



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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### The Sermons of Dan Duncan

1 Timothy 3: 1-13

1 Timothy

“Elders and Deacons”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We are going to look at a lengthy portion of scripture, 1 Timothy 3:1-3, which deals with the offices of the church, at least two of the offices; the elder and the deacon. And we'll do that in just a moment after we pray and read the text. Let's begin with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you for the time we have together this evening. We count it a privilege to gather together as believers in Jesus Christ in fellowship with one another and do so in the very best way, which is through the study of your word. And so, we pray that as we do that, you would bless us. You've blessed us abundantly beyond all that we can ask or think. You've given us new life in Jesus Christ. Our eternal destiny is settled once and for all. We can't ever fall out of the position in which you have placed us by your grace, our standing in grace.

Life is brief, and it has trials and tribulations, and great difficulties, pain and suffering, and yet, it's brief, and then, all eternity stretches before us, a world without end, without any suffering, with nothing but unimagined joy and blessing that only increases without end. An amazing thought. You've given us a down payment of all of that in the person of the Holy Spirit who's within our hearts and we praise you, thank you for that, and pray that our time this evening would be honoring to him, that we would not quench him, that we would not resist him, but that we would be obedient to him and that he would minister to us, that he'd open our hearts, and he would teach us tonight. That's the ultimate teacher, Father. Not the man that stands at a podium, but the Spirit of God, and he teaches all of us, and so, may we listen with critical hearts, not a critical spirit, but hearts that analyze and think carefully about what's said, and we pray that he would teach us. Sanctify us, build us up in the faith. Bless us now, Father, as we read the

scriptures and we study them together, and may all that's done be pleasing to you. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

[Message] 1 Timothy 3:1-13: "It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, and able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?), and not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. These men must also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach. Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things. Deacons must be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households. For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus."

Paul has been giving instruction on the meeting of the local church, prayer in the church, public prayer, and in all of that, male leadership in the church, at least that's been implied in the things that he has stated in chapter 2. And so, in chapter 3, he passes naturally from public worship to the qualifications of those who serve as officials in the church. These are mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament, but nowhere are they dealt with or described, or do they receive so much attention as they do in the Pastoral Epistles. And we have it here in chapter 3, and then, in chapter 1 of Titus, we also have a text that deals with these offices of the church. What is clear from the beginning, not only from what Paul says, but I think we find this throughout the book of Acts and other books that Paul has written is that the leadership of the church is in a plurality. There are more than one, there are many men who lead a church. God did not setup the church to be ruled by one man, and I sound like a broken record, I suppose, not only from the things I've said, but what has preceded me in the teaching ministry of this church that does not teach that there is one man who is the pastor of the church. A plurality of leaders is what God has ordained for the church.

For reference, you might look at Philippians 1:1 where he and Timothy greet the elders and the deacons, plural, both are plural, of that church. Philippi was a small town. I don't think there was more than one church at Philippi at that time. So that is the nature of the officials or the leadership of the local church. It's a plurality. And he begins with the office of elder or overseer. He writes in verse 1, "It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office oversee, it is a fine work he desires to do." This term overseer is the word from which we get bishop. In fact, if you're reading from the King James Version it has bishop as the translation, and that word has a different connotation today than it did when it was used by Paul when he wrote in the first century. With the rise of what is called the monarchical bishop in the second century, the bishop came to represent a single individual who functioned as the head of a group of churches in a region. So he was in charge of a number of churches in a particular area and that's really what the word has come to mean in the thinking of many people. The bishop is one who's head over a group of churches.

The Greek word here is *episkopos* and we get from that the name Episcopalian. They derive their ecclesiology, their understanding of the church from this structure where one is over a group of churches. This is a different meaning, as I said, from the meaning that is found in the New Testament. The word *episkopos* is used in the New Testament interchangeably with the word *presbuteros*, the word elder. For example, in Titus 1:5-9, the word elder is used in that statement where the description of the qualifications of the elder are given, essentially the same qualifications as are found here, which indicates that it's the same office, same qualifications are given, just a different name for that office. And in Acts 20 in verse 17 and 28, both words are used of the same group; the Ephesian elders. So the two words are used interchangeably for the same office.

