

Systematic Theology
Church Government: Monarchy, Anarchy or Democracy? (Part 4)
Selected Scriptures
January 7, 2007

Tom Pennington, Pastor-Teacher
Countryside Bible Church, Southlake, Texas

Tonight, we come specifically to the issue of servant leadership. You know, you can tell a lot about a culture by how it defines greatness. When you examine the American culture, frankly, the definitions are a bit frightening. Take a look, for example, at the entertainment world. Greatness is defined in our culture by musicians who can sing and put together a tune well, regardless of what their lives may be, or the lyrics may be. Actors are praised for their ability and are called great for their ability to imitate somebody that they aren't, to pretend to be something that they aren't, and a person that they aren't. Athletes are called great simply because of the mechanical ability to throw a ball, to catch it, or to put it through a basket, and other sports. All of those people in the entertainment industry are evaluated and called great because of their abilities and their fame. And what's remarkable in our culture is that some people are called great simply because they're infamous. There are people whom the tabloids trace who haven't done anything in years but they're great because they're getting into trouble all the time.

Then there's the business world. In the business world, great is determined by the size of your paycheck, by the number of perks and benefits you receive, by the size of your company, by the return that you ensure to your investors, by the number of employees who work for you, by the magnitude of your influence. In the political world, the same thing holds true. It's the number of supporters; it's the ability that you have to generate revenue. I don't know about you, but I'm tired of the articles talking about all of those who are thinking about running for president in the next election and their ability to generate revenue. That makes them gifted leaders?

Did you notice that not one of those definitions of greatness that's a part of our culture have anything to do with character? When we look at greatness in the American culture rarely is it defined by a person's character. In fact, it was a bit refreshing, wasn't it, to hear some of the comments relating to the late President Ford? To hear that, whatever he was, and I certainly

Available online at: www.countrysidebible.org
Copyright © 2007 Tom Pennington. All rights reserved
Unedited transcript for personal use only.

don't know all the kind of man he was, but to many anyway, he stood as a paragon of integrity. It was wonderful to hear a man praised because of his character. But that in fact, character, and the kind of person that you are, is how greatness is defined in a different kingdom.

You see, in the kingdoms of the world, greatness is defined practically across the globe, as it is in the American culture. But as believers, we live and serve in a different kingdom, and there is a totally different standard of greatness in the kingdom in which we live and serve. I don't know whether you have ever even thought about this. But you don't belong to this culture, at least I hope you don't. You don't belong even to this world. You are a kingdom of heaven citizen. You are a citizen of eternity, of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. And in His kingdom, there is a totally different standard of greatness. There are great people seated in this auditorium tonight when it comes to the kingdom of heaven, and someday, when we stand before Christ, they will be identified as such.

Turn, as we begin, to Matthew chapter 20. I want you to see Jesus and His definition of greatness. Matthew chapter 20 verse 20. "Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee" James and John "came to Jesus with her sons, bowing down and making a request of Him." Thanks Mom! "And He said to her, 'What do you wish?' She said to Him, 'Command that in Your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit one on Your right and one on Your left.'" You see, she had bought into the earthly standard of greatness: It has to do with the position you hold; the influence you wield; the power you have. And that's what she wanted for her boys. "But Jesus answered, 'You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?' They said to Him, 'We are able.' He said to them, 'My cup you shall drink; but to sit on My right and on My left, this is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father.'" So, He answers the question but then He goes on to teach a far-reaching lesson on greatness in the kingdom. Verse 24 "And hearing this, the ten became indignant [of course] with the two brothers." I'm sure it was not happy around the water cooler that day. "But Jesus called them to Himself and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them.'" Here's the standard of greatness in the world in which you live, I understand that, and James and John, you have bought into that standard. Your mother has bought into that standard, but you have got it all wrong.

