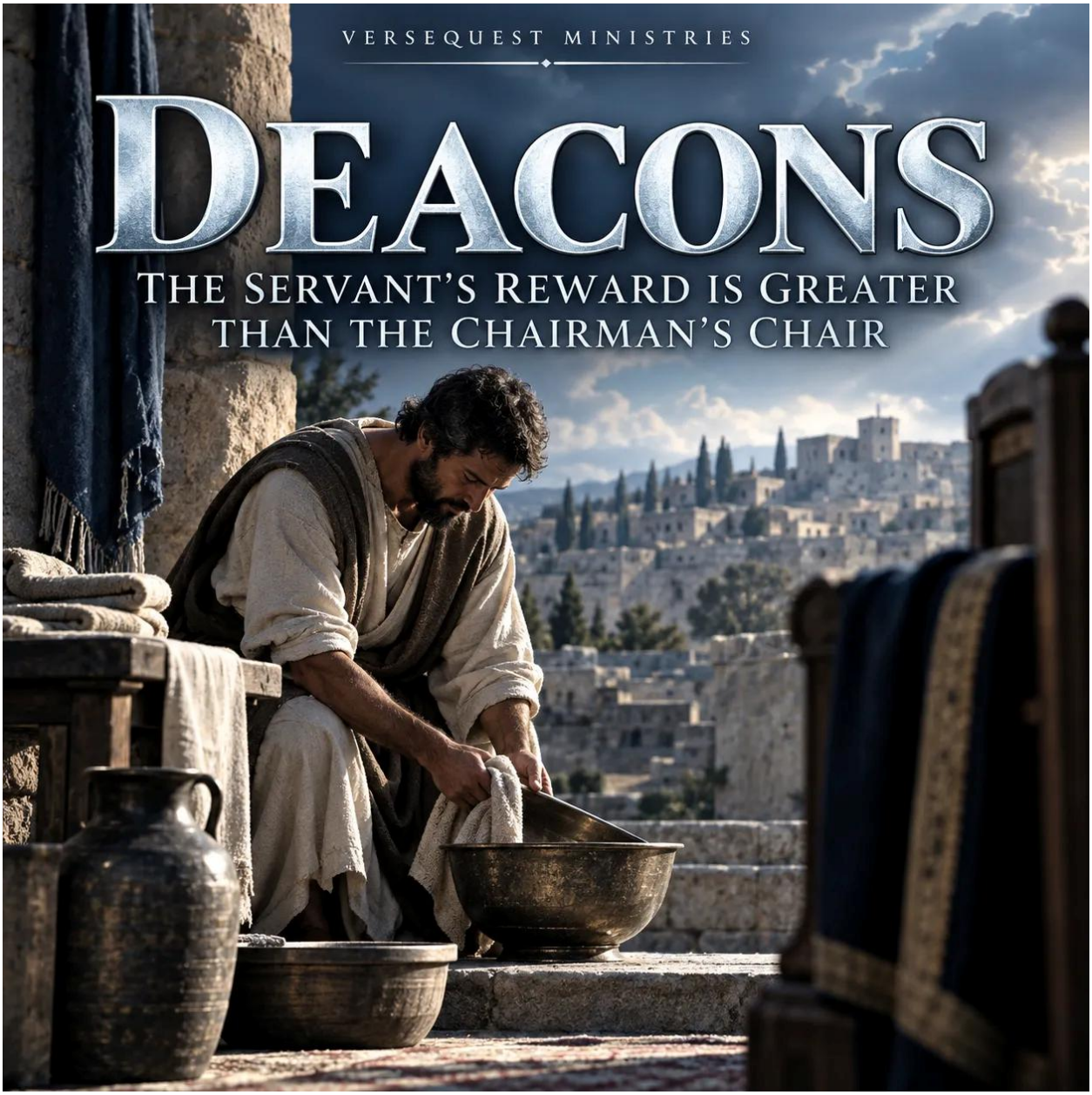
Deacons

Servant Standards and the Work Behind the Pulpit

Series 1-10

By Paul Tackett

VerseQuest Ministries




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DEACONS

Servant Standards and the Work Behind the Pulpit

A Ten-Part King James Bible Study Series

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Doctrinal and Educational Purpose

This publication is an independent, King James Bible-based study examining the biblical office of deacon, its qualifications, responsibilities, relationship to pastoral leadership, and the eternal significance of faithful Christian service.

The teaching follows a rightly divided, dispensational approach to Scripture, distinguishing the historical setting of the early church in Acts from the doctrinal instructions given to the body of Christ in the New Testament epistles.

This work is intended to encourage careful Bible study, sound doctrine, personal examination, and faithful service to the Lord Jesus Christ.

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"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

2 Timothy 2:15 — KJV

VERSEQUEST MINISTRIES

Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

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Deacons — Servant Standards and the Work Behind the Pulpit

There is something mighty peculiar about the way certain churches have managed to turn the office of a servant into the position of a ruler. Somewhere between the book of Acts and the modern church business meeting, the deacon went from a qualified man appointed to handle necessary responsibilities to a fellow who sometimes acts as though he owns the pulpit, supervises the pastor, controls the treasury, and possesses the final authority over everything from the church budget to the temperature of the sanctuary. Give a man a title, a chair at the conference table, and access to the checkbook, and before long he may start confusing himself with the board of directors of a Fortune 500 corporation. There is only one little problem with that arrangement: **the church belongs to Jesus Christ, and the New Testament never established the deacon's office as a private kingdom for religious politicians.** The Bible presents something considerably different. It presents qualified men, proven character, sound doctrine, honest service, and responsibilities carried out for the benefit of God's people. If the church intends to understand what a deacon actually is, it will have to put aside the organizational customs of men long enough to examine what God wrote.

The trouble with religious tradition is that it can become so familiar that nobody thinks to question whether it has any biblical foundation. A congregation may operate under a particular arrangement for fifty years, pass it down through several generations, and eventually treat that arrangement as though Paul personally delivered it to Timothy with a signature and a church constitution attached. But age does not establish authority, and repetition does not transform human preference into divine revelation. Second Timothy 2:15 commands believers to study, rightly dividing the word of truth. That instruction applies to the organization of the local church just as surely as it applies to salvation, prophecy, and the distinction between Israel and the body of Christ. We are not permitted to invent an office, rearrange its responsibilities, attach whatever authority we desire, and then announce that the Bible supports the arrangement simply because the titles sound religious. **A hundred years of church custom cannot improve upon one verse of Scripture.** The question throughout this series will not be what a denomination traditionally expects from its deacons, but what the King James Bible actually requires.

The historical background begins in Acts 6, where the early Jerusalem assembly encountered a problem involving neglected widows. The number of disciples was multiplying, and the Grecians complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily ministration. Here was a growing congregation facing a genuine practical difficulty. The twelve apostles did not dismiss the complaint, pretend everything was functioning perfectly, or abandon the ministry of the word to personally supervise

every distribution. They instructed the multitude to select seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom they could appoint over the necessary business. Acts 6:4 records their determination: "But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word." Notice the arrangement. Necessary practical responsibilities received attention without displacing the spiritual responsibilities already entrusted to the apostles. The seven were appointed to solve a problem, not establish a competing government. **The widows needed assistance, the apostles needed to continue preaching, and nobody needed a committee chairman behaving as though he had just inherited the kingdom of heaven.**

An important distinction must be maintained from the beginning. Acts 6 never explicitly calls those seven men deacons by the formal title later recognized in the New Testament. Their appointment provides a valuable historical example of qualified servants handling practical responsibilities, but the actual office of deacon is explicitly identified in Philippians 1:1 and regulated in 1 Timothy 3. The historical setting of Acts 6 involves the early Jerusalem assembly under the ministry of the twelve apostles, while the Pauline epistles provide direct instruction concerning local church order under the present dispensation of grace. Confusing those settings produces unnecessary doctrinal problems. Nevertheless, the underlying lesson is unmistakable. God values honest, spiritually qualified men who can be trusted to handle real responsibilities. The seven were not chosen merely because they possessed organizational talent or enjoyed the approval of influential families. Their character mattered before the appointment was made. That ought to disturb the comfortable assumption that almost anybody can qualify for church office provided he knows how to count money, attend meetings, and keep his opinions agreeable to the right people.

When Paul addresses the qualifications for deacons in 1 Timothy 3:8–13, he does not begin with business experience, political influence, financial contributions, or years of attendance. He requires that deacons be grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre, and that they hold the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. He then requires that they first be proved, that their family responsibilities meet the biblical standard, and that they use the office faithfully. These are not suggestions offered for consideration whenever convenient. They are qualifications established by the Holy Ghost. A man who tells the pastor one thing and the congregation another is not qualified merely because he owns a successful company. A man who manipulates financial decisions for personal advantage is not qualified merely because he contributes generously. A man who knows nothing about the doctrine he professes is not automatically qualified because he can maintain the building. **God did not ask Timothy to find the most**

successful men in town and give them religious badges. He required spiritually qualified servants whose conduct could withstand examination.

One of the most neglected instructions appears in 1 Timothy 3:10: "And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless." That little word *first* dismantles the modern habit of appointing a man and hoping the responsibility will eventually straighten him out. The church is not commanded to take an immature, unreliable, quarrelsome individual, place him in an important position, and pray that the title produces the character he should have demonstrated before receiving it. Faithfulness is supposed to be established through observation. Can the man be trusted with an ordinary assignment? Does he keep his word? Does he handle criticism without organizing a rebellion? Can he continue serving when somebody else receives recognition? Does he speak honestly when the truth costs him something? Does he possess enough humility to admit when he is wrong? The Bible does not require sinless perfection, but it does require proven character. **A church office cannot manufacture integrity any more than putting a crown on a mule can turn it into a king.** If the congregation ignores disqualifying conduct before the appointment, it should not act astonished when that same conduct appears afterward with an official title attached.

The qualifications also follow a man home. Paul requires deacons to be "the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well" (1 Timothy 3:12). Verse 11 addresses the character of their wives, requiring gravity, freedom from slander, sobriety, and faithfulness. The home is not an irrelevant private department that the congregation must pretend does not exist when evaluating a candidate. A man who desires responsibility in church affairs should demonstrate that he understands responsibility toward those already entrusted to his care. Ephesians 5:25 commands husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church, while Ephesians 6:4 instructs fathers to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. These responsibilities cannot be abandoned in exchange for public religious importance. A flawless family is not required, and difficult questions concerning marital history and household circumstances must be handled according to what Scripture actually establishes. But the basic principle remains firm. **A man should not be congratulated for helping govern church business while neglecting the obligations waiting for him at his own front door.** Christianity was never intended to become a public performance concealing private disobedience.

Neither may doctrine be treated as somebody else's responsibility. First Timothy 3:9 requires deacons to hold "the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience." That requirement places genuine biblical understanding alongside personal integrity. A deacon is not necessarily called to fulfill the same teaching responsibilities as a bishop, who must be apt

to teach according to 1 Timothy 3:2. But the distinction between offices does not provide permission for spiritual ignorance. A man serving in the church should understand the gospel of salvation by grace through faith, the authority of Scripture, and the necessity of rightly dividing the word of truth. He should recognize that Israel's national covenant promises cannot simply be reassigned to the church, that salvation is not purchased by human works, and that sound doctrine is more important than fashionable religious opinions. He does not need to possess exhaustive knowledge of every difficult passage, but he must demonstrate genuine fidelity to the faith he professes. **The man entrusted with the offering ought to know more about the Bible than the location of the verse announcing that the Lord loves a cheerful giver.** Administrative competence is useful; doctrinal stability is indispensable.

Money deserves particular attention because it has a remarkable ability to reveal the motives of men who appear otherwise respectable. Paul specifically warns that deacons must not be greedy of filthy lucre. The church treasury is not a private business account, a family inheritance, or a political weapon for controlling the preacher. A man handling church resources must demonstrate honesty, impartiality, and a willingness to operate under reasonable accountability. Second Corinthians 8:20–21 records Paul's concern to administer contributions honorably in the sight of the Lord and of men. That principle should govern financial arrangements wherever believers are entrusted with funds. Yet financial influence can become corrupted even when nobody openly steals money. A wealthy donor may expect special treatment, a treasurer may attempt to dictate doctrine through control of expenditures, or influential families may treat church property as though their ancestors left it to them in a will. None of that constitutes biblical stewardship. **A dishonest dollar does not become holy because somebody dropped it into an offering plate, and a greedy man does not become righteous because the checkbook carries the church's name.**

Another recurring problem concerns the relationship between deacons and pastoral leadership. Philippians 1:1 identifies bishops and deacons as distinct groups, while Acts 20, Titus 1, and 1 Peter 5 connect elders with spiritual oversight and the responsibility of feeding God's flock. The deacon's office does not establish him as a superior governing authority over the pastor. At the same time, rejecting an unauthorized deacon dictatorship does not establish the pastor as an untouchable religious monarch. First Peter 5:3 warns shepherds against being lords over God's heritage, and First Timothy 5:19–20 supplies instructions concerning accusations and the correction of elders. Biblical authority is never a license for corruption, intimidation, or concealment of wrongdoing. The pastor must remain accountable to Scripture, and the deacons must serve without attempting to become an alternative pulpit government. **The church does not need a pastor who thinks**

he is a pope or deacons who think they are a board of directors. It needs men who understand their responsibilities and remember that Jesus Christ already occupies the position of Head.

The practical work of service must not disappear beneath discussions about church government. Galatians 6:2 commands believers to bear one another's burdens, Romans 12:13 speaks of distributing to the necessity of saints, and First Peter 4:10 instructs believers to minister their gifts as good stewards of God's grace. These passages address Christian conduct more broadly and should not be misrepresented as an exclusive checklist of formal deacon duties. Nevertheless, they reveal the spirit that ought to characterize faithful servants. There are widows who need attention, struggling families who need legitimate assistance, ordinary responsibilities that require dependable workers, and difficulties that should be handled without becoming public gossip. A deacon may be assigned financial administration, practical coordination, or other legitimate work according to the congregation's circumstances. Whatever the assignment, he should carry it faithfully instead of spending his time arguing about his position. **Some men want to be called servants provided nobody expects them to serve. They will chair a committee to discuss moving a table, but somehow the table never moves until somebody without a title gets tired of waiting.** The Lord's work requires more than organizational decoration.

Stephen and Philip provide a magnificent reminder that practical responsibilities do not exhaust a man's spiritual usefulness. Both were among the seven men selected in Acts 6. Stephen, full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, stood before hostile religious authorities and delivered an extraordinary biblical indictment of Israel's rebellion. His testimony ended in martyrdom, but not in surrender. Philip went into Samaria preaching Christ and later explained Isaiah 53 to the Ethiopian eunuch, beginning at the same Scripture and preaching unto him Jesus. Acts 21:8 explicitly identifies Philip as "the evangelist, which was one of the seven." Their ministries occurred during the extraordinary apostolic period, and the signs and circumstances recorded there must not be turned into universal requirements for every deacon today. Yet their courage and biblical understanding expose the poverty of measuring a man's usefulness merely by his designated administrative position. **Stephen did not need an impressive title to stand upon the truth, and Philip did not require a committee resolution before opening the Scriptures and preaching Christ.** God can use a faithful servant in ways far more substantial than a church bulletin can describe.

Finally, this series must bring the matter to the judgment seat of Christ, because that is where every temporary distinction of earthly importance will be placed beneath divine examination. First Timothy 3:13 promises that those who use the office of a deacon well

purchase to themselves "a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus." That promise does not establish an automatic promotion into pastoral office, an academic qualification, or a guaranteed heavenly rank defined by human imagination. It identifies a genuine spiritual benefit connected with faithful service. First Corinthians 3:11–15 teaches that believers' works will be tried, while Second Corinthians 5:10 declares that we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. This is not a second opportunity to determine whether the saved man deserves eternal life. Salvation rests entirely upon Jesus Christ and His finished work, while the believer's labor remains accountable to the Lord. A deacon may receive tremendous public recognition and still have little of lasting value to show for his efforts. Another may work faithfully in obscurity and possess service that endures divine examination. **The Lord will not be impressed by a man's ability to win church elections if the work performed afterward cannot survive the fire.**

That is why the ten studies in this collection will examine far more than the mechanics of selecting officers or conducting business meetings. We will begin with the seven men appointed in Jerusalem, examine the character and doctrinal qualifications established by Paul, consider the necessity of testing candidates, investigate household responsibilities, expose the corruption of financial and political power, distinguish pastoral oversight from practical service, and examine the extraordinary ministries of Stephen and Philip. Throughout, the King James Bible will remain the authority, and the distinction between the historical setting of Acts and the explicit instructions of the Pauline epistles will remain intact. We will not invent qualifications God never gave, excuse conduct He condemned, or treat denominational customs as though they descended from heaven engraved upon stone. The purpose is to understand what Scripture requires and why those requirements matter. A congregation that neglects biblical standards when appointing its servants should not be surprised when religious ambition eventually produces problems that faithful service was supposed to prevent.

In the end, the entire subject comes down to a question considerably larger than who occupies a chair at the church business meeting. Who is being served? If the answer is a man's pride, his reputation, his financial interests, or his appetite for authority, then the office has already been corrupted in its purpose. If the answer is the Lord Jesus Christ, demonstrated through obedience to His word and faithful attention to entrusted responsibilities, then the servant has understood something worth carrying into eternity. Matthew 20:28 records the Lord's own words concerning His earthly ministry: "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." His atoning sacrifice is unique and cannot be reproduced by human service, but His humility exposes the folly of religious ambition. The church needs qualified men who consider it an honor to serve rather than a privilege to rule. It needs faithful husbands,

responsible fathers, honest stewards, sound Bible believers, and dependable workers whose conduct agrees with their profession. **The office of deacon was never intended to turn an ordinary man into somebody important. It was intended to entrust important responsibilities to a man already proved faithful. The chairman's chair will eventually be empty, the church meetings will end, and the earthly titles will pass away. But the Lord Jesus Christ will still be on the throne, and every servant will answer to Him. Let the men holding the office remember who owns the church, who established the qualifications, and whose approval will matter when every religious nameplate has finally been taken down.**

1 of 10 — Deacons — When Seven Servants Solved What Seven Committees Would Have Complicated

Key Passage: Acts 6:3–4

“Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.”

There is something wonderfully revealing about the way the Holy Ghost introduces the problem in Acts 6. The church at Jerusalem was growing, disciples were multiplying, and the word of God was producing results that the religious establishment could neither manufacture nor suppress. Yet right in the middle of that growth, Scripture records a complaint. Acts 6:1 says, “there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration.” Notice that the Bible does not hide the difficulty to protect the reputation of the congregation. The widows were being neglected, the complaint was real, and something needed to be done. There was no need to invent a theological explanation for empty stomachs or pretend that tremendous preaching automatically guaranteed proper administration. A congregation can be doctrinally active and practically negligent at the same time. The presence of spiritual blessings does not excuse the absence of ordinary faithfulness.

The trouble arose among believers who were connected to the same Jerusalem assembly but came from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The Grecians were Greek-speaking Jews, while the Hebrews belonged to the Hebrew-speaking Jewish community. Acts 6 is not describing Gentile believers demanding representation in a fully developed Pauline local church. That distinction matters because the historical setting comes before the application. These were the early days following Pentecost, with the twelve apostles

exercising their particular authority among the believers at Jerusalem. Yet the practical problem is immediately recognizable in any generation. People were being overlooked, needs were going unmet, and dissatisfaction was spreading. The devil does not always need a false prophet to trouble a congregation. Sometimes an unattended responsibility provides enough material for confusion to grow. And when a church becomes more interested in defending its reputation than correcting a legitimate problem, it has exchanged biblical honesty for religious public relations.

What followed was not the establishment of a little government composed of seven miniature authorities who could supervise the apostles, control the preaching, and argue over the furniture. The twelve identified the problem, stated their responsibility, instructed the multitude to select qualified men, and arranged for the neglected work to receive proper attention. The result was not merely improved administration. Acts 6:7 declares, "And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly." That is a remarkable outcome for a disagreement involving the daily distribution of assistance. Seven men were appointed over a necessary business, the apostles continued in their spiritual responsibilities, and the work advanced. The lesson is not that seven is a magic number or that every church needs seven officeholders. The lesson is that responsible service strengthens the ministry instead of competing with it. God never intended a church office to become a throne for a man who was unwilling to carry a burden.

1. The Neglected Widows and the Problem Nobody Could Preach Away

Acts 6:1 places the difficulty directly before us: the Grecian widows were neglected in the daily ministration. The word "daily" is worth noticing because this was not an occasional ceremonial distribution performed when somebody remembered to organize one. There was an ongoing responsibility involving people who depended upon assistance, and the arrangement was failing to serve some of them properly. Scripture does not specify whether the neglect was intentional, the result of poor organization, or some combination of human weaknesses. There is no need to manufacture motives when the Holy Ghost has already identified the problem. The widows were neglected. That was sufficient reason to act. A church does not have to prove that somebody committed deliberate wickedness before correcting an obvious failure. Sometimes men become so determined to establish who deserves the blame that they forget the person who needs the bread. The neglected widow is not helped by a magnificent explanation of why nobody is responsible.

The larger context makes the situation particularly instructive. Acts 4:34–35 records that possessions were sold and distributions were made "unto every man according as he had need." Acts 5 then records the judgment upon Ananias and Sapphira, whose deception

demonstrated that religious appearances could conceal dishonesty. By Acts 6, the growing community faced a different administrative difficulty involving the distribution of assistance. These passages belong to the early Jerusalem setting and must not be turned into a command requiring every local church today to surrender all private property to a common treasury. Acts 5:4 makes plain that the property and its proceeds had remained under the owner's authority before the gift. Nevertheless, the underlying requirement of honesty and faithful stewardship is unmistakable. If a congregation voluntarily assumes responsibility for meeting certain needs, it must administer that responsibility honorably. Money dedicated to assisting the needy is not an ornamental feature of the church budget. It represents real needs that should not disappear beneath organizational confusion.

There is a practical rebuke here for congregations that mistake activity for faithfulness. A church may have a crowded preaching schedule, excellent attendance, busy workers, and an impressive financial report while somebody quietly suffers because nobody followed through on an ordinary responsibility. James 1:27 speaks of visiting “the fatherless and widows in their affliction,” and 1 Timothy 5 later provides specific instructions concerning widows and congregational responsibility. Those passages must be handled in their respective settings, but neither permits us to dismiss genuine needs as unspiritual distractions. On the other hand, recognizing material needs does not require transforming the church into a social institution that forgets the gospel. The Jerusalem apostles understood both sides. They would not abandon the ministry of the word, and they would not allow the widows to remain neglected. Biblical wisdom refuses the false choice between feeding those who need help and preaching the truth to those who need salvation.

2. The Twelve Refused to Abandon the Word for Administrative Confusion

Acts 6:2 records a statement that deserves careful attention: “It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.” The twelve were not declaring themselves too dignified to perform ordinary labor. They were recognizing that God had entrusted them with responsibilities that could not be neglected without damaging the ministry. Their calling involved prayer, the testimony of Jesus Christ, and the proclamation of God's word during a foundational period in the history of the assembly. When the number of disciples multiplied, the necessary practical work increased as well. But an increase in legitimate responsibilities did not justify abandoning the central spiritual assignment. There is a difference between being willing to serve and being willing to neglect what God has already required. A man can stay extremely busy doing something useful while failing to perform the work he was actually appointed to accomplish. Busyness is no substitute for obedience, and a packed schedule is not proof of faithfulness.

Notice the apostles' language. They did not say serving tables was beneath them. They said leaving the word of God to serve tables was unreasonable. That difference destroys the foolish idea that visible ministry automatically possesses greater personal dignity than practical assistance. The question was not whose work sounded more impressive in a religious announcement. The question was whether the proper responsibilities were being handled by properly qualified people. A preacher can spend so much time dealing with ordinary administrative matters that his preparation becomes an afterthought. Before long, he is expected to settle every maintenance dispute, answer every complaint, approve every purchase, and somehow deliver serious biblical exposition after studying whatever time remains. Then the congregation wonders why the preaching has become shallow. A church that demands everything from its preacher except sustained attention to Scripture should not be surprised when it receives everything except sustained attention to Scripture.

Acts 6:4 gives the positive statement: “But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.” The apostles identified two continuing priorities, not an impressive religious hobby to be performed whenever administrative business slowed down. Prayer and the word were essential to their responsibility. The present-day pastor is not one of the twelve apostles, and his office must be established from the New Testament instructions governing pastors, bishops, and elders rather than by claiming apostolic authority. Nevertheless, the principle remains powerful. In Acts 20:28, the elders are instructed to feed the church of God, and 2 Timothy 4:2 commands, “Preach the word.” A congregation should recognize that serious biblical instruction requires labor, study, prayer, and faithful attention. The pastor is not excused from serving others, but neither should every ordinary responsibility be placed upon him until the preaching ministry survives on scraps of time. The man charged with feeding the flock must have room to prepare the food.

3. Seven Men of Character, Not Seven Men Who Wanted a Title

The qualifications in Acts 6:3 are especially revealing: “seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom.” The apostles did not instruct the multitude to select the most influential members, the loudest complainers, the most generous contributors, or those who had spent the most years waiting for recognition. They required men whose reputations and spiritual condition suited the responsibilities they would receive. “Honest report” concerns the testimony of their lives. “Full of the Holy Ghost” identifies a spiritual qualification that cannot be replaced by managerial experience. “Wisdom” addresses the judgment necessary to handle real problems among real people. These requirements were established before the appointment. A man who cannot be trusted without an office is not magically transformed into a trustworthy servant when somebody hands him one. Church

titles do not manufacture character any more than putting a Bible under a man's arm makes him understand what is written inside it.

Consider the nature of the business. These men would be involved in a sensitive problem affecting widows from different backgrounds. They needed enough honesty to treat people fairly, enough wisdom to recognize and address the difficulty, and enough spiritual maturity to avoid making the situation worse. A doubletongued troublemaker could have turned one legitimate complaint into a permanent division. A greedy man could have found opportunities to benefit himself. A proud man could have treated assistance as a means of purchasing influence over vulnerable people. The apostles therefore began with character rather than convenience. Proverbs 11:3 says, “The integrity of the upright shall guide them: but the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them.” The principle is just as sound when applied to practical church service. The fellow who enjoys being important but resents being accountable is not a promising candidate for responsibility. His greatest qualification may be his willingness to campaign for himself, which is hardly the same thing as being full of wisdom.

Acts 6:5 records the selection of Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, “a proselyte of Antioch.” The congregation chose men to address the problem, and the apostles subsequently prayed and laid their hands upon them. Stephen is specifically described as “a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost,” reinforcing the spiritual character expected of those selected. The passage does not provide individual biographies of all seven men, and we should resist inventing accomplishments, motivations, or personalities that Scripture has not supplied. What matters is that the qualification preceded the appointment. The selection was not a ceremony for recognizing religious celebrities. It was the deliberate assignment of necessary work to trustworthy men. There is an old-fashioned common sense here that some congregations manage to bury beneath enough procedure to qualify as an archaeological discovery. Find men who meet the biblical requirements, entrust them with actual responsibilities, and expect them to serve faithfully. The purpose of appointing servants is not to create an organization that needs additional servants merely to manage its own organization.

4. The Multitude Selected, the Apostles Appointed, and Nobody Needed a Religious Throne

Acts 6:3 contains two expressions that must be kept together: “look ye out among you seven men” and “whom we may appoint over this business.” The apostles instructed the multitude to identify qualified men, while retaining responsibility for the appointment. Verse 5 says, “And the saying pleased the whole multitude,” and verse 6 records that the selected men were set before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands upon them.

Here we find cooperation rather than confusion. The congregation was not treated as irrelevant, and the apostles did not surrender their own assigned responsibilities. The people participated in identifying men whose reputations they could recognize, while the apostles established the arrangement for the work. That is not the same thing as proving every detail of a modern church election procedure. Scripture describes what happened in Jerusalem; it does not provide a denominational constitution complete with parliamentary motions, secret ballots, and a committee to nominate the committee.

The difference between participation and domination deserves special attention. The multitude's involvement did not turn every member into an apostle, nor did the appointment elevate the seven men into rulers over the twelve. Authority and service were functioning according to their respective responsibilities. That distinction corrects the notion that a deacon's office must operate as a superior governing board over pastoral leadership. The New Testament nowhere commands congregations to establish deacons as a collection of miniature bishops whose principal responsibility is controlling the preacher. Yet that mistaken arrangement has become familiar enough in some places that men assume it must be biblical because the church has practiced it for decades. Longevity does not turn tradition into revelation. A crooked arrangement does not become straight merely because several generations have become accustomed to walking around it. The proper question remains whether the arrangement agrees with the responsibilities and qualifications Scripture actually establishes.

At the same time, Acts 6 must never be twisted into permission for unaccountable leadership. The apostles were appointed witnesses of the risen Christ, occupying a unique position that modern pastors do not inherit. Their example cannot be used to place a preacher beyond correction or to silence every legitimate congregational concern. First Peter 5:3 warns spiritual leaders against being “lords over God's heritage,” and Hebrews 13:17 addresses the responsibility of believers toward those who watch for their souls. Biblical responsibility exists on both sides. Proper leadership does not mean dictatorship, and proper cooperation does not mean disorder. A church needs enough spiritual maturity to recognize that a legitimate complaint is not automatically rebellion, while an ambitious power struggle is not automatically accountability. The twelve heard the grievance and corrected the problem. They did not protect their prestige by pretending the widows were imagining their hunger. True leadership addresses necessary problems without converting every difficulty into a contest over who holds the biggest religious chair.

5. Acts 6 Gives the Pattern, but It Does Not Call the Seven Men Deacons

Here is where careful Bible study becomes indispensable. Many Christians have heard the seven men of Acts 6 described as the first deacons, and the connection is understandable

because their appointed service resembles responsibilities associated with deacons. Nevertheless, Acts 6 never explicitly calls Stephen, Philip, or the other five men deacons. The passage describes seven men selected and appointed over a particular business in the Jerusalem assembly. It does not present a formal declaration establishing the office later identified in Philippians 1:1 and regulated in 1 Timothy 3. The distinction may seem small to someone content with familiar religious terminology, but a Bible believer ought to care whether a statement comes directly from Scripture or from a conclusion drawn from Scripture. An interpretation may be reasonable without becoming an actual quotation from God. The safest habit is to say everything the Bible says and refuse to pretend it says the things we have merely become accustomed to hearing.

The historical setting reinforces that caution. Acts 6 occurs during the early Jerusalem period, when the twelve were ministering among a predominantly Jewish body of disciples and the progressive revelation concerning the present dispensation had not yet unfolded through Paul's ministry. The later epistles give explicit instructions concerning recognized offices in local churches. These settings are related, but they are not identical. A dispensational Bible student does not erase their distinctions simply because a familiar church practice would be easier to defend without them. Acts records a developing history, including events that must be understood according to their particular audiences and circumstances. The epistles provide direct instruction concerning the order and conduct of churches under the present dispensation. Second Timothy 2:15 commands the workman to be “rightly dividing the word of truth.” That instruction applies to church organization just as surely as it applies to salvation, prophecy, and the distinction between Israel and the church.

