

1Tim 24-01-21b

First Timothy chapter three, verse eight, begins the second part of qualification for the formal work and service in the church. The first part here, beginning in verse one and extending through verse seven, had to do with leadership, with oversight. The second section here has to do with service.

And we first saw this distinction made in the church back in Acts chapter six, to which you might turn real quickly. You're familiar with this. In those days when the number of the disciples was multiplying, first and foremost, these functions and the formal designation is more or less directly related to the size of the group.

The smaller a group, the less work and identification and formality is required. We have a relatively small group and we don't formally designate, you know, this individual is an elder, this individual is a deacon. Everybody is everything in our group.

And we're really like-minded in that, I think. I don't know that we've ever made a decision as a church that all of the men in the church are both elders and deacons when something needs doing and you're available and have means, motive and opportunity why we get together and do it. Helping somebody move, contributing to various things that we do as a group.

And we don't really have a formal distinction. And you will note in Acts chapter six that this formal identification and distinction occurs as the number of disciples multiplies. And when a group gets large, now you cannot enjoy the informality and the cooperation that a small group setting confers.

I really love the small group model. I am glad that God has chosen to make us a small and hearty band of brothers and sisters. And we're so close, we're family and anybody can do anything at any time.

And we're not worried about names or designations or offices or functions. We do what we do and we're just extremely close knit and like-minded and it's a wonderful blessing. I have been in groups where that was not the case and it's been this way for however many years now.

And I imagine it will continue until we check out or the Lord returns. But here as the number of disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint and size, breeds, divisions and complaints. It's just almost inevitable that groups I think to cohere have to be relatively small.

And when a group gets large, it's inevitably going to split into smaller groups. It reminds me of being in the desert and looking at the petrified forest out there in Arizona, was it? Was that in Arizona? New Mexico, wherever that is. Same place the Grand Canyon is.

I think it's Arizona. Yeah, but Patty and I went to the petrified forest. What was interesting to me is these trees petrified thousands of years ago and yet they, very few of them are contiguous now.

Most of them as time and erosion and movement has happened, these trees break, they don't stay large. And what fascinated me and I, Patty and I talked about this all day long walking around is they break almost exactly in firewood lengths. It looks like somebody came with a chainsaw and cut these petrified trees into fireplace length or stove length logs.

And it seems like up to a certain point, the stone will remain together. But if it gets too long, pretty soon it's going to break. And they just happened to break.

It just looks like somebody's been out there doing firewood. I was amusing myself thinking that some poor guy was out there cutting firewood and a big storm happened and a mudslide and this is actually his firewood and he really did cut it. But certain things don't seem to be able to survive intact and they will break into smaller pieces.

And then the smaller pieces can survive quite a lot longer than the large ones. And this is my theory about groups of people. Large churches, these mega churches and very large denominational churches, most of the time will divide up into smaller groups and there will be sub teachers or there will be Sunday school classes or there will be flocks with flock leaders and flock meetings because small groups just work better than large groups.

Large groups, it's hard to involve everyone. It's hard for everyone to be personal with everyone else. I've had this difficulty when I first started in the piano business and I only knew several dozen customers in that first year or two.

I could easily remember them, their pianos, what I had done, what their house looked like, how to get there, recognize their house when I pulled up to it. But we got to a certain hundreds of clients and beyond that now I recognize a name and I'm sure I've been there but I can't remember how many times. I can't visualize their house or their face or their piano.

There's just too many and it all becomes sort of opaque except for the handful that I'm really familiar with that I've been there any number of times. But large things are more difficult to manage, to maintain cohesiveness and unity. We just tend to divide into smaller groups.

So in Acts chapter six, the number of disciples multiplied. By the way, what is the point of application in that? We tend to be most sensitive and most connected to a relatively small group. And we don't need to feel bad about that but what we do need to recognize is God is the one that puts the solitary into families, puts individuals into groups.

