

10/15/23 - 1 Tim. 3:8-13 - "Deacons, the Archetype of Christ"

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[0 : 00] Today we're going to be reading from 1 Timothy 3, verses 8 to 13. Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.

And let them also be tested first, then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. Let deacons be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

Praise God for His Word for us today. Amen to that.

It's been wild around the world, eclipses, wars, and everything going on. But today we come to something that we know is true and certain in our lives that's transcended from day to day, age to age. And for that we come to God's Word in this gathering, at the central point of this gathering. And we've been in a series in 1 Timothy for a couple weeks now, and this series has sort of felt a little bit practical of some implications for the gathered church and everything like that.

And it's given us sort of like this practical academic-like feel in nature. But I don't want you guys to necessarily be turned off to that way that the Word is hitting as we're going through Scripture verse by verse. It's not bad for it to feel a little academic once in a while and practical once in a while. What we know for certain is that we need to discover and uncover from the Word of why it matters in our lives. And that's something that we're going to do. We're not just going to be looking at different phrases and different verses. We're going to be looking for the message of the Holy Spirit as it is bound through the inscription of Paul's writing to this church. So, for the last several weeks, this has been Paul's letter to Timothy. He seems to have been unfolding a logical discourse, sort of building up an argument regarding God's design of the household of God. He's been unfolding that for us. It went from chapter 1 to the importance of prioritizing the doctrinal purity of the church, but then all the way to chapter 2 of prioritizing prayer, and then how that looks specifically between men and women in the church. And Paul is clearly laying something foundational out within the household of God, which relates to a complementary way of organizing. Complementary, meaning that certain roles and certain functions are set apart within the gathered church, and it sets us apart from the world as we are set apart from the church in the church. And so, last week, similar to his charge to men in chapter 2, Paul established the office of overseers. We studied that last week, and these were also known as elders, which were clearly exemplary men of character with the central role of teaching and instruction. However, just as it was not good for Adam to be without a helper, God saw fit to provide elders with helpers as well to complement their leadership role.

[4 : 35] And here we find the ongoing foundational, complementary unfolding of God's design, creational design, transcendent through all times since Genesis, in not only the home and the church, but the practical way that God intended to serve the practical needs in the church through qualified and trustworthy people. But we got to ask, what type of people? Is this office in the church, in the household of God, also limited to men? Is the helper sort of this inferior being in the church that makes them lesser than the one in charge? Well, today we will see that this office consists of humble individuals with outstanding character, similar to elders. And I plan to disband the lie that being complementary means being inferior, as our culture likes to claim. No. In the church, in the household of God, the head and the helper are vital to function together as a unit, as an organism that fits. And so, the sermon titled today is now Deacons, the Archetype of Christ, just as last week we saw the elders being the Archetype of Christ. And so, let's lay this out and see the beauty of God's purpose and God's design. I'd like to pray as we enter into His Word and discover the message. Let's pray.

Father, Father, we come to You today asking for help, for the Holy Spirit to help us in our lives and in our understanding and our comprehension. And we know that this is no ordinary work of, and just understanding the English language isn't good enough. We need to get deeper to our hearts, open up our hearts to Your Word today. And by the power of Your Holy Spirit, we know You can make this so. Speak through me as Your servant, Your under-shepherd of this body. And Lord, proclaim the gospel through Your Word. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. So, two sections today, the first being the household of God needs deacons. Similar to last week, saw the household of God needs overseers. Well, today, we see the household of God needs deacons. And check with me at the end of the passage that was read this morning in verse 13. It says, for those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus. So, after listing all these qualifications of a deacon that we read this morning, the very last verse before he goes into some concluding marks in verse 14, Paul concludes with a two-fold description of the office of deacon.

What this entails, what this means, it's the so what of all these qualifications. The so what of deacons is that they will have a good standing, a good reputation, and also great confidence in being bold in their faith, assured in their faith, unmovable, if you want to say that. How could Paul make such a conclusion over just qualifications? Well, I believe that the Bible helps to illustrate the Bible. The Bible interprets the Bible, and I believe that what Paul is saying here is interpreted through the context of the book of Acts. And I see the good standing happening and unfolding in Acts chapter 6 in verse 4. This is when there is a dispute going on between the Hellenists and the Hebrews.

