



**BELIEVERS CHAPEL**

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1st Timothy 3:8-13

“The Office of the Deacon”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee again for the privilege of the study of the Scriptures. We pray that Thou will guide us and direct us in our thinking. Enable us to understand the things that are written in the inspired word. We thank Thee for the assurance that we have through the Scriptures of the salvation that is available for us through Jesus Christ. And we thank Thee for the ministry of the Holy Spirit who has made the possession of the salvation a reality. Now we ask, Lord, that the spirit may teach each of us who belong to Thee in the things that concern the Lord Jesus and the things that concern the program and purpose which Thou art carrying out at the present time. We ask Thy blessing now upon everyone present to that end. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] We are continuing our exposition of 1 Timothy with stress upon the doctrine of the church. And for the last two hours together we have been studying the office of elder, and tonight our subject is “The Office of Deacon.” We have been saying in connection with the elder that the New Testament does give us a settled church order. We admit there is a bewildering array of church orders that are observable in the

professing Christian church, but nevertheless we have tried to affirm that there is a simple and understandable and settled order for the local church taught in the New Testament. We have tried to stress the fact that order does matter, but it is not enough. There are churches that are organized properly that are not doing the kind of work that honors the Lord to the extent that the New Testament intends and there are churches that are not organized according to the New Testament but which nevertheless have a true understanding of the gospel and are enjoying blessing from God. We have been only seeking to maintain that all things being equal the church that has the testimony of Christ and is organized according to the New Testament will do a more effective job of Christian ministry and testimony.

Now the term elder, we pointed out, was derived from the Old Testament and that is why in the New Testament when the term elder occurs in connection with the local church there is no description of that office necessary since it is regarded as a continuation in large measure of the requirement for eldership in the nation Israel. In our last hour we were discussing the qualification for elder, and since we did not finish those qualifications before we turn to the office of deacon tonight, I want to say a few more words about three or four of the qualifications that we were unable to cover last time. We were looking at verse 2 in which the apostle writes, “A bishop,” this is 1 Timothy chapter 3 verse 2, “A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober minded, of good behavior, given to hospitality.” Incidentally that expression, “Given to hospitality,” is used with reference to the elder but is not used with reference to the deacon, which does not mean, of course, that the deacons should be inhospitable, but that the requirement for hospitality is not specifically attached to them but is attached to the office of elder.

And finally in verse 2 the apostle writes, “Apt to teach.” Now, since this description which is the translation of one Greek word is apt to be misunderstood, I want to say a word about, “Apt to teach.” This does not mean that every elder should have the

ability to stand on a platform and keep hundreds of people interested for a lengthy period of time in the exposition of Scripture. There is a difference; it seems to me, between the expression, “Apt to teach,” and the gift of teaching.

Now that seems evident because in 1 Timothy chapter 5 and verse 17 the apostle said remember, “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine.” In other words, in that verse, 1 Timothy 5:17 he distinguishes between two classes of elder, the elders who rule, all of them rule, but some of them also labor in the word and doctrine. Some of them have gifts of ministry, evangelist, pastor/teacher, teacher, gifts of exhortation perhaps, but some of the elders’ labor in the word and doctrine and some do not. Therefore the requirement that all of the elders be, “Apt to teach” cannot be understood in the sense that we read in 1 Timothy 5:17, some of them labor in the word and doctrine.

What that means, evidently, in the light of the other statements concerning elder in Titus chapter 1, is that the elder should have a comprehensive knowledge of biblical doctrine and be able to communicate that doctrine to anyone who wishes to know the doctrine of Christ. He should be “apt to teach” in the sense that he is able to sit down with anyone and give them a good comprehensive treatment of the biblical faith. And that means, of course, that every elder should be a man who is skilled in systematic theology. He should be skilled in biblical doctrine. He should also be skilled in the application of biblical doctrine, therefore learned in the practical side of the faith or the ethical side of the faith as well. “Apt to teach,” therefore it is not a matter of insignificance for the eldership that every elder should be a man skilled in theology.

Now we often have people make disparaging comments about theology, but again, notice the apostle lays down the requirement he should be “apt to teach.” And the person who disparages a comprehensive knowledge of the Christian doctrine is only disparaging that things that the apostles affirm are essential, and they are particularly essential for the elder who has responsibility of oversight.

