

1 TIM. 3:8 – 5:2

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IX. Instructions About Deacons (3:8-13)

⁸ Deacons likewise are to be worthy of respect, not double-tongued, not indulging in much wine, not greedy for money, ⁹ holding securely the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰ Let these also first be tested; then, if being blameless, let them serve. ¹¹ Their wives, likewise, are to be worthy of respect, not slanderers, level-headed, and faithful in all things. ¹² Let deacons be husbands of one wife, who manage their children and their own households well. ¹³ For those who have served well gain a good standing for themselves and great boldness in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

A. Paul also gives qualifications for the office or position of deacon (see, Phil. 1:1). The Bible does not specify exactly what deacons are to do, but as church officers, they are necessarily under the oversight of the elders. The word translated (or, more accurately, transliterated) "deacon" (*diakonos*) means "servant," which suggests that they serve the church in ways determined by the elders to be beneficial. The picture that emerges in early church history is that "deacons ministered to the needy, visited the sick, administered church property, and assisted at worship. They were described as the 'eyes' and 'ears' of the bishop." Ferguson, *Church of Christ*, 336.

B. The requirements overlap to some extent with the requirements of elders.

1. Deacons must be (v.8) worthy of respect; not double-tongued ("sincere" - NIV); not indulging in much wine (same requirement as elders); not greedy for money (same requirement as elders); (v. 12) the husband of one wife (same requirement as elders); and must manage their households and children well (same requirement as elders).

2. Though they are not required to be skillful in teaching, as are elders, they must have orthodox convictions (v. 9). They must hold securely the "mystery of the faith," meaning the truth of the gospel, which was once hidden in God but has now been revealed by the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:6-16). And in doing so, they must maintain a clear conscience, meaning they must strive sincerely to live in accordance with the ethical demands of the gospel.

3. As with the elders (that's the thrust of the "also" in v. 10), prospective deacons are to be examined ("tested") to see if they have what is required to serve in that position.

4. In v. 11, Paul says literally, "Likewise wives/women (*gune* means both) respectable, not slanderers, level-headed (sober), faithful in all things." Some scholars believe that Paul is here referring to women deacons and giving their qualifications rather

than referring to the wives of deacons, but I consider that unlikely (I am indebted to Daniel Wallace's online article for this analysis).

a. If women deacons are in view in v. 11, it seems rather strange that they should be discussed right in the middle of the qualifications for male deacons, rather than by themselves.

b. Paul seems to go out of his way in the very next verse to indicate that women are *not* to be deacons, for he says, "Deacons must be husbands of one wife."

c. If v. 11 is addressed to women deacons, why do they have only four qualifications? Why would they not have to be tested? Why would they not have to hold securely the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience? Why would they not have to be wives of one husband? The fact these requirements seem so universal, and yet are given specifically only to the men, seems to argue against women deacons being in view.

d. On the other side, proponents of the women-deacon view say, "Why would the wives of deacons be mentioned but not the wives of elders?" It may be related to differences in roles of elders and deacons. As Daniel Wallace says:

Since deacons' duties involved taking care of physical needs, they would have been in control of the mercy funds in the church -- and, if so, it would be imperative for their wives to be 'dignified, not scandalmongers, but sober, and trustworthy in everything' (REB). One can readily see the psychological realities of such instructions to deacons' wives: they must be tight-lipped when it came to discussing the very personal needs of the body.

e. Proponents of women deacons try to bolster their case by appealing to Rom. 16:1 where Phoebe is referred to as a "*diakonon*" (accusative) of the church at Cenchreae. The problem is that the word can simply mean "servant" without the connotation of a church office or position. It is translated simply "servant" in the vast majority of its occurrences. Historically, apart from an ambiguous reference in Pliny's letter to Emperor Trajan (early 2nd century), there is no mention of female deacons until the third century, despite the fact second-century Christian sources discuss church organization. Lewis, *Exegesis of Difficult Passages*, 105-109.

C. Paul says that faithful service as a deacon leads to good standing or esteem in the eyes of the community and of God and brings a greater sense of confidence in God and assurance of salvation.