That's here! Those people—you know, I really wish we could get this into our heads—those people who are great in our world are nothing to God. He is unimpressed because He marches to a beat of a different drum of grace. Jesus goes on to explain: “It is not this way among you,” — It's not to be like this. It's not like this in My kingdom. —“but whoever wishes to become great” —Here it is. Here's Jesus's standard of greatness. —"among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

Do you want to know what the standard of greatness is in the kingdom of Jesus Christ? It's how many people do you serve. It doesn't look like that here; even in the church the standard of greatness sometimes looks a little different. It looks more like the world than like the kingdom of heaven. But someday when we stand before Christ, it will all be sorted out and those whom God sees as great will be recognized by Him in His presence and it's all about serving.

Christ is the unquestioned Head of His Church and He has appointed two groups of leaders who are to be servant leaders. Two offices. These leaders are to march to the beat of a different drum. They are not to be leaders and great in the sense of the leaders of the world. Jesus just said that. They serve in a different kingdom. They live by a different standard of greatness. There are two offices in the church: elders and deacons. We've examined the office of elder. The elder is identified in the New Testament by three words, we studied it together: by elder, speaking of his character, he is spiritually mature; by overseer, speaking of his function, he exercises oversight and supervision; and pastor, speaking of his attitude, he has a shepherd's caring heart.

The office of elder is not the only office that Christ appointed in His church. According to 1 Timothy 3, there are also to be deacons. And nowhere is this different standard of greatness clearer than when it comes to the office of deacon in the church, and you will see that as we look at what the word “deacon” means. It's the Greek word *diakonos*. This is a very common Greek word in the New Testament. Our English word, you'll notice, “deacon” isn't a translation. Most of our English Bible is a translation from the Greek. But the word “deacon” is not a translation, it's what is called a “transliteration.” They just took the Greek letters, essentially, with a little

variation for English pronunciation, and brought it over into English—*diakonas*— “deacon.” It occurs some twenty-nine times in the New Testament. It is translated as “servants,” “minister” and as “deacon.” By the way, “deacons” when it is translated that way is always plural never singular. Like with elders, a church is expected to have a plurality of deacons. At its most basic level, the word means “servant.” And it’s often translated that way. It’s a servant. In fact, in secular Greek, as well as in some places in the New Testament, the word is used to identify waiters. It’s used to identify messengers, stewards, those who were keepers of the house, and just general servants. That’s how this word is used most frequently in most of Greek writing. So, you get a picture of this word.

In the church, in the kingdom of God, the expression of the kingdom of God here is the church, in the church, here is one of the offices. One of the offices of leaders are slaves—servants. That’s because they are great in the kingdom of God. Now let’s talk for a moment about the office itself and a little bit about the history. The office of elder grows out, as we have learned over the last several weeks, the office of elder grows out of the Old Testament. It doesn’t just show up when the New Testament arrives. As we learned, there were elders in the Old Testament. There were elders of families. There were elders of towns. There were even elders of nations. So that was already a part of the culture of the early church and under the direction of Christ Himself that was brought into the church. But this is interesting. The office of deacon is absolutely new with the church of Jesus Christ. There is no parallel in Jewish culture. There is no parallel in Greek culture. It simply shows up. So, if it never existed before, where did it come from? Well, I think the prototype is Acts chapter 6.

Turn there with me for a moment. We looked at this a few weeks ago so I am not going to spend a lot of time here, but I just want you to see this. Acts chapter 6 verse 1, “Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food.” So here you have a dispute centered on the distribution of food. It’s really a factional dispute—the Hellenists against the Hebrews. That is those Jewish people who had been Hellenized, that is, who had been made like the Greeks, they had adopted the Greek culture, and then there were those who in most cases had transplanted in outside of the nation of Israel. And

then you had those who were there and had been there, their families had been there, they were native Hebrews. And there was a dispute about the fact that the Hellenists were being overlooked. Their widows were being overlooked in the distribution of food the church was supplying. So, the solution is very clear, verse 2: “So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, ‘It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God [in order] to serve tables. Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. But we will devote ourselves in prayer and to the ministry of the word.’”