The next thing that we read in the 3rd verse is that he should be “not a wine bibber,” “not given to wine” my text says. Now that means that he should not be a person who sits by his glass of wine, not a “wine bibber,” “not given to wine.” This does not mean, so far as I can tell, that the elder should never take a glass of wine. I am not advocating that, I assure you, I don't want to be quoted as advocating this, but as far as the Bible is concerned, I do not find anything in Scripture that says a person could not drink a glass of wine. But the Bible is very strong against drunkenness, and that is what this text refers to here, “Not given to wine.” Drunkenness is forbidden. It is particularly forbidden an elder. It is forbidden all Christians, for that matter. But this is specifically marked out as applicable to the elder. He should not be “given to wine.”

The next of the qualifications must be related to it, for “No striker,” or “Not violent,” as my text has, literally has, “not a giver of blows.” And evidently this is a reference to the brutality that often results from drink, characteristic of men who drink, at least certain men, is the fact that it makes them belligerent. And there is hardly anyone who has ever drunk much who has not been involved in a fight. And so this is also added, “Not violent,” “Not a striker.” So it's a reference, evidently, to brutality that might result from taking too many drinks.

Now it is also, by some commentators, affirm that this is a warning to an impatient overseer. We don't have any way of judging between these two interpretations but it is entirely possible for an elder to lose patience with a recalcitrant member of the flock and strike him. It has been done. As a matter of fact, I know of one graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary who has been in at least one fight with members of his church over the carrying out of certain things that have to do with the local church. So it may be that this is a warning addressed to some of the elders whose fuses are rather short, “Not a striker.” So, a person who has a quick temper is a person who probably is not equipped to be an elder according to that interpretation. Since we don't have a whole lot in the

Bible about some of these qualifications we cannot be absolutely dogmatic about the meaning of them.

Then the next qualification that I didn't say anything about is, I think, rather plain, and the apostle devotes more space to this than the others so it must be somewhat important, “One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity.” Now over in the Epistle of Titus in the 1st chapter of that particular epistle the apostle says something that has sometimes been misunderstood. He states in verse 6, “If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children.” It has sometimes been affirmed from that statement in verse 6 of Titus chapter 1 that that means that all of the elder's children should be believers in the Lord Jesus because the term *pistos*, which is used there, can on certain occasions mean “believing.” But that is probably not the meaning of the text if you will look at the usage of that adjective in the Epistle of Titus and in the Pastoral Epistles you will find that it does not mean “believing,” “having believing children,” but rather, trustworthy children.

And as a matter of fact, this 3rd chapter of 1 Timothy begins with the expression *Pistos o logos ei tis episkopos oregetai kalou ergou epithumei*. I'm sure you understood that, but if you listened carefully you'd remember that the first word is *pistos*, and you'll read in your English text, “This is a true saying.” The Greek text says literally, “Faithful is the saying,” “Trustworthy, something that we can rely upon.” So the meaning of the expression in Titus chapter 1, “Having faithful children,” is reliable children, not necessarily believing.

The elder should have his children in control, and they should be reliable children, but the belief of the children is, of course, the work of the Holy Spirit finally. One should expect that an elder's children ordinarily, would come to faith in Christ. But that is not a requirement for the eldership. As Paul says here, “One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity.” So they should be trustworthy. They should be in subjection.

And then Paul reasons and gives the reason for this qualification. “For if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?” Notice the change in verbs. He says, “One that rules well his own house,” If a man does not know how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?” Now it’s perfectly alright for the apostle to say that the elders rule in the church because in other places the New Testament states that, but you’ll notice here, there is a little bit of softening of it because he wants to stress the fact, it seems to me, that the elder is a person who rules, but he’s a person who rules over that which is likened to a household. And when a father rules in his household, it’s the rule of love and affection and the rule of care for the best interests of the children and the wife, all the members of the household. So it is that kind of ruling. It is not a domineering kind of ruling that is hard and disagreeable. But it is the care of a father for a family. In a moment he will speak of the church as the household of God. So, one that rules well his own house because if he doesn't know how to rule his own house, how can he take care of the church of God? That is, I think, inexorably correct logic. If a man cannot take care of a few people that make up his own home and cannot maintain control there, how can he possibly maintain an effective oversight over a crowd of people like you? [Laughter] See, that’s the point. [Laughter]

Now, then he adds in verse 6, “Not a novice,” that Greek word means “newly united.” Some have given it the translation, “newly planted.” It can mean that, but “newly united” is probably more accurate, and it reminds us of the statement that the Apostle Paul makes in Romans chapter 6 when he talks about the union of the believer with Jesus Christ. He states in the 4th verse, “Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death,” that word is related to the one here in 1 Timothy.