X. Purpose of Writing and the Glorious Nature of Christianity (3:14-16)

¹⁴ Although hoping to come to you soon, I write these things to you so that,

¹⁵ if I am delayed, you may know how it is necessary to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and

foundation of the truth. ¹⁶ Without a doubt, the mystery of our religion is great: he was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

A. Why was Paul planning to go to Ephesus when he said to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:25 that he knew "that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will no longer see my face"?

1. Perhaps Acts 20:25, 38 meant only that Paul would never again see the elders who came to him at Miletus, and they had either died or left the city. I consider this unlikely.

2. Or maybe Paul had forgotten the prophecy (1 Cor. 1:16) that Luke, under inspiration, later recorded. This also strikes me as unlikely.

3. I am guessing that Paul understood his release from prison in Rome in response to prayer as an act of divine mercy that superseded the prophecy (e.g., 2 Ki. 20:1-6 -- fifteen years added to Hezekiah's life). In other words, the prophecy that he would not see them again was (or was interpreted as) a prophecy of an impending imprisonment that would end in death, either naturally or by execution, and thus deprive him of the opportunity to return to Ephesus. By being released from prison, Paul was granted that opportunity. If he never made it back to Ephesus, and we have no record that he did, it was only because more pressing things occupied him until that window of opportunity closed (probably by his final arrest).

B. Paul says he's writing so that, if he is delayed, Timothy will know how people are to conduct themselves as members of God's household, God's church, which is the pillar and foundation of the truth.

1. The church is the "pillar" of the truth in that, just as a pillar holds up a roof, the church holds up the truth to be seen and admired through its proclamation.

2. The church is the "foundation" of the truth in that, just as the foundation keeps a building from shifting or collapsing, the church defends the truth from forces pushing against it, forces seeking to undermine or destroy it.

3. The false teachers, on the other hand, had abandoned the truth (1 Tim. 6:5; 2 Tim. 2:18, 3:8, 4:4), so it is very important that Timothy stop them and get people back in touch with the truth.

C. In v. 16 Paul expresses some great truths of Christianity. The truth of God's redemptive plan, that mystery that he kept hidden for ages but revealed through Christ and the apostles, is wonderful. Jesus was manifested in the flesh, was vindicated by the Spirit in his resurrection (see, Rom. 8:11), which was witnessed by angels (e.g., Mat 28:5-7; Lk.

24:4-7), he ascended to heaven, was preached among the nations, and that message was believed in the world.

XI. The False Teachings Censured (4:1-5)

4:1 But the Spirit explicitly says that in [the] last times some will abandon the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons ²[that come] through the hypocrisy of liars whose own consciences have been seared. ³They forbid marriage and demand abstinence from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and have known the truth. ⁴For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if received with thanksgiving; ⁵for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.

A. Though the church has been entrusted with the truth, what was happening in Ephesus should come as no surprise. The Spirit clearly forewarned that the "last times" would include this kind of thing, Christians abandoning the faith, turning from the truth.

1. The Spirit revealed this truth in the past. Paul uses the present tense (Spirit "says") because that word, though spoken in the past, remains valid. It's like saying "Scripture says" X or Y (e.g., 1 Tim. 5:18; Rom. 4:3). What was in the future when the truth was revealed ("will abandon") is being exhibited in Ephesus.

2. Paul does not say *how* or *where* the Spirit revealed this truth. It's doubtful he is referring to the O.T., because he nowhere else refers to the O.T. that way. I think the best candidate is the teaching of Christ in Mat. 24:10-11, perhaps as reiterated by the Spirit through Paul (Acts 20:29-30) and other prophets in the early church. (Note that in Revelation "the Spirit says" is used of revelation given by Jesus.)

3. The phrase "later times" (NIV) is better translated "last times" (*husteros* can mean later or last - BDAG gives "last" as its most probable meaning here). It is synonymous with the phrase "last days." It means the time between the kingdom's inauguration and consummation. It is the era in which all people since Pentecost have lived. As Knight remarks (p. 188), "The NT community is conscious of being 'in the last days' (Acts 2:16, 17; [Heb. 1:2]), i.e., the days inaugurated by the Messiah and characterized by the Spirit's presence and power, the days to be consummated by the return of Christ."