It says in verse 1, now in these days, when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint, imagine that, a complaint in the body of Christ, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve apostles, they summoned the full number of disciples and said, it is not right that we should give up preaching the Word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word. What's happening here is that there is a good standing of people in this passage, specifically seven men who were appointed because there was a complaint, there was a neglect of the widows and the distribution. People were getting forgotten about because it wasn't up to the men who are proclaiming the Word of God to be doing everything.

So God, through the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit, impressed upon the apostolic body to appoint helpers. It's almost like you have that Genesis language, it's not good for man to be alone.

[10 : 13] It was not good for the apostles to be alone. And so, two vital things needed done, the preaching of the Word and the serving tables, both vital to be functioning. And God didn't intend for all of that to be done with one office. That's having a good standing. Deacons, that's why deacons are called shock absorbers.

They're the ones that the complaints kind of buffer between the church body and leadership. They're the shock absorbers of those complaints. But we see this playing out practically. If you haven't seen the foyer, it was newly painted, looking pretty fancy. Thank you, Deacon Luis. Practical illustration of that is, while I'm upstairs preparing the message, Deacon Luis is downstairs with a paint roller, right?

And so, I'm devoting myself to the preaching of the Word. I'm not better than the paint roller and picking up a paint roller, but my duty was called at that point to be devoted to the preaching of God's words.

And so, that distinction of help is even lived out in the body of this church, and we saw that so recently. But also, it says in this summary of all these qualifications, there's a great confidence that there's a call for sacrificial service. And it's interesting because if you look at the Bible interpreting the Bible, we see in Acts 6, 7, and 8, that unfolding. And if you can imagine, Paul writing to Timothy, Paul, before his conversion known as Saul, knew exactly what took place in Acts 6, 7, and 8.

Because we see one of the men that were appointed in Acts 6 were stoned to death. His name was Deacon Stephen. And he gave what a powerful gospel proclamation in Acts 7, laying it out since the beginning to the end, and it led to all the Jews surrounding him gnashing their teeth at him. And guess who approved of his death?

[12 : 34] Saul, Saul, the author of this letter to Timothy. That's what having a great confidence looks like. It also looks like Deacon Philip, also one of these men in Acts 6 that were appointed from within. Can't forget Deacon Philip, who ushered the gospel into Samaria according to God's plan in Acts 1, 8.

Not only that, he translated it to the Ethiopian eunuch on the road. Not only that, he continued to proclaim the gospel to all the towns. And while a deacon doesn't need to be able to teach, we certainly know that deacons can teach if they want. It's not like their tongue is restrained.

But look, for those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves. They're recognized, they're set apart, and also they have great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

You see, following such an extensive list of qualifications that we read this morning, we are certain that their standing, their confidence, anything that they have regarding their reputation or their faith has nothing to do with them. They are not those special Christians that have arrived at the pinnacle of Christlikeness, that if you gave them a pool, they would walk on the water. No, these are flawed individuals that have this attainable trajectory of Christlikeness that's observable in their lives, but that they have been formally called, and they're obedient to that calling to serve. And so this gets into the practical expression of what it means to be in the office of deacon. Deacon is literally translated as servant, diakonos. But specifically, these servants serve, diakoneo. And so, these servants serve specifically within the body of Christ, the household of God. A diaconal work in this office is critical work within the household of God.

Luis knows about it this past week with painting and freeing me up for the preaching of the words and prayer. And the elders are supported through the work of deacons just as Eve supported and was created for Adam. This supporting office of leaders are woven all throughout the Old Testament Scriptures. Exodus 17, you have Aaron and Hur. They held up the hands of Moses during the battle against Amalek. If you remember that one, that's a crazy one. Exodus 18, the father-in-law of Moses, seeing how overwhelmed Moses was in trying to meet all the needs of Israel, advised him to set up layers of councils to assist Moses. And these were the, quote, the finest and wisest of men that were available.