This distinction also prevents another error: assuming that everything done by the seven men defines the formal duties of every deacon throughout the Church Age. Stephen preached with tremendous power, and Philip carried the message of Christ into Samaria and preached to the Ethiopian eunuch. Acts 21:8 later calls Philip “the evangelist, which was one of the seven.” Their spiritual usefulness was not confined to administrative service. Yet their later ministries do not establish an automatic requirement that every deacon possess the calling or responsibilities of an evangelist. Nor does Acts 6 demonstrate that deacons must always number seven, serve only widows, or be appointed with precisely the same procedures followed by the twelve. We must distinguish an example from a universal command. The Bible provides the historical record, and the reader must handle it honestly. There is no advantage in winning a church argument by making a verse say more than God put into it. A conclusion built on an imaginary sentence will eventually collapse when somebody opens the Bible and discovers that the sentence is missing.

6. Philippians and Timothy Establish an Office With Actual Standards

Philippians 1:1 identifies the recipients of Paul's letter as “all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons.” There we have explicit recognition of two distinguishable categories of church officers alongside the saints. Paul does not present the bishops and deacons as interchangeable titles for one responsibility. Their distinction becomes clearer in 1 Timothy 3, where the qualifications of a bishop are presented first, followed by those of deacons. First Timothy 3:1 speaks of the office of a bishop, and verse 8 begins, “Likewise must the deacons be grave.” These are not titles invented by a church convention to provide additional places of honor. They are identified in the apostolic instructions concerning congregational life. A biblical office carries biblical requirements, and those requirements cannot be discarded because somebody dislikes the inconvenience of testing candidates. The church has no authority to improve upon God's arrangement by lowering His qualifications until almost anybody can qualify.

The requirements for deacons are substantial. First Timothy 3:8–9 says they must be “grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.” Verse 10 adds, “And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless.” The passage continues with instructions concerning their wives, marriages, children, and households. Notice how thoroughly these qualifications concern character, doctrine, and proven faithfulness. Paul does not provide a list of fundraising talents, business accomplishments, or committee-management skills. Administrative ability can be useful, but it cannot compensate for the absence of spiritual qualifications. The fellow who handles money brilliantly while lying habitually has failed a biblical test before the church ever opens its financial records. And the man who knows how to win an argument but cannot hold the faith in a pure conscience is not improved by receiving a position from which to conduct more arguments.

The distinction between bishops and deacons also corrects the assumption that every office must carry identical responsibilities. First Timothy 3:2 requires a bishop to be “apt to teach,” while the deacon's stated qualifications emphasize holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience without imposing that same phrase upon his office. This does not authorize ignorance among deacons. It means we must respect the wording of the passage. A deacon must possess doctrinal substance, spiritual integrity, and proven character without pretending his office automatically carries the same teaching and oversight responsibilities as a bishop. First Timothy 3:13 promises that those who use the office well purchase to themselves “a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.” Service is therefore a serious spiritual responsibility, not a decorative title.

The church that fills the office with unqualified men merely to satisfy a custom has exchanged God's standards for religious convenience, and convenience makes a miserable substitute for obedience.

7. The Word Increased Because Necessary Work Was Not Neglected

Acts 6:6 records the final steps in the appointment: “Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.” Prayer accompanied the arrangement, demonstrating that practical responsibility was not regarded as a merely secular matter detached from spiritual concern. These men were assigned to necessary work among God's people, and their service mattered. Immediately afterward, verse 7 reports that the word of God increased and the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem. We should not turn that sequence into a mechanical promise that every congregation appointing servants will automatically experience numerical growth. The passage reports what happened in that particular historical setting. Nevertheless, the connection is instructive. The apostles attended to their appointed ministry, legitimate material needs received attention, and the work continued without allowing an administrative problem to consume the entire congregation. Faithfulness in ordinary matters can remove obstacles that unnecessarily hinder larger responsibilities.

There is also a warning against treating the appointment itself as the great achievement. Acts does not conclude by congratulating the seven men for acquiring impressive titles or by describing their new authority over the congregation. The record returns immediately to the progress of the word of God. That is where the emphasis belongs. The success of faithful servants is measured by whether the responsibilities entrusted to them are properly fulfilled, not by how prominently their names appear in a bulletin. A church can spend months discussing organizational arrangements and accomplish very little through them. It can establish more committees than it has functioning ministries and still wonder why ordinary needs remain unattended. Seven trustworthy men addressing one real problem may accomplish more than a room filled with officers endlessly considering whether somebody should eventually do something. The purpose of biblical organization is to assist the work, not to become a permanent substitute for the work.

The final detail of Acts 6:7 is especially striking: “and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.” The testimony was advancing in Jerusalem, even among men connected with the religious system that had opposed the Lord Jesus Christ. That does not mean the seven men caused every conversion or that their service independently produced the spiritual results. God was working through the testimony of His word during a particular period of redemptive history. What the passage does show is that the legitimate problem was addressed without surrendering the central ministry. The church did not have

to choose between spiritual proclamation and practical integrity. Both responsibilities received attention. That balance ought to rebuke any congregation that treats necessary service as beneath spiritual men or treats preaching as an inconvenience to administrative business. A faithful servant helps the work move forward without insisting that the whole congregation stop and admire the fact that he is helping. The best service often leaves the spotlight where it belongs: upon the Lord Jesus Christ and His word.

Conclusion

The account of Acts 6 provides a powerful lesson precisely because it begins with an ordinary problem rather than an impressive religious ceremony. Widows were neglected. Complaints arose. The apostles recognized the difficulty and arranged for qualified men to address it while they continued in prayer and the ministry of the word. Nothing in the passage requires us to invent a governing board over the apostles, establish seven as the permanent number of deacons, or pretend that the formal title appears where Scripture never uses it. Yet everything in the passage teaches the seriousness of honest character, wise administration, spiritual qualification, and faithful service. When the later epistles explicitly identify deacons and establish their qualifications, we have the doctrinal instruction necessary to understand the recognized office in local churches. The Bible is not confused about these matters. Confusion enters when men confuse an office with a personal distinction, mistake administration for dominion, or insist that their religious traditions must have been hiding somewhere between the verses.

A local church needs spiritual leadership devoted to the responsibilities God has assigned, and it needs dependable servants who will assist in meeting legitimate needs without creating unnecessary turmoil. These responsibilities should complement rather than consume one another. There is nothing biblical about a preacher who considers ordinary people beneath his attention, and there is nothing biblical about a deacon who considers the pastor an employee to be managed through financial pressure and political maneuvering. The Lord did not establish church offices to provide ambitious men with a respectable substitute for worldly authority. He requires faithfulness, integrity, humility, and obedience to His word. First Corinthians 4:2 declares, “Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.” That principle reaches far beyond a particular office. The man trusted with spiritual oversight must be faithful. The man trusted with practical service must be faithful. Neither can purchase divine approval with a title, a reputation, or a carefully maintained appearance of importance.

The great lesson of Acts 6 is not that seven men became somebody important. It is that seven qualified men were entrusted with necessary work, the apostles remained faithful to their responsibilities, and the word of God continued to advance. That is the kind of

outcome a church ought to desire. Let the qualifications be biblical, the responsibilities be clear, the administration be honest, and the servants be willing to serve. Let no man imagine that occupying an office makes him superior to the people he is supposed to help. The judgment seat of Christ will not be impressed by the size of a man's chair, the number of meetings he controlled, or the influence he exercised over a congregation. The question will concern faithfulness to the Lord who entrusted him with responsibility. A church does not become stronger by multiplying titles. It becomes stronger when its members fulfill the responsibilities God has placed before them. The seven men of Acts 6 were appointed over a business that needed attention, not promoted into a religious aristocracy. There is a world of difference between taking care of the Lord's work and attempting to take possession of it.

2 of 10 — Deacons — A Church Badge Cannot Make a Crooked Man Straight

Key Passage: 1 Timothy 3:8–10

“Likewise must the deacons be grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless.”

There is something almost comical about the way certain churches select men for spiritual responsibility. A fellow can own three businesses, contribute generously to the building fund, occupy the same pew for forty years, and know precisely which switch operates the fellowship hall lights, and somebody will announce that he would make an excellent deacon. Whether he knows his Bible, controls his tongue, handles temptation, tells the truth, or walks with God apparently belongs somewhere near the bottom of the qualifications. After all, he is successful, dependable with money, and has been around long enough to recognize every crack in the parking lot. But when the apostle Paul instructed Timothy concerning deacons, he did not begin with financial accomplishments, social connections, or years of attendance. He began with character. That ought to settle something before the nominations begin. A church badge cannot make a crooked man straight, and a religious title cannot sanctify a character that refuses the authority of Scripture.

First Timothy 3 is not a collection of suggestions from a denominational handbook. Paul is writing under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost concerning the conduct and order of the local church. Verse 15 explains the larger purpose: “that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the

pillar and ground of the truth." The chapter first establishes qualifications for bishops and then turns to deacons, distinguishing responsibilities without lowering the necessity of spiritual integrity. These are instructions concerning recognized offices among believers in the present dispensation, not regulations borrowed from Israel's Levitical priesthood or requirements for entering the kingdom under the law of Moses. Salvation remains entirely by grace through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. Ephesians 2:8–9 settles that. But being saved and being qualified for a particular church office are two different matters. A man may belong to Christ eternally and still be unfit for an office requiring demonstrated faithfulness.

That distinction has been lost in enough congregations to produce a remarkable collection of religious officeholders who seem better acquainted with Robert's Rules of Order than the orders of the apostle Paul. The problem is not that every deacon who fails is necessarily unsaved. The problem is that churches sometimes treat an office as a reward for popularity rather than a responsibility governed by Scripture. Paul does not say a deacon ought to become grave after his appointment, learn honesty while handling money, and develop doctrinal stability once somebody gives him a nameplate. He says these things must already characterize the man. The qualifications are not decorations placed around an office to make it appear spiritual. They are requirements for occupying it. God is not searching for a successful businessman who can occasionally act religious. He requires a proven servant whose life demonstrates that the Bible has authority over him before he is entrusted with additional responsibility among God's people.

1. Grave Means Serious About God, Not Sour About Everybody Else

The first qualification in 1 Timothy 3:8 is that deacons must be "grave." That word immediately eliminates the careless fellow who treats spiritual responsibilities as an opportunity for entertainment, self-promotion, or personal advantage. Gravity concerns seriousness, dignity, and proper regard for matters that deserve respect. A deacon handles responsibilities involving God's people, the testimony of the congregation, and potentially sensitive circumstances in the lives of other believers. He cannot approach those matters with the judgment of a schoolboy who thinks every private conversation is material for another joke. Yet gravity does not mean a man must walk around looking as though he swallowed a lemon and lost his last friend. Biblical seriousness is not perpetual misery. A Christian can possess joy, laugh appropriately, and enjoy fellowship without making sacred responsibilities cheap. The issue is whether he understands the weight of what has been entrusted to him.

Paul uses related language in 1 Timothy 3:4 concerning the bishop's household, where he speaks of having children in subjection "with all gravity." Titus 2:2 likewise instructs aged

men to be “sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience.” The repeated emphasis shows that gravity belongs to mature Christian character, not merely to a particular administrative assignment. A grave man knows when to speak, when to listen, when to remain silent, and when a matter requires careful attention rather than an amusing remark. He does not turn another believer's hardship into conversation material or treat every church disagreement as an opportunity to display his superior intelligence. Proverbs 17:27 declares, “He that hath knowledge spareth his words: and a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit.” A man who cannot control his mouth while discussing ordinary matters will hardly become trustworthy because the conversation takes place behind a church office door.

There is also a counterfeit gravity that deserves exposure. Some men mistake a gloomy personality, an intimidating manner, or a permanently disapproving expression for spiritual maturity. They imagine that making everybody uncomfortable proves they possess authority. But a long face is not listed among the qualifications for deacons, and looking miserable during the hymns does not demonstrate that a man is filled with wisdom. First Thessalonians 5:16 commands, “Rejoice evermore.” Seriousness and Christian joy are not enemies. The qualified servant respects the office without worshipping it, understands responsibility without advertising his importance, and maintains dignity without demanding ceremonial treatment. He can be approachable without becoming careless and firm without becoming arrogant. The church does not need a deacon who acts like a funeral director inspecting the congregation for signs of unauthorized happiness. It needs a man whose conduct demonstrates that he takes God's word, God's people, and his own accountability seriously.

2. A Doubletongued Deacon Can Start a Fire in Two Directions

Paul's next requirement is unmistakable: deacons must not be “doubletongued.” Here is a qualification that could save many churches years of unnecessary trouble if somebody would enforce it before the election instead of discussing it after the damage. A doubletongued man does not speak consistently or honestly. He tells one person what that person wants to hear and tells somebody else something entirely different. He can agree enthusiastically with the pastor on Monday, encourage the complainers on Tuesday, and declare on Wednesday that he has been misunderstood by everybody involved. His greatest skill is not communication but contradiction carefully arranged to preserve his own advantage. Proverbs 12:22 says, “Lying lips are abomination to the LORD: but they that deal truly are his delight.” The Holy Ghost did not add an exception for men who happen to occupy a church office or claim that their dishonesty serves the congregation's best interests.

Consider the damage a doubletongued deacon can accomplish. A pastor explains a difficult decision, and the deacon expresses complete agreement. Later, someone complains, and the same man quietly suggests that he has always had serious concerns. Another member approaches him, and he carefully rearranges his words to avoid being identified with either position. Before long, nobody knows what he actually believes, but everybody has heard something different from him. That is not wisdom, diplomacy, or keeping the peace. It is dishonest speech dressed in religious clothing. James 3:5 warns that “the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things,” and verse 6 describes the tongue as a fire. A man skilled at spreading contradictory accounts does not need control of the church treasury to create trouble. Give him access to private conversations and a few willing listeners, and he can accomplish enough confusion to keep the congregation occupied for months.

The biblical alternative is plain speech governed by truth and charity. Ephesians 4:25 commands believers to put away lying and speak truth with their neighbours, “for we are members one of another.” Verse 29 requires speech that ministers grace to the hearers, while verse 31 condemns bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, evil speaking, and malice. These instructions apply to the entire body of Christ, but a deacon must demonstrate particular faithfulness because his responsibilities may place him in the middle of sensitive matters. He must be capable of disagreeing respectfully without carrying contradictory stories from one room to another. He must know the difference between protecting legitimate confidences and concealing dishonesty. A trustworthy man does not need a different version of the truth for every audience. If a man's testimony changes according to who is standing in front of him, the congregation should investigate his character before giving him a position behind the pulpit.

3. Not Given to Much Wine Means His Appetites Are Not His Master

Paul continues by requiring deacons to be “not given to much wine.” The wording matters, and nobody has permission to rewrite it either to strengthen a personal argument or to weaken the biblical warning. In 1 Timothy 3:3, the qualification concerning bishops says, “Not given to wine,” while verse 8 addresses deacons with the specific expression “not given to much wine.” We should acknowledge that distinction rather than pretend the two statements are worded identically. Yet neither passage provides encouragement for a man to surrender his judgment, damage his testimony, or become governed by intoxicating drink. Ephesians 5:18 commands, “And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.” A man entrusted with responsibilities among God's people must exercise self-control rather than permit an appetite to govern his conduct. The church does

not need its judgment entrusted to somebody whose own judgment regularly disappears at the bottom of a bottle.

Proverbs 20:1 declares, “Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.” Proverbs 23:29–35 provides an extended warning about the misery, confusion, wounds, and distorted judgment associated with drunkenness. Those warnings are not obsolete merely because society has developed fashionable terminology for drinking habits. The Bible's concern is moral and spiritual, not a contest over whether somebody can identify an expensive bottle or describe its flavor. A man may possess considerable worldly accomplishments and still demonstrate an alarming inability to govern his appetites. There is also a difference between recognizing the precise wording of a qualification and using that wording to excuse dangerous conduct. Someone determined to negotiate the greatest amount of indulgence he can defend has already revealed something troubling about his priorities. Christian maturity does not consist of discovering how closely a man can approach temptation while still insisting that he has not technically violated a rule.

The larger principle reaches beyond the immediate matter of wine. First Corinthians 6:12 states, “All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.” Paul is not teaching that every conceivable action is morally permissible; his point includes the danger of becoming mastered by something that ought not govern the believer. A deacon must demonstrate disciplined conduct rather than a life controlled by his impulses. Whether the temptation concerns intoxicating drink, uncontrolled anger, careless entertainment, or another appetite, the issue of mastery remains important. We should not invent additional formal qualifications and claim Paul wrote them in 1 Timothy 3, but neither should we ignore the spiritual principles established elsewhere in Scripture. A man who cannot govern himself has no business demanding influence over the affairs of others. Before the congregation asks whether he can manage church responsibilities, it should examine whether he consistently demonstrates responsibility over his own conduct.

4. Filthy Lucre Can Buy Influence, but It Cannot Purchase Integrity

The fourth qualification strikes directly at one of the church's most persistent temptations: deacons must not be “greedy of filthy lucre.” Money itself is not the enemy, and possessing wealth does not automatically disqualify a man from spiritual service. First Timothy 6:10 says, “For the love of money is the root of all evil,” identifying the corrupting affection rather than declaring that every coin is inherently wicked. Scripture records wealthy believers who used their resources honorably, and it also condemns poor men who act dishonestly. The qualification concerns greed, corrupt motives, and the willingness to pursue material gain

at the expense of righteousness. A wealthy man may satisfy this requirement, while a poor man may fail it miserably. The size of the account does not reveal the condition of the conscience. A congregation that automatically equates financial success with spiritual qualification has confused the ability to make money with the character required to handle responsibility.

The temptation becomes particularly dangerous when money purchases religious influence. A man contributes generously, supports a major project, or provides resources the congregation would otherwise struggle to obtain. Before long, somebody suggests that his financial importance should be recognized through an office. Then comes the unspoken arrangement: because he supplies so much money, his preferences deserve special consideration. Decisions begin to bend toward his wishes, uncomfortable questions are avoided, and legitimate biblical standards become strangely negotiable. James 2:1 warns believers against having "the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons." Although that passage addresses favoritism involving rich and poor rather than deacon appointments specifically, its moral principle exposes the danger. A church must not confuse generosity with ownership. A man can give generously without purchasing authority, and a congregation can appreciate a gift without selling its judgment to the giver.

The danger also extends to the handling of funds. Second Corinthians 8:20–21 describes Paul's concern to avoid blame in the administration of a substantial contribution, "Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men." That is an excellent principle wherever believers administer resources entrusted for spiritual purposes. Transparency is not an accusation against honest men; it is a protection for honest administration. A faithful deacon should welcome reasonable accountability rather than treat it as an insult to his position. Financial arrangements should not depend upon blind personal trust when straightforward safeguards can protect both the congregation and the servants involved. The fellow who becomes offended because somebody wants proper records may need to explain why ordinary honesty suddenly threatens him. Church money does not become private property because a respected member knows where the checkbook is kept. A man who loves the treasury more than the truth is already too expensive for the church to afford.

5. Holding the Mystery of the Faith Requires More Than Religious Vocabulary

First Timothy 3:9 raises the standard beyond respectable outward conduct: "Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience." A deacon must possess a genuine relationship to the truth he professes. Paul does not describe a man who merely remembers religious expressions, follows the congregation's customary vocabulary, or repeats whatever the

pastor said last Sunday. He must hold the faith, and he must hold it with a pure conscience. The New Testament reveals truth concerning Christ, the body of Christ, and God's present work that must be understood within the unfolding revelation entrusted to the apostles. Ephesians 3:3–6 explains the mystery revealed to Paul, particularly the inclusion of believing Gentiles as fellowheirs and members of the same body in Christ by the gospel. The specific expression in 1 Timothy 3:9 must be respected without pretending it supplies a complete doctrinal examination in one sentence. Nevertheless, it plainly refuses the idea that doctrinal ignorance is acceptable merely because a man is useful with practical matters.

A deacon is not necessarily required to possess the teaching responsibilities specifically assigned to a bishop in 1 Timothy 3:2, where the bishop must be “apt to teach.” But the absence of that identical requirement does not excuse ignorance, indifference, or instability. Second Timothy 2:15 instructs the believer to study, rightly dividing the word of truth. A man serving in a local church should understand the gospel of salvation, the authority of Scripture, and the distinction between what God has commanded the church and what belongs to other biblical settings. He should not confuse Israel's national promises with the heavenly position of the body of Christ or replace salvation by grace with religious performance. He should recognize that sound doctrine is not optional decoration attached to Christian service. A man may accurately calculate every expense in the church budget and still be dangerously confused about the message the church exists to proclaim. Arithmetic is useful, but it cannot substitute for an understanding of the gospel.

The final words of verse 9 are equally important: “in a pure conscience.” Doctrine is not merely information stored in the mind; it must be sincerely embraced without deliberate hypocrisy. First Timothy 1:19 speaks of “Holding faith, and a good conscience,” warning that some who put away a good conscience made shipwreck concerning faith. There is an obvious connection between what a man professes and how he behaves. A deacon who can recite correct teaching while privately practicing dishonesty has not satisfied Paul's requirement merely by answering theological questions correctly. His conscience must not be a neglected alarm that he has learned to silence whenever obedience becomes inconvenient. That does not mean a qualified man never sins or never needs correction. It means he cannot maintain a settled arrangement with known wrongdoing while presenting himself as an example of faithful service. Sound doctrine in a crooked conscience is like a straight ruler in dishonest hands: the instrument is accurate, but the measurements cannot be trusted.

6. Integrity Is What Remains When the Church Crowd Goes Home

Proverbs 11:3 declares, “The integrity of the upright shall guide them: but the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them.” That verse identifies a quality that cannot be manufactured through public recognition. Integrity means a man's conduct is governed by uprightness rather than convenience, personal advantage, or the identity of those watching him. The Proverbs belong to Israel's wisdom literature and must not be transformed into a detailed ordinance concerning New Testament church offices. Nevertheless, their moral instruction provides valuable support for the character Paul requires. A qualified servant should demonstrate consistency between public profession and private conduct. The man who is remarkably honest during church business meetings but less particular when dealing with employees, customers, creditors, or family members has not discovered a superior form of Christian stewardship. He has merely divided his conscience into departments and decided that some departments require less supervision than others.

Proverbs 20:7 adds, “The just man walketh in his integrity: his children are blessed after him.” Notice the word “walketh.” Integrity is presented as a manner of life, not a special performance arranged for important occasions. The man's ordinary conduct supplies the evidence of his character. Does he tell the truth when the truth costs him something? Does he admit mistakes without inventing excuses? Does he fulfill obligations when nobody reminds him? Does he respect another person's property? Does he handle disagreements without threats, manipulation, or dishonest accusations? These questions are not inventions designed to complicate church administration. They arise naturally from the biblical requirement that a servant possess an honest and trustworthy character. A man should not become respectable only when he enters the church building. If his Christianity requires a special costume and disappears when he reaches the parking lot, the problem is not a shortage of opportunity. It is a shortage of integrity.

This is where long attendance can become a deceptive substitute for genuine qualification. Remaining in the same congregation for decades may provide excellent evidence of faithfulness, but time itself proves only that time has passed. A man can sit under sound preaching for forty years and remain stubborn, dishonest, greedy, quarrelsome, and spiritually careless. He can memorize the order of service without learning obedience, recognize every member without loving them, and defend the church's traditions while disregarding its Scriptures. Proverbs 10:9 says, “He that walketh uprightly walketh surely: but he that perverteth his ways shall be known.” The warning deserves attention because public reputation can sometimes be maintained by influence, familiarity, or the reluctance of others to speak openly. Genuine integrity withstands examination beyond friendly assumptions. A congregation should thank God for faithful longtime members, but it must not mistake longevity for sanctification. Forty years in a garage will not turn a lawn mower

into an automobile, and forty years in a pew will not automatically turn an unfaithful man into a qualified deacon.

7. Let Him Be Proved Before Somebody Hands Him the Keys

Paul removes any remaining excuse for careless appointments in 1 Timothy 3:10: “And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless.” The order is unmistakable. First comes proving; then comes exercising the office. A church must not appoint an untested man merely because it hopes the title will inspire him to become responsible. The office is not a spiritual rehabilitation program designed to cure dishonesty, immaturity, or laziness through increased prestige. Being proved means that a man's character and fitness must be established through examination and demonstrated conduct. The passage does not specify a universal number of months, a mandatory training course, or an elaborate examination procedure. Those arrangements may be useful according to local circumstances, but they must not be presented as commands God never gave. What Scripture does command is that the proving come before the appointment. The church that reverses that order should not be surprised when its experiment produces trouble.

Paul also requires that the man be found “blameless.” That does not mean sinless perfection, for no ordinary believer possesses it in his daily walk. First John 1:8 warns against claiming to have no sin, and verse 9 directs believers to confession and God's faithful forgiveness. Blamelessness concerns a life that does not stand under legitimate, disqualifying reproach. The congregation should not find a settled pattern of dishonesty, uncontrolled conduct, corruption, or other violations of the required qualifications. Nor should every unfounded accusation automatically destroy a man's reputation. Fair examination distinguishes established conduct from malicious rumor. First Timothy 5:22 warns, “Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure.” Although that instruction must be handled in its own context rather than treated as a detailed deacon appointment procedure, it reinforces the seriousness of proceeding carefully with spiritual responsibility. Hasty recognition can make a church a participant in problems it should have recognized beforehand.

A wise congregation observes how a man serves before placing him into an office. Luke 16:10 states, “He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.” The principle exposes the absurdity of expecting an important title to repair an established pattern of unfaithfulness. Does the man complete ordinary assignments without demanding applause? Can he accept correction? Does he keep commitments? Can he disagree without creating factions? Does he recognize legitimate authority without surrendering his conscience to personalities? How

does he behave when another man receives the responsibility he wanted? These ordinary circumstances often reveal more than a carefully managed public introduction. A church should also recognize that disqualification from an office is not the same thing as rejection from Christian fellowship or denial of salvation. A man may need correction, growth, and restoration without being suitable for immediate appointment. Grace can forgive a crooked man, but a church office cannot straighten him. The man must submit to God before the church entrusts him with responsibility.

Conclusion

The qualifications of 1 Timothy 3:8–10 present a standard that modern churches have no authority to lower. A deacon must be grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre, and must hold the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. He must first be proved and found blameless before using the office. These requirements do not describe a religious aristocrat, a committee politician, or a wealthy contributor whose donations purchase recognition. They describe a spiritually responsible servant whose character has already been demonstrated. The qualifications involve speech, conduct, appetites, financial motives, doctrinal fidelity, conscience, and tested integrity. They reach into the ordinary places where a man's Christianity is either practiced or contradicted. A congregation cannot obey Scripture by admiring these requirements while deliberately ignoring them. God's commands are not ceremonial words recited before doing whatever human preference already intended. If a man fails the biblical standard, the answer is not to rewrite the standard until he passes.

There is a tremendous difference between appreciating a man's talents and recognizing him as qualified for spiritual office. The church may benefit greatly from a skilled businessman, an experienced administrator, a generous donor, or a member who faithfully repairs the building. Such service should be appreciated without automatically becoming a qualification for the office of deacon. Likewise, a man who does not hold an official position may be doing extraordinary work for the Lord without needing a title to make that work important. First Corinthians 12 teaches that God has arranged differing members and functions within the body, and the ordinary principle of faithful service should never be swallowed by the desire for public recognition. The question is not whether a candidate is useful in some respect. The question is whether he meets the requirements Scripture places upon the particular office. A congregation that appoints men because they possess influence, money, or popularity may eventually discover that those same advantages provide them with considerable power to create division. It is far easier to withhold an office from an unqualified man than to repair the destruction caused after the wrong man has gained influence.

Ultimately, the office of deacon is a responsibility to be exercised faithfully before the Lord Jesus Christ. First Timothy 3:13 promises, “For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.” The emphasis falls upon using the office well, not merely possessing it. There is no promise of spiritual reward for collecting a title while disregarding the qualifications attached to it. A deacon's usefulness must rest upon something more enduring than financial influence, social standing, familiar family connections, or an impressive record of attendance. His life must demonstrate honesty when dishonesty would be profitable, fidelity when compromise would be convenient, restraint when indulgence would be easy, and submission to Scripture when human tradition offers another path. That is the kind of character worth recognizing. Let the congregation search for faithful men rather than impressive names. Let it test their conduct instead of counting their contributions. Let it honor God's requirements above every political convenience. A crooked man does not become straight because the church pins a badge on his chest. He becomes right in his conduct by submitting himself to the word of God. And until that character is demonstrated, the badge ought to remain in the drawer.

3 of 10 — Deacons — The Man Who Carries the Offering Had Better Know the Book

Key Passage: 1 Timothy 3:9

“Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.”

There is something terribly wrong with a church that will examine a man's financial experience, investigate his business accomplishments, admire his organizational ability, and then appoint him to spiritual office without discovering whether he knows enough Bible to distinguish the gospel of the grace of God from a religious sales pitch. A fellow can count every dollar in the offering, remember every maintenance expense, and balance the church treasury down to the last penny, but if he cannot recognize serious doctrinal error when it walks through the front door carrying a Bible, something important has been overlooked. The apostle Paul did not tell Timothy that deacons must be competent administrators who can leave all that complicated doctrinal business to somebody else. He required them to hold “the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.” That is not a decorative qualification inserted between warnings about wine and instructions concerning testing. It is a spiritual requirement, and the Holy Ghost placed it there deliberately. A man who can guard the church's money but cannot recognize an attack upon its message is protecting the smaller treasure while leaving the greater one exposed.

The setting of 1 Timothy 3 is important because Paul is not handing Timothy a miscellaneous collection of religious opinions. He is instructing him concerning the proper order of the local church. In verses 14–15, Paul explains that he writes so Timothy may know how he ought to behave himself "in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." That final expression ought to settle the question of whether doctrine matters in church administration. The congregation is identified with the truth, not merely with social fellowship, charitable activity, financial management, or respectable community involvement. Paul first establishes qualifications for a bishop and then gives requirements for deacons, distinguishing their responsibilities while insisting upon spiritual integrity in both. These instructions belong to the present dispensation of grace and concern recognized offices among believers in the body of Christ. They are not qualifications for Levitical priests under the Mosaic law or a continuation of Israel's national priesthood. The local church is an assembly of redeemed sinners whose life and service must be governed by the word of God.

Unfortunately, some churches seem to believe that doctrinal understanding becomes optional whenever a man demonstrates sufficient talent with a calculator, a toolbox, or a committee agenda. The pastor can study Scripture, the teachers can explain Scripture, and the deacons can simply handle the business. That arrangement sounds wonderfully efficient until somebody introduces false teaching, misuses a passage, or begins promoting a counterfeit gospel. Then the church discovers that administrative competence cannot answer biblical confusion. There is nothing wrong with employing men who possess useful practical abilities, and there is no biblical requirement that every deacon become a pulpit preacher. But usefulness in one department does not cancel the qualifications established for the office itself. Paul requires doctrinal substance because Christian service cannot be separated from Christian truth. A man who understands the building but not the Book may be an excellent maintenance worker. That does not automatically make him a qualified deacon. The church needs servants who can carry responsibility without dropping the doctrine that gives the entire ministry its purpose.