Later on in this book, in 1 Timothy 5 in verse 17, he speaks of elders who rule well. He's not introducing a new group, a new office. It's what he has described here in chapter 3, but what he calls overseers here. So the two words are synonyms and probably are to be understood as stressing different aspects of the same office. The word overseer stresses the function of the office while the word elder would stress the dignity of the office. An overseer is one who manages the affairs of the church. He's one who governs the church. That's how he's described in verse 5 of our passage, or as Paul said in Acts 20 in verse 28, he is to shepherd the sheep. He's to shepherd the church of God. He is to care for their spiritual needs as a shepherd would and we have a great illustration of that from a shepherd and how he tends a flock. A shepherd

stands guard. He looks out over the flock. He watches the sheep. He makes sure that they are brought to the right place where they can feed and gain nourishment. He leads them to the right pasture and there he looks out over them to make sure that the sheep don't wander away or that wild animals don't come in and devour the flock, and that's the analogy that's given us of an elder, what he is to do as he watches out over the flock of God, over the church of God.

The importance of the office is indicated by what Paul states about the one who desires to occupy it. He writes that, "If any man aspires to the office...it is a fine work he desires to do." The word aspires literally means to reach or to stretch out. And so, the idea is he longs for this, has a desire for it. And here, that word aspire is used favorably. Paul is not commending self-seeking. He's not advocating or commending selfish ambition. We might get that idea from aspiring to this position because it's a position of authority, and men do aspire to authority, and very often aspire to positions of authority and power because they want it for their own ambitions, as Diotrephes did. But what Paul is doing here is commending a good desire and it's a good desire, it is a good aspiration to want to serve God and serve his people, and that's what the elder is to do.

Now, the office of elder gives an opportunity for doing that, great opportunity for doing that. It is a high position. It is a fine work he says and a work with lots of responsibility, but not a position that a person can attain to can obtain by seeking it, by desiring it. It's good to desire it. It's good to want to serve the Lord. It's good to have one's mind set on that position and desire to be that kind of person and to serve the Lord, but that's not how one obtains that position. People don't choose elders. God does that. The Holy Spirit appoints men to that position and that is just what Paul told the Ephesian elders, that they had been appointed to their position by the Spirit of God; Acts 20 in verse 28. He doesn't tell us how the Spirit does that, but I think we can understand it in this way, that the Holy Spirit gifts men, gifts all believers.

Every one of you that are believers in Jesus Christ are gifted. You have a spiritual gift. And so, he gifts men, and then, he leads certain men, directs them, puts desires within them, and they respond to that leading by the Spirit, and their leadership is manifested in the church through their instruction, or through their counsel, through their care. They are, in effect, functioning as an elder and that's recognized by the congregation, and these people are recognized then by the elders as doing the work of an elder, as one that has been raised up by God to that position, and then, they assume that responsibility officially. But there are qualifications that govern the recognition of such people and the congregation needs to be very

familiar with these if they are to make the right choices, and make the right choice of an individual to occupy this office. And Paul lists them in verses 2 through 7.

Verse 2: "An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach." Doesn't seem to be any special reason for the order of these requirements of this list, although the first qualification seems reasonably placed at the top of the list. He is to above reproach and that's an all-embracing qualification. There must be nothing in his life, principally in his Christian life that is an obvious defect in his character or his conduct. That statement needs to be qualified somewhat. I say nothing that's obvious. Doesn't mean that we're going to be perfect or that a man must be perfect. Scrutinize anyone's life carefully enough and you'll find things to object to and that's certainly true, but generally speaking, that's a principle. But it must not be a person that has defects that are glaring, that are obvious, that would be a bad witness in that office. And so, he's to be above reproach.

Now, he specifies in what follows, he must be, he says, first of all, the husband of one wife. Now, this is a statement that has been interpreted in various ways. Some take it as merely stating that he's to be married, but if that is so, then it seems to make the word one meaningless. Husband of one wife. Well, if he's married, then that would be assumed. And so, if that's the point, that this man be married, then we would think that Paul would simply say that, that he should be married.