The apostles were Hebrews, therefore they, this is very wise on their part, appointed Hellenistic men, you’ll notice from the names, to supervise. Verse 5, “This statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose” seven. Notice the qualifications of these men: “of good reputation, full of the Spirit and full of wisdom.”

Now there’s a lot of debate, in fact there is great debate, about whether these seven men were the first deacons. The noun for “deacon” does not appear in Acts 6. However, although they are not called deacons, two words are used in the context that have the same root for the word “deacon.” In verse 1, the word “serving”; in verse 2, “serve tables”; and in verse 4, the word translated “ministry” comes from the same root as “deacon.” So, the concept of service obviously is here but the word isn’t. Personally, I do not believe that these men filled the office of deacon. I don’t think they were the first deacons, but Acts is a book that provides us with an explanation of many of the foundational things in the church. So, I think that Luke includes these verses in Acts 6 to give us the background so we will understand where the office of deacon came from because this serves as a prototype, I think, for that office. Nowhere else before, not in the Greek culture, not in the Jewish culture and suddenly they arrive on the scene and I think this is the prototype. This event, this circumstance was the prototype for their beginning. They weren’t officially deacons but they in their ministry point us toward the New Testament office of deacon.

Now let’s look, for a moment, at the New Testament’s references for deacons. There are two that are very questionable. Some would argue that these men were deacons. Ephesians chapter 6 verse 21. Colossians 4:7. Tychicus. The word is used in our translation—it’s not translated as

“deacon.” It’s translated as “servant” or something similar to that. And then in Colossians 1:7—Epaphras—also could be a deacon. I don’t think he is. I think when it comes down to it, there are really only two specific references to deacons in the New Testament. The first of those is in Philippians 1. Turn there with me for a moment. Philippians 1 verse 1. Now remember when we studied the book of Philippians, Paul wrote this from Rome in the early AD 60’s and as he writes to this little church, that he had founded, remember, back in Acts 16, that he visited ten years later (or I should say that he visited in the interim, this is now ten years later), he says “Paul and Timothy, bond servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers”—there are your elders—“and deacons.” Notice that even in small church at Philippi, and we know that it was small because a couple of decades later after the Apostle Paul, there was another letter written to them, and it was still a small struggling church. They still had a plural number of deacons and a plural number of elders. Now, why does Paul mention the deacons in Philippi? Think about this with me for a moment. Why does Paul mention the deacons in Philippi when he doesn’t reference them in any of his other letters? Well, I think Robert Saucy in his book on the church has a great explanation. Listen to what he writes:

Since this letter [that is, the letter of Philippians] was written at least partially as a thank-you letter, for the contribution given by the Philippian church, it is possible to see the overseers and deacons mentioned as the organizers of that collection with the deacons assisting the overseers in the actual work of overseeing the collection. So they are mentioned here and not elsewhere because this is a thank-you letter for the gift they sent and he references them because they were such a vital part of that process.

I think that is a really good explanation as to why the deacons are not mentioned in any of the other letters.

But the primary place where we learn about deacons is in 1 Timothy 3 verses 8 through 13. This is by far the most detailed and thorough explanation of the office of deacon. It occurs here in

Paul's letter to Timothy as Timothy serves in the church at Ephesus. Turn with me to 1 Timothy chapter 3. Let me read this paragraph to you. First Timothy chapter 3 beginning in verse 8.

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.

Now before we look at this passage in detail, I want to ask a general question and that is what can we learn just from just general observations of that passage I just read to you? First of all, we can learn that the office of deacon is a distinct office to which a few men are appointed. In other words, it's not merely the recognition of everybody in the church who faithfully serves. It is very specific. It is one of two offices in the church, so it is a distinct office and not merely a recognition of everyone who serves.

Secondly, we can observe that by definition, the word "servant" where "deacon" means "servant," and by qualifications (in the list of qualifications we will look at in a minute, there is no reference to their being able to teach), by both of those, deacons are to be focused on serving, not on teaching. Now let me clarify quickly by saying, that doesn't mean that a deacon can't also teach or have the gift of teaching. But teaching is not part of the heart of what it means to be a deacon. By the way, neither does it mean that elders are not to serve. In fact, this word is used of elders. Paul uses it himself constantly that he is a servant of the church.