And we want to recognize the divine ordination of where we are and with whom we are associated to respect it and to look for application and for the expression of the fruit of the spirit with and among those that God has assigned us to and has assigned to us. And that's our first area of responsibility is in the immediate periphery. And to not be concerned about the starving children in Afghanistan or the poor Palestinians or the Ukrainians or this group or that group in a far off land and spending all of our time, our mental clock cycles, twisting and perseverating about things over which we really have no direct influence or control.

We have been put into a family or into an association of people with whom we have frequent contact. That is our mission field. That is our place of training and application of the truth and the expression of our spiritual gift.

And if that group starts to get too large, God is going to take steps to ensure that we are still in a manageable situation. I don't believe in one pastor for several hundred people. I just don't think you can do that successfully.

And this is why large churches rely more and more on the formal identification and designation of elders and of deacons so that there can be personal oversight over a reasonable size group and not biting off more than one can choose so that you're doing many things poorly instead of a few things well. And it is a good thing that large churches subdivide in certain ways to ensure that personal individual contact is maintained, needs are met, and the fruit of the spirit and the exercise of spiritual gifts can happen effectively. It only happens in small groups.

So if you're a big group, you find a way to make it smaller and ensure that it's like blood flow. If you just had one great big artery for your whole body, your appendages and your extremities would perish from lack of circulation. There's got to be provision.

There's got to be respiration and exchange in every part. And that's why we've got smaller veins and smaller arteries all the way down to capillaries. And you just have to have that immediate contact.

That's what's going on in chapter six, multiplying. And there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists. Notice within the big group, now you're gonna divide along ethnic lines, along social lines, along origination lines, cultural lines, Hebrews and Hellenists, the Greeks, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.

So I would expect that the distribution was begun under the Hebrews and because the church started out as Jews, converted Jews, Messianic Jews, you might call them, but more and more non-Jews were coming to faith as the gospel spread. And Peter talks about the sheep being let down and Arise Peter, kill and eat. What God has sanctified, let no man call common and so on.

So the 12, that's concept, that's not sequence by the way, that happens a bit later. The 12 summoned the multitude of disciples and said, it is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Studying and presenting the word of God, implementing divinely sanctioned policies and so on.

This is a leadership function. The apostles are doing the episkopos thing. They are overseeing and serving tables.

This is service. This is exactly the division we have represented in Timothy and in Titus. There is a natural division of service and oversight.

In a small group, you can do both. Everybody can do both. The larger a group gets, the more these two functions have to be segregated and divided.

This group has gotten to that size. So the 12 in verse three say, therefore brethren seek out from among you seven men. Now we have the qualification for deacons.

The very same thing we're looking at in first Timothy chapter three. This is the archetype. This is the origination of it.

Seek out seven men of what? Good reputation. The very first element is good reputation. What do we have for deacons in chapter three, verse eight? Deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience and let them be tested.

Then let them serve as deacons being found blameless. We have that same blameless idea that we saw for the overseers, blameless. And you can see that blameless is last in the list for deacons.

Doesn't mean last in importance, but it's last in the sequence. And it was first for the overseers. And this begins to suggest to us that there's sort of a symmetry here, a reverse symmetry, which we like to call a chiasm.

But back to Acts chapter six, these men should be of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit. Is it okay for the deacons to be full of the Holy Spirit and not the overseers? Or is it okay for the leadership and the servants, the deacons to be filled, but not the individual disciples in the group? All of us should be filled with the Holy Spirit. All of us should be of good reputation, right? These men are just representative and emblematic, and they should be a distillation and a summary of what characterizes the entire group.

So when you see these characteristics, you don't say, well, I'm glad that guy's got those qualities. The reason he has those qualities is he is a walking sermon, a walking Bible class for what all of us should cultivate and develop and strive to improve with respect to characteristics. So, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.

The Holy Spirit and wisdom, the spirit and the word. Wisdom is understanding of God's will, God's way, God's revelation, doctrines, principles, promises, that which pleases God, that which God will judge and is appositional and contrary to the word of God. So, spirit and wisdom, this is the means by which the power of God comes into our life.

What is the reputation part? These things have worked themselves out in application. We've taken the word, taken the presence and power of the spirit, and it is manifest in practice, in exercise, in function. So, the power is present and it is being used.