So that, the “union” that he is speaking about here not a “newly united individual,” is “union” with the Lord Jesus that comes when we believe in him.

Now, I think, I cannot speak with absolute dogmatism, contrary to my custom, [Laughter] when it says, “Not a novice,” I think that he refers primarily to experience in the Lord. He is not saying that an elder necessarily has to be an old man. He doesn't necessarily have to have gray hair. But ordinarily the men who have had Christian experience for a lengthy period of time are the men who should be expected to be elders. One thing Paul says is, “Beware of having an elder who is a novice.”

So far as I can tell from the study of 1 Timothy, the church at Ephesus of which Paul is speaking since Timothy was there, was a church that was about a dozen years old at this time. So there would be men in the church who would conceivably have Christian experience of only about twelve years. So at least twelve years experience, it's possible for a person to be an elder, perhaps even earlier, if there are other considerations that pertain to the individual.

It seems to me in the case of a person who has grown up in a very strong Christian home, but who for a lengthy period of time did not become a Christian, but who becomes a Christian has a back log of experience and understanding that another person that was not brought you in a Christian home does not have. We often see that at Dallas Seminary. Young men come into the seminary with two years Christian experience. They don't even know the books of the Bible often. And they are in the first year class with some men who have been in the Christian faith for twenty years and have had a great deal of experience and know a great deal about Christian things. I felt very much that way when I came into Dallas Seminary since I had been converted only a few years before I entered the Theological Seminary. I knew the books of the Bible, but I didn't know a whole lot more about some of them, but some of my friends who sat by me had already had three or four years of Bible college and had been trained in a Christian home.

It makes a great deal of difference. “Not a novice,” and the reference, I think, is primarily to youth in the Lord.

The judgment of the devil referred to here may be the judgment that the devil carries out because back in verse 20 of chapter 1 we read about, “Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, so that they will be taught not to blaspheme.” So Satan exercises certain disciplinary acts under the authority of God and it may be that that is what is referred to here.

“Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.” It’s very easy for a person in the Christian church to be lifted up with pride. That verb, incidentally, in the Greek text is a verb that means literally, “Wrapped in smoke.” Now a person who is wrapped in smoke is usually blinded and cannot see. And so the idea of the apostle is that he is wrapped in the smoke of his own importance and consequently he is unfit for the service of elder. Donald Guthrie says in his commentary, “He has a false sense of altitude.” [Laughter] Someone has also said, “Someone who is wrapped up in himself makes a mighty small parcel. And so pride is something that an elder should avoid. “Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.”

Well the apostle concludes his words concerning the elder in verse 7 by saying, “Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.” I always read this text remembering my father’s words to me. He was speaking about the fact that the church of which he was a member had often asked him to be an elder, and he refused for many, many years, though my grandfather had been a Presbyterian elder for many years. And in fact was so active in the Presbyterian church both in Summerville, South Carolina and Charleston that when the churches did not have ministers he preached. And while my father grew up in that environment and actually his home was right next to the Presbyterian church for a lengthy period of time, he felt that he should not accept the eldership because he didn't feel that



his own Christian life measured up to what he expected an elder to attain to. And he used to illustrate it by a mutual friend who was an elder and who had been an elder and my father felt that he should never have been appointed an elder by the church because his business reputation in the community was that of a shyster, and consequently, it cast reproach in the local church. So he says, “He must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.”

Well let’s move on to discuss the office of deacon. I wish that it were possible for me to devote two hours to the subject of deacon because this relationship to the local church is extremely important. But let’s look now at verse 8 through verse 13 in which the apostle discusses the requirements and qualifications for deacons. In the 8th verse he says, “In like manner must the deacon be grave, not double tongued, not given too much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre.” The beginning of the office of deacon is wrapped in some obscurity. It’s usually traced to Acts chapter 6, verse 1 through verse 6 so I want you to turn with me if you will to Acts chapter 6, and we’ll read together these 6 verses which have to do with the church in Jerusalem. Acts chapter 6, verse 1 through verse 6, now notice we are at that part of the story of the church in Jerusalem that Luke begins to describe some difficulties internal dissention that existed in the church at Jerusalem. We read in the 1st verse,

“And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians (now they are Hellenistic Jews) against the Hebrews (those Palestinian Jews), because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration (now that word is the same root from which we get deacon, service). Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not fitting that we should leave the word of God, and serve.”