Thirdly, the general observation that we can make is that the deacons are accountable to the elders and under their leadership and direction. Elders are called "overseers" and are responsible to provide leadership for the entire church, in fact, look back at verse 5. In reference to the elders, they are to "take care of the church of God." There is no reference like that to the

deacons. they may be leaders of individual ministries, but they are not assigned the oversight of the entire church, the elders are.

Number four, the office requires a spiritual man. There's a list here of spiritual qualifications for the man who would fill the role of a servant in the church. The spiritual qualifications both in Acts 6 which as we saw was the prototype, the pattern, and here in 1 Timothy 3, the actual office of deacon, set an extremely high standard. You know, I think this is interesting because in my experience, and I hate to say this but, in my experience growing up in both Southern Baptist churches and independent Baptist churches in the south, the deacons often lacked any appearance of spiritual life much less a genuine spiritual maturity and yet that is the standard for deacons.

Now let's look at their qualifications, having made those general observations, let's look what are their qualifications. There are nine of them listed and, this is interesting, five of the nine are shared with the elders. In other words, the elders and the deacons share five qualifications, only four are distinct for the deacons. So, what are the qualifications for deacons? First of all, in terms of their character, verse 8, we learn that they are to be "men of dignity." This simply means "serious," "worthy of respect," they are not frivolous about life, they are not known as jokesters. Certainly, they are men who can enjoy life, enjoy humor and enjoy fun when it is appropriate, but they also know how to be serious when it is time to be serious. They are worthy of respect. They are men of dignity. They are not to be double-tongued. They are not to engage in double-talk. The reference here is being insincere. They are not to say one thing to one person, and then turn and say something else entirely different to another. They are not to be "addicted to much wine." That is, they are not to be controlled by wine or any other substance. They are to be self-controlled. Remember that's part of the fruit of the spirit. Not controlled by something else. Nothing else dominates their life. And they're not to be "fond of sordid gain." What does that mean? It means they are not greedy for money. This is very important, by the way, if they are going to be handling money as apparently, they did in the early church, this quality would be absolutely crucial that they would not be greedy for money.

That's his character. But look at his doctrine, verse 9. "But holding to the mystery of the faith, with a clear conscience." There really are two parts to this qualification. The first is "holding to

the mystery of the faith.” In other words, he embraces the revealed truth of the Christian faith. A deacon must embrace the body of Christian doctrine to serve as a deacon. He doesn’t have to be a theologian, but he must embrace the revealed truth of the Christian faith. But there is a second part, not only must he embrace it, must he hold to it, but he must do so “with a clear conscience.” This means that his life must be consistent with the doctrine that he holds. This man who is qualified to serve as a deacon sincerely tries to live in keeping with the faith that he holds. In verse 10, we learn of his reputation. “These men must also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach.” Tested. Implied here is congregational affirmation that the man meets these qualifications. There is a period of time over which his faithfulness and his character qualifications are proved to the congregation and to the elders. Tested.

And then it says that he has to be above reproach. This is the result of the careful evaluation—he is found to be (and this is a very close synonym to the word for “elders”) he is found to be without “handles.” There is nothing somebody who wants to blame the gospel and to condemn Christ and condemn the church, there is nothing in his life they can grab onto and connect blame. He is above reproach.

What about his family? Verse 12, “Deacons must be husbands of only one wife.” Literally they must be one-woman men. If they are going to serve as deacons, one-woman men. As we learned with elders, that means not only is there been a lengthy commitment to fidelity in a single marriage with a single person, it means they are pure in both body and mind. They are committed to their spouse in every sense, and they have proven a pattern of faithfulness of that for many years. I won’t go back through the qualifications we talked about in a lot more detail when we talked about elders. I won’t do that again tonight but if you are unclear on that, I encourage you to go back and listen.

