Lord, that you would help us to have new people come to church and that those new people could be comforted and cared for and that we can keep the cycle of growth going in our church. Lord, we do pray also for that situation in Texas and the terrible shooting that took place today. I pray you comfort all of those people and help them, give them a lot of grace. And I pray you also bless the offering, give us the funds needed to do your work here in this town. Amen.