Now again that's the word from which we get deacon. Incidentally, deacon in English is simply a word derived from the Greek word *diakonos* and you can see it's almost a transliteration of the Greek word, to deacon,

“Tables (to serve tables). Wherefore, brethren, look among you for seven men of honest report, full of the Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we (that is the apostles) will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry (and again this is the same word from which we get the word deacon, the ministry) of the word (So you see deacon means simply a minister). And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, 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 the beginning of the office deacon is usually traced to Acts chapter 6 verse 1 through verse 6. There is a great deal of debate over this however, and some good Bible teachers feel that what is referred to in Acts chapter 6 on the plain reading of it is simply odd hokey situation, that is some men had hands laid upon them for a specific local task and when it was done that was the end of the deaconing of Acts chapter 6.

Two things, I think, are important in trying to settle a question like this. First, while the word “diakonus” or deacon does not occur in that Acts 6 passage, there are two other words all related to this same root that do occur in verse 1, verse 2 and verse 4 as I've pointed out to you. So while the word deacon doesn't occur, the word “serve” does occur three times. And furthermore the reason perhaps that we have this rather lengthy treatment of the origin of the office of deacon, if it is the origin of the office of deacon, is because deacon was not an office derived from the Old Testament. In the case of the elder there is no need to give any words concerning the rise of the eldership

because the Jews knew what elders were, but they did not know what deacons were. And so it may be that Luke has recorded that historical incident to give us a clue to the origin of this new office, the office of deacon.

But probably it would be wise for us to say that's only a probability. We cannot be certain that is the origin of the office of deacon. It's evident from 1 Timothy chapter 3 that by the time Paul writes 1 Timothy he regards the deacon to be an office because he lists his qualifications in the same chapter immediately following the qualifications for the elder. And in Philippians chapter 1 and verse 1 he writes a letter to the church at Philippi, and he addresses it to all the saints with the bishops, or elders, and deacons. So he thinks of the elder and the deacon as belonging together and since the elder is an officer in the church then it is likely that we are to regard the deacon as an officer too. And in the 2nd century in the books that were written by some of the church fathers, you will find, for example, in Ignatius these two things linked together again, bishops and deacons. So, it evidently came to be the doctrine of the early church as an early stage that the deacon was a church official just like an elder and was associated with him. That's surely what we have here in 1 Timothy chapter 3. So I think the soundest conclusion is that the two offices are referred to here in 1 Timothy chapter 3, elder and deacon.

Now I say all of this because there are some good brethren who want to resist that interpretation. I have a good friend out on the coast in California, and I won't say anything about California which might prejudice you against his words, but he insists that there is no such thing as the office of deacon. But they are simply to be regarded as household servants. But the association with the bishops is not explained by that interpretation. And it does not agree with what we know of early church history. So I think it is better to take this passage then to refer to the deacon as an official in the local church.

Now, let me say something that I think needs to be born in mind. When I say that the elder is an official and the deacon is an official, let me qualify that by saying I am doing that because it is easier to refer to them in that way. The whole thrust of the New Testament however is upon the functions of these men and not upon their position. In other words, the elder is a person who shepherds. The deacon is a person who serves. And the great stress of the New Testament is not that these men hold office and they have the perquisites that belong to office, but rather, they are functions and the men are men who function in certain ways in the local church. So the stress is on what they do, not their position of authority in the local church. Let us not forget that. So when I refer to them as the office of elder, the office of deacon that should be qualified by what I'm saying.

