

Deacons – A Ministry of Service
Spilman Memorial Baptist Church
Dr. H. Powell Dew, Jr.
August 6, 2023

Texts: I Tim. 3:8-13, Romans 16:1-2, Phil. 4:1-4

Purpose: To help us realize that deacons are to serve the needs of the community of faith. They need to be members of the church that have demonstrated maturity in their walk with God.

One Sunday morning a preacher was talking to his congregation about the need for each person to give of their best to God. They should give of their time in service to the church and community. They should give of the first fruits of their labor. They were to give in the same manner in which God had given to them. The preacher summed it up by saying that God did not want our leftovers.

A little girl in the congregation leaned over to her mother and said, “See! God doesn’t want leftovers either!” Can you relate to that?



On November 13, 1988, I had the honor and privilege of being ordained as a deacon at First Baptist Church in Kinston. Even though I cannot remember the exact words, I can clearly remember being charged by the pastor with the duties and responsibilities of a deacon. I knew that I was not



totally 100% sure I was able to meet the challenge, but I can tell you that I wanted to be able to fill those shoes. I determined in my heart that I would give it my best in order to be that person God described in our scripture reading this morning from I Timothy, Romans and Philippians.

When it came time for the laying on of hands, Jan Barwick (a woman) and I went and knelt on a prayer bench at the front of the church. In the back of my mind, I thought the scene looked kind of like a wedding ceremony with a man and woman kneeling before the congregation. Those that were serving as deacons, or had ever served as a deacon in the church or any other church were invited to come forward and whisper in our ear a word of blessing or encouragement. That particular day, there must have been 50 people lined up ready to pray for us. To this day, I remember both my mother and father praying for me.



Time has a way of causing us to re-remember things in light of other circumstances. I would not have remembered the day or the year if my parents hadn't given me

a book by Henry Webb, titled, "*DEACONS: Servant Models in the Church.*" In the front of that book, they signed and dated the event. Much of today's sermon is drawn from this book.

As that stream of people came by to lay hands upon me, I had an overwhelming sense that I was joining a group of people that have dedicated themselves to serving Christ and His church through the office of Deacon. There were men and women



who had selflessly given their time, effort, energy, and devotion, to service within the church.

Who can be a deacon? I guess a better question is, "What are the qualifications of a deacon?" The qualifications of the first seven deacons, as recorded in Acts 6:3 can be grouped into four general qualifications. Those who would be chosen as deacons should:



1. **Demonstrate growth toward mature faith** – *“men of good reputation, full of the Spirit of wisdom”* (Acts 6:3, NASB) *“They should hold to the revealed truth of the faith with a clear conscience.”* (I Timothy 3:9, GNB).
2. **Demonstrate a Christian home life** – *“husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households”* (I Timothy 3:12, NASB).
3. **Demonstrate personal and public morality** – *“serious, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for gain”* (I Tim. 3:8, RSV).
4. **Demonstrate a life accepted by God and the church** – *“tested; ... blameless; ... those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith”* (I Tim. 3:10, 13, RSV).

Another way to describe a deacon is **someone that is growing.**

I. Growth in Experiencing God's Presence

Experiencing God's presence has always been central in biblical faith.



- When God called Abraham to go to a new land, God promised to go with him to show the way. (Gen. 12:1)
- When Moses protested his inadequacy to lead God's people, God responded with the promise, "I will be with you" (Ex. 3:12, RSV).
- At the Last Supper with his disciples, Jesus was trying to prepare them for the time when he would no longer be with them physically. He promised, "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth ... the Holy Spirit." (John 14:16, 17, 26, NASB)

As a deacon, you must be willing to trust God to show the way, depend upon His Holy Spirit and walk in faith.

II. Growth in Seeing Life from God's Perspective

When the Jerusalem church set apart the seven, they needed men who not only were full of the Spirit but also were full of wisdom. Today's deacons need God's wisdom to carry out their ministry responsibilities.



God gives wisdom to those who are close to Him. God's gift of wisdom includes not only factual knowledge and

experience but also the discernment and insight His Spirit can provide. This gift is available to all Christians. "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him." (James 1:5, NASB).

James made a distinction between earthly wisdom and wisdom from above (3:13ff). Earthly wisdom, which is motivated by selfish ambition, creates jealousy and disharmony. "But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy" (James 3:17, NASB).

A deacon needs to view life, people, problems, and opportunities from the vantage point of God. We do not need to judge others on the basis of the world. We need to operate our lives in grace, in forgiveness, in compassion, in love, and in mercy. These are things that the world does NOT understand. But with the wisdom of God, a deacon can help discern God's perspective.

III. Growth in Integrating Faith into Life

The goal of deacons is to incorporate what the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel anticipated – that is: The Lord would place His law within His people and write it on their hearts (Jeremiah 31:33; Ezekiel 36:27). Deacons who have integrated their faith into their lives are seen as those who are "holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience" (I Timothy 3:19). They have discovered the joy and freedom that comes from the process of inner growth that expresses itself in outward relationships.