1. Holding the Faith Means More Than Holding a Church Office

Paul's wording deserves close examination. He says, "Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience." The word "holding" describes something retained, maintained, and faithfully possessed. It does not describe a man who has heard certain doctrines occasionally, memorized a few familiar expressions, or learned which religious phrases receive approval from his congregation. The deacon must actually hold the faith. First Timothy 1:19 uses similar language when Paul writes of "Holding faith, and a good conscience," warning that some who abandoned that good conscience made shipwreck

concerning faith. The connection between sound belief and spiritual integrity is impossible to miss. Biblical doctrine is not a collection of religious ornaments displayed whenever visitors arrive. It is truth that must govern the believer's understanding, convictions, and conduct. The man who holds the faith only when everybody around him agrees has demonstrated little more than an ability to follow the crowd. A weather vane can do that without attending a single Bible study.

The expression “the mystery of the faith” must also be handled carefully. Scripture uses the word “mystery” in connection with truth revealed by God that was previously concealed. Romans 16:25 speaks of “the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began,” while Ephesians 3:3–6 explains the revelation given to Paul concerning believing Gentiles becoming fellowheirs and members of the same body in Christ by the gospel. Colossians 1:26–27 likewise discusses the mystery hidden from ages and generations but now made manifest to the saints. These passages establish the importance of understanding God's revealed truth concerning the present dispensation. Nevertheless, 1 Timothy 3:9 does not provide a complete list of dispensational doctrines that every deacon must recite before appointment. We must not manufacture requirements that the verse does not state. What it does require is substantial fidelity to the revealed Christian faith, maintained sincerely rather than superficially. The servant must possess spiritual conviction, not merely a collection of religious expressions.

Paul adds the words “in a pure conscience,” preventing anybody from reducing the requirement to intellectual knowledge alone. A man may defend correct doctrine in conversation while maintaining dishonest conduct behind closed doors. He may argue eloquently concerning salvation by grace and then use manipulation, bitterness, or financial pressure to achieve his personal objectives. Such a contradiction does not satisfy the apostle's qualification merely because the man can answer theological questions. First Timothy 1:5 identifies the end of the commandment as “charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.” That last expression is particularly important. Faith must not become a performance arranged for religious approval. A pure conscience does not require sinless perfection, but it does require sincerity before God and a refusal to make peace with known wrongdoing. The truth a man professes in public should be the same truth that governs him when nobody is watching. Otherwise, he is not holding the faith so much as displaying it for inspection.

2. A Deacon Is Not a Bishop, but Ignorance Is Not His Job Description

The distinction between bishops and deacons must be preserved if the church intends to follow Scripture rather than tradition. First Timothy 3:2 requires that a bishop be “apt to teach,” identifying an ability specifically connected with his oversight responsibility. Titus

1:9 provides further instruction concerning an elder, requiring him to be “Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.” That responsibility includes doctrinal instruction and correction. The deacon's qualifications in 1 Timothy 3:8–13 do not repeat every requirement stated concerning the bishop. Paul gives separate instructions because the offices carry distinguishable responsibilities. A church therefore has no biblical warrant to demand that every deacon possess the same teaching ability required of a bishop. But it has even less warrant to interpret that distinction as permission for a deacon to remain doctrinally ignorant. Different responsibilities do not mean different standards of loyalty to the truth.

There is a peculiar habit among religious people of converting a distinction into an excuse. Tell a man that deacons are not required to perform the same teaching duties as bishops, and he may conclude that studying Scripture is somebody else's business. By that reasoning, the cook does not need to know whether the food is spoiled because he is not the physician. The argument falls apart before it reaches the dining room. Every believer is responsible to receive God's word, grow in understanding, and resist error. Colossians 3:16 commands, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom,” and 1 Peter 3:15 instructs believers to be ready to give an answer concerning the hope within them. Those passages are not formal lists of deacon qualifications, but they establish responsibilities that belong to Christian life generally. A man being considered for recognized service should demonstrate maturity in those responsibilities rather than indifference toward them. The deacon does not need to occupy the pulpit to understand why the pulpit matters.

Titus 1:9 also illustrates why doctrinal oversight should remain where Scripture places it. The elder must be able to exhort and convince gainsayers by sound doctrine. That teaching responsibility should not be transferred wholesale to a committee of deacons simply because somebody prefers government by board meeting. Nor should the deacons become doctrinal spectators who cannot distinguish faithful instruction from obvious corruption. A qualified servant can respect the teaching responsibility of the pastor while exercising biblical discernment himself. He can recognize when a statement contradicts Scripture, ask legitimate questions, and refuse to promote teachings that undermine the gospel. He need not become the congregation's unofficial theological police chief, inspecting every sentence for opportunities to demonstrate superiority. Spiritual maturity produces discernment without converting every disagreement into a courtroom. The objective is faithfulness to God's word, not competition for the title of most intelligent man in the building. A servant who knows his place should also know his Bible.

3. Rightly Dividing the Word Prevents a Church From Mixing God's Instructions

Second Timothy 2:15 gives the foundation for faithful Bible study: “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” Notice the command to study, the objective of God's approval, and the requirement to divide the word correctly. Scripture is not a collection of interchangeable religious statements that can be lifted from their settings and applied indiscriminately to every person in every age. God has spoken to different people under different circumstances, and those distinctions matter. A command given to Israel under the law does not automatically become a command governing the church under grace. A promise concerning Israel's land does not become a promise concerning the Christian's bank account. A prophetic passage about the restoration of Israel cannot be absorbed into the church simply because somebody dislikes the distinction. Right division respects what God actually said, whom He addressed, and the purpose of His revelation.

The surrounding context of 2 Timothy 2 makes the danger unmistakable. Paul warns against profane and vain babblings, then identifies Hymenaeus and Philetus, who were teaching “that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some” (2 Timothy 2:18). These men were not merely confused about a minor administrative matter. They were mishandling doctrine in a way that damaged the faith of others. That is why the command to rightly divide the word of truth cannot be treated as an optional hobby for people who enjoy detailed Bible charts. Correct interpretation protects believers from serious error. When a man confuses a past event with a future promise, or applies instructions to an audience God never addressed, the consequences can reach far beyond an interesting disagreement. False doctrine can destroy assurance, produce legalism, corrupt Christian hope, and leave believers chasing promises that were never made to them. A church cannot afford to treat careless interpretation as harmless religious creativity.

Consider the confusion created when somebody takes promises of earthly national prosperity given to Israel and declares that every Christian must receive the same material blessings. Or when the conditional provisions of the Mosaic covenant are imposed upon believers who stand under grace. Or when the judgment seat of Christ is confused with the great white throne judgment, leaving saved people terrified that their eternal justification will be overturned by an unfavorable examination of their works. These errors arise when biblical distinctions are erased. Second Corinthians 5:10 concerns the believer's appearance before the judgment seat of Christ, while Revelation 20:11–15 describes the great white throne judgment. They are not interchangeable events. A deacon need not possess exhaustive knowledge of every prophetic passage before serving, but he should understand that Scripture must be interpreted honestly. When a church refuses to divide

the word correctly, it eventually begins distributing doctrinal confusion as though it were spiritual nourishment.

4. A Servant Must Know the Gospel Before He Can Defend the Ministry

There is no doctrine more essential for a deacon to understand than the gospel of salvation. First Corinthians 15:1–4 presents the message Paul preached, declaring "that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures." The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ are not peripheral details that can be replaced by religious enthusiasm or church membership. They stand at the center of the gospel. Ephesians 2:8–9 explains that salvation is by grace through faith, "Not of works, lest any man should boast." Romans 4:5 states, "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." A man serving in the church should know that sinners are justified through faith in Jesus Christ, not through financial contributions, water baptism, moral improvement, denominational loyalty, or participation in religious activities. The church is supposed to proclaim this gospel, not substitute a religious payment plan for it.

That distinction becomes especially important when practical service is confused with spiritual merit. A deacon may devote many hours to helping the congregation, yet those hours cannot purchase the forgiveness of his sins. He may distribute assistance to needy families, oversee legitimate financial responsibilities, and labor faithfully for decades, but none of those activities provides the righteousness necessary for justification before God. Titus 3:5 declares, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us." Christian service follows salvation; it does not purchase salvation. Ephesians 2:10 explains that believers are created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has ordained that they should walk in. The order is critical. Grace saves the sinner, and the saved sinner is then called to faithful service. Reverse that order, and the church begins teaching a religious arrangement in which human labor accomplishes what only the finished work of Jesus Christ can accomplish. No amount of committee service can improve upon Calvary.

The deacon should also understand the believer's standing in Christ. Ephesians 1:13 describes believers being sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise after hearing and believing the gospel, while Ephesians 4:30 declares that believers are sealed "unto the day of redemption." These passages provide assurance grounded in God's work rather than the believer's fluctuating performance. They do not encourage careless living; Romans 6:1–2 expressly rejects continuing in sin so that grace may abound. But they do distinguish eternal salvation from the believer's accountability for service. First Corinthians 3:11–15

explains the examination of a Christian's work, including the possibility that his work may be burned while “he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.” A deacon who understands that distinction will not confuse the reward of faithful service with the gift of eternal life. The man who carries the offering should know that the greatest gift ever received by a Christian was never placed in an offering plate. It was purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ.

5. Israel Is Israel, the Church Is the Church, and God Has Not Lost His Promises

Doctrinal stability also requires understanding the distinction between Israel and the body of Christ. Romans 9:4 identifies important privileges belonging to the Israelites, including “the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises.” Those historical and covenantal distinctions cannot be casually reassigned to the church. God made specific promises to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David concerning a nation, a land, and a kingdom. The church, as the body of Christ, possesses heavenly blessings in Christ and is composed of believing Jews and Gentiles united through the gospel. Ephesians 2:14–16 explains that Christ has made both one and reconciled them unto God in one body by the cross. That spiritual unity does not require the cancellation of God's covenantal commitments to Israel. The Lord knows the difference between His promises, even when religious systems have spent centuries trying to place every promise into one convenient theological filing cabinet.

Romans 11 directly confronts the notion that God has permanently discarded Israel. Paul asks, “Hath God cast away his people?” and immediately answers, “God forbid” (Romans 11:1). Later, verses 25–26 describe blindness in part happening to Israel until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in, followed by the declaration, “And so all Israel shall be saved.” Verse 29 states, “For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.” These are not empty expressions. Paul is discussing God's dealings with Israel and the future fulfillment of His purposes. The church must not seize Israel's national promises and announce that the original recipients have permanently forfeited everything God pledged. Nor should the spiritual unity of believing Jews and Gentiles in Christ be denied. Both truths must be maintained according to Scripture. A man who cannot distinguish Israel's prophetic future from the church's present calling will struggle to interpret many passages honestly. Confusion in one part of Scripture has a remarkable talent for spreading into several others.

The practical danger appears when religious tradition begins replacing biblical distinctions. A congregation may adopt a teaching system in which every Old Testament promise is automatically assigned to Christians, every prophetic passage is converted into a description of present church activity, and every uncomfortable distinction is explained away. Before long, Scripture becomes a collection of verses arranged to support

conclusions chosen in advance. A deacon should not be expected to deliver a complete exposition of Daniel's seventy weeks during every financial meeting, but neither should he regard the distinction between Israel and the church as an irrelevant curiosity. Sound doctrine helps protect the congregation from teachers who mishandle God's promises. First Corinthians 10:32 recognizes Jews, Gentiles, and the church of God as meaningful distinctions in Paul's instruction. A faithful Bible student should recognize those categories instead of blending them into confusion. God has never needed a church committee to revise His covenants, and a deacon does not become spiritually enlightened by pretending that God has forgotten whom He was addressing.

6. Denominational Tradition Is Not a Substitute for an Open Bible

Colossians 2:8 contains a warning that reaches into every generation: “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.” Paul is not condemning every ordinary custom or every practical arrangement adopted by a congregation. Churches may establish schedules, organize responsibilities, and develop procedures necessary for orderly administration. The danger comes when human traditions are elevated into spiritual authority or allowed to contradict the word of God. A practice does not become biblical because a denomination has maintained it for a hundred years. A committee does not acquire divine authority by declaring that its constitution has always required a certain arrangement. Scripture remains the standard by which the church's beliefs and practices must be examined. The faithful servant must distinguish between an administrative custom that may be useful and a doctrinal requirement that God has actually established.

During His earthly ministry to Israel, the Lord Jesus Christ confronted religious leaders who substituted human traditions for God's commandments. Mark 7:8 records His rebuke: “For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men.” The immediate setting concerns particular traditions among Jewish religious leaders, not the formal office of a deacon in the present dispensation. Nevertheless, the underlying warning against allowing human tradition to overturn divine instruction remains applicable. Churches can develop their own respected customs and eventually defend them more fiercely than the Scriptures they supposedly represent. Somebody asks why a particular office operates a certain way, and the answer comes back that the congregation has always done it that way. That may explain the history, but it does not establish biblical authority. “We've always done it this way” is a description of habit, not a verse of Scripture. A deacon who confuses those things is likely to protect the machinery of the institution while neglecting the truth that should govern it.

Acts 17:11 provides a commendable example in the Bereans, who received the word with readiness of mind and searched the Scriptures daily to determine whether the things preached were so. That account belongs to Paul's missionary ministry and describes people examining apostolic preaching against the written Scriptures available to them. Its principle is powerful: religious claims are not exempt from examination merely because they are delivered confidently. A congregation should welcome careful Bible study rather than fear it. A qualified deacon should possess enough spiritual maturity to examine teaching without becoming quarrelsome, and enough humility to correct his own understanding when Scripture exposes an error. He should neither swallow every fashionable doctrine nor reject a biblical truth merely because it challenges something familiar. The church does not need men who collect controversies as though they were trophies, but it certainly does not need men who surrender their discernment whenever somebody speaks with impressive religious authority. Loyalty to Christ requires loyalty to His word.

7. Honest Report, Spiritual Wisdom, and Doctrine That Actually Governs Conduct

Acts 6:3 records the apostles' instruction concerning seven men selected to address the neglected daily ministration: “look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.” The historical setting must remain clear. These men were selected in the early Jerusalem assembly during the ministry of the twelve apostles, and Acts 6 does not explicitly identify them by the formal title of deacon. The later epistles provide the explicit qualifications governing that recognized office. Nevertheless, Acts 6 supplies a useful example of spiritual qualifications accompanying practical responsibility. The seven were not selected merely because they could organize the distribution of resources. Their reputations, spiritual condition, and wisdom mattered. The apostles did not imagine that handling material responsibilities relieved a servant from the need for spiritual maturity. The assignment concerned practical work, but the qualifications reached into the character of the men entrusted with it.

Stephen and Philip demonstrate that practical service need not limit a man's usefulness in proclaiming the truth. Acts 6:5 identifies Stephen as “a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost,” while the following chapters record his powerful testimony before hostile religious opponents. Stephen's defense in Acts 7 demonstrates considerable familiarity with Israel's history, God's dealings with the patriarchs, Moses, the law, and the nation's resistance to divine revelation. Philip later preached Christ in Samaria and explained Isaiah 53 to the Ethiopian eunuch. Acts 8:35 declares, “Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.” Acts 21:8 identifies Philip as “the evangelist, which was one of the seven.” Neither man's ministry proves that every formal

deacon must become an evangelist or public preacher. What their examples establish is that practical responsibility and substantial biblical understanding are not enemies. The man willing to serve in ordinary matters may also possess considerable spiritual understanding.

First Timothy 3:10 brings the application directly to the recognized office: “And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless.” That proving should include the doctrinal faithfulness required by verse 9 rather than examining everything except what the man believes. Does he understand the gospel? Does he demonstrate respect for Scripture? Can he identify serious departures from essential Christian truth? Does he receive correction when a passage exposes his misunderstanding? Is his conduct consistent with his profession? These questions matter because doctrine must govern life. James 1:22 instructs believers to be “doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.” A man who knows biblical terminology while practicing dishonesty is not thereby qualified, and a man who behaves respectably while disregarding essential doctrine has not satisfied Paul's standard either. A deacon should be more than a man who knows where the church keeps its money. He should be a man whose conscience and conduct demonstrate that he knows where God has placed the truth.

Conclusion

The requirement of 1 Timothy 3:9 cannot be dismissed as a minor qualification suitable only for unusually studious men. Paul expects deacons to hold the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. That requirement places doctrinal fidelity alongside the other qualifications concerning character, speech, appetites, financial integrity, family life, and proven faithfulness. The church must not treat biblical understanding as an inconvenience when selecting its servants. Nor should it confuse the deacon's office with the bishop's responsibility for teaching and oversight. Scripture establishes distinguishable offices without suggesting that one office requires loyalty to truth while the other may operate in comfortable ignorance. A deacon is not necessarily called to preach, but he must belong to the truth he professes. His convictions should rest upon Scripture rather than denominational habit, personal preference, or whichever religious argument happens to sound persuasive at the moment. The church that demands financial competence while neglecting doctrinal faithfulness has examined the servant's hands without bothering to investigate what governs his heart.

A congregation should appreciate practical ability without allowing it to overshadow spiritual qualification. There is nothing wrong with a deacon who understands accounting, maintenance, administration, or the ordinary responsibilities involved in congregational

service. Those abilities may prove extremely useful. But when the church begins selecting men primarily because they possess worldly competence, it risks forgetting what makes Christian service distinctly Christian. A man may manage a prosperous business while misunderstanding salvation by grace. He may organize complicated projects while confusing Israel with the body of Christ. He may chair meetings efficiently while accepting serious doctrinal errors because nobody ever taught him to examine Scripture carefully. None of those deficiencies disappears merely because his financial records are impressive. The solution is not to replace practical servants with argumentative religious intellectuals who refuse to perform ordinary work. It is to recognize men whose spiritual qualifications and practical faithfulness belong together. Christian service does not require choosing between a sound mind and willing hands. The Lord expects His servants to use both.

First Timothy 3:13 declares that those who have used the office of a deacon well "purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus." That is a far more substantial objective than occupying a respected position or receiving public recognition. The faithful deacon should desire to serve the Lord honestly, strengthen the congregation, protect the integrity of its work, and remain steadfast in the truth. The man who carries the offering should understand the gospel that makes the offering meaningful. The man who helps maintain the building should understand the spiritual purpose for which believers gather inside it. The man entrusted with congregational business should know that no amount of administrative success can compensate for abandoning the doctrine upon which the congregation stands. Let the church examine character, test faithfulness, and insist upon sincere biblical conviction. Let its servants be willing to study as well as serve, to obey as well as organize, and to defend the truth without pretending to occupy responsibilities God has assigned elsewhere. A church can survive an inexperienced treasurer more easily than it can survive a generation of leaders who no longer know what the Bible teaches. The offering plate may need a steady hand, but the man carrying it had better have a firm grip on the Book.

4 of 10 — Deacons — Let Them First Be Proved, Not First Be Popular

Key Passage: 1 Timothy 3:10

"And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless."

There is a little word in 1 Timothy 3:10 that has caused more trouble for religious popularity contests than a skunk in the fellowship hall. That word is “first.” Paul says, “And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless.” Notice the order. God did not say appoint them first and investigate them afterward. He did not say give them a title, hand them some authority, place them on a committee, and hope the responsibility eventually produces the character that should have qualified them in the beginning. He said prove them first. That single word demolishes the foolish notion that church office is a reward for popularity, a consolation prize for disappointed ambition, or an incentive offered to an immature man in the hope that he might finally become serious about the Lord. A church office is not a machine for manufacturing character. It is a responsibility to be entrusted to a man whose character has already been demonstrated.

The setting is unmistakable. Paul is writing to Timothy concerning proper conduct in the house of God, which he identifies in 1 Timothy 3:15 as “the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.” The chapter distinguishes the qualifications for bishops from those required of deacons, but neither office is presented as something to be filled according to social standing, political maneuvering, or financial influence. These are instructions governing local church order under the present dispensation of grace, not requirements for entering heaven or earning justification before God. A man is saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, according to Ephesians 2:8–9, and his salvation is not purchased by faithful committee service. But being saved does not automatically qualify him to hold every responsibility within the congregation. The distinction is elementary, yet some churches seem determined to forget it. Salvation places the believer in Christ; demonstrated faithfulness qualifies him for particular service. Confuse those things, and the church begins mistaking religious enthusiasm for spiritual maturity.

The trouble begins when congregations treat offices as vacancies that must be filled instead of responsibilities that require qualified men. Somebody resigns, another moves away, and suddenly the church behaves as though the Lord's work cannot continue unless a new name appears on the organizational chart by next Wednesday. Then come the nominations. One man is popular, another is wealthy, a third has influential relatives, and a fourth has attended so long that somebody assumes he must know something. Whether these men possess the qualifications listed in Scripture becomes a secondary consideration. But the Holy Ghost did not command Timothy to find the most familiar face in the congregation. He required men to be proved and found blameless. The Bible has no interest in religious elections that disregard biblical standards. A congregation can count every ballot accurately and still arrive at a completely unbiblical result. The majority may determine who receives the title, but the word of God determines whether the man qualifies to carry it.

1. The Word “First” Puts God's Order Ahead of Church Politics

The order of 1 Timothy 3:10 is not complicated: “first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon.” The proving comes before the appointment. That means the congregation should already possess reasonable evidence of the man's integrity, spiritual stability, and faithfulness. Paul does not specify that every candidate must complete a particular number of months in training or pass a denominational examination containing a hundred questions. Those arrangements may have practical value, but the specific procedure is not established in this verse. What is established is the necessity of prior examination. The man's qualifications are to be recognized rather than imagined. An office should confirm demonstrated faithfulness, not create an opportunity to discover whether faithfulness exists. There is nothing especially spiritual about giving a man responsibility for which he has shown himself unprepared and then congratulating the congregation for exercising faith. Presumption becomes no less foolish because somebody announces it from a pulpit.

First Timothy 5:22 reinforces the seriousness of proceeding carefully: “Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure.” In its immediate context, Paul is instructing Timothy concerning elders, their treatment, accusations, and correction. We should not pretend the verse directly supplies every detail of the process for appointing deacons. Nevertheless, it establishes an important principle concerning hasty recognition of men for spiritual responsibility. Timothy was not to participate carelessly in advancing someone whose character had not been properly considered. The warning concerning participation in another man's sins is especially sobering. Appointing an unqualified individual can involve more than making an unfortunate personnel decision. It can place the congregation in a position where its own disregard for Scripture contributes to preventable trouble. A church should not act surprised when an untested man behaves according to the character he possessed before receiving his title. The appointment did not produce the problem; it gave the problem an official seat.

Acts 6:3 provides a useful historical example, although the seven men appointed in Jerusalem are not explicitly called deacons by that formal title. The twelve instructed the multitude to select “seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom.” Those qualifications were required before the men were appointed over the daily ministration. The historical setting involves the early Jerusalem assembly under apostolic leadership, not a complete procedural manual for every local church during the present dispensation. Nevertheless, the wisdom is plain. The apostles wanted men whose reputations and spiritual condition could already be recognized. They did not gather seven strangers, appoint them over sensitive responsibilities, and hope that handling resources would

somehow teach them honesty. The men had to possess the character appropriate to the work. This exposes the foolishness of appointing a man because he seems promising while ignoring what his conduct has already revealed. Biblical leadership does not gamble the church's welfare upon a candidate's potential when Scripture requires evidence of his present faithfulness.

2. Faithful in Little Things Before Entrusted With Greater Things

Luke 16:10 declares, “He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.” In its immediate setting, the Lord Jesus Christ is teaching concerning stewardship and the proper handling of unrighteous mammon. He is not delivering a formal list of qualifications for deacons in the later Pauline churches. Yet the principle is directly relevant to the examination of character. A man's treatment of smaller responsibilities reveals something about his reliability when larger responsibilities are entrusted to him. If he cannot keep a simple promise, why should the congregation assume he will keep more serious ones? If he mishandles a minor assignment, why should receiving an impressive title suddenly make him conscientious? Responsibility does not create honesty. It provides another setting in which honesty or dishonesty becomes visible. A faithful servant proves himself when the assignment is ordinary, the audience is small, and nobody is preparing to announce his accomplishments.

Consider the man who willingly accepts a small church responsibility but never follows through unless somebody reminds him repeatedly. He volunteers enthusiastically, speaks confidently about what ought to be done, and disappears when the actual labor begins. Another man quietly completes what he promises, arrives when expected, admits mistakes, and finishes necessary work without demanding recognition. Which man has demonstrated faithfulness? The answer should not require a committee investigation. Proverbs 25:19 says, “Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint.” That is a memorable description of relying upon someone who cannot be trusted when the need becomes serious. A broken tooth is not helpful when something must be chewed, and an injured foot is hardly dependable when a man needs to walk. Likewise, an unreliable servant becomes most troublesome precisely when the congregation needs him. Religious enthusiasm is cheap until somebody must depend upon it.

The same principle applies to ordinary commitments outside the church building. Does the man deal honestly with customers, employees, neighbors, and creditors? Does he keep his word when there is no church audience to congratulate him? Does he fulfill his family responsibilities or reserve all his apparent dedication for public religious activities?

Proverbs 20:6 asks, “Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness: but a faithful man who can find?” That question exposes the difference between advertising character and possessing it. A man may describe himself as dependable with considerable enthusiasm, but the people who have relied upon him should be able to confirm the claim. The congregation does not need to demand perfection or investigate every harmless personal detail. It does need reasonable evidence that his manner of life supports the responsibilities he seeks. The man who cannot be trusted with an ordinary promise should not expect the church to trust him with an extraordinary position. Faithfulness grows in practice before it is recognized in office.

3. Blameless Does Not Mean Sinless, but It Certainly Means Something

Paul concludes 1 Timothy 3:10 with the requirement that deacons be “found blameless.” Here is another expression that must be handled without twisting Scripture in either direction. Blameless does not mean a man has achieved sinless perfection. First John 1:8 states, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” Verse 9 explains the believer's responsibility concerning confession and God's faithful forgiveness. No ordinary Christian possesses a sinless record in his daily walk, and no church office changes that reality. If Paul required absolute sinlessness, no congregation could appoint anybody, and the qualifications would become an impossible standard rather than a practical instruction. But rejecting sinless perfection does not empty the word “blameless” of its meaning. A man must not be characterized by conduct that legitimately brings reproach upon his qualifications. The issue is demonstrated uprightness, not an imaginary claim that he has never sinned.

Blamelessness must therefore be understood in connection with the surrounding requirements. First Timothy 3:8–9 addresses gravity, truthful speech, conduct regarding wine, freedom from greed, and holding the faith in a pure conscience. Verses 11–12 continue with qualifications involving wives, marriage, children, and household leadership. The man being examined must satisfy the actual standards rather than merely avoid being caught in a public scandal. Some sins become known through spectacular exposure, while others become recognizable through consistent patterns of behavior. A man may never have appeared in a courtroom and still be habitually dishonest, quarrelsome, irresponsible, or greedy. On the other hand, an accusation does not become true merely because somebody repeats it loudly. Biblical examination requires fair judgment based upon genuine evidence. The church should not manufacture charges against a faithful man, but neither should it dismiss established wrongdoing because the candidate happens to be influential. Blamelessness is not the absence of enemies; it is the absence of legitimate, disqualifying reproach.

There is also a necessary distinction between forgiveness and immediate qualification. A believer who has sinned may confess his wrongdoing and receive God's forgiveness without automatically becoming suitable for every position of responsibility. First John 1:9 concerns confession and cleansing, not the cancellation of every practical consequence of misconduct. A man who has damaged the trust of others may need time to demonstrate genuine repentance and restored faithfulness. That does not mean the church must treat him as permanently useless or deny the reality of God's grace. It means spiritual responsibility should not be confused with the forgiveness of sin. Galatians 6:1 instructs spiritual believers to restore one overtaken in a fault in the spirit of meekness, but restoration to fellowship and readiness for a particular office are not identical questions. One concerns the proper treatment of a fallen brother; the other concerns the qualifications required for entrusted responsibility. The church should practice both mercy and discernment, refusing to turn grace into an excuse for careless appointments.

4. The Tongue Must Be Tested Before the Man Gets a Title

First Timothy 3:8 requires deacons to be “not doubletongued,” and that qualification deserves serious examination before a man receives access to sensitive church business. A doubletongued man tells different people different things according to what serves his immediate advantage. He agrees with the pastor during one conversation, encourages dissatisfaction during another, and somehow manages to present himself as the innocent party when the contradiction becomes obvious. Such a man can create enormous damage without stealing a penny or raising his voice. James 3:5 reminds us that “the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things,” while the following verses warn of its destructive power. A congregation should observe how a candidate speaks when controversy arises. Does he report conversations accurately? Does he exaggerate disagreements? Does he use confidential information to purchase influence? A man whose principal talent is carrying stories from one room to another does not need a church office. He needs to learn that the telephone is not a substitute for Christian character.

Proverbs 11:13 declares, “A talebearer revealeth secrets: but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter.” The principle is especially relevant when a man may encounter personal difficulties, financial needs, family troubles, or sensitive disagreements among believers. Discretion requires knowing when information should remain private and when a matter legitimately requires attention from those responsible for addressing it. It does not authorize concealing abuse, protecting criminal conduct, or suppressing truthful reports of serious wrongdoing. Biblical discretion must remain governed by righteousness. The faithful servant does not turn private suffering into public entertainment, but neither does he confuse loyalty to a person with permission to conceal evil. He understands that

information entrusted for a legitimate purpose should not become ammunition in personal disputes. Some men cannot learn a private detail without treating it like a valuable possession that must eventually be displayed. Such behavior disqualifies them from responsibilities requiring trust, regardless of how carefully they arrange their public religious appearance.

A man's response to disagreement can reveal even more than his agreeable conversation. It is easy to appear gracious when everybody accepts your ideas, praises your judgment, and treats your preferences as particularly important. What happens when somebody challenges your proposal? Does the candidate listen, consider Scripture, and respond honestly, or does he become offended and begin recruiting supporters? Ephesians 4:25 commands believers to put away lying and speak truth, while verse 29 requires speech that ministers grace to the hearers. Those instructions are not suspended when a church meeting becomes uncomfortable. A qualified man should be able to disagree firmly without becoming deceitful, vindictive, or divisive. He should accept legitimate correction without treating it as a declaration of war. The man who cannot control his tongue when he has no authority will not suddenly develop a bridle when somebody gives him a title. Before appointing him, examine what comes out of his mouth when his pride has been disturbed.

5. Money Reveals Whether a Man Is Faithful or Merely Financially Successful

The requirement that deacons be “not greedy of filthy lucre” in 1 Timothy 3:8 places financial integrity squarely among the qualifications. Paul does not say a deacon must be wealthy, successful in business, or skilled at managing enormous accounts. He addresses the man's relationship to material gain. First Timothy 6:10 declares, “For the love of money is the root of all evil,” and warns concerning those who covet after it. A poor man may possess a greedy heart, while a wealthy man may demonstrate generosity and uprightness. The amount of money somebody possesses does not automatically reveal his spiritual condition. Nevertheless, financial dealings provide opportunities to observe character. Does he pay legitimate debts? Does he treat people fairly in business? Does he manipulate figures, conceal obligations, or exploit others for personal advantage? A successful businessman may possess useful experience, but a successful swindler possesses experience too. Experience becomes a qualification only when it is joined to the character Scripture requires.

