

## Qualifications for Deacons of the Local Church

### 1 Timothy 3:8-16

1 Timothy 3:8-16: *“Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money,<sup>9</sup> holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience.<sup>10</sup> But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless.<sup>11</sup> Likewise, their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things.<sup>12</sup> Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.<sup>13</sup> For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.<sup>14</sup> These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly;<sup>15</sup> but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.<sup>16</sup> And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh; Justified in the Spirit; Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles; Believed on in the world; Received up in glory.”*

#### Background Notes

The theme of 1 Timothy is “Church Order” – how to set up a church, how to structure a church, and how to conduct yourself in the house of God, the church of the living God. Thus verse 15 could be called the “theme verse” of 1 Timothy: *“I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.”*

Notice that the Church is the *pillar* and *ground* of the truth. The Church is not the *source* of truth, but it supports the truth. The Church rests on the truth. The Church holds up the truth. The Church proclaims the truth. What a responsibility we have as the Church of the living God! Are we doing our job?

Notice also that the Church is the “house of God.” The Church is not only the body of Christ, and the bride of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Spirit - it is also the house of God. In the context here, the idea is that it is **God’s** house, not man’s house.

If you’re invited into someone’s house, you fit into the order of that house - at least I hope you do! I hope you don’t try to run someone else’s house your way. It’s not your house! Well, it’s the same with **God’s** house. He calls the shots. It’s **His** house, not our house. So if you want to know how to conduct yourself in the house of God, then follow the order that He has set up and given to us in His Word.

How dare anyone say that these instructions were only for the early Church, and today we can structure our local churches any way we want? The Church is still the house of the living God, and He hasn’t given any further revelations

on how to change the order and structure of His house. The instructions He gave in 1 Timothy, for the order and structure of the Church, are still good for today.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. Deacons are responsible for spiritual service.

Remember, the office of deacon and the office of elder are the only two church offices described in the New Testament. What's the difference between a deacon and an elder? Are deacons less spiritual than elders? No, deacons are to be just as spiritual as elders. The difference between deacons and elders has to do with their **functions** in the local church.

As we have seen, the elders are responsible for the spiritual leadership of the church. The word deacon means "servant," and deacons function under the elders in various areas of service. In the office of "deacon," certain designated members of the local church are appointed to be in charge of various areas of service. In some denominations the spiritual leaders are referred to as deacons, but biblically they should really be called elders rather than deacons.

How are the deacons designated? Because they function under the elders, they are generally appointed or asked to serve by the elders. The first deacons were appointed by the apostles to serve in the early Church in Jerusalem. Acts 6:1-5: *"Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word." And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch."*

Did you notice that the deacons were **spiritual servants**? They are very important for the smooth running of the church and they function under the spiritual leaders. Deacons are spiritual servants, but they are not the spiritual leaders or spiritual authority in the church. All believers are to be involved in the service of the Lord, but we all have different jobs to fulfill.

### 2. Deacons are characterized by moral integrity and ability to manage.

The qualifications for deacons are not quite as strict as elders, but that does not mean that the deacons may be less spiritual. **Both elders and deacons are to be spiritual.**

However, the ability to teach is not listed for deacons, as it is for elders. As the spiritual leaders, the elders need to be able to explain Scripture, answer questions and discern false teaching. That does not mean that deacons cannot teach. They may even have the gift of teaching. In fact, deacons who have the ability to teach may become elders.

Look at some of these qualifications for the deacons:

*a. Not “double tongued” (v8).*

Why is that important? Deacons can't be deceptive, giving conflicting reports to different people – one story to the elders, and a different story to the congregation.

*b. Not greedy for money (v8).*

Deacons may handle church funds, so they must be trustworthy. Many tragic cases of mismanagement of funds could be shared.

*c. Able to handle responsibility (v10).*

Verse 10 says that a person should be “tested” before he becomes a deacon. The idea is not a formal “exam” like my students take at Emmaus Bible College. The idea of “testing” here is that prospective deacons should be given responsibility in areas of service before they are officially chosen as deacons. Can they do the job? Do they quit when the going gets tough? Do they have what it takes to carry it through? Can they manage when they are put in charge? This is important. That's why our doctrinal point for deacons is that deacons are characterized by **moral integrity** and the **ability to manage**.

Some believers have great intentions for serving the Lord, and they are faithful, but they can't seem to carry through. They can't get the job done. They can't handle responsibility. A “monkey wrench” seems to appear in the project every time these folks are given a responsibility.

Do you know any “servants” like that? They're faithful believers, and they want to get involved, but they can't manage responsibility. These people should not be selected as deacons, even though they would like to be deacons. If they can't pass the “test,” they shouldn't be given the responsibility of being deacons. You'll have problems; your church will not run smoothly.

*d. Able to care for their families well.*

How a would-be deacon handles his “home front” should be part of the testing stage. Verse 12: *“Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.”* Does the prospective deacon have a loving and happy relationship with his family? Does he handle his family responsibilities well?

The qualification for deacons that's the hardest to interpret is in verse 11. Some translations say, *“their wives must be reverent or worthy of respect.”* Other translations have *“women must be reverent or dignified.”* The Greek word that's

used here can be translated either “women” or “wives.” So is the verse referring to the wives of the deacons or to women holding the office of deaconess? There are good arguments from the text for both positions. Romans 16:1 refers to Phoebe as a deaconess in the church of Cenchrea, and it appears that the term is used there in an official sense. I think it’s best to let the elders of your local church decide what position to take on that verse.

Verse 13 indicates that deacons who serve well not only attain a good record but actually gain confidence and boldness in the faith: *“For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.”* That’s a great benefit! And the teaching of this verse is true for any believer, not just for “official deacons”! Get involved in serving the Lord, and you will find that one of the good results is that you will gain courage as a Christian.

So we’ve seen the qualifications for deacons in the local church. Deacons are characterized by **moral integrity** and the **ability to manage**.

## Practical Application

### Do you know the secret of godliness?

Verse 16 is probably the verse of an early Christian hymn. It contains the secret for godliness in your life and in your lifestyle. Suppose you were to read the first part of verse 16, *“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness.”* Would you know what that mystery of godliness or secret of godliness is?

What is the secret of godliness? ***The secret of godliness is Jesus Christ!*** That’s what we have in the rest of the verse. This early Christian hymn is all about Jesus Christ!

There’s a lot of doctrine in these few lines. *“God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory.”* Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became Man. He was justified, or vindicated by the Spirit at His baptism, in His miracles, at the transfiguration, and in His resurrection. He was seen by angels in His earthly life, at Gethsemane, at the resurrection, at the ascension. He was received up in glory, and He is in glory today, seated at the right hand of God.

Do you want to live a more godly life? Focus on Jesus! Keep these truths about Jesus Christ before you at all times, and you will stay Christ-centered. You will be increasingly Christ-focused - and your life and your lifestyle will be more godly.

The secret of godliness is not found in self-help books. The true secret of godliness is keeping your mind on Jesus Christ – on His Person, and on His work. Then the life of Christ will be seen in your life, and the truth of Galatians 2:20 will become a reality in your life: *“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”* This is the secret of godliness. Do you know the secret of godliness?