Let me say just a word now about the real meaning of this word deacon. In verse 8, Paul says, “In like manner must the deacons.” The word deacon, “diakonos” comes probably from the word “konias” which in Greek meant “dust.” So I think that probably the background of it is of a person who stirs up a lot of dust by activity. So it refers to a person who serves. And that's the meaning of it and usually it is service in a menial capacity, serving around the table, like a butler. You remember, twenty-five, thirty-five years ago when you used to have a butler in your house. I know you won't believe it, but I grew up with a butler in the house. I had a butler. We had a chauffeur too. And that's the kind of service that this word suggests, the service of a menial servant. It means to wait on tables. That's exactly what a deacon does. He waits on tables. That's his function. He is a servant of the flock. He's not a person who stands over the flock and holds authority over them. He is a servant of the flock, and it's a great thing to be a servant of the flock.

We have in the New Testament some beautiful illustrations of this. One of them is Martha in Luke chapter 10. In Luke chapter 10 and verse 40 we read, but you won't find it in Mark, that's what I'm looking at and started to read, Luke chapter 10 and verse 40,

“But Martha was cumbered about much serving; and she came up to him, and said, Lord, dost Thou not care that my sister did leave me to serve alone?” So Martha who went into the kitchen evidently to prepare the Lord something to eat when he came to Bethany was doing the work of a deacon. She was doing service. She was preparing a meal. The greatest illustration of the work of the deacon is the work of our Lord Jesus. In Mark chapter 10 and verse 45 he describes his work of the cross in that way. He says, “The Son of man also came not to be ministered unto.” He did not come to be served. He did not come to have men serve him, but he came to serve. He came to be a deacon in that sense and to give his life for ransom for many. So his whole ministry is gathered up under this idea of service and his service is the greatest service of all. It is the basis of our salvation.

There is a woman who is referred to in the New Testament as a deacon. We'll talk more about that in just a moment when we discuss whether there is such a thing as the office of deaconess. In Romans chapter 16 and verse 1, the Apostle Paul writes to the church at Rome and says, “I commend unto you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church,” a deacon of the church which is at Cenchreae. So Phoebe is referred to in Romans chapter 16 and verse 1 as a deacon, as a servant. It is my opinion simply that she was a person who carried out Christian ministry of service in the church, that there is no such thing as the office of deaconess, but there may be, and we will talk about that in a moment. The word then deacon means simply a person who serves. That's all it means, and the stress is on the menial type of service. Just as the work of an elder is the work of oversight, both of these offices suggest service and functions with reference to the good of the congregation, of the flock. And if you are an elder or if you're a deacon, you should never think that God has set you over the flock to exercise authority as that being the primary thing.

How may we distinguish a deacon from an elder? Well as you look at these qualifications there are several things that appear. In the first place there is no mention of

a teaching responsibility for the deacons. We read that they are to, “Hold the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience in verse 9. We read in verse 13 that they are ones who are to use the office of deacon well, and they purchase for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus. But we have no evidence that the deacons are individuals who teach. So the teaching responsibility does not evidently belong to the deacon.

There is a second thing that is clear from the study of the qualifications of the deacon. There is no clear reference to governing duties. They are not given responsibilities of rule in the church. Theirs are purely service, no governing duties. There is one other thing too. There is no reference to their representative character. Now in the case of the elders they are representatives of the church. The Apostle Paul in his ministry speaks of calling for the elders of the church and giving the elders an exhortation because they represent the church. Then when money is given to the local church as the gift that was collected for the poor, it was given to the elders in order that the elders might dispense it for the church. The elders are representative men. They represent the local church, but there is no evidence of a representative character for the deacon. I would assume from this, and this is not just my opinion, it's the general opinion of New Testament scholars, that the deacons were assistants of the elders and helped them in the work that they carried out. I also feel that the great thrust of the New Testament is to the effect that the deacon was a particular officer or official in the local church and he would be an official in that church for as long as he effectively and faithfully served.

Now my good friend from the coast in California has affirmed that that is not true because, he said, in the case of Stephen, Stephen preached and evangelized, and also Philip preached and evangelized. But that doesn't have anything to do with whether he served as a deacon or not. In the Bible we are told that spiritual gifts are given to all of the flock of God. Utterance gifts may be given to anyone. Even women may have utterance gifts. They're not allowed to exercise them in the meetings of the church, but

they have utterance gifts. And in the case of Stephen and in the case of Philip who were of the seven and were deacons, those men had the gift of evangelism, and so, they were deacons who also did evangelistic work.