Our confidence as a Christian should grow out of the awareness of God’s amazing grace extended towards us. *“But God commendeth His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”* (Romans 5:8) If we realize our need for grace and forgiveness, then we can operate in the same manner. We need to give grace and forgiveness to others. As we do that, we grow our faith in God.

We do not obey God’s laws in order to be worthy of God’s love. Instead, God’s commands become valuable and appreciated guides for the life that is pleasing to God. *“Oh, how I love Thy law! ... How sweet are Thy words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through Thy precepts I get understanding; therefore, I hate every false way. Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path”* (Psalm 119:97, 103-105, RSV)



Our goal as a deacon is to be willing to let God rule in our life. Seek God first in all things. Trust Him daily. We should not wait until we have attained this to accept the position of deacon, but we should be willing to strive towards the goal.

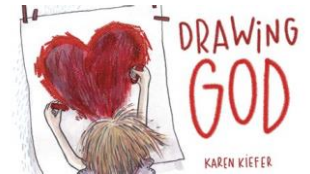
IV. Growth in Demonstrated Maturity.

The seven deacons in Jerusalem were chosen because they were people that had grown in their faith. They had proven themselves. They knew the word of God. If you remember, Steven was one of the seven chosen as the first deacons. It was Steven that preached boldly to the



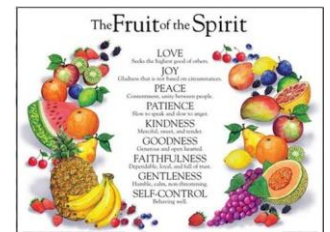
Sanhedrin and was stoned to death. He knew the word and was willing to stand fast as a witness of the gospel.

One day, a little girl told her teacher that she was drawing a picture of God. The teacher said, “But no one knows what God looks like.” The little girl replied, “They will when I get through with my picture!”



Jesus said in Matthew 5:48, *“You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”* We may not know what God looks like, but we know it when that person has the character of Christ. They should be humble of spirit, willing to lead by example, be “fully grown” or mature.

I will be the first person here to say, “I don’t qualify.” But each person, if they were honest, would agree there is a tension between what he or she is now - and what God wants them to become. This tension is healthy because it pulls the Christian towards the goal of a mature faith. Paul admitted that he had not arrived at the goal of perfection, but he was determined to *“press on toward the goal for the upward call of God in Christ Jesus”* (Phil. 3:14). He added that those desiring to mature in Christ should have an attitude or drive toward the continuing change and growth needed to conform to the image of Christ.



Questions or Problems that may arise from these passages of scripture

I. What about the phrase “Husband of one wife.”

1. Is the Deaconate for men only?

Clearly in the I Timothy passage that Jerry Crisp read earlier is referring to men serving as deacons. But there are several other passages, like the one that Laverne Burks read from Romans and the one that Bess Hooks read from Philippians, indicate that women did play an important role as servants or “*diakonos*” in the church.



While some churches may not allow women to serve as a deacon, Spilman has had women serving as Deacons for many years. Nancy Wilkie first served as a Deacon at Spilman in the 1970’s. She, along with Lucille Reed at FBC here in Kinston, were the first women chairpersons in NC and possibly the first in all SBC churches. Paul acknowledged the important role that women played in ministry. In our culture, women have an equal opportunity to serve in the military, to vote, and to be elected to public office. We should accept women as equal ministry partners. Our churches should do no less.

2. Is the Deaconate for married men only?

Paul in his other writings has expressed that it was good that a man to marry. In other places he emphasizes that, in his opinion, it

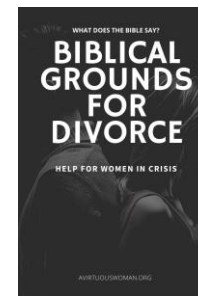
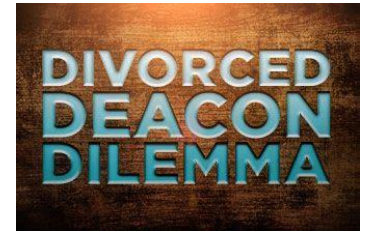


was better if they didn’t because then they could devote their attention and time to the matters of God.

I believe these guidelines are for the married as well as the unmarried.

3. Can a divorced person serve as a deacon?

The culture, in which this passage in I Timothy was written, was saturated with polygamy. This is the practice of being married to more than one person at the same time. Paul’s instruction doesn’t address the issue of divorce.



As much as God hates divorce, He permitted it due to the people’s hardheartedness. I believe marriage is a covenant that is intended to be kept as long as you both shall live. But life happens. People change. Hearts become hard. Sin enters into the marriage. Abuse and abandonment sometimes rear their ugly heads.

I would like to remind us that there are clear biblical grounds for divorce. The scripture teaches that marriage is a covenant. When the covenant is broken due to adultery, abuse, or abandonment, in my opinion, the innocent party in the divorce is free to remarry. Not everyone agrees with me on this, but after carefully reading the scripture, when the marriage covenant is broken, sometimes it simply cannot be fixed. I do believe we serve a God of grace and forgiveness. Sometimes a marriage can be healed. And

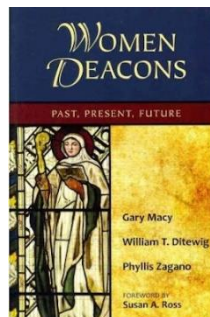
other times it cannot. God can forgive, heal, and restore us even when divorce comes into our life.

