

Serving Like Our King - Kevin Miller, 30 minutes, **1 Timothy 3:8-13** (#532)

Introduction: Who serves in the church? Who is given the task of being called to serve the body of Christ within the congregation and also called to serve their neighbors, their friends, their coworkers, and even perfect strangers? Most churches throughout the last fifty or sixty years would quickly answer that it should be some sort of full-time ministry professional: the pastor or a missionary. Others, perhaps a bit better taught, might answer that it is the elected officers of the church who are to serve – the overseers. Still others, perhaps with a bit of Greek language background or who have studied **1 Timothy** or **Titus**, might answer “it’s the deacons and deaconesses – they are the ones we elect to serve.”

What I want to show you this morning from God’s Word is that all of those answers are, at best, only partially right. They recognize something very true about leaders in the church – all are called to be servants, none are somehow above caring for other people. But all of these answers also fall short, because they miss one absolutely vital truth: every Christian is called to be a servant. There are no exceptions. This was exemplified to us first by Jesus, in passages like **Mark 10:45** where it says: “For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Make no mistake: Christ’s first advent was not filled with power, might, riches, fawning media personalities, and celebrations apart from the “little people.” No, He came as a servant; He deeply cares for those that the world overlooks. Yet, this is a task not only for Jesus...

Just one chapter before, in **Mark 9:35**, Jesus gives the call to servanthood to all of his disciples: “...If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.” This idea of every Christian being called to be a servant – young or old, educated

or not, rich or poor – is also expressed in places as varied as **John 15, Colossians 3, and 1 Peter 4** among others.

So, as we head back to **1 Timothy 3** this morning, let me call you to adjust your thinking: just as we spoke a few weeks ago about how the overseers were to be an example, a pattern that the congregation could emulate in appropriate ways, so it will be here, though perhaps even more directly: though some men and women will be called to be *examples* of service, *all* Christians are called to be servants. Let's see what that looks like, beginning with **verse 8**...

3:8-9 When Paul writes “Deacons likewise...” here, it means that he is continuing in the same train of thought as what he has just written. So, we began this chapter by speaking about the character of an overseer – at home, in the community, in their faith, and certainly before the church. Now, when we speak of deacons, and – in a little bit – deaconesses, Paul prefaces these teachings by saying, in essence, “in a similar vein, deacons...” Though some of the specifics and examples will be different, the pattern is the same.

Here, then, we read that deacons are to be dignified, not hypocritical or deceitful in their speech, not given to addiction, and not looking for only how they can gain in this world or in the church. The character of a deacon, therefore, is to be thoroughly Christian. Perhaps that's stating the obvious, but notice what it also isn't stating: nothing written here is different from what should be true of every follower of Jesus. Deacons, therefore, are called to be an example not in some extraordinary way, but instead simply by truly holding to, believing, and living according to what the Scriptures say as real-life examples to be emulated.

Verse 9 speaks to a deacon's belief: they are to hold to the faith. Remember that Paul uses "mystery" in his letters not to mean "something we don't understand," but instead to mean "something which wasn't previously understood, but now God has revealed it and made it clear." So, deacons are to hold to the faith revealed in the Scriptures without any double-mindedness. They are to be men of the Word, not necessarily in the teaching sense of an overseer, but with no less sincerity. Think of Stephen, in **Acts 6 and 7**: he is literally chosen as a deacon, yet what we know him best for is his amazing sermon about who Jesus is.

Put these two aspects together, and what you get is little different from an overseer, only that the practical responsibility isn't towards teaching, but towards serving. With Stephen and the others, it was quite literally distributing food to widows. With Phoebe, listed in **Romans 16:1** apparently as a deaconess, it was supporting the mission of the church. There are certainly many needs and many ways to serve – these, and others like them, are called to serve as an example for the rest of the congregation to follow, to pattern their lives after. Are you living that way? Could somebody watching you learn something about how to faithfully follow Jesus?

3:10 Much like with overseers, deacons are – likewise – to be known for a pattern of faithfulness. For the overseer, the command was that he not be a "recent convert." Here, the command is different, but runs on the same rails: a deacon is to have a reputation for faithfulness, a reputation that is blameless. That word, blameless, doesn't mean perfect, but rather "above reproach." Their pattern of life is well known not just by faithful works at one point in time, but instead by a trusted way of living that speaks to Christian character and witness. How long it takes for this to be noticeable might well differ according to each person, but the point remains: if somebody is going to be an example, they need to be trusted. In

our fast-paced society, we give a lot of lip-service to trust, but we rarely put in the time needed to build it; after all, we are too busy for long-term evaluation! Not so in the church. This, by the way, is another indicator that the church is to be formed and patterned more like a family than a business or corporation. Trust is key, speed is not. There are no shortcuts to spiritual maturity. Are you putting in the time and effort in the here and now? Small steps today lead to great gains tomorrow.