It's being implemented. This man is availing himself of God's gracious provision. We will give ourselves, verse four, continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.

This doesn't mean that these men are never going to serve or that they're going to lack the filling of the spirit and the wisdom and the good reputation. This is a matter of emphasis. This is a matter of function and assignment in being a blessing to the group.

And so, the emphasis for the apostles is going to be on prayer, ministry of the word. That will enable everybody in the group of disciples, however large it gets, to cultivate the ministry of the spirit. And notice, the apostles are not distributing the spirit.

The Holy Spirit's presence and power is something we individually access and cultivate and rely on, avail ourselves of. The apostles are not ministering the spirit to the people. The only person who is able to do that is the Lord Jesus.

And on multiple occasions, he breathes on his disciples and says, receive the Holy Spirit. God is going to send the Holy Spirit from heaven. You will receive power after that, the Holy Spirit has come upon you.

Pentecost, Acts chapter two, the Holy Spirit descends, but it descends from heaven. Peter doesn't stand up and say, notice as I stretch out my hands, the spirit is now going to emanate from me and go to you. The spirit comes directly from God.

The ministry of the word is using intermediate agency. We will pray and we will minister the word. And that's for everyone in the group, including the deacons.

So that's where you get Stephen and the other six original deacons, deaconess to serve, to wait tables. That's what we have here. Deacons must be in first Timothy three, eight.

It says, reverend, this word *semnos*, S-E-M-N-O-S means honorable. And we have seen this in one of our memory verses where we remember the whatsoever things are in Philippians four, eight, whatsoever things are noble and honest, that is this word. So in this case, what is true, that's first, what is honorable or venerable, one translation has it, but this is *semna*.

Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honorable. So a deacon must be first

of all, honorable. And this is kind of a generality.

What are the specifics? Well, if you were gonna describe either an action or a person, and the Bible uses this word for both actions and an individual characteristic, what comes to your mind? If someone is honorable, they are truthful, they are reliable, they are honest, they are balanced, they have any one of the fruits of the spirit that you wanna name, they are loving, they are not a sourpuss, they have joy. Sometimes this is manifest in contentment and even temperedness. They have peace, they have patience, they are gentle, they express goodness in what they do, they stay away from what is bad and they cling to what is good and so on.

All of this comes under the general rubric of someone who is honorable. You get a honorable or a dishonorable discharge from the military service. So what is an honorable discharge? You did your assignment well.

There is no rebuke, there is no court martial or other charge that can be brought against you that you were dishonorable and received a dishonorable discharge for disobedience or malfunction of some kind. So you are dishonorable and honorable. And this is the leading term here that under which all the rest will provide more detail.

But again, if someone is honorable, even outsiders can't bring a charge and say, well, you're a cheater, you're dishonest, you're unreliable. You come to work and you don't do your job. We never know if you're gonna show up.

You're late, you're sloppy, you're unkempt. You talk too much and don't work enough. None of this would be honorable.

So deacons must be honorable, not double-tongued. What is double-tongued? Do you say one thing when somebody is in the room and you say something completely different when that person is absent? When I was a kid, one of the songs on the radio, you know, they smile in your face and all the time they're trying to take your place. Backstabbers.

Double-tongued is varying the content of your conversation based on who's around or you say one thing and do another. You don't practice what you preach type of thing. And this is a difference between truth and what you say, a difference between practice and what you say.

You talk a good fight. In Texas, they say you're all hat and no cattle. You are double-tongued.

Jesus talked about this in slightly different terms when he said that the eye is the window into the soul. And if you are transparent, if you have integrity, then what's inside is visible to the outside and it conditions the way you look at the world. And you are consistent.

You're not a hypocrite. The light of the body is the eye. And when you have what is good inside you, you are full of light and that light shines forth.

That is honorable and that is not double-tongued. Not given too much wine, once again, not dependent on something other than spiritual resources for happiness, for getting through circumstance. Not greedy for money, once again, greedy for money.

This is self-indulgence, self-interest, self-gratification. I want money because then I can buy things that will make me happy instead of carrying my happiness around with me. Holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience.