Others interpret this as meaning that he is faithful to his wife; he's not an adulterer. That's a very common view. In fact, that may be the most popular view that is given as the interpretation of Paul's phrase here, but as J.N.D. Kelly objects, this is to squeeze more out of the Greek than it will bear. The word's simply one and it would seem to be an odd way, even an abstruse way of describing fidelity when there are clearer ways of saying it, such as he's not to be an adulterer. He's not to be an immoral man. And there is a word, a Greek word for faithful and faithfulness and I haven't traced it out. It's used quite a bit in the New Testament and I haven't checked it out to see if it ever applies to this, but if that's what he meant, he could've used that word.

Others argue that Paul means that he must not be a polygamist. He must not be a man with concubines. But as Kelly says, this is improbable in the extreme since polygamy or keeping concubines was never an option for any Christian, much less of an elder. In the Roman empire at this time there was a law against polygamy, so it would go without saying. That

would not be an option. It'd go without saying that he wouldn't be a polygamist, he wouldn't have concubines or whatever. This is also clear from its parallel text over in chapter 5 in verse 9 regarding the widows list, and the widows who qualified for this list had some qualifications of their own that they had to meet before they could be placed on this list. They had to be 60 years of age. They had to have a good reputation. They washed the feet of the saints. Various things, various requirements that they had to meet and one of the requirements was that she is to be the wife of one man. It's the same construction here.

Now, clearly Paul doesn't mean that she was to be a person who had multiple husbands at the same time. Certainly not a polygamist. That would've been unheard of in the Greek and Roman world. Some take it to mean that he simply means she was a faithful wife, but again, if we're correct in saying what Kelly says of that in this text, that that is squeezing more out of the Greek than it will bear, it means that she simply had one husband, one and only husband who died, and so, she's now a widow. It seems to be very clear. She had only one husband in her lifetime and that makes good sense here, to take the statement at face value that the requirement of an elder is that he be married only once in his lifetime. He's to be the husband of one wife.

The natural meaning of the word one suggests that. That seems to be suggested from the emphasis that's placed on the word one. Literally he is a one wife man. This doesn't mean that Paul prohibited remarriage or that he thought remarriage was wrong. He didn't think that. In fact, later in chapter 5 in verse 14, he urges remarriage for young widows. So in certain circumstances he urged that that be done. It's not wrong to be remarried, but for the office of elder and deacon, he forbid it, and the reason is probably to be found – doesn't give a reason – but the reason is probably to be found in the statement that he gave at the top of the list, to be above reproach.

There's a lot of evidence, and the commentaries will, not all of them, but many of the commentaries mention this and give examples of it, but evidence from the ancient writings of this time and from inscriptions on tombs that both the pagans and the Jews of that time considered it meritorious for a person to remain unmarried after the death or after a divorce from a spouse. And they would put on the tombs that she was the wife of one man or he was the husband of one wife. And so, they viewed that as meritorious. And so, for a man to be above reproach to those inside the church or those outside the church, because the pagans had this standard as well, he was to be a one wife man.

Now, that does not seem altogether fair to us as we look at that sometimes because there

are various reasons why people have been remarried and perhaps it's a divorce. And sometimes godly men get divorces. Sometimes because of a fault in themselves, they sin, but they repent and they're restored to fellowship, and restored to usefulness. Does that mean they can never be used? Or they may be the victim of a divorce; it's not their fault. Or they may remarry and there's nothing wrong with remarriage. So it seems to be an unfair stipulation that Paul has placed on certain individual, very useful individuals. And so, I think that's one reason why people resist this interpretation, which seems to be, on the surface of it at least the natural interpretation of it. But we shouldn't understand that to mean that if a man can't be an elder he can't serve the church.