We must not confuse office and spiritual gift. That is what my friend has done, suggested that if a person evangelizes he cannot be a deacon. Why a man may be a deacon and he may also be an evangelist, and he might even have some other gifts as well. So then in the case of Philip, in the case of Stephen, they were deacons but they preached. Now I don't know whether we have any preaching deacons here or not. We have some interesting deacons. They leave things on my desk like this. Did you hear about the Aggie who went to Japan and opened a string of franchised mortuaries? The name Jack Jap in the Box [Laughter], it's signed by one of the deacons. [Laughter] I think he has gifts of utterance. [Laughter] But we did have a deacon here who did preach. Mel Bryant was one of our deacons for some time, and he was a very effective teacher of the word, and so far as I know still is. He preached but he was also a deacon. So if you're a deacon, the opportunity to preach is yours.

Let's look now at the qualifications, beginning at verse 8. He states, “In like manner must the deacons be grave.” Now, I don't know about my friend, whether he qualifies or not or on that point there. [Laughter] “Grave, not double tongued,” now this is one I wanted to stress. Incidentally, these qualifications you will notice are qualifications that are closely related to their duties. Now the duties of the deacon pertain to the property. They pertain to the services. They pertain to things such as ushering. They pertain to the handling of money. They pertain to many, many of the things that transpire around the local church. This local church here could not get along without its deacons. And they serve a very effective place and part in the ministry of the word of God here.

“Not double tongue,” not an Ananias or a Sapphira, or not a Gehazi. John Bunyan speaks about the city of fair speech in one of the sections of his *Pilgrim's Progress*. He

talks about the city or town of fair speech. And in it there dwelled my lord Turn-about, my Lord Time-server, my Lord Fair-speech, after whose ancestors the town was named, and then there is Mr. Smooth-man who is in the city and Mr. Facing-both-ways. We have a lot of decedents of that man in the local church today, Mr. Facing-both-ways, Mr. Any-thing, and the parson of the parish, according to Mr. Bunyan, is named Mr. Two-tongues.

So the deacon is not to be double tongued. Evidently this arose out of the practice of the deacons to carry out the ministry of helping the poor and needy of the flock. From what we know of the deacons, it was into their hands that the elders committed the task of visiting in the congregations, in the families, and discovering the needs that existed in the congregation. And consequently, the deacons were individuals who knocked on doors, and they kept in touch with what was happening. And there would be a tremendous temptation on the part of deacons whose responsibility it was to knock on doors to find out the conditions that existed in the poor and needy of the flock to speak hypocritically, and so this “not double tongued” is especially suitable for the kind of work that they would do.

Another thing that is given as a qualification of the deacon is that he should not be, “Given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre,” not a Judas or a Simon. Such is referred to in Acts chapter 8. Now again this would be a temptation that a deacon might have because he handled money under the supervision of the elders and having money in his hands it would be a temptation for him to be “greedy of filthy lucre.” So that particular qualification is related to, again, the work that he does.

In the 9th verse the apostle states that he should, “Hold the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.” Now notice the expression, “The faith,” again. The deacon is not a person who is not to be qualified in biblical doctrine. He too is to know the great doctrines of the faith. And if you wish to know what “the faith” is, well in the 16th verse of this chapter, a verse that we shall look at next Wednesday, the Lord willing, we have



the mystery of godliness and the story of the ministry of the Lord Jesus. And expanding that into all of the aspects of biblical doctrine we have the mystery of “the faith.”

Incidentally, when we read in the Bible the mystery of the faith, we are not speaking of something mysterious but something that is hidden from the natural man but which may be discovered by the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. So, the mystery of the faith is not something mysterious, but it is simply the faith as it is revealed to us by the Holy Spirit. All truth comes to men by revelation. And all truth comes to believers by illumination. That is, we never know anything of the truth of God if we are not the recipients of the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit.

So it is the secret of the faith. It has been revealed, and Paul says the deacon is to hold this in a pure conscience. What does that mean? Why it means the simple truth that we all who have been around a Christian church know. That is what we believe is to be manifested in what we do. Our belief and our behavior are to agree. Our theology and our ethics are to be in harmony. So, he says we are to hold the mystery of the faith. We have to know the biblical doctrines. We are to have a comprehensive grasp of the Christian faith as it stands over against the fables of the pagans, but we are to hold this in a pure conscience, and the kind of life that is characterized by biblical ethics is the kind of life the deacon is to have. We should never divorce these two things, what we believe and how we behave, and the apostle puts it right on the line here for the deacons.