Also related to family, they are to manage well their children and their entire household. Both “their children and their household” is a word that encompasses not only the other people that would be part of the household, including extended family, including servants, perhaps, but it would also include all the operations of the household from finances and everything else. So

here is a man who manages well the people he is responsible for as well as everything else that goes with running a household. Those are the qualifications. So, you can see that these are to be spiritual men with unrepachable reputations.

So, what are they to do? What exactly is it that deacons are to do? So, let's look at the duties of a deacon. The big picture is very simple. Historically, the deacons have had the responsibility to administer and serve in some aspect of the affairs of the church. To administer and serve in some aspect of the affairs of the church. But scripture nowhere directly states what their specific duty should be, and honestly, I think that is by design. I think the Holy Spirit obviously could have included that. But He chose not to, and I think the reason is that it is clear that they are supposed to be special servants under the elders in the church. but I think there is latitude granted for each church to decide exactly what roles the deacons shall fill. They are servants. Servants respond to the need of the moment. And I think that is the idea of the deacons. God has gifted them in unique ways. What we have done here in our church is we have encouraged our deacons to serve under an elder in the area of his giftedness leading ministries. The Holy Spirit has granted the elders of our church and the elders of every other church the responsibility and the privilege of designating exactly what the functions and duties of deacons will be.

While there is latitude, I do think we can learn something about their duties by examining two things: by examining the scripture of the circumstances in Acts 6 in that prototype of deacons and by the nature of the qualifications here in 1 Timothy 3; and then you throw church history in and you come up with about six different functions or duties of elders. Again, the church, I don't think, is bound to these, but these are some of what their responsibilities could include.

First of all, deacons have served in relief to and care for the needy in the church. You see that again in the prototype in Acts 6. They were serving food to the widows. They were caring for the widows, distributing food to the Greek widows in the Jerusalem church. Secondly, it can include oversight of specific ministries. In Acts 6 verse 3, the apostles say, I want you to select seven men whom we will put in charge of this ministry. So, the duties of deacons not only can include relief to and care for the needy but can also include oversight of specific ministries. It can include care for the church's finances. Most commentators agree that the qualification "not

fond of sordid gain” or “not greedy for money” because they were caring for the finances of the church. That also makes sense about that Philippians 1:1 reference as well.

Fourthly, they have in the history of the church, cared for the church’s property. This grows out, by the way, of that qualification “good managers of their households.” Some have seen in that the foundation for making the deacons those responsible once the church had property, of course, this wouldn’t have been true in the first century. It would have been, perhaps, serving utensils and other things but not of a building, per se. As church history went on, it included that.

Support of the public worship. This is, by the way, now just historically, in church history, churches have assigned deacons not only to those four things, but also to the support of public worship—various liturgical functions in churches that have more sacerdotal sacramental kinds of worship and the administration of the ordinances, essentially caring for baptisms and the Lord’s table. I don’t mean actually baptizing but preparing people and helping them, assisting in baptism.

All right, so, those are duties of deacons that deacons have had through the history of the church and there are some of these implied and even stated in the New Testament. But as I said, the scripture does not put the elders of this church or any other church in a box as to specifically the role that deacons will serve in.

Now there is another thing that we need to deal with and that is common misunderstandings about deacons because there are some. The first is, and these are some that I grew up with, some will say that deacons are essentially a replacement for elders. In some churches there is only one pastor but the men on the deacon board really do the spiritual work of elders. In the New Testament, however, both their title and their implied duties are distinct from that of elders. So, we are talking about two different offices. And as we saw in Philippi, a small church, there was both a plurality of elders who led the church and there was a plurality of deacons who served in the church under the direction of the elders. We aren’t told exactly what the deacons in Philippi did but again the implication is perhaps that they were involved in the collection of funds even for the gift for Paul which would, of course, be missions, wouldn’t it.

A second thing that the deacons are not meant to be is a board of trustees. Deacons are not to be a corporate board. That's a modern concept. They are to be servants. Totally different picture the scripture gives us than the way some churches are established.