There are two kinds of elders and Paul will mention them later in chapter 5 in verse 17; those who rule well and those who work diligently at teaching and preaching. And so, not all elders teach and not all teachers are elders. So some men who are gifted to teach are not elders and they can serve the church just as well and probably even better than some elders do. One is not excluded from service because he is not an elder. Women are not excluded from service, though they can't be elders. So this has nothing to do with whether one can serve. It has to do with maintaining a high standard in the community and in the world and being above reproach.

Well, next he says that the elder is to be temperate. The idea of that is to be clear-headed. He is to be prudent and respectable. All of these describe an orderly persona life. That's to be characteristic of the elder. Fourth, he needs to be characterized by hospitality. He opens up his home to others. And some have suggested that this had particular relevance in the first century and was applied to his willingness to open his home to traveling Christians. The accommodations in those times, in fact, probably until fairly recently, until modern times were not good. And so, it was a kind thing and the right thing for Christian to do to open their homes to those who traveled through. And so, that was a characteristic of an elder; hospitable.

The last qualification in verse 2 is that he be able to teach. This does not refer to him being gifted to teach. And again, you can look at chapter 5 in verse 17. There are two kinds of elders; those who rule well and those who teach. So not every elder is gifted to teach. And the office of elder, as with the office of deacon, is not determined by spiritual gift. And the office of elder and the office of deacon is not a spiritual gift in the sense of the gifts that are given to every believer. This is an office and not a gift.

So spiritual gifts are not qualifications of being an elder. What this means is that a man who is an elder has a knowledge of the scriptures and the ability to use it, to give instruction to

others, to be able to give good counsel to those who need it, to shepherd the sheep with the word of God. It doesn't need to be a great orator, a great speaker, in order to be an elder. And a man can be a great speaker without being an elder. But the one who occupies this office, who is an overseer, who watches over the flock of God, must know the word of God and be able to apply it to all of the circumstances of the church. He must be able to explain the whole counsel of God. He must be well equipped with the knowledge of the word of God and the skill in applying it. That is a very high standard, but that's what's expected of the elder, be able to carry out his responsibilities of feeding the sheep, guarding the sheep against error. When it comes in, he's got to know what error is, and one way we recognize error is by knowing the truth.

The best way to be able to recognize counterfeit money is to know what real money looks like and feels like. And so, you must be able to do that and must know the word of God in order to be able to apply discipline where there is moral or doctrinal error. So he must be able to apply the scriptures. He must know them. He must be able to use them. The requirements in verse 3 are generally denials of extreme cases of excess. All rights not addicted to wine or pugnacious, he doesn't get in fights, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money.

This looks at his personal life, but his life's also to be orderly in his family life and that's what Paul describes in verses 4 and 5. "He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity," and then, Paul says, but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?" So he's a man who maintains discipline over his children. He keeps them under control with all dignity. The idea is that he doesn't do this with force or with violence. He does it with his wisdom and the force of his character. He keeps his home in order.

The family is viewed as a kind of microcosm of the church. And if a man can't manage the affairs of his own family, then he's not qualified to manage the affairs of the church. If he can't manage the basic institutions of life, he can't go beyond that. He can't manage the smaller issues, he certainly won't be able to manage the larger ones. And so, the man's family life is very critical in whether he is qualified to be an elder. Doesn't mean he has a perfect family. Doesn't mean that there are no problems.

Parents can't be blamed for every defect in their children or every rebellious act, but he has to be seen as a man who does manage his household well and makes wise decision when there are problems. Sometimes that's a good example of whether a man's an elder. He has difficulties and he manages those difficulties well.

Also, as verse 6 states, the one aspiring to the office of overseer must not be a novice or a new convert. Literally, newly planted. Newly planted in the faith. Newly planted in Christ. Must not be new. This is the word from which we get neophyte. He needs to have experience in life. He needs to have experience in the Christian life, specifically the Christian life, but as an elder and one who sits in meetings with other elders, and one who doesn't have wide experience in many things, absolutely no experience in business, I see the value of having businessmen who are elders, and men who are physicians, and men who have a wide range of experience that's very important for that position of leadership when men who are trained in theology, and that's what they know and don't have wide experience can get rather idealistic ideas and narrow views on things, and it's helpful to have other men bring in their wide experience of life. And that's how we gain wisdom in life, by the experiences of life.

