

life group study guide

SERVANT LEADERS

October 7, 2012



Servant Leaders – 1 Timothy 2:9-15; 3:8-16

“Jesus called them [disciples] together and said, ‘You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.’” Mark 10:42-45.

“He got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.” John 13:4-5.

“As the cross is the sign of submission, so the towel is the sign of service.” Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*.

“Lord of all pots and pans and things . . . make me a saint by getting meals and washing up the plates!” Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*.

Q: What do you think of when you think of or hear the word “deacon” or “deaconess?” What do you think of when you think of or hear the word “servant?” What are some church traditions that you are familiar with concerning deacons? Responsibility for the church building and other property? Serving at communion? Ushering? Being part of a church board with the Elders?

Study:

1. What is a “deacon” and what is their role in the church?

The basic meaning of the Greek word *diakonos*, from which we get our word “deacon,” means “servant.” It can also mean a servant who manages other servants in a given task. **Read 1 Timothy 3:1-13, Acts 6:1-7, Romans 16:1-2, and Philippians 1:1.**

Last week’s sermon dealt with Elders and Overseers – those men whom God has appointed to oversee the church. When you consider the Acts, Romans, and Philippians verses, and that deacons are described in the same 1 Timothy passage as the Elders/Overseers (the Greek words for “elder,” “overseer/bishop,” and “pastor” are all used interchangeably in the New Testament and almost certainly refer to the same church office), all of the following are reasonable conclusions:

- The New Testament concept of *diakonos* is appropriate for both men and women. This is a reasonable conclusion from 1 Timothy 3:11 and Romans 16:1-2. In the former passage, qualifications are given for women (either the wives of deacons or female deacons), but in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, no qualifications are given for the wives of elders, so it is more likely that 1 Timothy 3:11 does not refer to the wives of deacons but rather to the qualifications of female *diakonos*. Romans 16:1-2 refers to “our sister Phoebe, a servant.” The word for servant in this text is *diakonos*, in the male form, instead of in the female form, *diakona*. Although not conclusive, Paul is likely referring to Phoebe in her role or office (*diakonos*) instead of merely referring to a servant who was female (*diakona*).

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- However deacons (men and women) are chosen, they serve under the oversight of an elder or the Elders.
- A deacon is a servant – someone who serves the local church – not in a generic sense (since we are all to be servants of one another), but in a particular ministry of the church.
- The seven men of Acts 6 set the pattern for the *diakonos* ministry. They were appointed by the Apostles (who led the church before the establishment of the Eldership) to lead a specific ministry – benevolence – providing food for needy widows.
- A deacon could be any servant who serves in an assigned task but he or she would usually and most likely be a servant who leads other servants in an assigned ministry. The early church and most churches since have seen deacons in this way – as “Servant Leaders” or “Ministry Leaders.”
- A “Ministry Leader” means more to people today than does the word “deacon,” and is a more accurate description of the biblical role and office. The English word “deacon” should probably be replaced by more meaningful descriptions of the ministry responsibility, such as “The Director of Benevolence Ministry,” “Children’s Ministry Director,” etc. It follows that a *diakonos* in the church today can be a paid (full or part-time) or volunteer position, depending on need, workload, and training.
- The 4 passages together (Acts, Romans, 1 Timothy, and Philippians), clearly point to “deacons”/*diakonos* as a second level of church leadership operating under the leadership of elders and responsible for many various ministries of the church. So, all Christian church members are servants, but not all are *diakonos* – all Christians have (or should have) some ministry, but not all are ministry leaders.

2. The Qualifications for Deacons/Ministry Leaders – 1 Timothy 3:8-13

Qualifications for church ministry leaders are similar to that of elders with the notable exception that deacons are not required to be able to teach. Like the list for elders, the list focuses on Christian character and godliness more than talent or training.

Q: Paul is giving Timothy instructions on appointing elders and deacons at Ephesus and other churches. Why does Paul seem to be so much more concerned with character and godliness than with training or ability? In your previous church experience (not at Kingsway), were leaders chosen in this way?

Let’s take a brief look at the qualifications Paul lays out for deacons, using the NIV with ESV translation in parentheses:

- Worthy of respect (dignified), 3:8 and 3:11: A ministry leader needs to be respected by those he/she leads and by the church as a whole.
- Sincere (not double-tongued), 3:8; and not malicious talkers (not slanderers), 3:11: A ministry leader must control their tongue, speak honestly, and keep their word.
- Not indulging in much wine (not addicted to much wine), 3:8; and temperate (sober-minded), 3:11: Moderation is the minimum requirement, but in today’s society, abstinence may be a better practice.
- Not pursuing dishonest gain (not greedy for dishonest gain), 3:8; and trustworthy in everything (faithful in all things), 3:11: There should be nothing unethical in the way a ministry leader makes or handles money – completely trustworthy in all they do.

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- Clear conscience (clear conscience): The full phrase “must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience.” A ministry leader must be a committed Christian and faithful church member – someone who is not going to quit their faith or task.
- Tested (tested): Most likely, Paul means that ministry leaders should prove themselves by faithful service in the church – in smaller roles – before being chosen as deacons.
- Nothing against them (blameless): This doesn’t mean that they have been perfect, but that they have done a reasonably good job performing their tasks. They have been both faithful and competent.
- Husband of but one wife (husband of one wife), 3:12; similar to “faithful to her husband” (wife of one husband) from 5:9 dealing with widows: The literal Greek is “one woman man,” and in 5:9, “one man woman.” The gist is that a ministry leader faithfully honors the commitment he or she has made to their spouse and avoids all forms of unfaithfulness, not just the outward. This does rule out past divorce or past sexual sin, but does mean that a deacon has repented of that and is faithful in their present commitments.
- Manage his children and his household well (managing their children and their own households well): A ministry leader should maintain a household that can serve as a good example of a Christian family – both to the church and to the world. This same requirement is also given to elders (1 Timothy 3:4-5, Titus 1:6) and to women (1 Timothy 5:14).

Conclusion

1 Timothy 3:13 – A man or woman who serves faithfully as a deacon gains standing in Christ’s church and greater confidence in the Christian faith.

Q: Although applied specifically to leaders, why are the qualities described in these verses important for all Christians?

Q: Of these qualities, what are two or three you have made progress with in the past year? In which areas do you want to grow?

Wherever you are at in your Christian walk, I encourage you to seek to serve. You don’t have to be a deacon/ministry leader – just seek to serve – the Church of Jesus Christ is built on service. Your life will be given for someone or something. Make it Jesus Christ and His church so that your service will have eternal benefit. The great Christian poet/singer Bob Dylan (not!) at least got this right:

*“You’re gonna have to serve somebody, yes indeed
You’re gonna have to serve somebody.
Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord
But you’re gonna have to serve somebody.”*