[15 : 35] Going to an unusual day of atonement in Leviticus 16, Israel's sin was laid upon the head of a goat and then sent away into the wilderness, not by the hand of the priest, but by the hand of a man who stands in readiness, somebody who's on standby. And then into Numbers 11, Moses was tired and weary.

The fickleness of the sickle. The fickleness of the people were weighing heavily upon him. He's getting ready to throw in the towel. And remember when he prayed, Lord, if I have found favor in your sight, Moses says, would you please kill me? This is why they started pastor appreciation.

No. The Lord instructed Moses to get help, get helpers around him. And so, he hand-selected elders who would bear the burden of the people with Moses. For that, you get an image not only of the plurality in leadership that's important and vital, but also that helper-ness of leadership to come along side. And you see, deacons are workers. They are servants with a mind to work and a heart to serve.

They do it joyfully. So, a well-functioning household of God looks like this then. This is the practical nature of this sermon. It looks like elders leading the ministry through the Word and through prayer.

deacons support that ministry, facilitate that ministry, and the congregation does ministry. Amen? It's God's good design. This is how peace is seen within the household of God. This is how order is created and unity within the congregation. And so, the household of God needs deacons.

[17 : 43] But what does this look like practically? I want to dive into the qualifications. And we'll, we're labeling this one. I'm, I'm funny with these numbers. If you saw, if you were here last week, you'll laugh. But we got the 533 of leadership and followership. And we'll, I'll explain what this means. It's interesting. The elders, the, the qualifications of an elder are 11. The qualifications of deacons are 11. It's really interesting, but I separate them in these numbers for a specific reason. So, the 533, we'll explain what that means. In verse 8, if we go back to the qualifications before that final statement in verse 13, he says deacons, sort of like a general expression, likewise, must be dignified. In the original Greek, it literally reads, deacons likewise dignified. Could you imagine me speaking like that? You'd probably think I had a stroke.

Deacons likewise dignified, right? So, like the elders charged to be above reproach, deacons in general are similarly charged to be dignified, meaning worthy of respect. And this is how, through these next five qualifications. See that they're, number one, dignified because they're not double-tongued. So, like elders, the word of the deacon ought to be the surest and strongest assurance of the church. Dependable to follow through, to be given a task knowing that it's going to be completed.

Not only that, but number two, not addicted to much wine. God permits Christians to obviously drink in moderation, and deacons, like elders, are not forbidden from drinking, just don't get drunk from drinking. Not to be drunkards. The third, not greedy for dishonest gain. Like elders, deacons must not be in love with money. And this is important because in Acts 6, what was playing out is they were handling a lot of the affairs to the poor, and the worst mark and witness to those early Christians would be for deacons to be pocketed in some of that money. So, they must not be lovers of money. Number four, they hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And now, mystery, just like the song we sang, Come Behold the Wonder's Mystery, this mystery isn't referring to things that are still being figured out in that sense, but it's something that has once been long hidden and fully revealed in Jesus Christ. They hold the mystery, Jesus Christ, in their faith with a clear conscience. This is doctrinal. And there's a distinct difference between deacons and elders because deacons are not required to be able to teach. So, that's a difference. But deacons, like elders, and all Christians for that matter, must be ready to evangelize. You've got to know what you believe.

And Philip, Deacon Philip and Deacon Stephen were a model of that. And then the last, the fifth, and let them also be tested first. Let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless.

So, similar to elders proving to be above reproach, above accusation, deacons should be tested and examined before taking office. In other words, deacons should already be doing the work of a deacon and being known for that work within the church. It should be clearly observable. You see, the household of God lacks nothing within these two offices being intact, elders and deacons. And so, while the previous two verses do include a comparison, the five sort of general qualifications of the office of deacon versus an elder, we are not certain at this point if this is limited to men, like it was clearly within elders, or if being a helper role might women also be included vitally in this office as well. Well, we get to verse 11 where it creates a really good second-tier conversation for the church. It says, wives likewise be dignified, must be dignified.