B. Demons are the ultimate source of the false doctrines, but they are delivered through hypocritical liars whose consciences had been cauterized.

1. These people presented themselves as faithful believers, as Christian teachers, but they were in fact enemies of the faith.

2. Their consciences were no longer effective in condemning this morally unacceptable conduct. (Note: Some commentators believe the point here is not that the conscience has been cauterized but that it has been branded as belonging to Satan.)

C. The false teachers forbid marriage and demand abstinence from certain foods.

1. In 1 Cor. 7:32, 35 Paul commended singleness as a state in which one could give more time and energy directly to serving the Lord. He recognized, however, that not everyone was gifted for singleness and insisted that marriage was not wrong (1 Cor. 7:28).

2. The false teachers in Ephesus claimed that marriage was strictly forbidden. This error was probably tied to an over-realized eschatology. You see a similar dim view of sex and marriage in 1 Corinthians. The thought may have been that we are already like angels and thus should not marry (Mat. 22:30). Of course, asceticism, the denial of physical satisfaction, particularly regarding food and sexual relations, does not require an over-realized eschatology to be mistaken for spirituality (e.g., Col. 2:20-23).

3. Paul has already implicitly refuted the ban on marriage in 2:15 and in chapter 3, and in chapter 5 he encourages the younger widows to marry. So he does not take the time to do so here. Rather, he focuses on refuting the false teachers' prohibition against eating certain foods.

4. The prohibition probably related to meat or to food regarded as ritually unclean by Jews.

a. Paul says that God created that food (and all other food) to be received with thanksgiving by those who have believed the gospel. In other words, dietary restrictions were never intended for anyone other than those under the Mosaic law. So to impose them on Christians, who are not under that law, is to rebel against God's purpose.

b. All that God created as food for mankind is inherently good, and none of it is to be rejected if it can be received with thanksgiving. In other words, if it can be received with a conviction that God has indeed provided it for consumption, if it can be eaten with a clear conscience (see 1 Cor. 10:30), no one can properly compel its rejection. It is clean, meaning acceptable to eat, by virtue of the fact God has so declared it and the heart has accepted it (as reflected in the prayer of thanksgiving).

XII. Timothy's Personal Responsibilities (4:6-16)

A. Teach these things and undergo training in godliness (4:6-10)

⁶By making these things known to the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being nourished in the words of the faith and of the good teaching which you have followed. ⁷But have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself in godliness. ⁸For physical training is profitable in a small way, but godliness is profitable in every way, holding the promise of life now and life hereafter. ⁹The saying is sure and worthy of all acceptance, ¹⁰for to this end we labor and struggle,

because we have set our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, that is, of the believing ones.

1. In making known to the church the error of the false teachers, Timothy will be acting as a good servant of Christ, as one who is being nourished in the truth of the gospel and in the good teaching he followed (throughout his association with Paul).

2. In contrast to that good teaching, Timothy is to have nothing to do with the superstitious nonsense being promoted by the false teachers. Instead of spending time with that stuff, he is to train himself in godliness; he is to do those things that help a person become godly.

3. He is to train himself in godliness because, though physical training has some value in this age, godliness is valuable for both this life and the life to come. Godliness, faithful living, is the path of spiritual blessing in this life, and it culminates in resurrection life.

4. The saying that is certain and deserves full acceptance is that godliness is profitable in every way because it promises life both for the present and the future. (The NIV is misleading here with its paragraphing at v. 9, its use of a parenthetical in v 10, and its translation of *gar* as "and" in v. 10.)

a. The surpassing value of godliness is evident in how Paul and his companions exert themselves in its pursuit -- they *labor* and *struggle* to that end.

b. They do so because they have set their hope on God for salvation, and he calls them to do it. The fact they were saved by God's grace did not make them casual about sin. It had the opposite effect. It made them pour themselves into being the people God wanted them to be. Timothy and we need to do the same.