Then he states in the 10th verse, “Let these also first be proved.” That does not mean I do not think that they are to engage in a specific examination. I don't think that we are justified in saying, now we are going to give the deacons a course in theology and all of the things that pertain to is such as they take in theological seminary, and when he has satisfactorily passed all of the courses we will make him a deacon. I don't think that would be a bad idea incidentally. Not a very workable idea, perhaps, but nevertheless, not a bad idea at all. What, however, the apostle has in mind is a testimony to a person's

character. He must be proved. That is, he must be demonstrated an actual Christian experience to have the kind of character and ability that a deacon should have.

Remember back in Acts chapter 6 when the local church there was told to choose men. They were told to choose men of good report, of honest report, of good reputation. Men who have a testimony to their Christian experience. The present tense that is used here and, “Let these also first be being proved,” suggests that there may be some time involved in this. And by the way the very fact that there is set forth here a proof of men before they become a deacon shows us that becoming a deacon is the same thing as becoming an official of a church and is incidentally, an argument that the term deacon does refer to an official.

Now, that is not the way we choose deacons today in our churches often. I hope this never happens in Believers Chapel, but I have been in entirely too many churches in the past when the way in which deacons are chosen is something like this. One of the elders says, “Why don't we think about so and so as a deacon?” Someone says, “Well he's not a very good Christian.” “Well maybe if we make him a deacon, he'll become a good Christian.” [Laughter] By serving, he'll become a good deacon. Another fellow says, “Well, he criticizes all the time. He's a constant source of trouble.” “Well if he becomes one of the deacons then maybe he'll stop his criticizing, so let's make him a deacon.” “Let's place him in nomination; if he's elected we can perhaps make something out of him.” That's the way churches go down the drain. And many churches who have membership roles allow people to become members in the hope that they may become Christians. They do not know how wicked the old nature is. You don't know what a great weight sin is. The preaching of the gospel will never change a great mass of people. It will never change. And of course the safety of the church lies in waiting upon the activity of the Holy Spirit, and as he does bring men to the knowledge of Christ, and as he does bring men to some maturity, it is these men who may become deacons and elders. You don't make any deacons or elders by appointing them to office.

Well in the 11th verse we have this question of wives. “Even so must their wives,” now if you’ll look at your text carefully, you’ll see the Authorized Version that I’m looking at here says, even so, and then in italics must and then italicized their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober minded, faithful in all things.” The question that arises here is is the apostle speaking about a third office in the church? The office of deaconess or is he speaking about the wife of the deacon. “Even so must,” now you can see the translators of the Authorized Version they have taken the interpretation that there is not a reference here to the office of deaconess, but to the wives of the deacons. So they have translated it, “Even so must their wives be grave.” The Greek text however does not have that. The Greek text has simply, “Likewise wives must be grave.” So there is no pronoun there. There is really no article, no “the wives,” just simply “wives.”

So, what can we say for this? What can we say for the office of deaconess? The Methodist church has deaconesses, and there are other churches that have deaconesses. If you study the history of the Christian church by the time of the 4th Century, it was quite common for deaconesses to be attached to churches. Now in the 2nd Century we have only one instance of that, but by the 4th century this had become a relatively common thing to have deaconesses.

What can we say for this? Well we don't have a whole lot of time to deal with the exegesis of this passage. But let me just say some things that can be said for the office of deaconess. The 11th verse begins, “Even so,” and the 8th verse began, “Even so,” or “In like manner,” so the fact that there is, “In like manner,” and then again, “In like manner,” the same Greek adverb would suggest since the apostle began to speak about deacons, he’s speaking about another office here in verse 8. Furthermore as I said there is no pronoun with wives -- it’s just simply wives or women -- and not the wives or their wives. Furthermore in verse 12 the apostle comes back and says, “Let the deacons,” now he talks about the deacons again. He comes back to the deacons here, so some have said he must be speaking about something else in the preceding verse.

And then Phoebe is used as the illustration. Phoebe is called a deacon. Now we say in English, “a deaconess.” What her duties were we do not know, of course, but we can imagine what the duties of a woman in a local church might have been, teaching the women, attending baptisms and taking care of the females who were baptized, just as we have here, ladies who help in the case of the females who are being baptized, a very necessary service. Furthermore in those days there was a lot less contact between the sexes and it would be important to have someone who could make contact between the elders and the women in the flock. And so a deaconess would serve a very noble purpose. Well you can see that there is a good basis for believing that there is such a thing as the office of deaconess.