So I include that in what Paul means, but strictly speaking, what he's saying here is not new in the Christian life. He's not a new convert. He can have youth and be qualified. He can be relatively young and still be qualified because he has been a Christian for some time. He's grown in the faith. And a person can be old and not qualified because he's rather new in the faith. But the idea here is that he is not a new Christian. There is danger in elevating a new believer to a place of authority and that danger is pride. A new convert, he says, "Not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited."

The Proverbs warn us about that. "Pride goes before destruction." And here, the result of pride is falling into the condemnation incurred by the devil. Now, that could mean he will receive the condemnation that the devil received who is the proud spirit. The proudest being in the universe is Satan. Ezekiel talks about that in chapter 28 and in verse 17, he says that his heart was lifted up because of his beauty. So pride was found in him, and so, he was condemned, and pride brings condemnation. And that may be what Paul means here, or it could mean that he will come under the condemnation that the devil will carry out.

You remember Paul placed the immoral man in Corinth in 1 Corinthians 5:5 under discipline and the discipline was he delivered him over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh. And so, that is a possible interpretation. Either one of these are possible and I'm not sure which one is correct because grammatically you could argue both equally, but what it does show is how perilous a thing it is for a church to put itself in the hands of such a person, a novice, a new convert. It's not fair to that individual to put them in a position that they're not ready for with responsibility that they cannot handle and the church itself will suffer greatly.

Finally, in verse 7, an elder must be a person with a good reputation with the nonbelieving community, "so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil." The world is naturally against the church. So it is only wise to avoid provoking criticism by yielding a place of leadership to a person whose life is at variance with his testimony. Placed in a position like that and the world will scoff at the church, "Look at the kind of people that lead that church." The dishonest businessman, or he's got moral problems, or whatever the case may be.

The picture that Paul gives here is of the devil setting a trap in that way, setting a trap to undermine the overseer, and that way, also the church, but we're not to fall into that trap. The church has a great responsibility in all of this. This is about the overseer. It's about the elder. It's giving stipulations that an individual can examine his own life. If he aspires to that office, it's a good thing, but look at yourself in light of this. Do you qualify? This is a good standard for a Christian man to aspire to, to seek to fulfill these standards here, whether he's to be an elder or not. And so, this is instructive for individual Christians in their own life and how they're to live their life, but it's instructive for the church. The church should know these standards here because they will be the ones that recognize a person as being qualified or not qualified.

The church has a great responsibility in who it recognizes as elder and the same in its deacons, and that's the subject that Paul takes up in verse 8. The office of deacon seems to have originated in Acts 6:1-7 when seven men of good reputation full of the Spirit and wisdom were selected from the congregation in the church of Jerusalem to serve tables. They are to take care of the material needs of the church, like the distribution of food to the widows of the church. That was the particular issue in Jerusalem in Acts 6 and they were to do that so that the apostles could devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word.

We don't have apostles today, but we do have elders and the elders are to be doing that. They're to be devoting themselves to prayer, the ministry of the word, the spiritual oversight of the congregation. And so, the deacons are those who assist them. In carrying out the overall function of the ministry of the church, they take care of the more, what we could call the menial tasks, the material needs of the church, so that the elders are free to do the spiritual tasks of the church, not that they're altogether exclusive of spiritual things. I think we'll see that in a moment, but basically they take care of that. They wait on the tables. They take care of the material needs. And the list of qualifications, which is very similar to that of the elders, so we won't deal with all of the qualifications, fit very closely with the duties that they are to perform. And they do differ somewhat from the list that is given of the elders. Very similar, but it differs,

and the qualifications fit very well with the duties that the deacons are to perform. Like the elders, they are to be men of dignity and we could say, as all Christians are because in chapter 2 in verse 2, we're to pray for all in authority, kings, and all who are in authority, so that we can lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.