5. Paul notes that the God in whom they set their hope is the Savior of *all* men, again pointing out the universality of the gospel. He then clarifies that this salvation, that *available* to all, is *received* only by those who believe. He says God is the Savior of all men, *that is*, those who believe. (The translation "*especially* those who believe" makes it sound like all are saved regardless of faith but those with faith are *really* or *especially* saved.)

B. Pay close attention to your life and teaching (4:11-16)

¹¹Command and teach these things. ¹²Let no one despise your youth, but be an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, and in purity. ¹³Until I come, apply yourself to the public reading, to the exhortation, and to the teaching. ¹⁴Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you through prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership. ¹⁵Practice these things; be diligent in them, so that your progress may be clear to everyone. ¹⁶Pay close attention to yourself and to

the teaching; continue in them, for by doing this, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

1. Paul reminds Timothy that the pursuit of true godliness with its promise of life is not just for him but for all Christians. Timothy is to command and teach these truths to the church.

2. He tells Timothy not to let anyone, meaning specifically the erring elders, look down on him because of his youth (probably around 30 or so). Timothy is in the right and must not allow the culturally superior position of the elders (who were older) to intimidate him. In saying this, Paul is no doubt also saying to the church that, despite Timothy's youth, he has Paul's authority to teach them.

3. Instead of being looked down on because of his youth, Timothy is to be looked up to because of his life. He is to set an example for the believers, to model for them how they are to be in speech (not arguing, not being double-tongued or deceitful), in conduct, in love, in faith (which the false teachers had abandoned), and in purity.

4. Timothy is to devote himself to the public reading of Scripture, to the exhortation of the saints to faithfulness, and to the teaching of the true Christian faith.

a. The public nature of this activity and the fact the article is used with each noun (*the* public reading, *the* exhortation, and *the* teaching) indicates that Paul is referring to recognized activities in the congregational meeting. As Fee says (p. 107), "this certainly refers to what Timothy is to do in public worship."

b. Paul emphasizes the teaching aspect of the assembly because the church is threatened by false teaching.

5. He urges Timothy not to neglect his gift for ministry as a preacher and teacher of the Word. The giving of that gift was apparently announced by one or more prophets and was accompanied by the laying on of hands by the elders and Paul (1 Tim. 1:18, 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:5). This almost certainly took place when Timothy joined Paul's missionary team (Acts 16:3).

6. Timothy is to commit himself fully to setting an example of Christian character and to faithful preaching and teaching, so that his spiritual progress will be evident to everyone. All Christians are called to spiritual growth, but that call has even greater significance for those in positions of leadership because of their potential influence.

7. Paul repeats that Timothy is to pay close attention to his own life and to the teaching (of right doctrine), for through this he will bring both himself and the congregation to final salvation. There is a war going on, and Christians cannot take their side of the battle lightly.

XIII. Manner of Correcting (5:1-2)

5:1 Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as a father; exhort younger men as brothers, ² older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, in all purity.

A. Timothy's authority as God's servant does not entitle him to be harsh. He must correct and he must rebuke (see Tit. 2:15), but he is not to lash out at people.

1. This is an application to Timothy of the requirement that church leaders (elders) not be violent (1 Tim. 3:3; Tit. 1:7).

2. The prohibition against harsh rebuke applies to all the groups, not only to the older men. This is clear from the fact that "exhorting" is given as the alternative course to harsh rebuke, and "exhorting" is how he is told to handle all the groups.

B. Though no one is to be abused, lashing out at older people is especially inappropriate. Age is entitled to a certain degree of respect.

1. This is made explicit in the Mosaic law. Lev. 19:32 says, "Rise in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the Lord." According to Lam. 5:12, one of the tragedies of the fall of Jerusalem was that the elders were shown no respect.

2. Older men and older women are to be exhorted to right action with the kind of patience and instruction one would use with one's parents, recalling that God calls us to honor our parents (e.g., Ex. 20:12; Eph. 6:2).

C. Younger men and women are to be exhorted to right action with the kind of patience and instruction one would use with one's brothers and sisters.

D. Regarding the younger women, Paul adds a warning about sexual purity. He is reminding Timothy that he needs to act with utmost propriety to avoid any needless suspicion.