Deacons (Female)

Romans 16:1; 1 Timothy 3:11

Last week in our study of the book of Romans, we talked about some of the spiritual gifts. As Romans 12 said:

**6**In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out with as much faith as God has given you. **7**If your gift is serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, teach well. **8**If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging. If it is giving, give generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly.

Romans 12:6-8

Today I want to take a little branch off from Romans 12 based off of Romans 12:7 which says, “If your gift is serving others, serve them well.”

When I say the word “servant,” what do you think of?

A person who opens the door for you?

A Limo driver?

A butler?

A gardener?

A police officer?

Or maybe a politician? After all, they are public servants, right? They are for the people.

Merriam-Webster defines the word “servant,” as:

“a person who performs duties for others, especially a person employed in a house on domestic duties or as a personal attendant.”

Some synonyms include “helper, supporter, follower.”

In the Greek, which is what the book of Romans was originally written in, the word serving was “diakonia.” In church leadership we have two official roles that the Bible addresses, one is the role of elder, the other is deacon. In the church there are those who have been “gifted” by God’s Holy Spirit, to be servants.

**3**The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. **2**Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, **3**not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. **4**He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, **5**for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? **6**He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. **7**Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

**Qualifications for Deacons**

**8**Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. **9**They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. **10**And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. **11**Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. **12**Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. **13**For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

1 Timothy 3:1-11

Over the years, these verses have led to debates on the roles of women in the church. People have asked, “Biblically, is it appropriate for women to be elders? And Deacons.”

In the question of eldership, which I won’t really address today, it seems that there is a distinction, that God makes, between male and female. There is no mention of female elders in the Bible and it seems that the scriptures reserve the role of “elder” for men. In 1 Timothy 2:11-12 Paul writes:

**11**Women should learn quietly and submissively. **12**I do not let women teach men or have authority over them. Let them listen quietly. **13**For God made Adam first, and afterward he made Eve.

1 Timothy 2:12

There are some that say this is simply a cultural thing or it was written for the specific context, but it seems that Paul is alluding to a more universal context, since he goes back to the creation order. At any rate, with regard to the official position of elder, it is harder to make a case for women holding that office. It is not impossible, there are many churches that have female elders and I don’t think that they are apostate. In fact, I believe there are many excellent female Bible teachers. But, seemingly due to the the curse of sin, between men and women, God decided to have the office of overseer reserved for men. I don’t think this is ideal, but it seems until sin is out of the picture, some modes of operation are less practically tenable.

You might think I am old fashion or maybe you even think I am a male-chauvinist. I would answer you by saying, “I am affected by the curse that Adam and Eve brought onto us, in similar ways that you are affected by it.”

Early in the history of mankind, after Adam and Eve sinned, God said:

**14**Then the Lord God said to the serpent,

“Because you have done this, you are cursed  
    more than all animals, domestic and wild.  
You will crawl on your belly,  
    groveling in the dust as long as you live.  
**15**And I will cause hostility between you and the woman,  
    and between your offspring and her offspring.  
He will strike your head,  
    and you will strike his heel.”

**16**Then he said to the woman,

“I will sharpen the pain of your pregnancy,  
    and in pain you will give birth.  
And you will desire to control your husband,  
    but he will rule over you.”

**17**And to the man he said,

“Since you listened to your wife and ate from the tree  
    whose fruit I commanded you not to eat,  
the ground is cursed because of you.  
    All your life you will struggle to scratch a living from it.  
**18**It will grow thorns and thistles for you,  
    though you will eat of its grains.  
**19**By the sweat of your brow  
    will you have food to eat  
until you return to the ground  
    from which you were made.  
For you were made from dust,  
    and to dust you will return.”

Genesis 3:14-19

When it comes to women as elders and having authority over men, in church offices, I don’t think it has anything to do with equality or ability. I think it has to do with avoiding some of the ongoing problems associated with the curse of sin.

But enough on elders, because I wanted to share with you, today, about deacons. One of the reason’s I am touching on this subject is because, in the near future we are going to officially recognize female deacons here at Bonney Lake Community Church. There are two main reasons I want to do this.

The first reason was that there were women who were clearly gifted by the Holy Spirit with the gift of service. They were already doing the job.

Second, when women who are attending Bonney Lake Community want counsel or help from another woman, I as the pastor, wanted to be able to point them in the direction of our female deacons.

To some of you, this may seem like a no brainer, and like I said earlier, some of you may think I’m an old-fashioned patriarchal male for even feeling the need to address these things. But Bonney Lake Community Church has not officially had females in the role of deacon. And it is time we did.