On the other hand, there are some things that can be said against it. Notice the apostle says in the 8th verse, “In like manner must the deacons be grave,” and then in the 12th verse, “Let the deacons be the husband of one wife.” It would be strange for another office to be spoken about in the midst of statements in a paragraph which pertained to deacons. You would expect him to finish with the deacons and then speak about the deaconesses, rather than inserting a verse in the midst of the paragraph about another third office and then coming back to speak about the second.

Furthermore in the case of the term for women that is used there the article is not used and one might expect the article to be used, the deaconesses. And still others say, as far as the “like manner” is concerned, notice it says in verse 8, “In like manner must the deacons be grave.” And then in verse 11, “Even so must their wives be grave.” The “like manner” is not the “like manner” of talking about the office of deacon and then the office of deaconess, but the “like manner” is that the deacon is to be a sober, solemn, grave kind of individual, and so is his wife.

Furthermore since the deacons were constantly mingling in the flock and caring for the poor and sick and the needy it would be common for their wives to go with them to help them. Now someone has said, “But nothing is said about the wives of elders.”

That's right because the wives of the elders who govern didn't have anything to do with the governing. Now I know that that is not always true. There are cases where that is just the opposite of the facts.

I think I made mention to you of a letter that we received at Believers Chapel about six or eight months ago from a pastor in a church who was having a great deal of difficulty, and his difficulty really was with a woman who had excessive authority in the church. And I have forgotten her name, but it was a rather unusual name. Something like Sadie, but that wasn't it. If there are any Sadie's present, pardon me. [Laughter] But anyway, he made the statement to the effect that nothing goes in this church unless Sadie agrees with it.

So it's possible of course for wives to exercise excessive influence on the men in the church. But in the case, and that's probably the reason why we don't have any reference to wives. They do not have a part in the governing of the church. But they would have a part in the ministry of the deacon. So with a little bit of diffidence I conclude that probably the office of deaconess does not exist, but I certainly hope there are a lot of deaconesses in this congregation, and that we have a lot of female servants in Believers Chapel because we need them.

I have a very good friend. She attends the meeting here as often as she can. She has a husband who is not completely well, but many years ago she was in Baylor hospital. And I called on her in the hospital and she has a very delightful sense of humor. And she said to me, “Dr. Johnson you might be interested in a little experience I had.” She said, evidently she was in a double room and there was another person in the room but there had been a change, and she said, “The person who was in the room next to me over here had her deaconess from a local Methodist church call on her during the week. And during the course of her call on my friend who was in the room with me, we engaged in a little bit of conversation. And she, after I had ask her what she was doing, she said she was the deaconess of one of the local Methodist churches.” She asked her,

she said, “Dr. Johnson I asked her if she enjoyed her work.” And she said, “I must say, Dr. Johnson, I was really thinking about you because I knew what you thought about women being active in the meetings of the church.” And I asked her did she enjoy her work, and she said, “I certainly do.” And then I asked her, “What do you like about it?” And she said, “I have twenty-five people under my command.” [Laughter] She evidently was the chief deaconess [Laughter] in the church and had authority over all of the other deaconesses. And my friend told me that with a great deal of relish because she knew I would enjoy it. [Laughter]

Now the apostle goes on to say in verse 12, “Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife.” We have already talked about that. “Ruling their children and their own houses well,” they should be individuals who have their children in subjection, “For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good standing, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.” I didn't say anything about the wives not being slanderers. I intended to say something about that. That means that the wives are not to be individuals who act like the devil, for that's the meaning of the word, and slander people. That is, they are not to be like Potiphar's wife, or Jezebel, but they are to be Ruth's and Lydia's. And you can see from this that if this is a reference to the wife of the deacon it is of the greatest importance that a deacon have a wife who measures up to these requirements in verse 11, and a deacon should not be a deacon who has a wife who does not.

The 13th verse concludes with the reward of the deacons. And it's evident from this that being a deacon is not to have part in an insignificant office. It is very important. “For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good standing.” “Degree” in inscriptions meant standing or rank, not a university degree. And...

**[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]**