Second Corinthians 8:20–21 records Paul's concern that the administration of a substantial contribution be handled honorably: “Avoiding this, that no man should blame us in this abundance which is administered by us: Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.” The immediate context concerns the collection administered among the churches, not an explicit command that every deacon

must serve as treasurer. Yet the principle of accountable stewardship is unmistakable. Wherever church funds are handled, appropriate records, careful procedures, and reasonable safeguards protect both the resources and the people responsible for them. A man who becomes insulted whenever somebody asks for legitimate financial accountability may be revealing a problem worth examining. Honesty does not fear ordinary transparency. The congregation should not treat every servant as a suspected thief, but neither should it establish financial arrangements that would tempt an honest man unnecessarily and provide a dishonest man with convenient opportunities.

Financial influence can also corrupt the selection process itself. James 2:1 warns believers against exercising respect of persons, and the following verses rebuke preferential treatment based upon wealth and outward appearance. Although James is not giving a formal procedure for appointing deacons, his warning exposes the danger of allowing money to purchase religious favor. A man may contribute generously, support important projects, and possess considerable business influence without satisfying the spiritual qualifications of 1 Timothy 3. His generosity should be appreciated, not converted into an entitlement to office. Likewise, a faithful man of modest means should not be overlooked because he cannot finance a major building project. The church that measures spiritual usefulness according to financial importance has begun operating with a worldly scale. A large offering cannot purchase a clean conscience, and an impressive bank account cannot substitute for proven faithfulness. If a congregation selects its servants according to who possesses the most money, it may eventually discover that the treasury has acquired a master.

6. Doctrinal Steadiness Must Be Demonstrated Before Responsibility Is Given

First Timothy 3:9 requires deacons to be “Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.” This qualification is especially important because some congregations treat doctrinal knowledge as unnecessary for men whose anticipated responsibilities are primarily practical. The assumption is that the pastor can handle biblical questions while the deacons manage administration. Yet Paul explicitly requires doctrinal faithfulness from those who use the office. The deacon is not assigned the identical teaching qualification placed upon a bishop in 1 Timothy 3:2, nor should the distinct responsibilities of the offices be confused. Nevertheless, the servant must understand and sincerely hold the Christian faith. He should know the gospel of salvation by grace through faith, respect the authority of Scripture, and possess enough doctrinal stability to avoid being carried away by every attractive religious novelty. The man who guards the building but cannot recognize false doctrine may protect the doors while leaving the congregation exposed to something far more dangerous than an unlocked entrance.

Second Timothy 2:15 commands, “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” That instruction establishes the importance of diligent Bible study and proper interpretation. Scripture must be handled according to its audience, historical setting, and doctrinal purpose. God's promises to Israel must not be carelessly transferred to the body of Christ, and salvation by grace must not be confused with the requirements governing Israel under the Mosaic law. Ephesians 2:8–9 clearly establishes salvation by grace through faith, apart from works. The faithful servant should understand that the church's message is grounded in the finished work of Jesus Christ rather than religious accomplishment. He need not answer every difficult prophetic question or possess exhaustive knowledge of every passage, but he should demonstrate a consistent willingness to study and submit to Scripture. A man who considers biblical knowledge unimportant has already revealed a troubling attitude toward the truth his office requires him to hold.

Doctrinal examination should also consider how the man responds when his understanding is challenged. Can he receive instruction without becoming defensive? Is he willing to change a cherished opinion when Scripture demonstrates that it is mistaken? Does he distinguish between a clear biblical command and a familiar denominational custom? Acts 17:11 commends the Bereans for searching the Scriptures daily to determine whether the things they heard were so. That willingness to examine teaching according to God's word is an excellent principle for every believer. A deacon should not become a religious troublemaker who treats every minor disagreement as an opportunity to establish his superior knowledge. Neither should he become a passive follower of personalities who accepts whatever the most influential man declares. He must possess conviction joined to humility. A man who changes his doctrine to please whoever holds the microphone has not demonstrated stability, and a man who refuses correction because he loves his own opinion has not demonstrated wisdom. Both weaknesses should be recognized before appointment.

7. The Real Test Comes When Somebody Else Gets the Chair

One of the most revealing examinations of character occurs when a man does not receive the recognition he expected. He has served faithfully, expressed interest in additional responsibility, and perhaps believed he would eventually be selected for office. Then somebody else receives the appointment. What happens next? Does he continue serving with the same willingness, or does his enthusiasm suddenly disappear? Does he rejoice that necessary work is being handled, or does he become offended because another name appears on the church bulletin? Philippians 2:3 commands, “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.”

That instruction exposes the difference between serving Christ and seeking personal advancement. A man who abandons ordinary service because he was not given an official title may have been working toward recognition rather than laboring for the Lord. The disappointment did not create his motive. It revealed what had been governing him all along.

Third John 9 records the conduct of Diotrephes, “who loveth to have the preeminence among them.” The passage does not identify Diotrephes as a deacon, and it should not be presented as though it does. Nevertheless, his conduct provides a dreadful example of religious ambition. He rejected legitimate apostolic testimony, spoke maliciously, and interfered with the reception of brethren. His desire for preeminence produced conduct directly contrary to Christian fellowship. That spirit can appear wherever a man begins loving his position more than the truth. A congregation should therefore consider how a candidate behaves when he is overlooked, corrected, contradicted, or asked to perform an unimpressive task. Does he remain faithful when somebody else receives the praise? Does he support legitimate decisions without demanding that his preferences always prevail? A proud man may tolerate humble service while imagining it is merely the staircase leading to the office he wants. Remove the promised chair, and suddenly he cannot find the stairs.

First Corinthians 4:2 declares, “Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.” The immediate passage concerns stewardship in Paul's discussion of ministers and their accountability to God, but the principle of faithfulness applies broadly to responsibilities entrusted by the Lord. A deacon should not require constant applause, personal control, or the satisfaction of winning every disagreement before he will serve. At the same time, faithful service does not mean becoming a blind supporter of unscriptural decisions. A man may properly raise biblical objections, ask questions, and refuse participation in wrongdoing without demonstrating rebellion. The difference lies in whether his conduct is governed by Scripture or wounded pride. A faithful servant can stand firmly upon the truth without demanding personal supremacy. First Timothy 3:13 promises that those who use the office well purchase to themselves “a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.” The reward concerns faithful service, not victorious church politics. The man who serves only when he receives the chair has already revealed that the chair means more to him than the service.

Conclusion

The instruction of 1 Timothy 3:10 leaves no room for the careless assumption that popularity establishes qualification. Paul requires that deacons first be proved and then use the office, being found blameless. That order protects the congregation, respects the office, and honors the authority of God's word. The proving must concern actual spiritual

qualifications rather than worldly accomplishments or personal influence. A man should demonstrate reliability in ordinary responsibilities, honesty in financial matters, discretion in speech, steadiness in doctrine, humility under correction, and faithfulness when recognition is absent. His life should provide reasonable evidence that he can be trusted with the responsibilities being considered. This is not a requirement for sinless perfection or an invitation to manufacture accusations against faithful believers. It is a demand that church appointments be governed by Scripture rather than enthusiasm, familiarity, or the political convenience of filling an empty position. The Bible does not instruct the church to reward a man's popularity and then pray that his character catches up with the appointment.

There is no disgrace in allowing a man additional time to mature before entrusting him with an office. A believer can serve the Lord faithfully without possessing an official title, and the church should never suggest that ordinary service is spiritually inferior simply because it receives less public recognition. Some of the most dependable workers in a congregation may never occupy a formally recognized office, yet their labor remains valuable before God. Likewise, a man who does not presently satisfy the qualifications may grow through instruction, repentance, and demonstrated faithfulness. The congregation should encourage such growth without pretending it has already occurred. Patience is not hostility, and examination is not persecution. A church that proceeds carefully is not insulting its members by taking God's standards seriously. It is refusing to gamble with responsibilities that affect the welfare of others. When the Lord requires proven servants, the congregation should look for the evidence rather than settle for attractive promises. Good intentions may start a project, but established faithfulness is what makes a man dependable when the project becomes difficult.

Ultimately, the office of deacon must remain a place of service rather than an instrument of personal importance. The man entrusted with it should be grateful for the opportunity to labor, conscious of his accountability, and unwilling to use his position for selfish ambition. He should remain the same faithful servant after receiving the office that he demonstrated himself to be before receiving it. The title may change his responsibilities, but it should not change the character upon which those responsibilities depend. The congregation, meanwhile, must resist the temptation to lower biblical standards whenever an influential candidate appears or an appointment becomes inconvenient. God's requirements do not become optional because the church is short of volunteers. It is better to leave a position unfilled while qualified men are sought and developed than to entrust it to someone whose established conduct contradicts the qualifications. First Corinthians 4:2 does not say that stewards must be found impressive, influential, wealthy, popular, or politically useful. It says they must be found faithful. That is the standard worth maintaining. A deacon should

not become faithful because he received an office. He should receive the office because his faithfulness has already been demonstrated. Let him first be proved, not first be popular.

5 of 10 — Deacons — Before He Helps Run Church Business, Take a Look at His Own House

Key Passage: 1 Timothy 3:11–12

“Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.”

There is something wonderfully inconvenient about the way the apostle Paul establishes qualifications for a deacon. Just when a church thinks it has found the perfect candidate because he can balance the treasury, organize a building project, and sit through a three-hour business meeting without falling asleep, the Holy Ghost directs attention toward something considerably closer to home. First Timothy 3:12 declares, “Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.” There goes the comfortable notion that church responsibility begins when a man walks through the sanctuary doors and ends when he drives out of the parking lot. God is interested in what happens after the Sunday clothes come off, the visitors leave, and the religious performance is over. A man may look impressive seated behind a polished conference table, but if his household tells a different story about his character, the church ought to listen. Before a man helps manage the affairs of God's house, there ought to be evidence that he takes responsibility for his own.

Paul is not writing instructions for a political organization, a denominational corporation, or a collection of religious businessmen looking for respectable titles. First Timothy 3 concerns proper order in the local church, which Paul identifies in verse 15 as “the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.” The chapter first establishes qualifications for bishops and then addresses deacons, distinguishing their offices while requiring spiritual integrity in both. These instructions belong to the present dispensation of grace and concern the conduct of believers who have been saved through faith in Jesus Christ. A man's marriage, children, and household management do not purchase salvation, contribute to his justification, or improve upon the finished work of Calvary. Ephesians 2:8–9 settles salvation by grace through faith, apart from works. But salvation and qualification for a particular church office are not identical

matters. A saved man may possess eternal life and still lack the demonstrated domestic responsibility required for recognized service.

That distinction exposes a contradiction that has troubled more than a few congregations. A man wants influence over church finances but neglects legitimate obligations at home. He wants to discuss spiritual leadership while refusing to lead his family according to Scripture. He speaks loudly about proper church government while his own conduct as a husband and father would not survive five minutes of honest examination. Then somebody announces that his private life should not affect his public ministry. Unfortunately for that argument, Paul has already connected the two. The apostle does not demand a household without difficulties or a family consisting of flawless human beings. He requires demonstrated faithfulness in responsibilities that reveal the man's character. Christianity was never intended to become a Sunday uniform concealing a completely different life from Monday through Saturday. A church that examines a candidate's business reputation while deliberately ignoring his household is inspecting the paint on the front porch while refusing to look at the foundation underneath it.

1. Paul's Qualifications Follow the Man All the Way Home

First Timothy 3:11–12 belongs to a larger passage that begins with personal qualifications and moves directly into household responsibilities. Deacons must be grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre, and must hold the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. They must first be proved and found blameless. Then Paul addresses their wives, marriages, children, and households. This is not a random collection of unrelated requirements. The apostle is examining the kind of man who may be entrusted with a recognized position of service among God's people. His speech matters. His appetites matter. His financial motives matter. His doctrine matters. And his treatment of his own family matters. The church cannot divide the man's life into convenient compartments, examine whichever compartment looks most impressive, and declare the investigation complete. A man's Christianity does not become private property the moment it begins contradicting his public profession.

The requirement to examine household conduct is especially significant because the home provides opportunities to observe character under ordinary pressures. A man may conduct himself with impressive restraint during a church meeting because he knows people are watching. His family sees how he behaves when plans fail, money becomes tight, disagreements arise, and responsibilities interrupt his preferences. Does he speak truthfully when telling the truth costs him something? Does he keep promises made to his wife and children? Does he accept correction when he has acted wrongly? Does he exercise patience, demonstrate consistency, and fulfill legitimate obligations without

expecting a public announcement? These questions reveal something more substantial than his ability to maintain an agreeable expression while sitting in a pew. Proverbs 20:7 declares, “The just man walketh in his integrity: his children are blessed after him.” Integrity is presented as a walk, not a performance reserved for particular occasions. The home often reveals whether that walk continues when the congregation is no longer watching.

Nevertheless, examining the household does not give a congregation permission to become a collection of nosy investigators searching for private family details to discuss over coffee. Biblical qualifications require responsible judgment, not gossip disguised as concern for holiness. Proverbs 11:13 warns, “A talebearer revealeth secrets: but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter.” Legitimate examination should concern relevant evidence of character, conduct, and responsibility. The goal is to determine whether the man satisfies Scripture, not to expose every ordinary disagreement that has ever occurred in his kitchen. A family is composed of human beings who experience difficulties, and the presence of difficulties does not automatically establish disqualification. The important question is how the man fulfills his responsibilities within those circumstances. A deacon does not need a household suitable for display in a furniture advertisement. He needs a household that provides credible evidence of faithful Christian conduct.

2. The Husband of One Wife Is a Biblical Qualification, Not a Convenient Slogan

First Timothy 3:12 says plainly, “Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife.” The church should neither ignore those words nor pretend they answer questions the passage does not explicitly discuss. The immediate requirement concerns a man's marital condition and faithfulness. The language excludes the notion that a man may maintain multiple wives while qualifying for the office, and it certainly provides no shelter for adultery or sexual dishonesty. Marriage is not an optional moral consideration in the examination of a candidate. The man must demonstrate fidelity to the marriage covenant and an upright domestic life. Hebrews 13:4 declares, “Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.” A man who treats marital faithfulness as negotiable has already demonstrated a serious problem with obedience. The church should not promote him into additional responsibility while pretending that his treatment of his wife has nothing to do with his spiritual qualifications.

There are disputed questions surrounding the expression “husbands of one wife,” and they should be handled with more care than is sometimes found in religious arguments. Some understand the requirement as demanding that a candidate be presently married, while others emphasize marital fidelity and contend that the wording does not necessarily exclude an unmarried man. Questions also arise concerning widowers who remarry, divorce, remarriage following divorce, and the circumstances of a man's previous marital

history. The passage itself does not provide a separate explanation addressing every one of those cases. First Corinthians 7 and Romans 7 contain relevant instruction concerning marriage, while the pastoral qualifications must retain their own force. A church should study those passages carefully, reach convictions it can honestly defend from Scripture, and apply them consistently. It should not settle difficult questions by pretending that the Bible explicitly contains a detailed list of exceptions or disqualifications where no such list appears. Conviction is commendable; claiming more biblical certainty than the text establishes is not.

Whatever conclusion is reached concerning those disputed applications, one obligation remains unmistakable: a candidate cannot disregard marital integrity. Ephesians 5:31 describes husband and wife becoming “one flesh,” drawing upon the marriage relationship established in Genesis. The covenant is not a convenient social arrangement that a man may honor publicly while betraying privately. If he promises faithfulness before God and witnesses, that promise ought to govern his conduct when temptation appears, disagreements occur, and the ordinary demands of marriage require sacrifice. A congregation should examine whether the man demonstrates genuine loyalty rather than simply possessing the appropriate marital status on paper. A marriage certificate can document a legal relationship, but it cannot testify that a husband has behaved honorably throughout it. The qualification is not satisfied by looking married on Sunday while living dishonorably the rest of the week. A man entrusted with responsibility in God's house ought to be trustworthy in the covenant obligations of his own.

3. The Deacon's Wife Is Not an Invisible Part of the Qualification

First Timothy 3:11 introduces another requirement that some congregations seem almost determined to overlook: “Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things.” Notice that Paul does not discuss the deacon's household while pretending that his wife's conduct is irrelevant. He specifically addresses her testimony and character. The wording of the King James Bible says “their wives,” and that wording should be allowed to stand. Some discussions of the passage raise the question of whether the reference concerns wives particularly or women engaged in recognized service more broadly. That question does not authorize us to erase the actual expression in the passage or announce an elaborate organizational arrangement that Paul has not explained here. The immediate qualification is plain enough to demand attention. The conduct of a deacon's wife is relevant to the examination of his household, and the church should take the requirement seriously without turning her into an unofficial officeholder who must satisfy expectations invented by religious tradition.

The individual requirements deserve careful consideration. She must be grave, demonstrating seriousness and dignity appropriate to Christian conduct. She must not be a slanderer, which rules out the poisonous habit of spreading damaging accusations and malicious reports. She must be sober, demonstrating sound judgment and self-control, and faithful in all things, showing reliability in the responsibilities entrusted to her. These are substantial requirements, not decorative compliments inserted to make a church installation ceremony sound impressive. The warning against slander deserves special attention because a deacon's wife may hear sensitive matters through her husband's involvement in congregational responsibilities. That possibility does not entitle her to confidential information she has no legitimate reason to possess, nor does marriage excuse either spouse from proper discretion. Proverbs 10:18 warns that “he that uttereth a slander, is a fool.” A church can survive without another committee luncheon, but it will struggle when private information becomes recreational conversation among people who ought to know better.

These qualifications must also be applied with honesty and fairness. A wife is not responsible for every accusation somebody invents against her husband, and her character should not be judged by malicious gossip, personal grudges, or whether she satisfies somebody's preferred model of a pastor's wife. Scripture does not require her to organize every women's activity, play the piano, host social gatherings, or maintain a permanently smiling expression during every congregation meeting. Those are human expectations, not qualifications established in 1 Timothy 3:11. What Paul requires is genuine Christian character. Her conduct should demonstrate gravity, discretion, sobriety, and faithfulness. The husband, meanwhile, cannot use her responsibilities as an excuse to neglect his own. A man's marriage should be characterized by mutual seriousness about the Lord rather than one spouse maintaining the appearance while the other enjoys the privileges. The church needs faithful households, not a religious husband-and-wife stage production with excellent costumes and a rotten script.

4. A Husband Is Commanded to Love His Wife, Not Rule Her Like a Prison Warden

Ephesians 5:25 establishes a command that every married candidate ought to understand before discussing authority: “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.” That verse is not a sentimental greeting-card inscription. It places the husband's conduct under the example of Jesus Christ, whose love involved sacrifice rather than selfish advantage. The husband is instructed to love, not merely to demand obedience, control household decisions, or insist that his preferences be treated as commandments from heaven. Ephesians 5:23 speaks of the husband as the head of the wife, while verse 25 defines the sacrificial character that must govern his treatment of her.

A man who quotes the passage concerning headship while conveniently forgetting the command to love has not demonstrated superior biblical knowledge. He has demonstrated selective reading. The husband who wants the authority of his position without the sacrifices attached to it is shopping for privileges rather than submitting to Scripture.

Colossians 3:19 makes the matter even clearer: “Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them.” First Peter 3:7 instructs husbands to dwell with their wives according to knowledge, “giving honour unto the wife,” and identifies husband and wife as “heirs together of the grace of life.” These instructions correct the notion that biblical leadership grants a man permission to be harsh, dismissive, threatening, or contemptuous. A husband does not become godly by frightening his family into silence, and abuse does not become righteous because somebody attaches the word “headship” to it. Biblical responsibility demands that he provide care, demonstrate consideration, exercise self-control, and treat his wife honorably. He may need to make difficult decisions and exercise judgment within the marriage, but those responsibilities never place him above God's commandments. A man who expects his wife to obey Scripture while he refuses to obey the commands addressed directly to husbands has an authority problem of his own.

The contradiction becomes particularly glaring when a man treats strangers more kindly than the woman to whom he has pledged his life. He speaks politely during church meetings, smiles at visitors, and offers cheerful assistance whenever somebody is watching. At home, however, he is impatient, demanding, harsh, or indifferent to legitimate needs. Such behavior reveals a division between religious appearance and actual obedience. Ephesians 5:28 declares, “So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself.” Paul is not describing a husband who treats his wife as an inconvenient employee assigned to maintain his comfort. He is describing a covenant relationship requiring genuine care and faithfulness. A deacon's wife is not a prop arranged to improve his reputation. She is his wife, and his conduct toward her matters before God. If a man cannot demonstrate Christian charity toward the woman sharing his home, the church should be cautious about entrusting him with responsibilities requiring charity toward everybody else.

5. Ruling Children Well Is Not the Same as Raising Little Religious Actors

First Timothy 3:12 requires deacons to rule “their children and their own houses well.” The word “ruling” identifies responsibility for proper household order, but the final word deserves equal attention. Paul does not merely require that a man exercise authority. He requires that he exercise it well. Biblical household leadership involves instruction, discipline, example, consistency, and care. Ephesians 6:4 addresses fathers directly: “And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and

admonition of the Lord." Those two parts belong together. Fathers are commanded to raise their children in the Lord's instruction while avoiding conduct that unnecessarily provokes them to wrath. A household governed entirely by angry threats, unpredictable punishments, and public intimidation does not become spiritually exemplary because the children remain quiet whenever visitors arrive. Silence can be produced by fear. Biblical nurture requires something considerably more substantial.

Proverbs 22:6 declares, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." The verse belongs to the wisdom instruction of Proverbs, originally given within Israel's scriptural inheritance, and its truth should be respected in that setting. It emphasizes the importance of proper training and the enduring significance of early instruction. Nevertheless, it should not be converted into a mechanical guarantee that every child raised by faithful parents will make identical decisions throughout adulthood. Scripture recognizes the moral responsibility of individuals, and parents do not possess the power to make every future choice for their children. The principle places serious responsibility upon fathers without granting them absolute control over another person's will. A deacon should demonstrate genuine diligence in raising his children, not merely assume that taking them to church automatically accomplishes his obligations. A child needs more than a reserved seat in Sunday school and a father who knows how to quote the rules when company arrives.

There is also a necessary distinction between children living under a father's immediate household responsibility and grown children making independent decisions. First Timothy 3:12 does not specify an age limit or supply a separate procedure for evaluating every possible family circumstance. A congregation must therefore avoid adding artificial certainty where the text does not provide it. The man's actual responsibility, his demonstrated conduct, and the circumstances involved should receive honest consideration. An adult son who rejects biblical instruction after establishing an independent household does not automatically prove that his father neglected every obligation while raising him. Likewise, a father cannot excuse years of evident neglect by declaring that his children's behavior is entirely their own affair. The issue is faithful household leadership, not an impossible guarantee of flawless outcomes. A congregation should examine whether the candidate has provided instruction, discipline, care, and a consistent example appropriate to the responsibilities God entrusted to him. It should neither excuse obvious negligence nor condemn a faithful father merely because his family has encountered genuine difficulty.

6. A Well-Ruled House Is Measured by Responsibility, Not Religious Appearances

The requirement that a man rule his household well reaches into ordinary matters that religious people sometimes prefer to leave unexamined. First Timothy 5:8 declares, “But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.” The immediate context concerns responsibilities involving widows and family provision, but the warning establishes the seriousness of neglecting legitimate household obligations. A man should not be eager to supervise church expenditures while refusing reasonable responsibility for the needs of his own family. Provision involves faithful effort and care according to one's actual circumstances, not a guarantee of wealth. A poor man may work diligently and provide responsibly, while a wealthy man may neglect his household despite possessing considerable resources. The question is not whether the candidate owns an expensive home or receives an impressive salary. It is whether his conduct demonstrates faithfulness toward those for whom he bears responsibility.

Financial provision is only part of household management. A husband and father may bring home substantial income while remaining absent from every meaningful family responsibility. He can provide expensive possessions while neglecting instruction, affection, discipline, and spiritual example. Deuteronomy 6:6–7 originally instructed Israel concerning the teaching of God's commandments within the household, and that covenantal setting must not be erased. Nevertheless, the importance of parental instruction is reaffirmed for believers under grace in Ephesians 6:4. Fathers are responsible to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. This requires more than delegating every spiritual conversation to a Sunday school teacher while the father concentrates entirely upon worldly accomplishments. The congregation should not confuse financial success with faithful domestic leadership. A man can purchase an impressive house while failing miserably at the responsibilities that make it a properly governed home. Church office should not become the reward for building a prosperous household on the ruins of neglected relationships.

The way a man handles trouble also reveals the quality of his household leadership. Every family encounters difficulties: sickness, financial pressure, disagreements, disappointments, and circumstances that cannot be resolved through a cheerful religious slogan. The qualified man must demonstrate honesty, patience, and responsibility when those difficulties arise. Does he admit mistakes, or does he blame everybody else? Does he seek biblical correction when his conduct is wrong, or does he demand that his family protect his reputation? Does he fulfill obligations when circumstances become inconvenient? James 1:19 instructs believers to be “swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.” That is excellent instruction for any household, particularly one whose head seeks recognized spiritual responsibility. A family need not be free from hardship to demonstrate

faithful leadership. Sometimes the strongest evidence of character appears precisely when hardship exposes whether a man truly believes what he professes. The Lord does not require a theatrical household without problems; He requires integrity and obedience amid the responsibilities of real life.

7. The Household Test Must Be Honest Before the Church Gives Him Responsibility

First Timothy 3:10 requires deacons first to be proved, and the household qualifications of verses 11–12 must be included in that examination. A congregation that investigates a candidate's finances, reputation, and biblical knowledge while deliberately overlooking his marriage and family has performed an incomplete examination. Nevertheless, proving must be conducted with fairness. The church should seek credible evidence rather than rumors, examine established patterns rather than isolated misunderstandings, and distinguish genuine concerns from personal hostility. First Timothy 5:19 gives a specific rule concerning accusations against elders, requiring proper witnesses. Although that instruction addresses elders rather than deacon candidates, it demonstrates the seriousness with which unsupported accusations should be treated. No church should abandon righteousness merely because a candidate is influential, and no church should abandon fairness merely because somebody dislikes him. Biblical examination is not a license for malicious people to destroy reputations through suspicion.

A congregation should also avoid manufacturing an impossible picture of the ideal family. The candidate's wife is not required to possess every talent that church members happen to admire. His children are not required to behave like miniature preachers rehearsing answers for a religious competition. The family is not expected to maintain perfect health, financial comfort, uninterrupted agreement, or a record free from every ordinary human difficulty. A faithful household may encounter serious burdens without demonstrating spiritual failure. Scripture requires marital integrity, the stated qualifications concerning wives, and proper household leadership. It does not require a flawless family photograph. On the other hand, the existence of human imperfection must not become an excuse for ignoring clear patterns of dishonesty, abuse, abandonment, or irresponsible conduct. A church must know the difference between legitimate hardship and established disobedience. Mercy does not require pretending that wrongdoing is righteousness, and discernment does not require treating every difficulty as evidence of sin.

This entire examination should remind the congregation that recognized office does not make a man spiritually superior to other believers. The deacon remains a servant accountable to Jesus Christ, and the responsibilities entrusted to him should be approached with humility rather than entitlement. First Timothy 3:13 promises that those who use the office well purchase to themselves “a good degree, and great boldness in the

faith which is in Christ Jesus." The blessing is connected with faithful service, not merely receiving an appointment. That includes obedience in responsibilities that existed before the appointment was made. A man who neglects his wife and children in order to spend every available hour appearing important at church has misunderstood the priorities established by Scripture. His family responsibilities are not obstacles to spiritual service that must be removed. They are obligations that form part of his required faithfulness. The Lord never instructed a man to sacrifice obedience at home upon the altar of his own importance at church. The faithful servant understands that God's authority follows him through both doors.

Conclusion

The household qualifications in 1 Timothy 3:11–12 place a necessary boundary around the office of deacon. A man cannot separate his public usefulness from his private responsibilities and then demand that the church examine only the portion of his life that looks impressive. Paul specifically addresses the testimony of deacons' wives, the integrity of their marriages, and the faithful ruling of their children and households. These requirements belong alongside the earlier qualifications concerning gravity, honesty, self-control, freedom from greed, doctrinal stability, and proven character. They are not secondary suggestions that may be discarded whenever a congregation finds a candidate with valuable business connections. The man may possess financial experience, organizational talent, and considerable enthusiasm, but those abilities cannot erase the qualifications written by the Holy Ghost. The church must recognize the difference between useful skills and biblical fitness for office. When God includes the household in His examination, the congregation has no authority to declare that household conduct is irrelevant.

At the same time, Scripture must be handled with enough honesty to avoid inventing requirements that God has not established. Questions concerning marriage history, unmarried candidates, the conduct of grown children, and particular family circumstances deserve careful attention rather than careless slogans. A congregation should maintain defensible biblical convictions without pretending that every disputed application is settled by a sentence that never actually appears in the passage. The objective is neither to excuse unfaithfulness nor to disqualify men through artificial standards. It is to recognize demonstrated obedience according to what Scripture actually requires. Ephesians 5 commands husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church. Ephesians 6 instructs fathers to nurture their children without provoking them to wrath. First Timothy 3 requires household responsibility as evidence relevant to recognized service. These passages do not contradict one another. Together they show that biblical leadership is inseparable from

personal obedience. The husband who desires spiritual responsibility must first demonstrate that God's commands govern his treatment of those closest to him.

The final issue is not whether a man's family appears impressive before other people. It is whether his life demonstrates sincere submission to the Lord Jesus Christ. A church should not reward religious performances, excuse obvious negligence, or allow worldly accomplishments to overshadow biblical qualifications. Nor should it demand sinless perfection from a household composed of ordinary human beings. It should seek men whose marriages demonstrate faithfulness, whose homes reveal responsible leadership, whose wives possess the character required in Scripture, and whose conduct remains consistent when public recognition disappears. The deacon's office is not a throne upon which a man may sit above responsibilities he has failed to fulfill. It is an opportunity for a qualified servant to labor faithfully among God's people. Let the congregation examine the man carefully, weigh the evidence honestly, and refuse to exchange divine standards for human convenience. Let the candidate remember that his first audience is not the church committee but the Lord who sees his daily conduct. Before a man asks the congregation to trust him with the business of God's house, he ought to demonstrate that he has been faithful with the responsibilities God already placed inside his own. A polished church badge cannot cover a neglected home, and a title behind the pulpit cannot repair disobedience behind the front door.

6 of 10 — Deacons — The Pastor’s Helpers Are Not His Board of Directors

Key Passage: Philippians 1:1

“Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:”

There is something almost entertaining about watching a modern church attempt to manufacture a board of directors out of an office that God established for service. A congregation begins with men who are supposed to be qualified servants, gives them responsibility for certain practical matters, and before long somebody decides that controlling the church treasury ought to include controlling the preacher. Suddenly the deacons are holding private meetings, counting votes, discussing whether the pastor has become too independent, and treating the pulpit as though it belongs to whoever possesses the checkbook. Then somebody announces that this arrangement is biblical church government. Biblical according to whom? Philippians 1:1 recognizes “the bishops and deacons,” but it does not identify the deacons as a superior governing board over the

bishops. First Timothy 3 establishes qualifications for both offices, but it does not promote the deacons into the pastor's supervisors. A man does not become the shepherd of a congregation merely because somebody gives him a key to the finance office.