[22 : 33] In the original Greek, it literally reads, wives likewise dignified. How are you dignified? Not slanderers, sober-minded, and faithful in all things. That's the five-three of leadership and followership.

And with this verse, this single verse is a mild controversy within the history of the church. There is nuance in this discussion. It does create a good discussion. I would recommend it for your next Bob Evans trip over coffee and eggs because there's disagreements within evangelical denominations. And we see that verse 11 addresses women, a female, in this passage, but the question is, how does it relate? Is it the wife of a deacon? Or is it a female deacon?

Like I said last week, I believe going to the original language is so helpful in these discussions, is so helpful because you just cut to the chase. Enough with these translations and trying to get it right and with all the textual criticism and trying to be consistent among the entire translation.

Greek just isn't English. Got it? So, if we go to the Greek, we see that this reference to wives, you'll see a footnote in verse 11 in your ESV Bible to the bottom. It also says, also women likewise. So, if it read, women likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, sober-minded, and faithful in all things, this seems to open up a general address to women within this office. And it wouldn't make sense for it to be deacons' wives because what about elders' wives?

Can they just be whatever they want to be? And if that's in charge of the ministry, the word and prayer of the church, it just doesn't add up, logically speaking, to have that distinction here.

[24 : 45] And I certainly believe that Paul was a man who encouraged women for this office. We see in Romans 16, verse 1, he says about Phoebe, I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant, diakonos, a servant of the church, a deacon of the church at Centuria. And he goes on to say, for she herself has been a helper of many and of myself as well. And even looking at the local context, the verses before specifically, similar to the qualifications that were laid out to describe a woman within a praying church in 1 Timothy 2, 9, for a woman to adorn herself, and he says to have self-control, as well as even into Titus 2, verse 3, for older women to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not slaves to much wine. We see that there is something here for women. And I believe in the Greek, it opens this up to women to serve within this body of deacons. You see, the gospel, it liberates women to serve actively within the Great Commission. And here, I believe, we see that unfolds, practically speaking, not as the head of the household of God, but as a helper within the household of God. And that is good. Complementary roles are not inferior roles, and the gospel depends upon the head and the help within the church to function well, right? And church, we cannot allow bad leadership, what they did and how they abused authority at the last church, and our experiences over there to undermine God's good design, just as we cannot allow the culture to somehow marginalize what the Bible says about men and women in the church in the name of equality, to just level the playing field all together and bulldoze it all. And with that, you bulldoze

God's good design. And we get to the last three, the 5-3-3. It ends here. Paul concludes with three final qualifications, but also addressing men and women. How? He talks to men. Verse 12, let deacons each be the husband of one wife, meaning that they have to be sexual accountable.

Sexually accountable. And then he goes to the home life. Remember what we said last week, little church before big church. You prove yourself at home, you will be proven to be trustworthy in the church. And he goes to the home life, women managing children. That wasn't a man's job in this culture at all. Managing their children is a clear reference to women. And then men again in their household, managing their own households well as men of the men of the house, the head of the household.

Good leaders at the home between husband and wife or father and mother. And similar to elders, the constructs of the home life is the proving ground for all leadership in the church, little church before big church. And what I have for you today is another graphic. I know I'm getting bonus points. I felt compelled again this week. So here, check this out. If you can see this, you might have to squint. It's also available on our website, steelvalleychurch.com slash notes. You can see it on your phone right now. We have a graphic of the 5-3-3. Let me see if that looks good. Yeah, that's a little small. But you see this all deacons in verse 8, 9, and 10. This is likewise, all deacons. This is the five, not double tons, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain, doctrinally sound, proved to be blameless. And then it kind of goes into these two departments, into female deacons and male deacons. Likewise, female deacons, not slanderous, temperates, faithful, male deacons, husband of one wife. And then it continues down to good leaders in the home, both men and women, managing children and also being the head of the households. But where does dignified and reputable fit in with this whole scene? Well, it's sandwiched together just like it was with eldership. Inside the church, they're dignified, verse 8. At the end, outside the church, they're reputable in verse, that should say verse 13 at the bottom.