This means not doubtful and disputing when the overseers, when the apostles, when the teachers present truth, this guy says, well, I'm a deacon and I'm here to tell you, you know, that ain't right. This guy's messed it up. If you're going to hold the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience, if you have a serious doctrinal disagreement with those who are teaching in the group, the thing to do is quietly depart and find a group where you can maintain unity.

You can hold the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. The mystery is that which needs to be revealed. It's not known.

And, you know, Paul says, I'm a steward of the mysteries and I'm revealing that truth. And let these first be tested, then let them serve. And because this is a service function, it's pretty hard to give a test to those who are teaching.

You know, who's going to give the test? If the teacher is presenting the truth, who knows more than the teacher and can evaluate the teacher? So this is not a part of the qualifications for an elder. You know, do the senior elders test the junior elder and give him a doctrine test and see if he, this is what happens in an ordination examination, which I've been through a couple of times. But let them be tested.

This is, can you do the job? If this is distribution for the widows, do you have a knack? Can you calculate what the supply is and how much ought to be allocated? And can you organize and function and carry out this service well? So let's have you shadow a deacon that's already doing it and see if you've got the knack. Some people have a knack for construction. And if you need to build benches for people to sit on, can this guy build something that doesn't fall apart and stab someone in the leg? Let them be tested because these are physical acts of service and you're either good at it or you're not.

If you're going to help cook the bread and mix the flour and oil and so on, well, there's people that are good at cooking and those who are not. So give somebody a trial run and be sure that they are competent, that they can do this job well. Take your car to a mechanic.

You want somebody that has proven that they can take things apart and put them back

together. So this is in the realm of material service and it is testable, it is repeatable, it's observable. You can use science, so to speak, to see if this is going to work.

And you don't put somebody in an awkward spot. Nobody wants to be asked to do a thing that they're really bad at. So give them a chance to prove out it's a good fit.

Let them be tested, then let them serve being blameless. There's no blame attached to the way they do the job. When they do the job, it gets done well.

If they're tasked, you know, now we have buildings and facilities and such, a grass to be mowed and carpets to be swept and windows to be cleaned and sound systems to be checked. And, you know, if somebody is put in charge of the sound system and it doesn't feed back and it doesn't cut out, you don't lose the recordings and it doesn't wind up being too soft or too loud or whatever, well, he's blameless. He has done this job and nobody can find fault with the job.

This is not moral blamelessness. And once again, you get the same word, but context tells us this is not the kind of blameless that attaches to the overseer. This is blameless in what immediately precedes.

Let him be tested and found blameless, then let him serve. Then in verse 11, it says, likewise, their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. Then you return to the deacons in verse 12.

Why are the wives in verse 11? Well, you've got two verses before that and two verses after that, that all describe the deacons. Very similar, we've seen most of these qualities already and we know what they are, it's not inscrutable. We know that these are observable qualities and character traits, but right in the middle, you have the wives, why? And notice we did not have the wives right in the middle of the previous section on Episcopos, on overseers.

Why is that? What is the role of the wife? She is a help meet for Adam, her function is service. You have in a marriage, the Episcopos and the Deaconess or the feminine form of that word. You have oversight and you have service.

It doesn't mean that the overseer never serves and it doesn't mean that the server doesn't ever oversee anything, it is an emphasis. And the description of the wife is put here because being a wife is not an overseer function with regard to the man, it's an overseer function with regard to the children, but it is a serving function. Talk about waiting tables as a description of Deaconess, the woman cooks the food, sets the table, cleans up after in many cases, it doesn't mean nobody can help or that nobody should help, that the husband never cooks.

These are qualities in terms of willingness to serve, willingness to take on responsibility to oversee. There are plenty of wonderful exceptions all the time. There are ladies who

lose their husband and they've got to do both, raising the kids, making the living and this is principle, in principle.

And because these are exemplary, they are examples, this isn't saying that we're just limited to the physical description of a deacon's wife. When we find ourselves in a service function, this is the quality. The wives must be reverent, the very same as the deacon himself, honorable, not dishonorable, reliable, not unreliable, well thought of, not someone of ill repute and deservedly so, inside or outside the church, not slanderers.