The distinction matters because the local church is not a corporation that happens to conduct religious services, and the pastor is not merely a hired motivational speaker whose continued employment depends upon pleasing a collection of influential businessmen. The New Testament describes spiritual oversight, teaching, shepherding, service, accountability, and responsibilities exercised under the authority of Jesus Christ. Those responsibilities must be understood according to Scripture rather than rearranged according to whatever organizational structure a congregation inherited from its grandparents. Paul instructs Timothy concerning bishops and deacons in 1 Timothy 3, and he explains in verse 15 that these instructions concern proper behavior in “the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.” That ought to establish the proper foundation. The church belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ, not the pastor, not the deacons, not the largest contributor, and not the family whose ancestors helped purchase the original property.

But before anybody mistakes this for an argument that pastors should operate without accountability, another biblical distinction must be established. Rejecting an unauthorized ruling committee does not establish a religious dictatorship. The man behind the pulpit is not above Scripture, beyond correction, or entitled to unquestioning obedience simply because he carries the title of pastor. First Peter 5:3 specifically warns spiritual shepherds against being “lords over God's heritage.” That instruction did not disappear when congregations began building impressive sanctuaries and printing elaborate constitutions. Biblical pastoral leadership is not tyranny, and biblical deacon service is not rebellion. Both offices operate beneath the authority of Christ and His word. The problem arises when men abandon their appointed responsibilities and begin competing for positions God never assigned them. The pastor who wants to become a dictator and the deacon who wants to become a corporate chairman are suffering from the same spiritual disease: they have mistaken responsibility for ownership. The church already has a Head, and He has never advertised the position as vacant.

1. Philippi Had Bishops and Deacons, Not a Religious Boardroom

Philippians 1:1 presents a straightforward distinction that should settle considerable confusion before the first organizational meeting begins. Paul addresses “all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons.” Notice the order and terminology. The saints constitute the congregation, while bishops and deacons are identified among them as distinguishable groups. Paul does not describe a board of

deacons governing the bishops, nor does he present bishops and deacons as interchangeable titles for identical responsibilities. The verse recognizes the existence of both offices without supplying every detail of their duties. That additional instruction must be gathered from other New Testament passages. The important point is that the church had recognizable spiritual order without Paul describing a corporate arrangement in which practical servants controlled the men responsible for spiritual oversight. A title appearing in the Bible does not authorize every organizational invention that later generations manage to attach to it.

Another important detail is that Philippians 1:1 uses the plural expression “bishops.” That should discourage the simplistic notion that every New Testament congregation must necessarily operate with one man exercising every aspect of pastoral oversight while everybody else remains subordinate to his personal decisions. Scripture recognizes plurality in spiritual leadership, and Acts 14:23 records elders being ordained in every church. The New Testament pattern therefore cannot be reduced to either a solitary religious dictator or a group of deacons supervising a hired preacher. The bishops bear oversight responsibilities, while deacons are identified separately. The precise administrative arrangements may differ according to congregational circumstances, but the biblical distinction between the offices must not be erased. A church that insists upon having several pastors or elders does not thereby establish that deacons govern them. And a church with one pastor does not acquire permission to place him beyond the authority of God's word.

First Timothy 3 reinforces the distinction by providing separate qualifications. Verses 1–7 concern the bishop, including his responsibility to be “apt to teach.” Verses 8–13 concern deacons, requiring gravity, honesty, self-control, freedom from greed, doctrinal fidelity, and proven character. Paul does not repeat every qualification in identical language because the offices are not presented as identical responsibilities. A bishop must meet the requirements associated with spiritual oversight, while a deacon must satisfy the standards governing his particular service. Neither office is established as a reward for popularity or a means of acquiring personal influence. Yet churches sometimes construct such elaborate systems of titles, committees, and competing jurisdictions that one wonders whether anybody remembered to bring the Bible into the organizational discussion. The New Testament gives the church qualified overseers and qualified servants. Men create trouble when they turn those distinctions into competing kingdoms.

2. Pastor, Bishop, and Elder Describe Spiritual Oversight, Not Competing Religious Ranks

The New Testament establishes a relationship between the terms pastor, bishop, and elder that cannot be dismissed merely because modern churches have developed different organizational customs. Acts 20:17 records Paul calling for the elders of the church at Ephesus. Then, addressing those same men, he declares in verse 28, “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” The elders are identified as overseers and instructed to feed the flock. That is pastoral work. The passage does not introduce three competing offices arranged into a religious ladder. It presents the same men in connection with their maturity, oversight, and shepherding responsibilities. The terminology emphasizes different aspects of the work rather than three unrelated classes of spiritual officials. The men responsible for feeding and overseeing the flock are not interchangeable with a committee appointed to administer ordinary congregational business.

Titus 1:5 provides another important connection. Paul instructed Titus to “ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee.” Then, while describing the required qualifications, verse 7 says, “For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God.” The movement from elders to bishop occurs within the same discussion of spiritual oversight. First Peter 5:1–2 likewise addresses elders and instructs them to “Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof.” Here again, the responsibilities associated with elders include feeding and overseeing the flock. Ephesians 4:11 identifies pastors and teachers among the gifts Christ gave for the ministry and edification of His people. These passages provide the biblical foundation for understanding pastoral oversight without constructing a collection of independent religious ranks. A bishop is not a denominational monarch promoted above ordinary pastors, and an elder is not automatically a separate legislative officer appointed to supervise the preacher. Scripture must define the responsibilities before church tradition begins distributing the titles.

The practical implication is considerable. A church should recognize spiritual oversight according to the qualifications and responsibilities established in Scripture, not according to whichever committee possesses the greatest institutional influence. First Timothy 3:2 requires a bishop to be “apt to teach,” while Titus 1:9 requires doctrinal ability sufficient to exhort and convince gainsayers. Those responsibilities cannot be transferred to deacons merely because they approve expenditures or organize practical affairs. Neither does the distinction establish that deacons are personally employed by the pastor or exist to carry out every preference he expresses. They serve the Lord within the local church, cooperating with legitimate spiritual leadership according to their appointed responsibilities. The pastor does not own the servants, and the servants do not own the pastor. When a church mistakes offices of service for positions of ownership, it stops asking what God

commanded and starts arguing over who possesses the keys to the kingdom. Unfortunately, the kingdom under discussion is usually no larger than the church office.

3. Acts 6 Shows Servants Handling Business Without Taking Over the Ministry

Acts 6:1–7 provides a valuable historical example of spiritual responsibilities and practical service functioning together. The early Jerusalem assembly was growing, but the Grecian widows were being neglected in the daily ministration. The twelve apostles recognized the problem and instructed the multitude to select seven qualified men to address the necessary business. Acts 6:2 records their explanation: "It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables." Verse 4 continues, "But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word." The distinction is clear. The apostles were not announcing that material needs were unimportant. They were recognizing that legitimate practical responsibilities should be handled without requiring them to abandon the particular ministry entrusted to them. Qualified servants were appointed to address the problem, allowing the apostles to continue their assigned responsibilities. The arrangement produced cooperation rather than competition.

The historical setting must be respected. Acts 6 concerns the Jerusalem assembly during the ministry of the twelve apostles, and the seven appointed men are not explicitly called deacons by the formal title subsequently recognized in Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3. Neither should the twelve apostles be treated as though they were merely twelve modern pastors. Their apostolic commission and foundational position were unique. Nevertheless, the passage demonstrates an unmistakable principle concerning the proper distribution of responsibilities. The seven were selected because they possessed an honest report, the fullness of the Holy Ghost, and wisdom. They were appointed over a particular business that needed attention. Nothing in the account describes them becoming a governing committee over the apostles or acquiring authority to decide whether the ministry of the word should continue. The apostles appointed men to solve a problem, not to create another government that would eventually become a problem of its own.

There is another detail worth examining. Acts 6:5 says the proposal pleased the whole multitude, and verse 6 records the selected men being presented to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands upon them. The congregation participated in identifying qualified men, while the apostles exercised their appointed responsibilities. Cooperation did not require eliminating distinctions, and recognized leadership did not require dismissing the congregation. By verse 7, the word of God was increasing and the number of disciples multiplying greatly in Jerusalem. Scripture does not promise identical numerical results every time a church arranges its responsibilities properly, but the historical outcome is instructive. The neglected work received attention without the central ministry

being abandoned. That is the kind of order a congregation should desire. A servant who removes unnecessary burdens strengthens the ministry. A servant who spends his time competing for control creates additional burdens. There is a considerable difference between helping carry the work and attempting to commandeer the wagon.

4. Whoever Controls the Money Does Not Automatically Control the Pulpit

One of the quickest ways to corrupt church service is to transform financial stewardship into spiritual domination. A congregation may properly entrust qualified individuals with receiving offerings, maintaining records, approving expenditures, or administering assistance. Such responsibilities require honesty and accountability. But Scripture never teaches that handling the money automatically confers authority to govern the preaching. First Timothy 3:8 specifically warns that deacons must not be “greedy of filthy lucre,” while verse 9 requires them to hold the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. Those qualifications concern integrity and doctrine, not the acquisition of financial power. A man entrusted with the church treasury is a steward of resources dedicated to legitimate congregational purposes. He is not thereby commissioned to rewrite the pastor's sermons, determine which biblical passages may be preached, or threaten financial consequences whenever the preaching offends his personal preferences. The offering plate is not a substitute for the authority of Scripture.

Consider the danger when a financial committee begins using the church budget as an instrument of intimidation. The pastor preaches against a practice that influential members enjoy, and suddenly somebody suggests that his compensation should be reconsidered. He addresses a difficult doctrinal question, and the committee announces that his position may be endangered unless he becomes more agreeable. He refuses to promote a wealthy contributor's preferred religious activity, and the financial machinery begins grinding against him. That is not faithful stewardship. It is an attempt to purchase control over the ministry through economic pressure. First Timothy 5:17–18 recognizes responsibilities concerning the support of elders who labor in the word and doctrine. Those instructions do not place a pastor beyond legitimate financial accountability, but neither do they authorize using his livelihood as a weapon against faithful preaching. A church that allows its treasury to dictate its doctrine has placed the cash box where the Bible ought to be.

At the same time, refusing financial intimidation must never become an excuse for pastoral secrecy or dishonest administration. Second Corinthians 8:20–21 records Paul's concern to avoid blame in the handling of substantial contributions, “Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.” That principle supports transparent financial procedures and responsible safeguards. Church funds should not

become the private property of a pastor any more than they should become the personal kingdom of a deacon. Proper records, appropriate authorization, and reasonable accountability protect the congregation and everyone entrusted with resources. A pastor who resents every legitimate financial question may possess the same appetite for unchecked control as the deacon who threatens him. Biblical stewardship refuses both extremes. The treasury must be administered honestly, and the pulpit must remain governed by God's word. Neither financial responsibility nor spiritual oversight authorizes one man to treat the congregation's resources as his personal possession.

5. Backroom Voting and Church Politics Are Poor Substitutes for Biblical Service

There is a particular kind of religious politics that begins with private conversations and eventually produces public division. A deacon becomes dissatisfied with the pastor, but instead of addressing a legitimate concern openly and according to Scripture, he begins gathering supporters. Another man is encouraged to express his dissatisfaction, a third receives a carefully edited account of the situation, and before long a faction develops. By the time the congregation discovers what is happening, several influential members have already decided which outcome they intend to produce. The actual biblical question may have disappeared beneath personal grievances, wounded pride, and competing ambitions. Romans 16:17 warns believers to mark those who cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine they have learned. The passage concerns genuine doctrinal division, not every honest disagreement or legitimate effort to correct wrongdoing. Nevertheless, it exposes the seriousness of deliberately creating factions contrary to biblical truth. A private conspiracy does not become righteous merely because its participants open the meeting with prayer.

The Corinthian church provides another warning. First Corinthians 1:10 calls believers to speak the same thing and avoid divisions, while the following verses expose factions identifying themselves with different men. Paul asks in verse 13, “Is Christ divided?” The problem was not that believers possessed personalities or recognized different teachers. Their allegiance to men was producing divisions that obscured the central place of Jesus Christ. Something similar occurs when congregations divide themselves into the pastor's supporters, the deacons' supporters, and the members who would prefer everybody stop fighting long enough to conduct a normal worship service. Once personalities replace Scripture as the basis of allegiance, nearly every decision becomes a contest. The church no longer asks whether a proposal is biblical, honest, or useful. It asks which faction will benefit. When church government becomes a contest over who can gather the most votes, the congregation may discover that it has elected a winner without finding anybody willing to serve.

This does not mean congregational participation, voting, or organized deliberation is inherently unscriptural. Acts 15 records serious doctrinal discussion involving apostles and elders, with the wider church participating in the resulting action. The circumstances were unique to the apostolic period, but the passage plainly does not portray all collective deliberation as rebellion. Congregations may need orderly procedures for selecting officers, approving expenditures, resolving practical questions, and fulfilling legal responsibilities. The presence of a vote does not establish corruption. The problem arises when procedures are manipulated to evade Scripture, conceal misconduct, silence legitimate concerns, or substitute personal ambition for spiritual judgment. First Corinthians 14:40 commands, “Let all things be done decently and in order.” Order is not an excuse to suppress righteousness, and liberty is not permission to manufacture confusion. A church can conduct an orderly meeting without becoming a political machine. Its decisions should be guided by truth, fairness, and recognized biblical responsibilities rather than by whichever group has mastered the art of parliamentary maneuvering.

6. A Pastor Must Be Followed Biblically, Not Worshipped Religiously

Hebrews 13:17 states, “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account.” The verse establishes a serious responsibility concerning spiritual leadership. Those who watch for souls are accountable to God, and believers should not treat legitimate spiritual oversight as an unnecessary irritation. Yet the passage must be read with its entire meaning intact. The leaders themselves must give account, and their responsibility concerns the spiritual welfare of God's people. The verse does not say that a pastor becomes incapable of error after receiving an office or that every personal preference he expresses carries divine authority. Submission to biblical leadership is not the surrender of conscience to a personality. Acts 5:29 establishes the controlling principle that obedience to God takes precedence over obedience to men. No church officer may command what Scripture forbids or forbid what God commands and then demand compliance as proof of spirituality.

First Peter 5:1–3 places equally serious obligations upon those exercising oversight. Peter addresses the elders, instructing them to feed the flock of God, take oversight willingly, and avoid filthy lucre. Then comes the warning: “Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.” That language leaves no room for a pastor who imagines his office makes him the personal owner of everybody attending the congregation. Biblical oversight involves feeding, guarding, teaching, correcting, and providing a godly example. It does not involve controlling every private decision, demanding unquestioned personal loyalty, or punishing believers because they respectfully ask biblical questions. A pastor

who refuses all examination has misunderstood his responsibility. He must preach the word, not present himself as a substitute for it. The shepherd is commanded to feed the flock, not consume it. A pulpit is a place of accountability before God, not a throne from which a man may rule without restraint.

Scripture also establishes procedures for addressing wrongdoing among spiritual leaders. First Timothy 5:19 says, “Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses.” Verse 20 continues, “Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.” These instructions protect elders against unsupported accusations while refusing to place guilty leaders beyond correction. The requirement for proper evidence must never be twisted into permission to conceal abuse, intimidate witnesses, or obstruct legitimate civil authority. Romans 13 recognizes the proper function of governing authorities concerning wrongdoing. A congregation should neither accept malicious rumors nor suppress established misconduct because the accused possesses an impressive title. The same principle of honest accountability should govern the handling of legitimate concerns involving deacons. Biblical order protects the innocent, exposes wrongdoing, and requires correction where Scripture demands it. Rejecting a deacon dictatorship therefore does not require embracing a pastoral dictatorship. Both arrangements place human authority above its rightful limits, and neither can be defended by an honest reading of the New Testament.

7. Christ Purchased the Church, and Nobody Else Gets the Deed

Acts 20:28 contains a statement that should humble every man entrusted with responsibility in a congregation. Paul tells the overseers to feed “the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” That settles the question of ultimate ownership. The church belongs to the Lord because He purchased it through His own blood. The pastor did not purchase it. The deacons did not purchase it. The wealthy contributors did not purchase it, regardless of how much money they have provided for buildings, ministries, or ordinary expenses. The body of Christ is not a business franchise available for acquisition by whichever faction gains control of the governing documents. Ephesians 1:22–23 identifies Christ as head over all things to the church, which is His body. A local congregation must therefore conduct its affairs with conscious submission to Him. The church does not belong to the man who preaches in it, the men who administer it, or the family who donated the land beneath it.

First Corinthians 12 develops the illustration of the church as a body composed of members with differing functions. Verse 18 declares, “But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.” The chapter concerns spiritual membership and function within the body of Christ, and the principle of diverse

responsibilities provides valuable instruction for local congregational life. Not every member performs the same work, and differing responsibilities do not establish that one servant is entitled to despise another. A church needs faithful preaching, biblical teaching, practical assistance, honest administration, mutual care, and believers who exercise their responsibilities without seeking personal supremacy. The pastor cannot perform every task himself, and the deacon should not attempt to govern every task performed by somebody else. The body functions properly when its members fulfill their respective responsibilities under Christ rather than competing for recognition. A congregation with every member insisting upon being the head would resemble a monster from a particularly unpleasant nightmare.

Proper cooperation also requires recognizing the difference between biblical commands and practical arrangements. A local church may adopt a constitution, establish lawful financial procedures, designate officers for civil purposes, and organize committees to handle responsibilities requiring collective attention. Such arrangements are not automatically contrary to Scripture. Neither, however, can they override the qualifications and spiritual responsibilities established in the New Testament. A corporate document may identify who is authorized to sign checks, but it cannot transform the office of deacon into a divinely appointed superior authority over bishops. Nor can a pastor cite his spiritual office to disregard lawful obligations, financial safeguards, or the congregation's legitimate responsibilities. Human arrangements must remain subject to biblical truth. The purpose of organization is to support faithful ministry, not to provide another arena for ambitious men to exercise control. A church constitution may explain how the congregation conducts its business, but only Scripture can establish what God requires of its servants.

Conclusion

The New Testament presents a church governed by the authority of Jesus Christ, served by qualified men, and instructed through the ministry of God's word. Philippians 1:1 identifies bishops and deacons as distinct groups without establishing deacons as a ruling committee over the bishops. Acts 20 and Titus 1 connect elders with the responsibilities of oversight, while 1 Peter 5 commands shepherds to feed God's flock without becoming lords over His heritage. Acts 6 provides a historical example of qualified men addressing necessary practical responsibilities while the apostles continued in prayer and the ministry of the word. First Timothy 3 establishes distinct qualifications for bishops and deacons, demanding spiritual integrity rather than political influence. These passages do not describe a congregation whose principal purpose is to provide impressive titles for ambitious men. They describe responsibilities to be exercised under divine authority. The

church that confuses those responsibilities will eventually spend more energy settling disputes over jurisdiction than accomplishing the work for which it exists.

There is nothing spiritual about a deacon who uses financial influence, private alliances, or procedural manipulation to control the pastor. There is equally nothing spiritual about a pastor who demands absolute personal obedience, refuses legitimate examination, or treats the congregation as his private possession. The answer to one abuse is not another abuse traveling in the opposite direction. The answer is Scripture. Let the pastor fulfill his responsibility to feed the flock, teach sound doctrine, and provide godly oversight. Let the deacons fulfill their responsibilities with honesty, wisdom, doctrinal faithfulness, and a genuine willingness to serve. Let the congregation exercise proper discernment, support faithful leadership, and address legitimate wrongdoing according to biblical principles. Let money be handled transparently, disagreements be addressed truthfully, and church decisions be governed by obedience rather than personal ambition. When every officeholder remembers that he is a servant, there is considerably less opportunity for anybody to mistake himself for the owner.

Ultimately, the man who enters the deacon's office determined to become the pastor's boss has misunderstood the position before he ever takes his seat. He may possess financial experience, organizational ability, and considerable influence, but none of those things gives him authority to replace biblical spiritual oversight with a committee government of his own invention. His responsibility is to serve the Lord faithfully within the duties properly entrusted to him, strengthening the congregation rather than using its administrative arrangements to acquire personal power. Likewise, the pastor must remember that his authority is ministerial and accountable, exercised beneath the word of God rather than above it. Both men will answer to Jesus Christ for the manner in which they have served. First Corinthians 4:2 declares, “Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.” The requirement is faithfulness, not domination, popularity, financial control, or political victory. The Lord is not impressed by religious power struggles conducted in His name. He purchased the church with His own blood, and He has not surrendered its ownership to a board meeting. The pastor's helpers are not his board of directors, the pastor is not the church's dictator, and the congregation is not anybody's private corporation. Christ is the Head, Scripture is the authority, and every man holding an office had better remember that he is there to serve.

Key Passage: 1 Timothy 3:8

“Likewise must the deacons be grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre;”

Money has a remarkable ability to expose what a man really believes about honesty, responsibility, and the authority of God. A fellow can sound wonderfully spiritual while discussing the church's mission, the importance of faithful service, and the necessity of supporting the ministry. But put him within reach of the treasury, give him influence over expenditures, or allow him to determine which needs receive assistance, and his actual convictions may become considerably easier to identify. That is why the apostle Paul included a financial warning among the qualifications for deacons. First Timothy 3:8 declares that they must not be “greedy of filthy lucre.” There is nothing complicated about the requirement. A man entrusted with responsibilities among God's people must not be governed by the love of money or the opportunities for personal advantage that sometimes accompany financial influence. A church treasury is not a private bank account with a steeple attached, and a deacon's title is not a license to reach into it.

The setting of Paul's instruction is important because the office of deacon belongs to the recognized order of the local church under the present dispensation of grace. First Timothy 3 establishes qualifications for bishops and deacons, and verse 15 explains that these matters concern proper behavior in “the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.” The church is not Israel operating under the Mosaic covenant, nor is it a continuation of the Levitical priesthood with the deacons serving as a new class of temple treasurers. The body of Christ consists of saved sinners redeemed through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. Salvation is by grace through faith, according to Ephesians 2:8–9, and no amount of charitable giving can purchase eternal life. Nevertheless, believers are accountable for their conduct, and church officers must meet the qualifications God has established. Financial honesty is not an optional administrative preference. It is part of Christian integrity.

The trouble begins when churches confuse financial ability with spiritual qualification, or worse, financial influence with spiritual authority. One man knows accounting, another owns a successful business, and a third contributes substantial sums to the congregation. Those abilities and resources may be useful, but they do not establish the character required for the office of deacon. Paul did not say the servants must be wealthy, experienced bankers, or skilled at operating church financial software. He warned against greed. That qualification reaches beyond arithmetic into motive, conscience, and obedience. A man may balance every account accurately while using financial pressure to manipulate the pastor, favor his relatives, or punish somebody who disagrees with him.

Another may handle modest resources faithfully without attracting any recognition whatsoever. The Lord sees the difference. A man who can account for every dollar but cannot account for his own dishonest motives has not demonstrated biblical stewardship. He has demonstrated that a calculator can function even when the conscience does not.

1. Filthy Lucre Begins in the Heart Before It Reaches the Offering Plate

Paul's warning against being greedy of filthy lucre concerns more than the obvious act of stealing money. Greed begins when material gain becomes an object of sinful desire and starts governing a man's judgment. First Timothy 6:10 declares, “For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” Notice that the Bible identifies the love of money, not the mere possession of money, as the danger. A wealthy believer may handle his resources faithfully, while a poor man may covet every possession belonging to somebody else. Neither financial success nor financial hardship automatically establishes righteousness. The question is whether money has gained control over the man's conscience. A deacon whose decisions depend upon personal advantage has already compromised the character required for the office, even if nobody has discovered an irregularity in the financial records.

The Lord Jesus Christ warned in Luke 12:15, “Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.” That statement was delivered during His earthly ministry and must retain its historical setting, but the moral warning certainly has not expired. Covetousness causes men to measure importance according to possessions, influence, and opportunities for gain. Inside a congregation, it can produce preferential treatment, dishonest arrangements, concealed conflicts of interest, and the mistaken notion that whoever contributes the most money deserves the greatest authority. A greedy man may never remove a dollar from the treasury without authorization. He may instead use his influence to direct expenditures toward his own interests, protect favored associates, or secure advantages unavailable to others. Such conduct is financial corruption even when it arrives wearing respectable business clothing. The love of money does not always enter the church carrying a burglar's bag. Sometimes it enters carrying a financial report.

John 12:6 supplies a sobering example in Judas Iscariot, who carried the bag but was described by Scripture as a thief. His outward association with the Lord's earthly ministry did not make his private dishonesty righteous. Judas was not a New Testament deacon, and his historical position among the twelve must not be confused with the later local church office. Nevertheless, the moral warning is unmistakable. Proximity to spiritual work does not guarantee integrity. A man may handle resources connected with religious activity

while possessing motives directly opposed to the Lord he claims to serve. That should destroy the foolish assumption that trusted church workers are automatically incapable of financial wrongdoing. Trust should be accompanied by character, and character should be demonstrated through conduct. The congregation need not suspect every servant of dishonesty, but it should never confuse religious familiarity with proof of uprightness. A man who fears God has better reasons for handling money honestly than merely hoping nobody notices when the figures do not agree.

2. The Widows of Acts 6 Were Neglected While the Church Was Growing

Acts 6:1 records a serious difficulty within the early Jerusalem assembly: “there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration.” The congregation was growing, disciples were multiplying, and the ministry was advancing, but some widows were not receiving proper attention. The Grecians were Greek-speaking Jews, and the Hebrews represented the Hebrew-speaking Jewish community. This was an early Jerusalem setting under the ministry of the twelve apostles, not a fully developed Pauline local church with every later instruction already revealed. Scripture does not identify precisely why the neglect occurred, and it would be dishonest to insist that deliberate discrimination or financial theft must have been involved. The neglect itself was sufficient reason to act. The apostles did not dismiss the complaint to protect appearances. They recognized that genuine material needs required responsible attention. A church can be growing numerically while failing administratively, and a crowded sanctuary does not excuse an empty plate at a widow's table.

Acts 6:2–3 explains the arrangement that followed. The twelve declared that it was not reasonable for them to leave the word of God to serve tables, and they instructed the multitude to select seven men “of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom.” Those qualifications were necessary because the assigned business involved real people, sensitive needs, and the fair distribution of assistance. The seven men are not explicitly called deacons by the formal title in Acts 6, and the passage should not be forced into saying otherwise. Nevertheless, their appointment provides a valuable historical example of practical responsibilities being entrusted to spiritually qualified servants. The apostles wanted honesty, wisdom, and spiritual substance before assigning the work. They did not assume that handling material resources required no more than mathematical ability. Proper administration demands judgment, fairness, and the willingness to act without favoritism. An excellent ledger is little consolation to somebody whose legitimate need has been deliberately ignored.

The later instructions of 1 Timothy 5:3–16 provide further guidance concerning widows and the responsibilities of believing families and the church. Paul distinguishes genuine need

from circumstances in which relatives bear the primary obligation of providing assistance. Verse 8 warns against neglecting one's own household, while verse 16 explains that believing relatives should relieve eligible widows so the church may assist those who are widows indeed. This passage must not be carelessly imposed backward upon the precise arrangements of Acts 6, but it demonstrates that Christian charity requires both compassion and discernment. Church assistance should not be distributed according to personal friendships, family connections, financial influence, or emotional pressure. Those handling resources must recognize legitimate needs and follow appropriate biblical principles. A church treasury is not a political reward system for favored members. The widow's need should not disappear because she lacks influential relatives, and the congregation's compassion should not become an excuse for abandoning honest judgment.

3. Every Deacon Is Not Automatically the Church Treasurer

One of the most common assumptions about deacons is that their office exists primarily to handle money. Yet Philippians 1:1 identifies “the bishops and deacons” without providing a universal assignment requiring every deacon to serve as a treasurer. First Timothy 3 establishes qualifications for the office, including freedom from greed, but it does not command that every deacon count offerings, sign checks, approve purchases, or supervise financial accounts. Those responsibilities may legitimately be assigned according to a congregation's needs and arrangements. A deacon may possess excellent financial skills, while another may be particularly useful in attending to practical needs or coordinating necessary assistance. The office is one of qualified service, not a mandatory accounting position. Churches should therefore avoid treating administrative customs as though they were specific commands from God. A deacon is not defined by the number of keys hanging from his belt or the number of signatures required on a church check.

There is another danger in assuming that financial responsibility creates spiritual authority. A man may be entrusted with administering resources without receiving the biblical responsibilities associated with pastoral oversight. First Timothy 3:2 requires a bishop to be “apt to teach,” and Titus 1:9 describes the doctrinal responsibility of elders. The distinction between those offices cannot be erased because somebody happens to possess financial experience. A deacon serving as treasurer may properly explain the budget, identify financial concerns, and recommend honest procedures. He does not thereby acquire authority to dictate doctrine, determine which biblical subjects may be preached, or govern the pastor through control of expenditures. Likewise, a pastor's spiritual responsibilities do not authorize him to disregard honest financial procedures. Both men remain accountable to the Lord and must exercise their respective responsibilities

faithfully. Church finances should support the ministry, not become an alternative government operating from the counting room.

Luke 16:10–12 provides valuable instruction concerning stewardship. The Lord declares, “He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.” The immediate context concerns stewardship and the use of material riches during the Lord's earthly ministry, rather than a formal procedure for appointing Church Age deacons. Nevertheless, the principle exposes the relationship between ordinary honesty and greater responsibility. A man who deliberately mishandles small amounts cannot reasonably expect to be trusted with larger sums. Verse 11 asks, “If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?” Money is a useful test because it reveals whether responsibility governs conduct when temptation appears. A servant who considers a small dishonest transaction unimportant has misunderstood faithfulness. If a man needs a large amount of money before he considers theft a serious matter, his problem is not the size of the transaction. It is the condition of his conscience.

4. Honest Administration Should Survive Examination in Daylight

Second Corinthians 8:20–21 establishes an important example of financial accountability in apostolic ministry. Paul explains his concern while discussing the administration of a substantial contribution collected for needy saints: “Avoiding this, that no man should blame us in this abundance which is administered by us: Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.” Notice that Paul was not content merely to insist that God knew his motives were pure. He wanted the administration conducted in a manner that would avoid reasonable grounds for accusation. The surrounding passage describes the involvement of trusted brethren in handling the contribution. These men were not identified as a modern church finance committee, and the passage does not establish a universal accounting system for every congregation. It does, however, demonstrate that faithful stewardship includes attention to public integrity. An honest man should not fear arrangements that make honesty easier to recognize.

That principle has obvious practical applications. A congregation handling offerings and expenditures should maintain accurate records, establish appropriate authorization for disbursements, document significant transactions, and ensure that financial responsibilities are not unnecessarily concentrated in one person's hands. Depending upon the church's circumstances, safeguards may include multiple people verifying collections, independent review of records, regular reporting, and clear procedures for approving expenses. These particular arrangements are applications of biblical stewardship rather than additional commandments written into the office of deacon.