All Christians are to live dignified lives, but that should be particularly seen in those who are officials of the church. It should be seen in the elders and it should be seen in deacons. They are to conduct their lives with seriousness. They are to conduct their lives in a serious way outwardly before men and that should be an outward seriousness because there's an inward seriousness. That should be what shows. The inward life should be seen in the outward life. They should be individuals of gravity; people of weight. Dignified lives. They are not to be double-tongued.

So a deacon is to control his tongue. He is not addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain. And all of this is very important because of the task that a deacon had. The deacons are to deal with the material or the physical needs of others. And so, they would learn things about people's physical condition, people's health, people's material situation that they should keep private. They would be involved with money since they would need to purchase the items that would meet the material needs of the congregation. So they would need to be trustworthy people. Not addicted to much wine because they could then lose control of themselves in these areas. They must be able to control their tongue. They must be honest people; people of high integrity. But they must also be spiritually mature men.

In verse 9, "But holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience." That word mystery is one that Paul uses, particularly in the book of Ephesians we see it. What it means is truth that was once hidden, but is now revealed. And here, it probably refers to the full revelation of the Christian faith. It refers to the revelation that's given about Christ. It refers to other things that were not known previously. It's what Paul speaks of in Ephesians 3, but what he means very simply is a deacon must be a man who knows the scriptures well.

So while basically the work of a deacon is that of servant, one who does the menial tasks if we want to put it that way in the church, keeps the church running, turns the lights on, turns them off, and does many other things like that, as well as working with those who have physical needs within the church, it doesn't mean it's a responsibility without spiritual qualifications either. He must be a spiritual man. He must be one who knows the word of God, understands the mysteries of the Christian faith, the full revelation of the Christian faith.

Stephen is a good example for the deacon. He's one of the seven that was chosen in Jerusalem and he was powerful in the word of God. He was an evangelist. I guess he was a teacher as well. He certainly knew the scriptures well. He confounded the Jews. None of them knew the word of God as well as Stephen and he could overthrow all of their arguments. That's a good model for any deacon to know the scriptures. And just as with overseers, they must be tested. That is, evaluated or scrutinized by the congregation in light of Paul's standard here. Different ideas on what Paul means by that.

Some of the commentaries I read, I don't think I read any that promoted the idea of a probation period, but I read a lot that said he doesn't mean a probation period in which a deacon is put under a period of probation, his life is examined. So the fact that so many were saying, "Doesn't mean there must be a few that do promote that?" Some have thought there's an examination that the person goes through, is grilled by the congregation or others. That may be. I think really what he's simply saying, they see his life. They have examined his life. They know the kind of person he is. And a congregation should know the men that are being considered to be deacons. They should know that they meet these qualifications. They should know what their life is like. Their life should be known to people openly and it should meet the qualifications that are given here. And what we would see or what the person should see is that this person is not a novice. This person is experienced in the Christian life, understands the word of God very well.

So Paul is here teaching the seriousness of this office, just as he's teaching the seriousness of the office of elder. Now, in verse 11, Paul introduces women. This is not women in the congregation generally. The passage is about special groups in the church, so these women are of the group that he's speaking of. And it's possible that they are deaconesses. That is, women who served in an office of deaconess and served with the men in particular duties that were best suited for women, such as helping in baptisms and helping with the sick, particularly women, not the kind of tasks that a man would be good at. Wouldn't be welcomed in that task, I wouldn't think. Or Paul is referring to the wives of deacons. The word that he uses here is the same word that's used for the elder's wife in verse 2, and again, of the deacon's wife in verse 12 where it stated that deacons also are to be husbands of only one wife. I think that that second interpretation, that wives, is what Paul is referring to is the more likely interpretation here because the preceding context and the following context are about deacons. And if Paul were introducing a new subject on the order of deaconess, then he wouldn't wedge it in the middle of

this context. He would introduce it with a new section, just as he introduces the order of deacons or the subject of the office of deacon with a new section. He'd do that with that of deaconess if that were his meaning.