Notice that on the deacons, it says not double-tongued. So you move from reputation, are you honorable or dishonorable to can you control your tongue? Are you circumspect in your conversation? Do you know when to not say what's on your mind or not tell what you know? Have good judgment when it comes to speech and conversation. Temperate, this is self-control, faithful in all things, reliable, consistent, dedicated, doing what you do heartily as under the Lord.

Then it returns to the deacons, being the husbands of one wife, once again, faithful to commitments, a promise keeper, so to speak, ruling children and their own houses well, proven when given an assignment to be faithful in carrying it out and not allowing disruption. Things should be done decently and in good order. And you can't do that for the group of disciples if you can't even manage it in your own home.

So this is get the board out of your own eye before you do moats with the group. Then finally in verse 13, for those who have served well as deacons obtained for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith, a good standing and boldness in the faith. This means they are a blessing to those who are in contact with them, who see them, who benefit from their ministry.

They are a blessing to others. This isn't talking about their own gratification, their own blessing, their own reward from God. Those who have served well as deacons and Paul is saying, look, you don't have to be an overseer to be respected and to be a blessing and to be appreciated and to be useful and functional in the eyes of both God and men.

You say, well, it's the overseers that count. It's the pastors who are the visible face and all of that. Paul says, look, those who have served well as deacons obtained for themselves a good standing and great boldness, great visibility, great impact, great presence.

In the faith related to Christ Jesus. This is a service to Christ. When you serve the body of Christ, if you've done it to the least of these, my brethren, you have done it to me.

And to do what we do heartily as under the Lord as a deacon means treating each person in the fellowship, the opportunity to be a blessing, to be a benefit, to help, to put a shoulder under the load. It is as though you are doing it for the Lord himself. And this is

boldness in the faith, which is in Christ Jesus.

And this is the life in Christ, the group that is in Christ, the brotherhood of Christ, the family of Christ, the family of God. And boldness is I am ready. I am putting my foot forward.

I'm putting my hand to the plow and not looking back because this is my assignment. This is my opportunity. If the Lord Jesus asked me to cook meals, if the Lord Jesus asked me to clean the bathrooms, if the Lord Jesus asked me to do this job, he's asking me.

I don't judge it by the quality of or nature of the work, but can I do it heartily? I am doing it because the Lord Jesus has asked me to do this. And others might consider it a drudge. Others might think it's lofty.

I just look at it as an assignment from the Lord. It's in the faith, which is in Christ Jesus. I'm gonna do it boldly.

I'm gonna do it well. I'm gonna do it consistently. I'm gonna keep my tongue in check.

I'm going to do it honorably so that there is a good reputation, both inside and outside the group. And this is true for every single one of us, not just, well, I'm not a deacon. I'm not a wife.

I'm not an overseer. These are put here as examples, like a parable, like an illustration for each one of us to cultivate all of these qualities. All of us have some area where we are in charge.

All of us have some area where we are in a service role. All of us, there's no exception. There may be phases of life where one or another drops onto the back burner, but we all are like the centurion.

I say to some, they come and others go and they go. And I also am a man under authority. We're all in the system, in the family somewhere.

And we need these qualities. And we can measure ourselves by these qualities. And we know how to cultivate and strengthen these qualities.

The power comes from God, full of the Holy Spirit, wise in the word. And then where's the application? You go back to Acts chapter six, a qualified deacon is going to be of good reputation. These things are working themselves out in practice because they're full of the Spirit and wise.

All of us need that. All of us benefit from it. All of us are enabled and privileged to reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ when we so do.

Well, that brings us down to verse 14, where we'll pick up next time. We'll close here in a

word of prayer. Father, thank you for the practical, pertinent guidance and revelation that we have from your word.

Particularly in this section, we pray that God, the Holy Spirit will minister it to each of our hearts, help us to see how we can implement it and benefit from it and grow in grace and be those who are considered of good reputation, faithful, obedient, prepared for every good work. We ask it in Jesus' name, amen.