3:11 Paul has been speaking of men up to this point. While I've made a few references to women, it is only now – in **verse 11** – that we read of you ladies. There is a bit of uncertainty in this passage as to who exactly Paul is referring to. One view, which is reflected in how the ESV and NKJV are translated, is that the women noted here are the wives of deacons, which is to say – they serve alongside their husbands in the church. Another view, which we hold to here at First E-Free, is that there is a separate role of deaconess, which is largely parallel to the office of deacon while still being distinct. Practically, the difference between these two views isn't much, but it does mean that in our church we believe ladies can serve as deaconesses even if their husbands are not deacons.

Paul's point, primarily, is that these ladies are to uphold the same kind of faithful pattern in their lives, their words, their thinking, and their actions. They may well be called to serve in different ways from the deacons – in our church, the tradition has been that deaconesses primarily give their attention to the women's ministries of the church, as well as to the vital ministries of assisting with baptisms, the Lord's Supper, weddings, funerals, and visitations, among other roles. Yet I want you to see that none of these callings are any less important, any less vital, to the health and disciple-making vision of the church. We need men who will serve and we need women who will serve. We need men and women who are willing to be

held up as examples to a congregation who need to see how we ourselves are to serve. That is what is being communicated here.

Ladies: are you trusting Christ and patterning your life after the Scriptures in these ways? Are you willing to do spiritual good to others in the church not only directly – by whatever ministry you might be serving in – but also by being an example to those watching? So much of discipleship is not just taught, but also caught.

Christ's church needs leaders – not in the CEO sense or the military general sense, but in the Christ-like servant sense. Are you willing?

Let's turn once more to men as we read these final two verses about deacons...

3:12-13 Just as with the overseers, the deacon is to be faithful in his own home first. This doesn't mean that you ladies don't have to be faithful, but given the creation-order argument that Paul gave earlier in the letter, he sees men everywhere as bearing the responsibility for being examples in their homes before they are able to serve in the church.

Yet, in **verse 13**, we do read something different: there is a reward for serving in Christ's church. Sometimes, we're reluctant to speak of such things because of how often ideas of rewards have been misused by prosperity preachers and those with poor theology. Yet here, the Scriptures are clear, and we should be no less so: being a servant is always hard. Being a servant who is willing to put yourself on display for others to pattern their lives after is even harder. Since this work is so vital to the health and life of the church, because it is so crucial to disciple-making, the Lord gives a reward to those who perform this task faithfully: these kinds of servants will grow personally. You who are teachers know this well: so often you

learn just as much as your students, simply by being willing to teach them. So it is with a deacon or deaconess. Men and women, if you are willing to step up to this calling, you will not only help others, but you will grow personally. You will grow in your understanding of Jesus as you pattern your own life after Him. You will better understand the joys and trials, the pressures and blessings, of what it means not only to serve, but to serve as an example. In short, your service may not be well rewarded here on earth – likely, none of you will be trumpeted in our church as much as you should be – but nothing you do will go unnoticed by our Heavenly Father.

So, where does all of this leave us? As you look at these character qualities, these patterns of faith, ask yourself “is this true of my life?” “Would I be qualified to serve as a deacon or deaconess?” If the answer is “no,” then why not? Are you giving your life to things that are sinful? Are you indulging in the dreams of health and wealth that are offered in the glossy magazines and on TV? Are you holding back from Jesus because you are trying to keep your options open? Brothers and sisters, whatever is keeping you from this kind of calling, cast it aside! Nothing in this life can compare with following Jesus, nothing will satisfy in a way that lasts, nothing will do you more good than to live as Christ has commanded!

And if your life does follow this pattern, are you willing to help others in our church along the way? Any member can be elected as a deacon or deaconess if they meet the requirements – would you prayerfully consider whether this might be the way that Jesus would have you serve His bride, the church? Whether in the formal role or not, all Christians are called to be servants. Let’s all ask the Lord to change us so that we wouldn’t think as our world does, always putting ourselves first; but rather that we would follow Jesus, serve others, and enter into His joy!