Let’s go back to 1 Timothy 3:

**8**Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. **9**They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. **10**And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. **11**Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. **12**Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. **13**For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

1 Timothy 3:1-11

Sometimes people try to say that this text rules out women for the role of deacon, because it says, “Let deacons each be the husband of one wife.” To that, I would say “**Men** who are deacons, are to be one women men, who are faithful to their one wife.”

The other thing that is confusing about this is that it doesn’t seem to talk about women here at all, but instead the “wives” of the deacons. This is because the Greek word can be translated as “wives” or “women.” As one commentator wrote:

“…in 1 Timothy 3:11, the NIV records: “In the same way, the women are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.” The NIV in using the word “women” suggests they were deacons, while the CSB (and others) inclines to “wives” of deacons. There are a couple of reasons why I (and many others) believe this word should be translated “women” and not wives.

1. It is highly unlikely that Paul would put qualifications on deacons wives but not on elders wives.
2. In the translations that use the word wives, they have to add the word “their.” The Greek does not include the word “their.”
3. The character qualities that are required for the women in 1 Timothy 3:11 are also mandated for elders and deacons, which makes sense if an official capacity is intended.

Finally, with regard to women being recognized officially, as deacons in the church, we have the example of Phoebe. In Romans 16:1 Paul writes:

**16**I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a deacon in the church in Cenchrea. **2**Welcome her in the Lord as one who is worthy of honor among God’s people. Help her in whatever she needs, for she has been helpful to many, and especially to me.

It is true that some argue that the word deacon just means servant in this context. But you really can’t argue that she wasn’t an officially recognized deacon. How much more officially recognized can you get than being recognized in the Bible?

I know that some may still disagree, but at Bonney Lake we have women who tested and true deacons and we are planning to recognize a few of them in an official capacity.

I remember a time when I was at the church by myself and a young homeless woman came into the church because she was cold and needed a place to warm up. I called woman who I would call a tested and true servant of the church, and she came right away and sat with the young lady and was hospitable with her. This was huge to me! As she ministered to the cold woman who didn’t have a place to go she also ministered to me by guarding me from being in an awkward situation with a woman I didn’t know and didn’t trust.

Let’s finish up today by looking at the qualities of a deacon. And remember, some of the comments Paul directs toward the men, some towards the women and some towards both.

“…deacons are to be worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. **9**They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. **10**They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.

**11**In the same way, the women are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.

**12**A deacon must be faithful to his wife and must manage his children and his household well. **13**Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.”

1 Timothy 3:8-13

We see first that a deacon has the responsibility of modeling Christian behavior. Not only are they to manage their households well, the scriptures say they are to be serious. Being serious does not mean that they will never crack a joke, but instead it alludes to the fact that they will be sensitive to different situations. In other words, they will have a knack for knowing when it is appropriate to laugh and when it is good to cry.

Second, we see that being a deacon is not just about changing light bulbs, it involves relational ministry. Many times being a servant requires discretion. Loose lips tend to expose things that should be covered over with love. Taking a food package to one in need might be anything but loving, if the state of their home is then shared with other members of the congregation.

Third, we see that deacons, are to be dependable and available. Those who are given to much wine, might not be able to assist in a moment of sudden and great need.

Fourth, we can gather that “servants of the church” may be used to assist in financial matters, therefore the requirement that they be “not greedy for money.”

Lastly, Paul shares with us the foundation of deacon ministry. Deacons are to “Hold fast to the mystery of the faith with all honesty.” Their service to the Body is to be founded and grounded in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Loving service is rendered not on a “who deserves it type of basis.” Instead it is gospel ministry that leads to serving not only the oppressed but those who are broken and undeserving and quite possibly even those who would be considered the enemies of Christ. Deacons are ministers of the gospel through the deeds of their hands.

As pastor here at Bonney Lake I have been so thankful to the men and women who have helped me carry the weight of ministry.

Deacons have kept the grounds and the building.

Deacons have done hospital visits

Deacons have visited shut-ins

Deacons have delivered essentials to those in need.

Deacons have stayed overnight with people in distress

Deacons have helped people fix damages to their homes

Deacons have helped people with hoarding problems purge their houses

Deacons have given people rides to doctor’s appointments.

Deacons have counseled people in times of needed wisdom

Deacons have taught Sunday school classes and led Bible Studies

I’m so thankful for those who are truly gifted with the gift of service.