Scripture does not prescribe a universal accounting software program, an annual audit schedule, or a specific number of signatures on every check. Nevertheless, ordinary wisdom recognizes the value of procedures that protect funds and reduce opportunities for dishonesty. A church should not have to wait until money disappears before discovering that nobody knows who authorized the expenditure. The purpose of sound administration is to prevent avoidable trouble rather than provide an impressive explanation after the trouble arrives.

Transparency must also be distinguished from the careless exposure of private information. A church may need to protect details concerning charitable recipients, confidential pastoral matters, or personal circumstances entrusted to responsible workers. Honest accounting does not require announcing a widow's financial hardship to everybody who attends the Wednesday evening service. At the same time, legitimate confidentiality must never become an excuse for concealing financial misconduct. A congregation should establish clear boundaries concerning who may access particular information and how concerns should be examined. When discrepancies arise, they should be addressed honestly rather than buried beneath accusations that the questioner lacks faith. Second Corinthians 8 demonstrates that Paul valued accountability even when his own ministry was involved. There is no biblical virtue in arrangements that depend entirely upon a person's refusal to answer reasonable questions. Secrecy may sometimes protect a legitimate confidence, but secrecy used to protect dishonesty is merely corruption with the office door closed.

5. Large Donors Are Not Entitled to Purchase Spiritual Authority

James 2:1 warns believers, “My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons.” The following verses describe improper favoritism toward a wealthy man while a poor man receives dishonorable treatment. Although the immediate passage concerns conduct toward rich and poor within the assembly rather than the appointment of deacons, the principle applies directly to financial favoritism. A congregation should not treat wealthy members as spiritually superior because their donations help pay the expenses. Generous giving may be commendable, but financial ability does not create biblical authority. A man who contributes a substantial amount remains accountable to the same Scriptures governing everybody else. If he fails the qualifications for spiritual office, his donation history cannot repair the deficiency. A large offering may help pay for the church building, but it cannot purchase an exemption from the Bible.

First Timothy 6:17–19 provides important instruction concerning believers who possess material wealth. Paul commands Timothy to charge the rich not to be highminded or trust

in uncertain riches, but in the living God. They are to do good, be rich in good works, and be "ready to distribute, willing to communicate." Wealth therefore creates opportunities for useful service, not permission for spiritual arrogance. A generous believer should be thankful for the ability to assist others without imagining that generosity entitles him to control the congregation. The church, likewise, should appreciate faithful giving without allowing financial dependence upon an influential donor to compromise its integrity. Sometimes the most dangerous financial arrangement is not theft from the treasury but the quiet understanding that certain people cannot be corrected because their contributions are too important. A church willing to sacrifice biblical truth to preserve one man's donation has already sold something considerably more valuable than the property listed on its financial statement.

Second Corinthians 9:7 teaches, "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver." The immediate context concerns the collection Paul was organizing, and the principle emphasizes willing generosity rather than coerced religious payments. Giving must never become a system through which wealthy members purchase influence or poorer members are shamed for lacking financial resources. The Lord's observation of the poor widow in Luke 21:1–4 also illustrates that the spiritual significance of giving cannot be measured merely by the amount contributed. That event belongs to the Lord's earthly ministry and should not be converted into a universal command requiring impoverished believers to surrender their last resources. Nevertheless, it exposes the weakness of measuring devotion by visible financial totals. A church may need substantial donations to maintain legitimate activities, but it must never allow financial dependence to determine its doctrine. The worth of a believer is not established by the size of his offering.

6. The Treasury Must Never Become a Weapon Against the Pulpit

Financial pressure can become a particularly destructive instrument when deacons or other influential members attempt to control the preaching. A pastor addresses a biblical subject that somebody dislikes, and suddenly there are questions concerning his compensation. He refuses to endorse an unscriptural practice, and certain financial supporters begin threatening to withdraw their assistance. He preaches against greed, and the men holding the purse strings decide that his ministry needs closer supervision. That is not financial stewardship. It is attempted doctrinal control through economic pressure. Second Timothy 4:2 commands, "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine." The pastor's obligation to preach Scripture cannot be surrendered to the preferences of whoever controls the budget.

When the offering plate begins deciding what may be preached, the congregation has replaced biblical authority with financial censorship.

First Timothy 5:17–18 addresses the proper treatment and support of elders, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. Paul declares, “The labourer is worthy of his reward.” A congregation therefore has legitimate responsibilities toward faithful spiritual laborers, and those responsibilities should not be manipulated to punish biblical preaching. Nevertheless, proper support is not the same thing as unlimited financial entitlement. A pastor remains accountable for honest conduct, and the church may properly examine compensation, expenses, and financial circumstances through legitimate procedures. Neither the pastor nor the deacons should control the treasury without appropriate safeguards. First Peter 5:2 warns spiritual overseers against serving “for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind.” Financial greed is wrong whether it appears behind the pulpit or behind the treasurer's desk. The office does not determine whether dishonesty is sinful. God's word does, and the same moral standard applies to every man who claims to serve Him.

A necessary distinction must also be made between intimidation and legitimate accountability. A deacon who raises a genuine concern regarding financial misconduct is not automatically rebelling against pastoral authority. A congregation that refuses to approve an improper expenditure is not necessarily persecuting its preacher. Likewise, a pastor who rejects an attempt to suppress biblical teaching is not automatically demonstrating pride. The matter must be judged according to Scripture and established facts rather than personal loyalties. First Timothy 5:19–20 provides instructions concerning accusations and correction involving elders, requiring proper evidence and rebuke where sin is established. Those instructions prevent both careless accusations and the shielding of guilty leaders. The church must not use spiritual authority to conceal financial wrongdoing, nor use financial authority to punish faithful spiritual leadership. A pastor is not above the books, a treasurer is not above the Bible, and neither man is entitled to convert his responsibility into personal ownership of the congregation.

7. Faithful Stewards Will Answer to the Lord Who Owns Everything

First Corinthians 4:2 declares, “Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.” In the immediate context, Paul is discussing himself and other ministers as stewards of the mysteries of God. The verse does not specifically identify church treasurers or formally establish the duties of deacons. Nevertheless, the principle of faithfulness in entrusted responsibility applies wherever a believer is called to serve. Stewardship means that a man has received responsibility over something that does not ultimately belong to him. The congregation may legally possess property and maintain financial accounts, but

its resources must be administered according to the purposes for which they have been entrusted. The man handling those resources should remember that his responsibility is temporary and accountable. He does not become the owner by maintaining the records. A steward who begins treating entrusted property as his personal possession has forgotten the difference between holding the keys and owning the house.

The eternal importance of faithful service must also be distinguished from the salvation of the believer. First Corinthians 3:11 establishes Jesus Christ as the only foundation, while verses 12–15 describe the testing of work built upon that foundation. Some work will endure and receive reward; other work will be burned, although the believer himself remains saved. Second Corinthians 5:10 declares that believers must appear before the judgment seat of Christ to receive according to the things done in the body. This is not the great white throne judgment of Revelation 20, and it is not a second examination to determine whether the finished work of Christ was sufficient to save the believer. Salvation is by grace through faith, while Christian service is accountable to the Lord. That distinction should encourage faithfulness without confusing stewardship with justification. A dishonest deacon does not lose the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice through financial misconduct, but he certainly should not imagine that his misconduct is therefore unimportant.

First Timothy 3:13 promises that those who have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves “a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.” The emphasis falls upon faithful service rather than impressive accomplishments or financial authority. A man may handle modest resources with extraordinary honesty, assist needy members without recognition, and protect the congregation's finances without ever becoming prominent. Such labor matters before the Lord. Another man may supervise enormous sums, possess considerable influence, and receive public praise while secretly using the office for personal advantage. Human recognition cannot transform that conduct into faithful service. The judgment seat of Christ will reveal what men have done with responsibilities entrusted to them. The church may praise a financial report without knowing every motive behind it, but the Lord requires no accountant to explain the condition of the heart. The faithful servant does not need to own the treasury, control the congregation, or receive applause. He needs to be found faithful when the Lord examines his work.

Conclusion

The biblical requirements governing deacons place financial integrity squarely within the examination of character. First Timothy 3:8 warns against greed for filthy lucre, while the example of Acts 6 demonstrates the importance of entrusting practical responsibilities to

men of honest report and wisdom. Second Corinthians 8 establishes the value of administering contributions honorably before God and men, and Luke 16 illustrates the relationship between faithfulness in ordinary stewardship and greater responsibility. These passages do not transform every deacon into a mandatory treasurer or establish a universal financial procedure for every congregation. They do establish principles that no church has authority to ignore. Money entrusted for legitimate spiritual purposes must be handled honestly, fairly, and accountably. The congregation should neither suspect every worker without cause nor construct arrangements that make dishonesty unnecessarily easy. Good stewardship involves both trustworthy people and responsible procedures. Integrity is not demonstrated by how loudly a man declares that he can be trusted, but by how faithfully he handles what has been placed in his care.

The church must also reject the idea that financial resources confer spiritual superiority. Wealthy donors should be appreciated without being permitted to purchase authority, while poorer believers should receive fair treatment without being made to feel spiritually inferior. Assistance must be administered according to genuine needs and appropriate responsibilities rather than favoritism. Financial records should be accurate, expenditures properly authorized, and legitimate concerns addressed honestly. The pastor must not treat the treasury as his private account, and the deacons must not transform it into a weapon for controlling the pulpit. Christ purchased the church with His own blood, according to Acts 20:28, and that settles the question of ultimate ownership. The resources administered by a congregation exist to support legitimate ministry and Christian responsibilities, not to finance private ambitions or reward religious factions. A man who uses money to manipulate others has forgotten that stewardship is a responsibility rather than an entitlement. The Lord does not need financial politicians. He requires faithful servants.

Ultimately, the question surrounding church finances is not merely whether the books balance. The deeper question is whether the men entrusted with the resources possess the character required by Scripture. Accurate figures matter, but so do honest motives. Proper records matter, but so does impartial treatment. Financial support matters, but so does the independence of biblical preaching from improper pressure. Every congregation should desire servants who can be trusted with small amounts, large amounts, private information, difficult decisions, and the responsibility of answering legitimate questions without resentment. Let the financial arrangements be orderly, the assistance fair, the procedures accountable, and the men faithful. Let no deacon imagine that handling the money makes him the owner of the ministry, and let no pastor suppose that spiritual oversight excuses him from honest financial administration. First Corinthians 4:2 requires that stewards be found faithful, not wealthy, influential, politically successful, or

exceptionally skilled at protecting their reputations. A church treasury is not a private business account, a political weapon, or a family inheritance. The man who handles it must remember that a dishonest dollar does not become holy because somebody placed it in an offering plate, and theft does not become Christian stewardship because the meeting opened with prayer.

8 of 10 — Deacons — Too Busy Fighting for the Chair to Carry the Tables

Key Passage: Acts 6:2–3

“Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.”

There is something remarkably backwards about a church in which the men appointed to serve spend more time arguing over their authority than actually serving anybody. The congregation needs help with legitimate responsibilities, widows need attention, ordinary work remains unfinished, and somebody needs to organize the practical affairs of the assembly. But instead of finding dependable men willing to shoulder those burdens, the church discovers a collection of aspiring chairmen who can debate procedure for three hours without accomplishing fifteen minutes of useful labor. Everybody wants a vote, everybody wants his opinion recognized, and everybody seems remarkably interested in determining who possesses authority over the next meeting. Meanwhile, the work waits patiently for somebody to finish discussing it. Acts 6 presents a considerably different picture. The early Jerusalem assembly encountered a real problem, and the apostles arranged for qualified men to address it. The Lord's work requires servants who carry responsibilities, not religious politicians who spend their lives campaigning for the privilege of telling somebody else to carry them.

The problem in Acts 6:1 was neither imaginary nor insignificant. As the number of disciples multiplied, “there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration.” These were Greek-speaking and Hebrew-speaking Jews within the early Jerusalem assembly, and the neglect concerned actual widows who depended upon assistance. This was a particular historical period under the ministry of the twelve apostles, before the full revelation of the present dispensation had been unfolded through Paul's ministry. We must not pretend that every administrative arrangement in Jerusalem automatically becomes a permanent command for every local

church. Nevertheless, the practical lesson is unmistakable. People were being neglected, the complaint required attention, and the apostles did not establish a debating society to determine whether widows deserved consideration. They instructed the multitude to select qualified men and entrusted those men with the necessary business. The solution involved responsibility, spiritual character, and action rather than a ceremonial display of importance.

That distinction strikes directly at the modern temptation to turn the office of deacon into an honorary position for men who have attended long enough, contributed enough, or developed sufficient influence to expect recognition. First Timothy 3:8–13 establishes serious qualifications for deacons, but nowhere describes the office as a retirement benefit for respectable church members. A deacon is not automatically the congregation's chief maintenance man, financial officer, or building supervisor. Those particular responsibilities may be assigned according to legitimate local needs, but the New Testament does not provide a universal maintenance checklist for every deacon in every congregation. What Scripture does require is qualified character and faithful service. The church must distinguish the biblical office from the particular assignments men may undertake while occupying it. A servant is not measured by how prominently his name appears on the organizational chart, but by whether he faithfully performs the responsibilities entrusted to him. A title that produces no useful service is little more than an expensive nameplate attached to an empty chair.

1. The Jerusalem Widows Needed Assistance, Not Another Committee Report

Acts 6:1 introduces a problem that could not be solved by pretending the congregation was too spiritual to experience administrative failure. The Grecian widows were being neglected in the daily ministration. Scripture does not tell us whether the failure resulted from deliberate favoritism, inadequate organization, poor communication, or some combination of human weaknesses. There is no reason to manufacture motives when the Holy Ghost has already identified the neglected responsibility. People who needed assistance were not receiving proper attention. The apostles recognized that such neglect could not be dismissed merely because preaching was flourishing and attendance was increasing. A congregation may possess sound doctrine, faithful teachers, and considerable spiritual activity while still failing to fulfill ordinary obligations it has undertaken. Growth creates additional responsibilities, and those responsibilities require more than enthusiastic announcements. The widow who needs assistance is not helped by a magnificent sermon about generosity if nobody follows through with the assistance already promised.

The twelve responded by calling the multitude together and explaining the necessity of arranging the work properly. Acts 6:2 records their statement: “It is not reason that we

should leave the word of God, and serve tables." The apostles were not declaring ordinary service beneath their dignity. They were protecting the particular responsibility Christ had entrusted to them. Verse 4 continues, "But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word." The neglected widows mattered, and so did the ministry of the word. Scripture does not establish an opposition between practical faithfulness and spiritual instruction. Rather, it demonstrates that both responsibilities needed proper attention. The apostles did not abandon their assignment to supervise every distribution, nor did they declare the widows' needs unworthy of attention. They arranged for qualified servants to handle necessary business. That is biblical common sense, a commodity sometimes harder to find in a church committee than a unanimous decision concerning the temperature of the sanctuary.

The outcome deserves attention. Acts 6:5 records the selection of seven men, including Stephen and Philip, and verse 6 describes their presentation before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands upon them. Then verse 7 declares, "And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly." The passage does not promise automatic numerical growth whenever a congregation organizes practical assistance. It records the progress of the ministry in its historical setting. Nevertheless, the arrangement removed an unnecessary obstacle. Qualified men took responsibility for necessary work, and the apostles remained devoted to prayer and the word. Nothing indicates that the seven became a governing authority over the twelve or spent their time debating which office possessed greater prestige. The passage moves from neglected needs to appointed servants and then to the continued advancement of God's word. That is a considerably better conclusion than a congregation divided into factions because nobody could agree upon who should chair the next meeting.

2. The Seven Were Appointed Over Business, Not Promoted Into Religious Royalty

Acts 6:3 identifies the required qualifications: "seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business." Notice the expression "over this business." The men were being entrusted with a particular responsibility, not granted unlimited jurisdiction over everything happening within the assembly. Their appointment addressed the daily ministration and the neglect that had arisen. The apostles required honesty because the work involved trust. They required spiritual character because practical responsibility among God's people is not disconnected from the believer's relationship to the Lord. They required wisdom because human needs often involve circumstances that cannot be resolved through mechanical procedures alone. The qualifications were established before the appointment, and the responsibility was identified before the men received it. There is no suggestion that the office existed to

provide seven ambitious individuals with additional influence. A biblical appointment assigns a responsibility; religious ambition invents a throne and then searches for somebody to place beneath it.

The distinction between Acts 6 and the later formal office of deacon must remain clear. Scripture does not explicitly call these seven men deacons, although their service provides an important historical example relevant to the discussion. Philippians 1:1 later identifies "the bishops and deacons," while 1 Timothy 3 provides specific qualifications concerning those recognized offices. These later instructions belong to the established order of local churches under the present dispensation of grace. It would therefore be careless to insist that every deacon must perform precisely the work assigned to the seven men of Jerusalem. The New Testament does not command that every congregation appoint seven deacons, establish identical distribution arrangements, or require deacons personally to maintain buildings and handle every financial transaction. Those responsibilities may be assigned where appropriate, but the distinction between biblical qualification and local assignment should never be erased. A church may organize its work wisely without pretending every detail of its organizational structure was dictated by an apostle.

The governing principle is responsibility accompanied by faithfulness. First Timothy 3:10 requires that deacons "first be proved," and verse 13 speaks of those who have "used the office of a deacon well." The office is something to be used faithfully, not merely occupied ceremonially. It is not enough for a man to announce that he possesses spiritual authority or enjoys considerable respect among the membership. What has he actually done with the responsibilities entrusted to him? Has he helped resolve legitimate difficulties, supported necessary work, exercised discretion, and demonstrated willingness to serve? Or has he created additional confusion through personal ambition and endless arguments? A church should never mistake an impressive organizational arrangement for faithful ministry. The congregation may possess an elaborate constitution, several standing committees, and enough officeholders to fill a courtroom, yet still struggle to find somebody willing to help a member in genuine need. The measure of a servant is not how many meetings he attends, but whether his presence helps accomplish the work those meetings were supposed to address.

3. Bearing Burdens Requires More Than Discussing Everybody's Difficulties

Galatians 6:2 commands, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." That instruction belongs to Paul's teaching concerning the conduct of believers under grace. The immediate context addresses restoring a brother overtaken in a fault, doing so in meekness, and recognizing one's own susceptibility to temptation. Bearing burdens therefore involves spiritual responsibility as well as practical assistance. A burden may

involve material hardship, physical suffering, discouragement, or a difficulty requiring wise counsel and Christian support. The command is not restricted to deacons, and it would be incorrect to assign every believer's burden exclusively to the men occupying that office. Nevertheless, deacons should exemplify the kind of faithful service expected throughout the congregation. A man who seeks recognized responsibility while remaining indifferent to legitimate needs has missed something essential about Christian service. It is difficult to claim that you are bearing another man's burdens while complaining whenever somebody asks you to pick something up.

Galatians 6:5 declares, “For every man shall bear his own burden.” Some readers imagine that verse contradicts the earlier command, but the immediate context shows that Paul is addressing different aspects of personal responsibility. Believers should assist one another while remaining accountable for their own conduct and obligations. Christian generosity does not abolish personal responsibility, and compassion does not require supporting deliberate idleness. Second Thessalonians 3:10 states, “that if any would not work, neither should he eat.” The distinction concerns unwillingness rather than inability. A sick widow, a disabled believer, or a family experiencing genuine hardship should not be treated as though circumstances beyond their control demonstrate laziness. At the same time, a congregation should not encourage irresponsible conduct by distributing resources without discernment. Faithful service requires both a willing heart and a sound mind. The man who refuses to help anybody is not practicing biblical discernment, and the man who abandons every reasonable standard is not necessarily practicing biblical charity.

Galatians 6:10 broadens the practical application: “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.” The instruction establishes a responsibility to do good when legitimate opportunities arise, with particular attention to fellow believers. That does not mean every congregation possesses unlimited resources or must personally solve every difficulty in the surrounding community. It does mean believers should not cultivate indifference toward needs they are able to address responsibly. A deacon assigned to coordinate assistance can help identify genuine circumstances, organize available resources, communicate with appropriate individuals, and prevent responsibilities from being forgotten. Some situations require financial assistance, while others call for transportation, meals, practical labor, or simple personal attention. Such work rarely produces public recognition, but it can provide substantial relief. The church does not need men who can explain why helping is everybody else's responsibility. It needs servants willing to determine what can legitimately be done and then help get it done.

4. Pure Religion Visits the Afflicted Instead of Merely Voting About Them

James 1:27 declares, “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.” The opening of James identifies its audience as “the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad,” and that historical address must not be ignored. We should not confuse the letter's setting with Paul's detailed instructions concerning the recognized office of deacon. Nevertheless, the moral obligation to show genuine concern for the afflicted is consistent with the broader testimony of Scripture. James is not teaching that visiting widows purchases salvation or replaces faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He is exposing the worthlessness of religious profession that never produces practical obedience. A man may talk at considerable length about Christian compassion while remaining entirely absent when genuine suffering requires attention. There is a difference between admiring the doctrine of charity and arriving at the widow's door when assistance is needed.

Visiting the afflicted involves more than fulfilling a social obligation so that somebody can report another successful ministry activity. Genuine care begins by recognizing the person's actual circumstances. An elderly widow may need transportation to an appointment, assistance obtaining necessary supplies, or help with a task she can no longer accomplish safely. A grieving family may need meals, practical support, or somebody willing to listen without turning private sorrow into material for public conversation. A fatherless child may benefit from the dependable concern of mature believers who exercise proper judgment and respect the family's circumstances. These responsibilities should be handled with discretion, appropriate safeguards, and honest respect for the people receiving assistance. The objective is not to make needy members feel like charitable projects displayed for congregational approval. Christian service should preserve dignity rather than manufacture dependence or embarrassment. The Lord never commanded His people to advertise somebody else's hardship merely to prove that they had performed a good deed.

Romans 12:13 instructs believers to be “Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality.” That command appears among practical exhortations concerning Christian conduct and mutual care within the body of Christ. It recognizes that genuine faith produces concern for the needs of others. The distribution must be governed by wisdom, and hospitality requires more than expensive entertaining designed to impress visitors. A modest meal, an ordinary conversation, or practical assistance given at the right moment may accomplish considerably more than an elaborate program intended primarily to display organizational success. A deacon who understands service will not measure its importance according to the size of the announcement preceding it. He will recognize that some of the most necessary responsibilities receive the least public attention. The widow does not need a photograph of the committee that discussed her circumstances. She

needs faithful believers who care enough to help without turning her difficulty into a church publicity campaign.

5. Faithful Servants Solve Problems Without Becoming Professional Talebearers

Practical service often places a man near sensitive information. He may learn that a family is struggling financially, that a member has experienced serious illness, or that somebody has become discouraged because a legitimate need was overlooked. Such circumstances require judgment, compassion, and discretion. Proverbs 11:13 declares, “A talebearer revealeth secrets: but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter.” The principle is particularly important when church servants are entrusted with private concerns. A deacon should not transform every personal difficulty into conversation material for the next fellowship gathering. Nor should he collect confidential information as a means of increasing his influence. A man who enjoys possessing everybody's secrets may eventually discover that people no longer trust him with anything. There is no spiritual gift of knowing everybody's business and telling half the congregation about it. Gossip does not become ministry because the speaker promises to conclude with prayer.

Discretion, however, must never be confused with concealing serious wrongdoing. If a concern involves abuse, criminal conduct, financial dishonesty, or another matter requiring legitimate intervention, a servant should not hide behind religious secrecy. Biblical faithfulness requires righteousness, truth, and appropriate action. Ephesians 4:25 commands believers to put away lying and speak truth, while verse 29 addresses speech that ministers grace to the hearers. These instructions require judgment concerning when information should remain private and when it must be communicated to those properly responsible for addressing the matter. A deacon should avoid spreading accusations without evidence, but he must also refuse to protect wrongdoing merely because the accused individual possesses influence. Responsible service does not mean pretending that every difficulty can be resolved through silence. It means handling information honestly, fairly, and according to the seriousness of the circumstances. Protecting the innocent and addressing legitimate concerns are far more important than protecting the reputation of a committee.

This distinction also applies when disagreements arise between church members. A faithful servant should not exaggerate the conflict, encourage factionalism, or use one person's grievance to strengthen his own position. Matthew 18:15–17 provides instruction concerning addressing offenses in its particular kingdom-related setting during the Lord's earthly ministry, while the Pauline epistles likewise require truthfulness, forgiveness, and proper conduct among believers. First Corinthians 6 rebukes the disgrace of believers conducting certain disputes before unbelieving courts rather than exercising proper

judgment within the assembly. Those passages must be handled according to their contexts, but they establish the seriousness of dealing with disputes honestly. A deacon assigned to assist with a legitimate difficulty should aim to clarify facts, encourage biblical conduct, and prevent unnecessary confusion. He should never turn the situation into a competition for supporters. A man who enters a disagreement carrying gasoline should not be congratulated for discovering that the building is on fire.

6. Not Slothful in Business Means Somebody Eventually Has to Do the Work

Romans 12:11 supplies one of the most practical instructions imaginable: "Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord." The expression is especially fitting when examining the conduct expected of believers entrusted with ordinary responsibilities. Paul connects diligence with spiritual fervency and service to the Lord. A man cannot defend consistent negligence by announcing that his attention is devoted to higher spiritual matters. If he accepts a legitimate assignment, he should make a reasonable effort to fulfill it faithfully. That does not mean every believer must possess the same abilities, physical strength, available time, or organizational talent. It means responsibility should be accompanied by diligence rather than endless excuses. Some church activities require extensive planning, while others simply require someone to arrive at the appointed time and perform the necessary work. A committee can spend six months determining who ought to move a table, while one dependable servant can have it moved before the first motion reaches the floor.

First Corinthians 14:40 commands, "Let all things be done decently and in order." The immediate context concerns the orderly exercise of spiritual gifts in the assembly, not a universal administrative manual for deacons. Nevertheless, the principle of avoiding unnecessary confusion is consistent with faithful church conduct. A growing congregation may require schedules, reliable communication, clear assignments, appropriate financial procedures, and coordination among workers. Such arrangements can prevent neglected responsibilities and needless duplication of effort. A smaller congregation may accomplish the same purposes through simpler methods. Scripture does not require every church to establish identical committees, maintenance schedules, or office procedures. Practical organization should fit legitimate needs rather than become an institution existing primarily to justify itself. There is no spiritual merit in creating complicated machinery for work that could be accomplished faithfully through ordinary cooperation. The purpose of an arrangement is to assist the ministry, not to provide endless opportunities for organizational activity.

The distinction between diligence and needless busyness deserves attention. A man may spend many hours attending meetings while accomplishing little that benefits the

congregation. Another may quietly complete necessary assignments without ever appearing before a microphone. Which one has demonstrated useful service? The answer depends upon the responsibilities actually entrusted and the faithfulness with which they are fulfilled, not merely the number of hours recorded. Colossians 3:23 declares, “And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men.” In its immediate context, Paul is addressing servants and their conduct, but the principle of wholehearted labor before the Lord has broad application to Christian service. The deacon should not regard an ordinary assignment as beneath his dignity simply because it offers little recognition. The man who considers himself too important to perform necessary work has already forgotten the meaning of service, regardless of how impressive his office sounds.

7. The Chair Is Not the Reward, and Recognition Is Not the Reason

First Peter 4:10 instructs believers, “As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” Peter writes to believers scattered through several regions, and the passage addresses the stewardship of gifts among Christians rather than establishing a formal list of duties for deacons. Nevertheless, the principle directly exposes the selfishness of seeking recognition without responsibility. Gifts and opportunities are to be used in service to others. The believer is a steward, not the owner of the abilities and opportunities entrusted to him. A deacon should therefore approach his office as an opportunity for useful labor rather than personal advancement. The question is not how many people will recognize his position but how faithfully he will exercise the responsibilities attached to it. A man who wants the title of servant but resents the activity of serving has misunderstood both the title and the activity.

Philippians 2:3–4 instructs believers to do nothing through strife or vainglory, but in lowliness of mind to esteem others better than themselves, looking also upon the things of others. Those instructions strike directly at the spirit that turns church service into a competition for recognition. A man may begin with genuine willingness to help and gradually become more concerned about whether people appreciate his efforts. Before long, he resents another worker receiving credit, becomes offended when his suggestions are rejected, and interprets every disagreement as an attack upon his importance. That is not Christian maturity. It is ordinary human pride wearing a church jacket. The example of Jesus Christ follows immediately in Philippians 2, where Paul emphasizes the humility and obedience of the Saviour. A servant who cannot endure being overlooked has considerable growing to do before claiming that he understands the mind of Christ. The Lord's work is not a contest in which every necessary duty must be accompanied by public applause.

First Timothy 3:13 promises that those who have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves “a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.”

Notice that the promise concerns using the office well, not merely obtaining it. Faithful service matters before God even when it receives little recognition from men. First Corinthians 3:11–15 teaches that the believer's work will be tested, distinguishing the reward of faithful labor from the gift of salvation itself. The judgment seat of Christ is not a religious election in which the most popular candidate receives the highest office. It concerns the Lord's examination of service rendered upon the foundation of Jesus Christ. That ought to correct the desire for recognition that sometimes infects congregational responsibilities. The man who quietly assists a needy member may accomplish work of genuine spiritual worth while somebody else receives congratulations for chairing another meeting. Heaven will not confuse the man who carried the burden with the man who merely insisted upon occupying the chair.

Conclusion

The account of Acts 6 demonstrates the value of qualified servants who address legitimate needs without attempting to replace the responsibilities of spiritual leadership. The early Jerusalem assembly faced a real difficulty involving neglected widows, and the apostles arranged for trustworthy men to administer the necessary work. The result was not a new religious government competing for authority but an orderly response that allowed the ministry of the word to continue. That historical example must be distinguished from the later formal office of deacon, yet its practical principles are unmistakable. Christian service requires honest character, wisdom, willingness, and faithful attention to entrusted responsibilities. Galatians 6 commands believers to bear one another's burdens, Romans 12 emphasizes diligence and hospitality, and James 1:27 highlights genuine concern for the afflicted. These passages do not establish an identical administrative assignment for every deacon, but they expose the emptiness of religious office divorced from actual service. The church needs men who recognize burdens and help carry them, not men who treat every burden as an excuse to organize another contest for authority.

A congregation should therefore examine how its servants use their opportunities. Are genuine needs being recognized and addressed? Are responsibilities clearly assigned and faithfully completed? Are confidential matters treated with discretion? Are the needy assisted according to biblical wisdom rather than favoritism or personal influence? Are practical arrangements helping the ministry function, or have they become unnecessary obstacles maintained because nobody wants to surrender a familiar procedure? These questions deserve more attention than arguments concerning who receives the most prestigious seat at the business meeting. The local church exists to glorify Jesus Christ, proclaim His word, edify believers, and carry out the responsibilities established in Scripture. Practical service contributes to those purposes when it removes unnecessary

burdens and helps legitimate work proceed. A servant who creates confusion, promotes gossip, or demands continual recognition is working against the very purpose his office should advance. The solution is not additional religious ceremony. It is obedience to the responsibilities already established by God's word.