Sometimes there are individuals that were unbeliever when they divorced and later come to know Christ as his or her Saviour. When we come to Christ, He forgives our sins and now the individual is restored. Should this person be excluded from service because of this? Wisdom needs to reign in each situation and not the law.

I once knew a church that would not allow a woman to serve as a deacon, and they could not be divorced no matter the reason. The end result of this strict interpretation left the church with only two men able to serve as representatives for the church. These two men were not the most spiritually qualified, but they were the ones that were legally qualified according to the church's interpretation. The result was that the church became legalistic and unforgiving because they disqualified some of the most qualified people in the church to serve the members of the congregation and help make wise, biblical decisions.

4. Can a woman serve as a deacon?

I think we can see that if a woman is willing to serve, if she has the qualities mentioned above, then she should be allowed and invited to take a step of faith and help her community.



II. What about the phrase “Not given to much wine”?

I have made comments before concerning alcoholic beverages in the life of a Christian. I believe each person needs to make up their own mind regarding this topic. The Apostle Paul admonished Timothy to “*take a little wine for his stomach.*” (I Timothy 5:23) Probably Timothy's stomach was upset at times or the water was not very good in his area – so this advice makes very good sense. There are places around the world today it is safer to drink the wine or beer than the water due to bacteria in the water.



The medical community today is promoting a glass of red wine is good for your heart. I am a little skeptical of these types of generalizations because it is probably funded by the growing wine industry. I am sure if you looked, you could find some studies that disagree with that assessment that a daily glass of wine is good for you.

Baptists have traditionally stood against consuming any kind of alcoholic beverages because of the slippery slope for some people that starts with one glass and ends up with several bottles of wine before the evening is over. Some people have an addictive personality and cannot moderate their control over this area in their life. For those individuals, abstinence is the best policy.

If I were to walk into the Food Lion here in Kinston and go over to the beer section, and pick up a case of beer, I am certain someone would be standing there watching me. That person watching me pay for my beer would not only

judge me, but they would make the same judgment on ALL Christians because of what they have seen me do. I do not want to do anything that may hinder another person from seeing Christ in me or lead another person astray.

I have seen how much damage alcohol has done to American families, more than any other one item. It causes families to break up, it causes paychecks to be squandered, it causes people to do things they shouldn't do, not to mention the tragedy that can occur when someone gets behind the wheel after drinking.



Each person should determine in their own heart whether to partake or not. I wholeheartedly agree with Paul's advice to Timothy, a deacon or pastor should not partake of "*much wine.*"

III. What about the phrase "Ruling their children and their own houses well."?

Some people can take this idea of ruling their house to the extreme. As leaders in our homes, we can only do the best that we can. Our children are not robots. They have a mind of their own. If a deacon (or any other church member) is struggling in this area, rest assured that many other families are facing the same pressure. As a deacon or a pastor, all we can do is provide the best environment we can, give good examples for them to live by, and spend a LOT of time praying for our children.



It makes me smile when I think – If the creator of the universe, created a perfect environment for His children Adam and Eve, and they rebelled against Him, what makes you think you can do any better?

All we can do is strive to manage our families well. Provide a good example, be tender and forgiving, discipline when necessary, while not provoking our children to anger.

It all boils down to having our priorities in the right order.

Do we love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength?

- If we do, we will love others as we love ourselves.
- We will not slander others.
- We will live a life above reproach.
- We will honor God by our actions, words, and deeds.
- We will share of our resources to further Christ's kingdom.

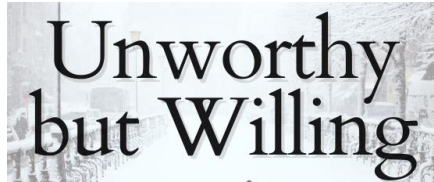


At Spilman, three deacons are elected each year from the membership in the church. This year, Jerry Crisp and Donna Keith will rotate off and are not eligible for re-election for one year. We are distributing nomination ballots today to elect our new deacons. Over the past few years, we have had a difficult time obtaining enough individuals willing to serve if elected. I would like you to consider accepting the nomination this year if you are called. I have found serving the Body of Christ is a blessing – not a burden.



Deacons are to consider themselves as servants of the church. Under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, the pastor and deacons are to consider and make recommendations to the church in all matters pertaining to its work and progress. Deacons are to consider themselves servants to the Body of Christ and grow in grace as your lives are lived out right here at Spilman Memorial Baptist Church.

When I was elected as deacon, I felt very unworthy. I failed many times. But I got up and began to do better.



At times, I have felt unworthy to stand here as your Pastor, but your prayers, notes and cards have under girded me as I have served you the over the past five years. God calls us to be faithful with the things we have been entrusted with. May the Lord find us faithful and willing to serve until He calls us home.

LET US PRAY