So I take this to be the wives of deacons, but the question then arises, why the wives of deacons, why are they mentioned and not the wives of elders? You would think that if the elder has the higher position, it's the higher authority that the elder's wife would be mentioned and not that of the deacon. I think the reason is probably to be found in the fact that the wives of deacons would accompany them on visitation to help with the material needs of the congregation. And so, to my mind that makes good sense because as noted earlier, deacons are involved in providing for the material needs and attending to people physically, and in certain situations, that involved women, such as attending to the widows of the church or attending to the young widows, or a situation such as that, it would be advisable to have wives accompany the men, or it might be best for the women to go and attend to the females in the church who are sick. There are many services in the church, which women are better adapted to than men.

In fact, all through the history of the church, women have had a major role to play in the work of the ministry. We dealt with that a little bit last week. Women instruct other women in the truth of God. They give counsel to women. We'll deal with that later in the book. We have examples in the book of Acts of women ministering and helping. Dorcas or Tabitha as she's also known is an example of that in Acts 9:36-41. She ministered greatly to the women of Joppa. She is described as abounding in deeds of kindness and charity, which she continually did. She made clothing for women. So women serve in many ways and this is the correct understanding of what Paul is saying here, then the wives of the deacons who will serve and minister are to be scrutinized as well. They play a part in understanding who is to be a deacon.

Well, Paul returns to the deacons in verse 12 and verse 13 where he emphasizes the orderliness of the home and the reward for their work. "Deacons must be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households. For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus." They obtain for themselves high standing. Literally, they obtain a step. The picture is they obtain a step up.

Now, that doesn't mean that the move up the ladder in the church, that by being a good deacon, they then become an elder, that they move up the ladder, so to speak. Now, that could happen. A deacon who serves well could be recognized as actually doing the work of an elder

and be recognized as that, but not necessarily. That's not what Paul means here. These are two different offices with two different functions. They're two different callings. And so, to be a good deacon doesn't mean one's qualified to be a good elder and a good elder wouldn't necessarily be a good deacon. God calls people into these functions, these offices. And so, he's not speaking about moving about the ladder, so to speak, in terms of progressing within the authority of the church, but may mean moves up, makes spiritual progress. Some have taken it that way. Toward God and receives great reward, but the transition from these basic virtues and the duties among the family that have just been mentioned to heavenly reward seems to be too abrupt a transition. So probably what he means here is that he has high standing among people, among other men, among the congregation, among those who observe him, and not necessarily just in the congregation, but in the community at large, that he's well thought of.

As one of the commentators put it, "Influence is a byproduct of character." And influence for good is a byproduct of character. And of course, with expanded influence and ministry in the congregation, there is eternal reward. Faithfulness in small things leads to responsibility in greater things and that results in a change of character. It results in spiritual development. Faithful deacons obtain, he goes on to say, "great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus," which probably means both confidence before men and before God. So the result of this is spiritual development. He has standing with men and great confidence with God, confidence to proclaim the faith before others. So confidence before men, but probably also boldness in their faith in the Lord, so that they grow in their faith and they live the more significant life spiritually.

The offices of elder and deacon are essential for the church. The church can't function properly without these offices. And so, it's essential that the congregation know the qualifications so that they will recognize them in the right men. And for both elders and deacons, the incentive to good and faithful service is great because there's great reward in undertaking this task, this responsibility, but it is a large task. The responsibility given to elders is greater than the elders themselves can bear and the same for the deacons. And so, these men need the prayers of the saints. And so, I'll conclude on that exhortation. Pray for your elders and pray for your deacons that they would manage the household of God well and oversee God's household, God's church well. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you for this text of scripture. We've dealt with it in a rather brief way and we could spend much more time on it, but we certainly have seen enough to know

the great responsibility that is set upon the shoulders of an elder and a deacon, and we pray that you would bless the elders and the deacons of this assembly. And we pray that as you're doing that and as they oversee and they serve the church, that you would be raising up new men for these offices. May we, who are elders and deacons do the work that you've given us to do well, so that this church would flourish spiritually, that the men and women, those who are young and old alike would grow in maturity and in the likeness of Jesus Christ, and this church would have a significant testimony to those around us. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.