Ultimately, the office of deacon should reveal the character of a faithful servant rather than provide a platform for personal ambition. A man does not need to occupy an official position to serve the Lord, and receiving such a position does not make ordinary responsibilities beneath him. The congregation should value faithful labor wherever it appears and recognize qualified men according to Scripture rather than popularity, financial influence, or years of attendance alone. Let the servants handle legitimate business honestly. Let them assist those who need help, support the proper work of the congregation, protect confidences, avoid needless disputes, and perform ordinary responsibilities without demanding applause. Let them understand that every assignment is carried out before the Lord who will examine their faithfulness. First Corinthians 4:2 declares, “Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.” That settles the matter more effectively than a hundred committee motions. The Lord did not establish servants so they could spend their lives fighting over who gets the chair. He established responsibilities that need faithful men. If a deacon is too important to carry the tables, he has become too important for the office.

9 of 10 — Deacons — Stephen Preached Like a Lion, and Philip Refused to Stay Behind the Tables

Key Passage: Acts 6:5

“And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch:”

There is something wonderfully inconvenient about Stephen and Philip for religious people who imagine that a man's usefulness to God must remain confined to whatever responsibility appears beside his name on the church organizational chart. Acts 6 introduces seven men selected to address a practical problem involving neglected widows, and two of those men proceed to demonstrate that spiritual service involves considerably more than distributing material assistance. Stephen stands before hostile religious authorities and delivers a blistering testimony concerning Israel's history, rebellion, and resistance to the Holy Ghost. Philip carries the preaching of Christ into Samaria and later

opens Isaiah 53 before an Ethiopian official who needs somebody to explain the Scripture. Neither man waits for a committee to announce that he has become important enough to speak about the Lord Jesus Christ. Stephen did not need a polished pulpit to preach like a lion, and Philip did not need an impressive religious title to carry the message of Christ down a desert road.

The historical setting matters because Acts 6 belongs to the early Jerusalem assembly under the ministry of the twelve apostles. The disciples were multiplying, and a complaint arose because the Grecian widows were neglected in the daily ministration. The apostles instructed the multitude to select seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom they could appoint over the necessary business. Scripture does not explicitly identify these seven men by the formal title of deacon. That office is explicitly recognized later in Philippians 1:1 and governed by qualifications in 1 Timothy 3:8–13. We must preserve that distinction rather than manufacture a title where the Holy Ghost has not supplied one. Nevertheless, the appointed service of the seven provides a valuable historical background for understanding qualified practical ministry. Their assignment involved meeting legitimate needs, but it did not establish a permanent boundary beyond which their spiritual usefulness could never extend.

This is where some modern ideas about church office begin to look rather small beside the New Testament record. A congregation may become so fascinated with titles, committees, and designated responsibilities that it forgets the difference between organizing service and restricting a man's obedience to God. Not every believer is called to pastoral oversight, and not every man should occupy the pulpit. First Timothy 3 establishes qualifications that must not be ignored. But every saved man is responsible to obey the Scriptures applicable to him, and a practical assignment does not excuse spiritual cowardice. The same man who helps carry necessary burdens may possess sound doctrine, evangelistic zeal, and courage to speak when truth is opposed. Stephen and Philip demonstrate that principle with remarkable force. Their ministries were not identical, and their historical circumstances must not be carelessly transferred into the present dispensation. Yet their testimony exposes a timeless absurdity: a man can become so busy protecting the boundaries of his religious position that he forgets the Lord never told him to be ashamed of His word.

1. Seven Men Were Chosen for Service, but Two Refused to Bury Their Spiritual Gifts

Acts 6:3 establishes the qualifications for the seven men: they must be “of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom.” The apostles were not searching for seven popular businessmen who could manage a distribution schedule while remaining completely ignorant of spiritual matters. They required men whose lives demonstrated trustworthy

character and genuine spiritual substance. Stephen and Philip appear among those selected, and Scripture subsequently provides detailed accounts of their ministries. The other five men should not be dismissed merely because the historical record does not describe their later activities. God has not supplied those biographies, and inventing conclusions about their usefulness would be foolish. The important distinction is that the assignment given to the seven did not exhaust the possibilities of service through those men. A faithful believer does not become spiritually useless outside the boundaries of his designated responsibility. The office may identify a particular assignment, but it does not place a padlock upon a man's Bible.

Acts 6:8 records, “And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.” That statement belongs to the extraordinary circumstances of the early apostolic period, when God was confirming His testimony through signs and wonders. Mark 16:20 describes the Lord working with the apostles and confirming the word with signs following, while Hebrews 2:3–4 speaks of God's witness through signs, wonders, divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost. Stephen's miraculous activity must therefore be understood within that historical setting. It does not establish that every deacon today must perform miracles or that an inability to produce supernatural signs demonstrates a lack of faith. Nevertheless, the passage reveals that Stephen possessed spiritual substance far beyond ordinary administrative competence. His usefulness was not confined to the immediate business for which he had been appointed. God had work for him that would place him directly before hostile religious authorities.

Acts 6:9–10 identifies the opposition that arose against Stephen, including men associated with the synagogue of the Libertines and others from various regions. These men disputed with Stephen, but verse 10 declares, “And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.” There is a remarkable difference between possessing biblical wisdom and merely possessing a loud voice. Stephen was not winning arguments by intimidating weaker opponents or inventing clever religious insults. His testimony carried substance grounded in the truth of God. When his opponents could not overcome his words, they turned to accusations and false witnesses. That pattern reveals the moral bankruptcy of religious men who prefer dishonesty to admitting that their position cannot withstand Scripture. When a man cannot answer the Bible, he may eventually decide to attack the man holding it. Stephen's enemies could challenge his reputation, but they could not make his testimony disappear.

2. Stephen Opened Israel's History and Turned It Into an Indictment

Acts 7 begins with the high priest asking Stephen, “Are these things so?” Stephen responds by addressing “Men, brethren, and fathers,” and proceeds to recount God's dealings with

Israel from the calling of Abraham onward. That opening establishes the audience and historical context of his defense. Stephen is speaking before Jewish religious authorities concerning Israel's history, God's promises, and the nation's repeated resistance to divine revelation. He is not delivering a complete exposition of the Pauline mystery concerning the body of Christ. He begins with Abraham's calling before his dwelling in Charran, discusses the promised inheritance, and recalls God's covenant concerning Abraham's seed. These details matter because Stephen's argument depends upon the actual history recorded in Scripture. He is not pulling religious slogans out of context to embarrass his opponents. He is establishing a biblical case from the very Scriptures those opponents claimed to defend. The man accused of dishonoring God's word proceeds to demonstrate that he understands it considerably better than his accusers.

Stephen then turns to Joseph and Moses, showing how Israel's history repeatedly involved the rejection of men through whom God was working. The patriarchs moved with envy against Joseph and sold him into Egypt, yet God was with him and eventually raised him to a position through which his brethren were preserved. Stephen next describes Moses, his rejection by his brethren, his departure into Midian, and his later commission to deliver Israel. Acts 7:35 emphasizes that the same Moses whom they refused was the man God sent to be a ruler and deliverer. The pattern is deliberate. Israel had a history of resisting God's appointed servants before recognizing the purpose of His dealings. Stephen's argument is not that Joseph and Moses were identical to Jesus Christ in every detail. It is that the nation's history furnished repeated examples of rejecting the very instruments through whom God intended to accomplish His work. Their own Scriptures were testifying against their stubbornness.

The indictment grows sharper as Stephen discusses the wilderness rebellion, the golden calf, the tabernacle, and Solomon's temple. Acts 7:48 declares, “Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet.” Stephen is not condemning everything God previously ordained concerning Israel's worship. He is exposing the folly of treating religious buildings and outward ceremonies as substitutes for obedience to the God who established them. Then comes the thunderclap of Acts 7:51: “Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.” He charges them with persecuting the prophets and betraying and murdering the Just One. This is preaching directed toward the conscience, not a diplomatic address designed to preserve Stephen's invitations to future religious gatherings. The religious establishment had its building, its ceremonies, and its official authority, but Stephen demonstrated that possessing religious furniture is not the same thing as obeying the God who speaks.

3. Stephen Saw the Son of Man Standing While His Enemies Gathered Stones

Acts 7:54 records the response to Stephen's preaching: “When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth.” Their reaction demonstrates that a message can strike the conscience without producing repentance. Conviction and submission are not identical. The same truth that humbles one man may provoke another into open hostility when pride refuses correction. Stephen did not manufacture the opposition by abandoning Scripture. His opponents resented the biblical indictment of their conduct. There is an important lesson here concerning the difference between faithful preaching and deliberately offensive behavior. A preacher should never confuse needless cruelty with courage, but neither should he assume that every angry reaction proves the message was improper. Second Timothy 4:2 commands rebuke and exhortation with longsuffering and doctrine. Truth must be spoken faithfully, even when the hearers would prefer a softer message that leaves their disobedience undisturbed.

Stephen's final vision must also be handled according to its proper biblical setting. Acts 7:55 says he was “full of the Holy Ghost” and “saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.” Verse 56 records Stephen declaring that he saw “the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.” That title is particularly significant because the Son of man is associated with the Lord's prophetic authority and kingdom in passages such as Daniel 7:13–14. Stephen is standing before Israel's religious authorities during a period of apostolic witness, and his vision forms part of that extraordinary historical testimony. The passage does not authorize us to manufacture an entire prophetic timetable from the Lord's standing posture or declare that Stephen's vision describes the catching away of the Church Age believer. Right division requires respecting what the text actually reveals. What cannot be missed is that heaven was not confused about the identity of Jesus Christ, regardless of what the council thought of Stephen's testimony.

The council's response was murderous. Acts 7:57–58 records that they cried with a loud voice, stopped their ears, ran upon Stephen, cast him out of the city, and stoned him. The witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. Stephen's final words included, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit,” followed by his prayer that the Lord would not lay the sin to their charge. Scripture then records that “he fell asleep.” Stephen's courage was not an opportunity to advertise his own importance. He remained faithful while facing death, and his final prayer displayed a concern far removed from the vengeance practiced by his enemies. The historical record does not promise that every faithful witness will be delivered from physical persecution. Sometimes obedience brings suffering rather than public success. Stephen's enemies had enough stones to silence his earthly voice, but they could not produce a single stone capable of overturning the truth he had preached.

4. Philip Carried Christ Into Samaria While Persecution Scattered the Witnesses

Acts 8 begins with the persecution following Stephen's death. Verse 1 records that Saul consented unto his death and that a great persecution arose against the church at Jerusalem. The believers were scattered abroad throughout Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. Verse 4 then declares, “Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.” Here is an extraordinary development. The enemies of the testimony intended to suppress the believers, yet their persecution became the occasion for the word to spread beyond Jerusalem. This movement corresponds with the geographical progression announced by the risen Lord in Acts 1:8, concerning witness in Jerusalem, Judaea, Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. The historical development was not accomplished through a comfortable religious expansion committee. It occurred amid suffering, displacement, and opposition. The persecutors succeeded in scattering the believers, but they failed to scatter the truth into silence.

Acts 8:5 introduces Philip's ministry with remarkable simplicity: “Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.” There is no elaborate discussion about whether Philip's earlier responsibility involving the daily ministration prohibited him from preaching. He had been one of the seven selected in Acts 6, and now Scripture records him openly proclaiming Christ. The Samaritans occupied a distinctive religious and historical position in relation to Israel, and their reception of the message forms an important stage in the developing account of Acts. Philip did not arrive with a program designed primarily to promote his personality. He preached Christ. Verse 6 records the people giving heed to the things he spoke, hearing and seeing the miracles he performed. The miraculous signs belong to the transitional history of Acts and must not be converted into universal requirements for evangelistic ministry today. But the central message remains unmistakable: Philip's preaching directed attention toward Jesus Christ.

Acts 8:9–24 introduces Simon, a man who had previously practiced sorcery and astonished the people of Samaria. When Philip preached concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, men and women believed and were baptized. Simon himself also believed and was baptized according to verse 13, yet his later attempt to purchase spiritual power exposed serious corruption in his heart. Peter rebuked him sharply, declaring in verse 20, “Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money.” Peter's words expose the danger of treating spiritual power as a commodity. Simon wanted something impressive he could possess rather than humbly submit himself to God's authority. That spirit has certainly survived the first century. Whenever a man wants the power associated with spiritual ministry more than he wants obedience to the Lord, Simon's old religious business is still attracting customers.

5. The Holy Ghost's Work in Samaria Must Not Be Turned Into a Modern Religious Formula

Acts 8:14–17 records a distinctive development after the Samaritans received the word of God. The apostles at Jerusalem sent Peter and John, who prayed that the believers might receive the Holy Ghost. Verse 16 explains that the Holy Ghost had not yet fallen upon them, although they had been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Peter and John then laid their hands upon them, and they received the Holy Ghost. This is an important part of the transitional history recorded in Acts, particularly as the testimony moves beyond Jerusalem into Samaria. The circumstances demonstrate apostolic participation in the reception of the Samaritans rather than the establishment of a permanent ceremony requiring every Christian to find an apostle before receiving the Spirit. Scripture must be interpreted according to its historical and dispensational setting. The unusual sequence in this passage cannot simply be imposed upon every believer under the fully revealed Church Age gospel.

Ephesians 1:13 supplies direct instruction concerning the believer's position in Christ under the present dispensation. Paul writes that believers were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise after hearing the word of truth, the gospel of salvation, and believing in Christ. First Corinthians 12:13 explains that believers are baptized by one Spirit into one body. These passages must govern the doctrine of the believer's spiritual standing rather than allowing the transitional arrangements in Acts 8 to become a universal requirement for obtaining salvation or receiving the Holy Ghost. Likewise, the miraculous manifestations associated with Philip's ministry do not establish that every modern Christian must perform signs to demonstrate genuine faith. God was accomplishing particular purposes during the unfolding apostolic witness. A man who ignores the Pauline epistles and builds his entire doctrine from unusual events in Acts may have collected many exciting stories while missing the instructions addressed directly to the church.

The practical lesson from Samaria is not that every deacon must reproduce Philip's miracles or abandon his assigned responsibilities to become a traveling evangelist. The lesson is that the Lord used a spiritually qualified man in a ministry extending beyond his original practical assignment. Philip preached Christ faithfully, and the word reached people outside the immediate Jerusalem community. The record also demonstrates that evangelistic activity requires doctrinal discernment. Simon's conduct revealed the danger of associating outward profession with spiritual power while misunderstanding the gift of God. A faithful witness must proclaim Christ rather than promise religious experiences that Scripture does not authorize. A church servant should therefore possess sufficient biblical understanding to distinguish the gospel from counterfeit spiritual merchandise. Philip was

not conducting a supernatural entertainment program. He was bearing witness to the Lord Jesus Christ during a significant period in the unfolding history of the New Testament.

6. Philip Opened Isaiah 53 and Preached Jesus Instead of Selling Religious Confusion

Acts 8:26 introduces a remarkable change of circumstances. An angel of the Lord instructed Philip to arise and go south toward the road descending from Jerusalem unto Gaza, “which is desert.” Philip obeyed and encountered an Ethiopian eunuch, a man of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, responsible for her treasure. The official had traveled to Jerusalem to worship and was returning in his chariot while reading the prophet Esaias. Scripture does not provide every detail of his religious background, and we should not invent conclusions concerning his precise ancestry or covenantal status. What the passage plainly establishes is that he was reading Scripture and needed understanding. The Spirit directed Philip to join himself to the chariot, and Philip asked, “Understandest thou what thou readest?” The man's answer was direct: “How can I, except some man should guide me?” There stood an opportunity for faithful biblical instruction, and Philip did not waste it discussing his previous appointment.

The passage the Ethiopian was reading came from Isaiah 53, concerning the suffering of the Lord's servant. Acts 8:32 records, “He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth.” The Ethiopian asked whether the prophet was speaking concerning himself or another man. Acts 8:35 then supplies one of the finest descriptions of biblical evangelism in the New Testament: “Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.” Philip did not discard the passage, replace it with a motivational speech, or present a religious philosophy unrelated to the words being read. He began with Scripture and proclaimed the person to whom the passage pointed. Isaiah 53 belongs to the prophetic Scriptures given through Israel, and its fulfillment in the suffering of Jesus Christ must be understood accurately. The Ethiopian needed the meaning of God's word, not an impressive religious personality who could talk for an hour without explaining a single verse.

As they continued, the Ethiopian saw water and asked what hindered him from being baptized. Acts 8:37 records Philip's answer: “If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest.” The Ethiopian replied, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” Philip then baptized him, and afterward the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away. The passage demonstrates the Ethiopian's confession of faith preceding his water baptism; it does not establish water baptism as the payment for salvation. Paul's later instruction in 1 Corinthians 1:17 distinguishes his commission to preach the gospel from baptizing, while Ephesians 2:8–9 establishes salvation by grace through faith apart from works. The historical setting in Acts must be respected without confusing the outward ordinance with

the finished work of Christ. Philip was subsequently found at Azotus and continued preaching through the cities until he came to Caesarea. The man who had once been appointed over practical business was still preaching Jesus when the chariot disappeared down the road.

7. The Evangelist of Caesarea Had More Than a Title to His Name

Acts 21:8 provides a final identification that settles an important point concerning Philip's later ministry: “And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him.” Notice how carefully Scripture identifies him. Philip is called “the evangelist,” and the record explicitly connects him with the seven men selected in Acts 6. That does not retroactively place the formal title of deacon into Acts 6, but it unmistakably establishes the identity of the man whose ministry had extended from Jerusalem to Samaria and beyond. His original assignment had not prevented him from becoming known for evangelistic labor. Acts 21:9 also records that Philip had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy. Their activity belongs to the recorded circumstances of that apostolic period and should not be converted into a universal requirement governing modern Christian households. The important fact is that Philip remained identified with the proclamation of Christ.

Second Timothy 4:2 commands, “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.” Paul addressed that instruction specifically to Timothy in the context of his ministerial responsibilities. It would therefore be careless to insist that the verse formally commissions every deacon to occupy the pulpit or exercise pastoral oversight. First Timothy 3:2 requires a bishop to be “apt to teach,” while 1 Timothy 3:9 requires deacons to hold the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. Those distinctions matter. But the responsibility of ordinary believers to bear witness to Christ is not abolished because they do not hold pastoral office. Second Corinthians 5:20 describes the ministry of reconciliation in which believers are ambassadors for Christ. A Christian should understand the gospel well enough to speak truthfully concerning salvation when opportunity arises. A deacon may not be responsible for feeding the entire flock from the pulpit, but that does not excuse him from knowing how to tell a lost sinner about the Shepherd.

Stephen and Philip therefore correct two opposite errors. The first error confines spiritually useful men to narrow administrative categories, as though a practical appointment prohibits biblical witness. The second error treats their examples as permission to disregard the qualifications and distinctions governing recognized church offices. Scripture supports neither extreme. Stephen demonstrated remarkable courage and understanding

while testifying before hostile authorities. Philip preached Christ in Samaria and explained Isaiah 53 to the Ethiopian official. Both were among the seven selected in Acts 6, yet neither example abolishes the biblical distinction between bishops and deacons. Every believer should seek to grow in grace and knowledge, according to 2 Peter 3:18, and serve faithfully according to the responsibilities God has entrusted to him. The lesson is not to manufacture titles for every activity or encourage unqualified men to seize positions they have not been given. It is to recognize that spiritual usefulness is larger than religious prestige. God can use a faithful man with an open Bible far more effectively than a proud man with an impressive title and nothing worth saying.

Conclusion

The account of Stephen and Philip exposes the poverty of measuring spiritual usefulness according to an organizational chart. Seven men were selected in Acts 6 to address a legitimate practical problem, and two of them subsequently became prominent examples of biblical understanding, courage, and evangelistic labor. Stephen stood before hostile religious authorities and traced Israel's history with a force that exposed their rejection of God's messengers and their betrayal of the Just One. Philip carried the preaching of Christ into Samaria, encountered an Ethiopian official searching the Scriptures, and proclaimed Jesus from Isaiah 53. These events belong to the extraordinary apostolic period and must be understood according to their historical and dispensational setting. Their miracles, prophetic circumstances, and particular assignments do not become universal requirements for every deacon today. But their examples demonstrate that practical service does not require spiritual ignorance, and faithful administration does not excuse a man from possessing biblical conviction. The seven were appointed to handle necessary business, not to surrender every other opportunity to obey the Lord.

There is also a serious warning for congregations that spend more energy distributing titles than developing spiritually substantial believers. A church may have deacons, trustees, committees, officers, and enough organizational positions to keep the printing company busy, yet still struggle to find men capable of explaining the gospel clearly. That ought to concern anybody who believes the church is supposed to be the pillar and ground of the truth. A faithful servant should understand salvation by grace through faith, recognize the authority of Scripture, and demonstrate courage when obedience becomes unpopular. He need not imitate Stephen's exact ministry or reproduce Philip's miraculous experiences. He does need to remember that serving Christ involves more than maintaining appearances and attending meetings. Let men study the Bible, fulfill their assigned responsibilities, and speak the truth when legitimate opportunities arise. Let them respect the distinct offices established in Scripture without turning those distinctions into excuses for ignorance or

cowardice. A man who knows the church budget better than the gospel ought to spend less time admiring the figures and more time studying the Book.

Ultimately, Stephen and Philip remind us that the Lord does not measure a servant's faithfulness by the prestige attached to his name. Stephen's earthly testimony ended beneath the stones of men who hated the truth, while Philip continued carrying the message of Christ into places where it needed to be heard. One stood before a furious council; the other sat beside a searching man in a chariot. One confronted Israel's religious rebellion; the other opened the prophetic Scriptures and preached Jesus. Their circumstances differed, but their willingness to obey the Lord remained unmistakable. That is the kind of spiritual substance churches should desire among all their members, including those entrusted with recognized service. The Christian's salvation rests upon the finished work of Jesus Christ, not upon his office, reputation, courage, or accomplishments. Yet the saved man will answer to his Lord concerning his faithfulness. Let the deacon serve honestly, the pastor preach faithfully, and every believer handle the word of truth with reverence and conviction. Stephen did not need permission from a religious committee to tell the truth, and Philip did not require an impressive title to preach Christ. Heaven is not impressed by the size of a man's chair when he is ashamed to open his mouth for Jesus Christ.

10 of 10 — Deacons — The Servant’s Reward Is Greater Than the Chairman’s Chair

Key Passage: 1 Timothy 3:13

“For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.”

There is something almost comical about the amount of importance certain religious men can attach to a chair. Give a fellow a title, place his name on the church bulletin, allow him to preside over a committee, and before long he may begin behaving as though the kingdom of heaven depends upon his approval of the next business meeting. He wants recognition, influence, respect, and perhaps the satisfaction of knowing that somebody must ask his permission before purchasing a new lawn mower. Meanwhile, the apostle Paul closes his qualifications for deacons with a promise that makes all that religious ambition look rather pitiful. First Timothy 3:13 declares that those who have used the office well purchase to themselves “a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.” Notice what the verse does not promise. There is no guaranteed promotion into the pastor's office, no private kingdom within the congregation, and no divine

certificate authorizing a servant to become everybody else's supervisor. The reward belongs to the man who uses the office well, not the fellow who merely enjoys possessing it.

The setting is essential because Paul is writing to Timothy concerning proper order in the local church under the present dispensation of grace. First Timothy 3 begins with qualifications for bishops, continues with the requirements for deacons, and concludes the discussion of those servants with the promise in verse 13. The surrounding qualifications involve gravity, truthful speech, freedom from greed, doctrinal faithfulness, a pure conscience, proven character, marital fidelity, and proper household leadership. Then Paul explains the benefit connected with faithful service. The promise is not floating by itself, waiting to be detached from the qualifications and turned into another religious slogan. It belongs to men who have actually satisfied the requirements and used the office properly. Nor does the word “purchase” mean that deacons can buy salvation through service. Ephesians 2:8–9 establishes salvation by grace through faith, apart from works. The believer's standing in Christ rests upon the finished work of Jesus Christ, while his service remains subject to divine examination.

That distinction brings the entire matter into focus. A man may be saved eternally and still waste years pursuing religious influence that will prove worthless when his works are examined before Christ. Another man may possess little recognition, handle ordinary responsibilities faithfully, and spend himself helping believers whose names never appear in a church announcement. The first may receive applause at every meeting while the second performs most of his labor unnoticed. But the judgment seat of Christ will not operate according to the church's popularity contest. Second Corinthians 5:10 declares that believers must appear before that judgment seat to receive according to what they have done in the body. Human reputation will not replace divine examination. The Lord knows the difference between responsibility and ambition, between faithful stewardship and personal control, and between service performed for His glory and activity performed for public admiration. A religious title may impress a congregation for a few years, but the Lord will determine what the service behind that title was actually worth.

1. Paul Promises Reward to the Man Who Uses the Office Well

The expression “used the office of a deacon well” deserves careful examination because Paul places the emphasis upon faithful exercise rather than mere possession. A man does not satisfy this statement by winning an election, completing an installation ceremony, or occupying an office for twenty years. He must use the office well. That requirement reaches back into everything Paul has already established concerning character and conduct. A deacon cannot disregard the warnings against dishonesty, greed, doubletongued speech,

and doctrinal instability, then expect the promise of verse 13 to function independently of his disobedience. The office is a responsibility entrusted to a qualified servant. Its proper use involves faithful conduct within the duties legitimately assigned to him. A man who treats the position as a reward for past attendance has misunderstood its purpose. The Lord did not establish an office so a man could spend the rest of his life admiring the fact that somebody appointed him to it.

First Timothy 3:10 makes the order unmistakable: “And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless.” The proving precedes the appointment, and faithful service follows it. A congregation should therefore recognize men whose character has already been demonstrated, then expect that character to continue governing their responsibilities. The man who becomes arrogant after receiving office has not advanced spiritually merely because his authority has increased. The man who becomes careless because his position seems secure has forgotten that faithful service is a continuing obligation. There is no retirement from honesty, humility, or biblical responsibility merely because a deacon has held office long enough to become familiar with every church controversy. First Corinthians 4:2 declares, “Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.” The immediate context concerns stewardship in Paul's ministry, but the principle exposes the requirement governing every entrusted responsibility.

This also means that different congregations may assign different practical responsibilities without altering the biblical standard of faithfulness. The New Testament does not command that every deacon serve as treasurer, maintain the building, supervise charitable assistance, or chair a particular committee. Those arrangements depend upon legitimate congregational needs. A small assembly may require servants to perform several ordinary tasks, while a larger congregation may distribute responsibilities among more people. The question is not whether every church possesses an identical administrative structure. The question is whether the man performs his actual responsibilities honestly, diligently, and in submission to Scripture. Colossians 3:23 commands, “And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men.” That principle destroys the idea that some work becomes unimportant because nobody publicly recognizes it. The work is not made honorable by the size of the title attached to it. The work is honorable when it is performed faithfully unto the Lord.

2. A Good Degree Is Not a Diploma From the Church's Promotion Department

Paul says that faithful deacons “purchase to themselves a good degree.” That expression has produced considerable discussion, but the passage does not authorize every elaborate interpretation men have attached to it. The word “degree” conveys the idea of standing or

position, and the immediate context connects that good degree with faithful use of the office. A sound understanding recognizes the favorable standing associated with demonstrated Christian service. But the text does not explicitly define that degree as an academic qualification, a guaranteed promotion into pastoral office, or a numbered rank in heaven. Those conclusions require additional claims that Paul does not make. The faithful deacon gains something of real spiritual value through his service, but we must not transform that promise into a denominational advancement program. A man does not become spiritually qualified for the bishop's office merely because he has occupied the deacon's chair long enough to wear out the cushion.

The distinction between deacons and bishops remains intact throughout 1 Timothy 3. Verses 1–7 establish qualifications for bishops, including the requirement to be “apt to teach.” Verses 8–13 establish the qualifications and promise associated with deacons. A man serving faithfully as a deacon may later possess the qualifications and calling necessary for pastoral oversight, but verse 13 does not guarantee that transition. Neither does it establish a compulsory ladder through which every pastor must first climb by occupying the deacon's office. Scripture recognizes different responsibilities without turning them into a religious career structure. The church should not imitate worldly institutions that measure success primarily through promotions, titles, and increased authority. A man may remain faithfully engaged in practical service throughout his Christian life without possessing a lesser standing before God merely because he never becomes a pastor. Faithfulness is not a consolation prize for men who fail to reach the pulpit.

There is an important difference between genuine spiritual standing and the reputation manufactured by public approval. A congregation may admire a man because he possesses wealth, influence, impressive speaking ability, or a family name associated with the church's history. Those circumstances do not establish the good degree promised to faithful servants. Proverbs 22:1 declares, “A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold.” That wisdom principle reminds us that upright character possesses value beyond material wealth. Yet even a favorable human reputation is not the final measure of spiritual service. The Lord knows whether the reputation rests upon genuine faithfulness or carefully managed appearances. A man can receive considerable respect while privately using church responsibilities for selfish purposes. Another may receive little public attention while quietly serving with integrity. A good degree is worth pursuing through faithful service, but a man who pursues the appearance of importance instead has mistaken the wrapping paper for the treasure.

3. Great Boldness in the Faith Is Better Than a Loud Voice in a Committee Meeting

The second benefit identified in 1 Timothy 3:13 is “great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.” Notice where Paul locates that boldness. It is in the faith which is in Christ Jesus, not in the deacon's authority, personality, financial influence, or ability to dominate a meeting. Biblical boldness involves confidence grounded in the Lord and His truth. Ephesians 3:12 declares that believers have “boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him.” The Christian's approach to God rests upon Jesus Christ rather than personal accomplishments. A faithful deacon's service can strengthen his confidence in the faith he professes, but it does not create a new basis of acceptance before God. The Lord has already provided that foundation through the finished work of His Son. A man who can shout down everybody at a church meeting may possess considerable volume without possessing one ounce of the spiritual boldness Paul is describing.

The distinction becomes especially clear when considering Stephen and Philip, two of the seven men selected in Acts 6. Although Scripture does not explicitly call those men deacons by the formal title, their appointed service provides relevant historical background. Stephen testified boldly before hostile religious authorities, while Philip preached Christ in Samaria and explained Isaiah 53 to the Ethiopian eunuch. Their extraordinary ministries belong to the apostolic period and should not be converted into a universal requirement that every deacon perform miracles or become an evangelist. Nevertheless, their courage demonstrates the difference between genuine spiritual substance and empty religious prestige. Stephen possessed no earthly power sufficient to protect him from his enemies, yet he refused to abandon the truth. Philip did not require a distinguished title before opening the Scriptures and preaching Jesus. Their confidence rested upon the Lord they served, not upon an institutional position.

Second Timothy 1:7 declares, “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” Paul wrote those words to Timothy in connection with his ministerial responsibility, and their principle beautifully illustrates the character of godly courage. Boldness is not recklessness, arrogance, or the determination to win every disagreement. It must be governed by love, sound judgment, and fidelity to Scripture. A deacon should possess enough courage to stand against dishonesty, reject doctrinal corruption, and fulfill his responsibilities even when doing so becomes unpopular. He should also possess enough humility to receive correction and acknowledge when another believer has understood a matter more accurately. A proud man mistakes disagreement for disrespect; a faithful servant asks whether the disagreement can be settled by the word of God. The boldest man in the room is not necessarily the one who speaks the loudest. Sometimes he is the man willing to obey Scripture when everybody else would rather protect the arrangement.