But inside the heart, you should see exemplary qualifications to such an office. This is God's good design, church. It is good. You see, there is nothing in all creation like the household of God. No organization. I don't care how successful Apple appears to be.

[30 : 23] Nothing that Apple accomplishes, Microsoft, can touch what God does in this little church in Youngstown. There's nothing like it. The only equality woven through God's creation and organization of His people is the value of men and women being equally precious as image bearers. But the specific roles and their functions are clearly observable if we would just turn off the lies to the world and open the word of truth. Amen? This is why verse 13, the work of the deacon gains a good standing for themselves and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus. And so what a reminder, I think, this is for those within leadership, especially similar to elders. Remember, if Satan can't get to the elders or if Satan can't get to the church, he's going to go after the elders.

Well, guess what? We learned something vital here. If Satan can get to the elders or the church, he's going to get to the deacons. He's going to divide. He's going to make the tables just pile up and people being forgotten and thrown to the side. This is a clear reminder for those in leadership now or future leadership. But also, we have to, as leaders, watch out for temptation, live a dignified life, follow through in faithful service to the church, and defend sound doctrine, lead your family well and resist the devil. Deacons, you are vital within this house, vital. But maybe others, you're just like, well, Brent, wonderful presentation, great illustrations, but what the heck does that mean to me? Well, similar to last week, the reason why this is the archetype of Christ is because when we see the qualifications of not only the office of elder, but also deacons, we get a picture of Jesus

Christ. Everything that qualifies an elder and a deacon is perfectly seen in the person of Jesus Christ.

This is so important to you if you're asking, so what, Brent? Because deacons, as the archetype of Christ, are an example to you, are an example to me. The office of deacon is an office that resembles the servanthood of Christ. And the Gospel of Mark says, whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. Let's put a little deacon language in this. Whoever would be great, Mark says, among you must be your deacon, and whoever must be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to receive diaconal care, but to serve as a deacon. This is Christ. He was the supreme example of it. Every Christian is called to serve, even elders. Elders are not exempt from cleaning and changing the toilets.

I don't care what the last church said, but that's what this church says, right? Because if Jesus Christ served and gave His life as a ransom for many, this takes many shapes and forms within the Christian life, and it is observable within the office of deacon between the deacons who serve in this church and also the elders who serve in this church, just as Christ served this church.

[34 : 44] And so, they ought to not look to the world for what this needs to look like to make sense, but they have to look at the Word in their hands and the example of elders and deacons within the church.

And so, why is the church, though, when we're talking about serving, serving, that doesn't always sound fun.

Why has the church in general become a place where service is so burdensome, that some don't desire to serve at all? Why has the church become sort of this spiritual care provider? Or if you put a quarter in the slot machine back there, you get a message?

That's not God's design. Well, may that not be true at Steel Valley Church. If the gospel is to spread through the body of Steel Valley Church, the gospel of Jesus Christ is to spread through our labor, it will take every person sitting within this seat or sitting at home who are sick or traveling to get in and get engaged with that gospel work.

Because God has equipped all of us. You're not here just to sit and receive. You're here to serve. All of us, in some way, one shape or another, there are no sidelines to that.

[36 : 21] And yes, you can sit around and maybe, well, I'll wait till my schedule frees up next week to really jump in the game, or maybe wait till the storm in life passes by a little bit.

Or you can just cut all the excuses and just trust God. Amen. What will it be, church? Well, through the example of elders and deacons being archetypes of Christ-likeness, I'm excited to find out at Steel Valley Church what this looks like over the years as God brings His work to completion through us.

Trust in God's good design. The world can do what they want, but not here. This is God's. And this is His construct for us.

This is what it means to be His church. Let's pray.