4. The Judgment Seat of Christ Will Test the Work, Not Reconsider the Salvation

First Corinthians 3:11 establishes the foundation upon which Christian service must be built: “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” Paul then describes different materials used in building upon that foundation: gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, and stubble. These materials illustrate the differing quality of work that will be tested. Verse 13 declares that every man's work shall be made manifest, because “the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.” Notice those final words. The issue is what sort of work has been performed, not merely how much visible activity has occurred. A deacon may attend hundreds of meetings, supervise substantial expenditures, and receive public recognition without ensuring that his service possesses lasting spiritual value. Another may quietly fulfill ordinary responsibilities with sincere faithfulness. The judgment seat of Christ will not confuse the quantity of religious activity with the quality of Christian obedience.

First Corinthians 3:14–15 makes the distinction between reward and salvation unmistakable. If a man's work abides, he receives a reward. If his work is burned, he suffers loss, “but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.” The believer's salvation rests upon Jesus Christ, not the endurance of his service record. Ephesians 2:8–9 establishes salvation by grace through faith, apart from works, and Ephesians 1:13 describes the believer's sealing with the Holy Spirit of promise. The judgment seat therefore does not reopen the question of whether Christ's sacrifice was sufficient to save the believer. It examines the work of one already standing upon the foundation of Jesus Christ. Neither does this passage authorize a detailed description of every heavenly reward or establish that particular church offices automatically receive particular crowns. Scripture reveals enough to make accountability certain without satisfying every speculation concerning its results. The servant should concentrate upon faithfulness rather than attempting to calculate an eternal salary schedule.

Second Corinthians 5:10 declares, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” The judgment concerns believers' earthly conduct and service, not the great white throne judgment described in Revelation 20:11–15. These events must not be confused. The great white throne concerns the final judgment associated with the book of life and the lake of fire, while the judgment seat of Christ concerns the accountability of those belonging to Him. That distinction is essential to rightly dividing Scripture. A faithful deacon should serve because he belongs to Christ, not because he hopes to purchase eternal life through church labor. Yet grace does not eliminate responsibility. The Lord who saved him will examine how he used his

opportunities. The man who spends his life polishing an earthly title may discover that the Lord is interested in the work beneath the polish.

5. The Lord Will Bring the Hidden Motives Into the Light

First Corinthians 4:5 introduces a truth that should humble every man seeking religious recognition: “Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.” In its immediate context, Paul is discussing the evaluation of ministers and the limits of human judgment concerning their faithfulness. The passage does not prohibit every necessary examination of conduct, because Scripture elsewhere commands churches to test qualifications, exercise discernment, and address established wrongdoing. It does warn against assuming the Lord's prerogative to pronounce the final verdict concerning hidden motives. Human observers may recognize faithful conduct, but they cannot see every intention governing it. A congregation may know what a deacon accomplished, but the Lord knows why he wanted everybody to know he accomplished it.

That distinction exposes the danger of performing spiritual work primarily for human recognition. A man may help a struggling family because he sincerely desires to relieve their need, or he may perform the same outward action because he expects public appreciation. The assistance may benefit the recipient in either case, but the motives are not identical. During His earthly ministry, the Lord Jesus warned against religious giving performed for the purpose of being seen by men. Matthew 6:1–4 belongs to the Sermon on the Mount and must retain its kingdom setting rather than being converted into a complete Pauline explanation of the judgment seat of Christ. Nevertheless, the warning against ostentatious religion exposes a moral danger that believers under grace must also reject. Christian service is not intended to function as an advertising campaign for personal holiness. A man who insists that every private act of generosity receive public recognition may need to examine whether he loves the needy or merely enjoys having an audience.

The same danger appears when servants become obsessed with comparing their accomplishments. One deacon handles finances, another coordinates assistance, and a third undertakes ordinary practical responsibilities. Before long, someone begins measuring importance according to which duties receive the most attention. But 1 Corinthians 12 teaches that the body contains different members with different functions, and that members appearing less honorable are not therefore useless. Paul specifically warns against divisions within the body and calls for mutual care. Faithfulness cannot be measured by comparing unrelated responsibilities as though everybody were competing for one trophy. Galatians 1:10 asks whether Paul sought to please men or God, declaring

that he could not be the servant of Christ while making the approval of men his governing objective. The deacon should take that principle seriously. A servant who must constantly announce his sacrifices may be more interested in collecting applause than in laying up work that will endure divine examination.

6. The Lord Jesus Turned the World's Definition of Greatness Upside Down

Matthew 20:25–28 provides a striking correction to human ambition. The immediate context concerns the request involving the mother of Zebedee's children, who desired positions of distinction for her sons in the Lord's kingdom. The other ten disciples became indignant, revealing that questions of prominence were already disturbing their fellowship. Jesus called them together and contrasted the dominion exercised by Gentile rulers with the conduct expected among His disciples. Verse 26 declares, “But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister.” The passage belongs to the Lord's earthly ministry to Israel and the instruction of His disciples concerning the coming kingdom. It must not be carelessly presented as though Jesus were formally establishing the later office of deacon. Nevertheless, His correction of selfish ambition carries a powerful moral lesson. The world's definition of greatness revolves around control; the Lord directs attention toward service.

Matthew 20:27 continues, “And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant.” Then verse 28 supplies the supreme example: “Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.” That statement reveals the astonishing contrast between the Saviour's humility and the ambitions of men seeking religious importance. Jesus Christ possessed divine authority, yet He willingly entered the world and gave Himself for sinners. His sacrificial death accomplishes something no ordinary servant could ever accomplish, and the unique redemptive character of His ransom must not be reduced to a general lesson about community volunteering. Nevertheless, the humility displayed by the Saviour exposes the ugliness of pride among those claiming to serve Him. It is a strange sight when men claiming to represent the crucified Christ become furious because somebody failed to recognize the importance of their committee position.

Philippians 2:5–8 carries the instruction directly into the believer's life under grace: “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” Paul then describes the Lord's humiliation and obedience unto death, even the death of the cross. The passage does not teach that believers can reproduce Christ's atoning work, but it requires an attitude of humility contrary to selfish ambition. Verses 3–4 command believers to reject strife and vainglory and to consider the concerns of others. That instruction reaches directly into every congregation where officeholders compete for recognition. A deacon who resents

ordinary work, demands preferential treatment, or uses his title to intimidate other believers has not demonstrated the mind of Christ. He may understand the mechanics of administration, but he has forgotten the spiritual purpose of service. The Lord wore a crown of thorns before men began fighting over padded chairs in His churches. That ought to settle something about the proper attitude of His servants.

7. Faithfulness When Nobody Applauds Is Still Faithfulness Before God

First Corinthians 15:58 concludes Paul's tremendous chapter concerning resurrection with a practical command: “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.” The promise rests upon the believer's resurrection hope in Jesus Christ, not upon earthly recognition. The work performed for the Lord possesses significance beyond the immediate approval of other people. That is important for every Christian servant, especially when necessary responsibilities become repetitive, difficult, or largely invisible. A deacon may spend years helping with ordinary matters that receive little attention unless something goes wrong. People may forget the many occasions when he completed his work faithfully and remember only the one occasion when a problem interrupted their expectations. Nevertheless, the Lord's assessment does not depend upon human appreciation. A work does not become worthless because nobody claps when it is finished.

Galatians 6:9 adds, “And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.” In its context, Paul is addressing the believer's conduct and the principle of sowing and reaping. The verse should not be converted into a guarantee that every faithful servant will enjoy immediate financial prosperity, public promotion, or measurable earthly success. The encouragement concerns perseverance in doing what is right. Faithfulness may involve continuing to serve when enthusiasm fades, accepting responsibilities that offer no applause, and maintaining integrity when dishonesty would provide an easier alternative. But perseverance does not excuse a deacon from neglecting his family, disregarding reasonable limitations, or assuming responsibilities beyond his ability to fulfill. Proper service must remain governed by all applicable Scripture. The Lord does not command a man to abandon obedience at home merely to maintain an impressive reputation for activity at church. Steadfastness means continuing faithfully within responsibilities God has actually entrusted, not manufacturing unnecessary burdens to advertise personal sacrifice.

The final test of a man's motive may appear when another servant receives the recognition he expected. He has labored diligently, contributed useful ideas, and fulfilled legitimate responsibilities, but somebody else is publicly thanked or appointed to a prominent task.

Does he rejoice that the work has been accomplished, or does he become offended because his name was not mentioned? Romans 12:10 commands believers, “Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another.” That is a difficult verse for men who believe every meeting should conclude with an announcement of their accomplishments. A faithful deacon can support another worker without treating his success as a personal defeat. He can accept correction without organizing opposition and continue serving when a preferred proposal is rejected. The man who stops serving because somebody else received the praise has revealed that he was collecting wages from the congregation's applause. The Lord never promised to pay His servants in compliments.

Conclusion

The closing promise of 1 Timothy 3:13 brings the entire question of the deacon's office into proper perspective. Paul does not conclude by praising organizational power, financial influence, committee authority, or the ability to dominate congregational decisions. He speaks of those who have used the office well, who purchase to themselves a good degree and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus. That promise belongs within the requirements established throughout the chapter: personal integrity, doctrinal faithfulness, freedom from greed, truthful speech, proven character, and proper household responsibility. The office exists for faithful service, not the satisfaction of human ambition. A congregation should therefore recognize qualified men and entrust them with legitimate responsibilities without converting their positions into honorary awards or political opportunities. The successful deacon is not the man who accumulates the greatest influence over other people. He is the man who can look back upon entrusted responsibilities and recognize that he sought to handle them honestly before the Lord.

The judgment seat of Christ gives the matter eternal seriousness. Every believer will answer to the Lord concerning his works, and the quality of those works will be examined. Salvation remains entirely by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, never purchased by service, sacrifice, office, or religious accomplishment. Yet the saved man's labor is not meaningless, and the Lord has promised reward for work that endures His examination. First Corinthians 4:5 warns that God will bring hidden matters and the counsels of hearts into the light. That should humble the man seeking applause and encourage the servant whose labor remains unnoticed. The Lord sees the widow assisted without publicity, the honest decision made when dishonesty would have been profitable, the difficult responsibility fulfilled without complaint, and the humble obedience that never produced an impressive announcement. He also sees religious pride concealed beneath the appearance of service. The congregation may admire a man's title, but Christ will examine

his testimony. The church may remember his position, but the Lord will judge his faithfulness.

Let the final verdict be settled by Scripture rather than religious custom. A deacon is not a miniature ruler, a ceremonial officer, a privileged financial supervisor, or a man entitled to control the pulpit because somebody handed him administrative responsibility. He is a servant whose qualifications and conduct must satisfy the word of God. Let him handle legitimate business honestly, uphold sound doctrine, protect the trust placed in him, assist those in genuine need, and serve without demanding recognition. Let him remember that Jesus Christ purchased the church with His own blood and remains its rightful Head. Let him pursue the good degree and great boldness promised to faithful servants rather than spending his life collecting temporary honors from men. The church needs fewer battles over who occupies the chair and more men willing to fulfill the responsibilities attached to it. First Corinthians 4:2 settles the requirement: “Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.” The chairman's chair will eventually be empty, his nameplate will gather dust, and his influence over church meetings will come to an end. But the judgment seat of Christ will settle what his service was worth. The faithful deacon has something better to pursue than a position of earthly importance: the approval of the Lord whom he serves.

Deacons — Servant Standards and the Work Behind the Pulpit

Conclusion

After examining what the King James Bible says about deacons, their qualifications, their responsibilities, their limitations, and the rewards promised to faithful servants, one conclusion ought to be unmistakable: **God never established the office of deacon to provide ambitious men with a respectable way to become important. He established an office requiring qualified men who understand what it means to serve.** Somewhere along the way, certain churches have managed to turn a position of responsibility into a contest for authority, a reward for financial influence, or an honorary title presented to men whose greatest qualification is that they have occupied the same pew longer than anybody can remember. But no amount of religious tradition can rewrite 1 Timothy 3, and no church constitution can transform human ambition into a spiritual qualification. The Bible does not ask whether a man is popular, wealthy, politically useful, or particularly skilled at winning arguments during business meetings. It demands character, doctrinal faithfulness, integrity, and proven responsibility. The difference between those two approaches is the

difference between selecting servants according to Scripture and manufacturing religious politicians according to human preference.

The entire subject begins with a principle that is so simple one might wonder how churches have managed to complicate it. In Acts 6, the early Jerusalem assembly encountered a genuine problem involving neglected widows. The apostles did not dismiss the complaint, abandon the ministry of the word, or appoint seven men to form a government over the congregation. They arranged for qualified individuals to handle necessary business while they continued in prayer and the ministry of the word. Those seven men are not explicitly identified by the formal title of deacon, and honesty requires us to maintain that distinction. The later Pauline epistles establish the recognized office and its qualifications for local churches under the present dispensation of grace. Nevertheless, the historical example remains instructive. The servants were appointed to address a responsibility, not to acquire a personal kingdom. **The widows needed help, the apostles needed to continue preaching, and nobody needed seven religious chairmen arguing over which one deserved the largest chair.** The work required spiritually qualified men willing to do something useful. That is a lesson worth remembering whenever a congregation begins mistaking organizational activity for actual service.

The first great requirement is character, and character cannot be purchased, inherited, borrowed, or manufactured through an installation ceremony. First Timothy 3:8 requires deacons to be grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, and not greedy of filthy lucre. These are not ceremonial words recited before a congregation proceeds to appoint whomever it intended to appoint anyway. They are qualifications that must be satisfied. A man who tells the pastor one thing and the membership another does not become trustworthy merely because somebody gives him a title. A man governed by greed does not become financially honest because he receives access to the church treasury. A man whose conduct is habitually careless does not become spiritually mature because his name appears on a printed list of officers. **A church badge cannot make a crooked man straight, and a polished nameplate cannot cover a rotten conscience.** The Lord is interested in the man beneath the religious appearance. If his character will not withstand examination before receiving the office, his appointment will not repair the deficiency afterward.

Equally serious is the requirement of doctrinal stability. Paul commands that deacons hold “the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience” (1 Timothy 3:9). That little statement eliminates the convenient assumption that practical service requires no meaningful knowledge of Scripture. A deacon is not automatically a bishop, pastor, or elder, and the offices must not be confused. First Timothy 3:2 specifically requires a bishop to be apt to

teach, while the qualifications for deacons emphasize faithful possession of the truth without assigning them identical teaching responsibilities. But the distinction between those offices does not excuse biblical ignorance. A man serving among God's people should understand the gospel of salvation by grace through faith, the authority of the Scriptures, and the necessity of rightly dividing the word of truth. He should know the difference between God's national covenant promises to Israel and the heavenly position of the body of Christ. He should recognize that religious works do not purchase salvation and that denominational customs cannot overrule the word of God. **A man who can account for every dollar in the offering but cannot explain the gospel has mastered the smaller responsibility while neglecting the greater truth.**

Then comes Paul's wonderfully inconvenient instruction in 1 Timothy 3:10: “And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless.” There is no complicated mystery surrounding the word “first.” The proving precedes the appointment. The man's faithfulness must be demonstrated before additional responsibility is entrusted to him. A congregation should not gamble its welfare upon the possibility that an unreliable man may become responsible after acquiring authority. Does he keep his word? Does he serve when nobody applauds? Can he accept correction without organizing a faction? Does he handle money honestly, speak truthfully, fulfill his commitments, and continue laboring when somebody else receives recognition? Those questions reveal considerably more about his character than an impressive business card or a collection of enthusiastic nominations. Blamelessness does not mean sinless perfection, but neither does it mean that established wrongdoing must be ignored because the candidate enjoys a favorable reputation. **A man should not become faithful because he received an office. He should receive the office because his faithfulness has already been demonstrated.** The church that reverses God's order should not complain when the results resemble the character it refused to examine.

Nor may the qualifications be left hanging on the church coat rack when the candidate returns home. First Timothy 3:11–12 addresses the testimony of deacons' wives, marital fidelity, children, and household leadership. The requirements do not demand flawless families or authorize the congregation to become a collection of malicious investigators examining every ordinary family difficulty. Difficult questions concerning marriage history, grown children, and particular household circumstances must be handled according to what Scripture actually establishes. But the central principle cannot be dismissed. A man who wants responsibility in God's house must demonstrate faithful responsibility within his own. Ephesians 5:25 commands husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church, while Ephesians 6:4 instructs fathers to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Those commandments do not become secondary because

somebody offers a man an important position. **The Lord never instructed a husband to neglect his wife, provoke his children, and abandon his household responsibilities so he could spend more time appearing important at church.** Public usefulness cannot substitute for private obedience.

Money, of course, deserves particular attention because it has exposed the character of more than a few religious men who looked wonderfully respectable until somebody opened the financial records. The apostle's warning against filthy lucre reaches beyond outright theft into greed, manipulation, favoritism, and the temptation to use financial resources as instruments of personal control. A church treasury is not a private business account, a family inheritance, or a political weapon for punishing a pastor who preaches something influential contributors dislike. Second Corinthians 8:20–21 demonstrates Paul's concern that financial administration be conducted honorably before God and men. Proper records, reasonable safeguards, transparent procedures, and honest accountability protect both the congregation and the men entrusted with its resources. Wealthy contributors should receive appreciation without purchasing spiritual authority, and poor believers should not be treated as though their limited financial resources make them less important before God. **A dishonest dollar does not become righteous because somebody placed it in an offering plate, and a greedy man does not become a faithful steward because he knows how to balance a checkbook.** The treasury belongs to the work, not to the ambitions of the men handling it.

The distinction between pastoral oversight and deacon service must also remain intact. Philippians 1:1 recognizes bishops and deacons as distinguishable groups, while Acts 20, Titus 1, and 1 Peter 5 connect elders with the responsibilities of oversight and feeding God's flock. Scripture does not establish a board of deacons as a superior government commissioned to supervise the preacher, control the pulpit, and determine which biblical doctrines may be proclaimed. But rejecting that unauthorized arrangement does not place the pastor beyond accountability. First Peter 5:3 warns shepherds against becoming lords over God's heritage, and First Timothy 5:19–20 provides instructions concerning accusations and the correction of elders. There is no biblical permission for either pastoral dictatorship or deacon-board tyranny. **The pastor is not a pope, the deacons are not a board of corporate directors, and the congregation is not anybody's private business.** The Lord Jesus Christ purchased the church with His own blood, according to Acts 20:28, and He remains its rightful Head. Every officeholder is accountable beneath His authority.

A local church may properly adopt administrative procedures, organize practical assignments, and establish arrangements suited to its actual needs. A larger congregation may require more extensive coordination than a small assembly, and Scripture does not

provide an identical maintenance schedule, financial system, or committee structure for every church. But practical arrangements must never be mistaken for divine commandments, nor should organizational machinery become more important than the work it supposedly exists to accomplish. Galatians 6:2 commands believers to bear one another's burdens, Romans 12:13 speaks of distributing to the necessity of saints, and First Peter 4:10 emphasizes faithful stewardship in serving one another. Those instructions belong to Christian responsibility generally, but they reveal the proper spirit of service. The church needs men who recognize genuine needs, exercise wisdom, protect confidences, assist the afflicted, and help necessary work proceed without needless confusion. **Some men are willing to chair a committee to discuss carrying the tables, provided somebody else eventually carries them. The New Testament has considerably more to say about faithfulness than it does about the importance of being chairman.**

Stephen and Philip provide a remarkable correction to the notion that a man's spiritual usefulness must be confined to whatever appears beside his name on an organizational chart. Both belonged to the seven selected in Acts 6, yet Scripture records Stephen boldly confronting Israel's religious leaders and Philip preaching Christ in Samaria and explaining Isaiah 53 to the Ethiopian eunuch. Their ministries occurred during the extraordinary apostolic period, and the miraculous signs and transitional circumstances recorded in Acts must not be treated as universal requirements for every modern deacon. Nevertheless, their biblical understanding and courage demonstrate that practical service does not prohibit spiritual substance. Stephen stood before hostile authorities and declared the truth without surrendering to their intimidation. Philip opened the Scriptures and preached Jesus rather than entertaining a searching sinner with religious philosophy. Acts 21:8 later identifies him as “Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven.” **Stephen did not need a committee title to preach like a lion, and Philip did not need permission from a boardroom to tell a man what Isaiah said about Jesus Christ.** Their usefulness was grounded in faithful obedience, not ecclesiastical prestige.

And that brings us to the promise that ought to govern a deacon's understanding of his entire office. First Timothy 3:13 declares, “For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.” The emphasis falls upon using the office well, not merely possessing it. The promised good degree is not an academic diploma, an automatic promotion into pastoral oversight, or a guaranteed rank in heaven defined by religious speculation. The verse identifies a genuine spiritual benefit associated with faithful service, including great boldness in the faith. That is a considerably richer objective than controlling a budget or winning a disagreement during a business meeting. A man may spend years accumulating personal influence only to discover that the influence accomplished little of lasting worth.

Another may serve quietly, perform ordinary responsibilities with integrity, and strengthen the congregation without ever demanding recognition. **The important question is not how many people recognized the deacon's authority, but whether the Lord recognized his faithfulness.** Human applause is temporary. Divine examination is not.

First Corinthians 3:11–15 teaches that the believer's works will be tested, distinguishing what endures from what is consumed. The foundation is Jesus Christ, and no other foundation can be laid. A man's salvation is not purchased through church service, financial generosity, organizational accomplishments, or a lifetime of respectable behavior. Ephesians 2:8–9 settles that salvation is by grace through faith, apart from works. The judgment seat of Christ concerns the believer's accountability for service, not another opportunity to determine whether the finished work of the Saviour was sufficient. Second Corinthians 5:10 declares that believers must appear before that judgment seat, while First Corinthians 4:5 explains that the Lord will bring hidden matters and the counsels of hearts into the light. That ought to straighten out more than a few religious ambitions. **The judgment seat of Christ will not be impressed by how many committees a man controlled, how many arguments he won, or how often his name appeared in the church bulletin. The Lord will examine the work, and human recognition will not change its quality.**

That future examination should encourage the faithful servant whose labor receives little earthly attention. The man who quietly helps a struggling family, handles entrusted resources honestly, completes necessary responsibilities without complaint, and stands upon the truth when compromise would be easier is not forgotten merely because nobody publicly recognizes his efforts. First Corinthians 15:58 commands believers to be steadfast and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that their labor is not in vain in Him. The value of Christian service does not depend upon the size of the audience watching it. A deacon who continues faithfully when another man receives the applause demonstrates something that cannot be manufactured through an election. He has begun to understand the difference between serving Christ and collecting compliments. Romans 12:10 commands believers to prefer one another in honour, while Philippians 2:3 condemns strife and vainglory. **A servant who quits because somebody else received the recognition has revealed that the applause meant more to him than the assignment. The Lord never promised to reward religious vanity merely because it learned to operate inside a church building.**

The supreme correction to all this human pride remains the example of the Lord Jesus Christ. During His earthly ministry, when the disciples became troubled over positions of prominence, the Saviour declared in Matthew 20:26–28 that greatness among them was to

be associated with service, concluding, “Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.” That passage belongs to the Lord's instruction concerning His kingdom and must retain its proper setting. His sacrificial death is unique, accomplishing redemption that no ordinary servant could ever provide. Nevertheless, His humility exposes the foolishness of men who demand prestige while claiming to follow Him. Philippians 2 brings the principle directly into Christian conduct, commanding believers to possess the mind of Christ and reject selfish ambition. The Saviour humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. **It is a mighty strange form of Christianity when men profess allegiance to a crucified Saviour while fighting like politicians over who gets the largest chair at the church meeting.** The Lord did not demonstrate greatness through selfish domination, and His servants should not imagine they can improve upon His example.

The purpose of these ten studies has never been to diminish the office of deacon. Quite the opposite. The office becomes more honorable when its biblical qualifications are taken seriously, its responsibilities are handled faithfully, and its limitations are respected. The congregation needs qualified servants, and faithful service should be appreciated. But genuine honor does not require inventing authority that Scripture never assigned. A deacon who understands his responsibilities can strengthen the ministry, relieve unnecessary burdens, support legitimate congregational work, and provide an example of Christian integrity. He can be honest without being arrogant, firm without being quarrelsome, knowledgeable without becoming contentious, and dependable without demanding constant recognition. He can respect pastoral oversight without surrendering his conscience to a man, and he can assist in practical matters without imagining that those responsibilities make him the owner of the congregation. **The strongest servant is not the man who makes everybody acknowledge his importance. He is the man whose faithful work makes unnecessary burdens lighter while leaving the glory where it belongs—with Jesus Christ.**

So let the local church return to the Book and examine its arrangements honestly. Let the qualifications of 1 Timothy 3 govern the selection of its servants. Let men first be proved rather than first be popular. Let doctrine matter, character matter, household responsibilities matter, and financial honesty matter. Let the pastor fulfill his biblical responsibilities without becoming a dictator, and let the deacons serve faithfully without turning into a competing government. Let the needy receive appropriate assistance, the treasury remain accountable, the pulpit remain governed by Scripture, and every officeholder remember that he is a steward rather than an owner. Let there be no confusion between salvation and service, no confusion between Israel's historical setting and the present dispensation of grace, and no confusion between religious tradition and the actual

commands of God. **A church that follows the Bible does not need to invent an aristocracy of religious servants. It needs saved men who understand the truth, satisfy the qualifications, and consider it an honor to spend themselves in the Lord's work.**

And when the last business meeting has been held, when the church records have been closed, when the nameplates have been removed and every earthly title has lost its temporary influence, one question will remain for the men who served: Were they faithful to the Lord who entrusted them with responsibility? First Corinthians 4:2 gives the standard in language plain enough for any honest Bible believer to understand: “Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.” Not famous. Not wealthy. Not powerful. Not politically influential. Faithful. That is the requirement, and no collection of religious arguments can improve upon it. The Lord knows the difference between the man who served for recognition and the man who served because he belonged to Jesus Christ. The chairman's chair will eventually be empty, and the influence that once seemed so important will disappear. But the word of God will remain, the judgment seat of Christ will settle the matter, and the faithful servant's labor will not have been in vain. **The greatest deacon is not the man who finally managed to get everybody beneath him. It is the man who understood that serving Jesus Christ was a greater honor than ruling anybody. The office was never supposed to make the man important. The Lord was supposed to make the service worthwhile. And when the final account is examined, faithfulness will matter infinitely more than the chair he occupied.**

VERSEQUEST MINISTRIES

DEACONS

Servant Standards and the Work Behind the Pulpit

Faithful Men • Practical Service • Sound Doctrine • Greater Reward

"For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus."
1 Timothy 3:13

NOT LORDS BUT SERVANTS
NOT POLITICIANS BUT HELPERS
NOT FOR SELF BUT FOR CHRIST

1 The Beginning
Seven Men for a Real Need
Acts 6:1–7

- The church faced a practical problem (neglected widows, vv. 1–2)
- The apostles instructed the congregation to choose seven men (v. 3)
- Qualifications: honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom (v. 3)
- Appointed over the business so the apostles could continue in prayer and the word (v. 4)
- Not explicitly called deacons, but provides valuable historical background

Practical service solves problems without replacing spiritual responsibilities.

2 Distinct Offices in the Local Church
Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3

- Philippians 1:1 recognizes bishops and deacons as distinct groups
- 1 Timothy 3:1–7 — qualifications for bishops (elders, pastors)
- 1 Timothy 3:8–13 — qualifications for deacons
- These offices cannot be casually exchanged
- Deacons are servants, not a ruling board
- Different responsibilities, same Lord

Distinct roles • Complementary work One church under Christ

3 The Biblical Qualifications
1 Timothy 3:8–10

- Grave (serious, weighty)
- Not doubletongued (honest speech)
- Not given to much wine (self-controlled)
- Not greedy of filthy lucre (financial integrity)
- Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience (doctrinal faithfulness)
- First be proved; then let them use the office
- Found blameless (demonstrated character)

Character, conduct, and conviction before commission, not after.

4 His Own House Must Be in Order
1 Timothy 3:11–12

- Wives must be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things (v. 11)
- Husbands of one wife (marital faithfulness)
- Ruling their children well (parental responsibility)
- Ruling their own houses well (domestic leadership)
- Home life is relevant to public service
- Not a perfect family, but no clear failures
- Christianity is not a public performance

How a man handles home shows how he will handle the church's business.

5 Not a Board of Directors
Philippians 1:1; Acts 6:2–4

- Deacons are helpers, not rulers
- They do not supervise the pastor
- Controlling the money does not give authority over the pulpit
- No deacon dictatorship and no pastoral monarchy
- Pastors are accountable to Scripture
- Deacons serve, strengthen, and support
- Avoid factionalism, intimidation, and backroom manipulation

Servants help the work. They do not compete for jurisdiction.

6 Filthy Lucre and the Church Treasury
1 Timothy 3:8; 2 Corinthians 8:20–21

- Must not be greedy of filthy lucre
- Handles funds, resources, and material decisions
- Not every deacon is a treasurer
- Accountability, transparency, accurate records
- Impartiality and honest procedures
- Avoid even reasonable grounds for suspicion
- Beware of favoritism toward wealthy members
- Do not use finances to control preaching
- A church treasury is not a private account

A dishonest dollar is still dishonest in a church building.

7 More Than a Title Carry the Tables
Acts 6:1–7; Galatians 6:2

- Not an honorary retirement package
- The office is for practical service
- Care for legitimate needs
- Visit and help the needy
- Support congregational ministries
- Assist with administration
- Solve problems without spreading a gripe
- Recognize needs not seen on the platform
- Be a doer, not just a decision-maker

The church needs men who work, not just men who vote.

8 Stephen and Philip Beyond the Tables
Acts 6:5–15; 7:1–60; 8:5–40; 21:8

- Stephen — full of faith and the Holy Ghost
  Performed great wonders and miracles
- Preached boldly before the Sanhedrin
- Delivered a powerful historical message
- Stoned to death for his testimony
- Philip — preached Christ in Samaria
- Explained Isaiah 53 to the Ethiopian eunuch
- Acts 21:8 calls him "the evangelist, which was one of the seven"
- Practical service does not limit usefulness

A man's usefulness to God is not confined to his title.

9 The Servant's Reward
1 Timothy 3:13

- Use the office well and purchase a good degree
- Great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus
- Not an academic diploma
- Not a guaranteed promotion
- Not a defined heavenly rank
- A real spiritual benefit from faithful service
- Connected with character, doctrine, and responsibility
- Better than religious prestige or influence

Faithful service brings a reward far greater than human recognition.

10 At the Judgment Seat
1 Corinthians 3:11–15; 2 Cor. 5:10

- Every believer will appear before Christ's judgment seat
- Works will be examined (what sort they are)
- Reward is different from salvation
- Salvation is by grace through faith
- The Lord will bring hidden things to light
- Faithfulness when nobody applauds still matters
- A religious title is temporary
- The Lord's approval is eternal

The chairman's chair will be empty, but the Lord's verdict will remain.

"Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."
Matthew 20:28

The Bottom Line

- Qualified men, not ambitious politicians
- Character before commission
- Doctrine, family, and finances matter
- Servants, not rulers
- Faithful work brings eternal reward
- It is an honor to serve Jesus Christ

It is a greater honor to serve Christ than to be seated above others.