Thirdly, they are not to be a police force to keep the pastor and elders in line. Unfortunately, because we have sort of the American democracy in mind, you know, the two houses of Congress keeping each other out of our pocketbooks, maybe one of them will keep the other straight, that's kind of how we tend to think about elders and deacons. Some churches have this sort of bi-parliamentary system, if you will, and the pastor serves as the prime minister and that's not at all the biblical model. The elders are to be responsible for the church, and the deacons serve the church under the direction of the elders. Now let me just comment on this one. There ought to be reasonable checks in place on the elders. The elders ought to be confronted if they are in sin. Just as an example of checks, I have absolutely nothing to do with touching any money that comes into this church. I don't want to. I will not. That's a good thing. That's a reasonable check. But folks, if a church really thinks that the deacons need to police the pastor or the elders, what they really need to do is dump the pastor and the elders and get some they can respect. It is not the responsibility of the deacons to police the elders.

This raises another question, what about deaconesses? While we are dealing with misunderstandings, this is an important question we need to answer. Some of you noticed and hopefully you noticed that I skipped verse 11 in 1 Timothy 3. I did that on purpose because I intended to come back to it. There is a great deal of disagreement over who the women are in verse 11. You'll notice that you have deacons in verses 8 and 9 and 10, and there they are all men. Then you have some women that show up in verse 11, and then you have deacons again and they are men in verses 12 and 13. Who are these women that show up in verse 11? Literally by the way, it says "women" as the New American Standard translates it. That's the literal translation. It could also be translated "wives." It's a valid translation, but "women" is the word. There are primarily two views about who these women are, there are a couple of other views, I'm not going to give you all four, but two primary views are that these women are deaconesses, female deacons. The other view is that they are simply the wives of deacons. So, which is it? So, let me give you the arguments just so you understand, because it's not as simple

as it may look on the face of it. Let me give you the arguments for deaconesses, those that believe these are female deacons in the church. First of all, they would say because of the repetition of “likewise.” This is a new group of leaders. Notice verse 8, “deacons likewise,” and then in verse 11, “women likewise.” They would say that this notes a change in categories of leaders and now you are dealing with another category of leaders. They would also argue that the absence of a pronoun—it doesn’t say in verse 11 “their wives,” then it would be clear that it is the deacons’ wives. It doesn’t say that so therefore, there is reason to believe that in fact, it is not the deacons’ wives but deaconesses. Let me just comment on that. That is not an uncommon thing in Greek for there not to be a pronoun if there is a clear antecedent.

Thirdly, they would say, “What about Phoebe? I mean, haven’t you read Romans 16? Phoebe is there called in the Greek text a deacon, translated ‘servant’ in our translation.” Well, let me answer that as well. This word “deacon” is never used in the feminine form which Greek would normally use to designate a female deacon. They would argue for “deaconesses” based on the absence of any mentions of elders’ wives. This is their argument: “Why would there be qualifications given for deacons’ wives but none for elders’ wives?” Therefore, these must not be qualifications for deacons’ wives, it must be qualifications for another office. They would say, “What about the testimony of church history?” It is true that “deaconesses” appear in church history. The first mention of “deaconesses” comes in the third century in a document called the *Didascalia* and it references “deaconesses” as assisting the sick, as assisting in the baptism of women and administering to the needy. And in the first council of Nicaea in 325 also refers to deaconesses and there they say that they did not receive ordination and they were to be considered as part of the laity, as part of the congregation and not as part of the leadership of the church. So, they are referenced in church history but that is how they’re referenced.

But the other viewpoint, is not female deacons but wives of deacons. Here are the arguments for that. There is a Greek word for “deaconess,” but it never appears in the New Testament. It’s a pretty clear argument to me. You can tell where I’m leaning. Secondly, there is no other example of the word “deacon” used of a woman holding an office. So, Phoebe is probably not a deaconess, and our translation has it correct when it calls her a “servant.” Remember that it is a word that simply means “servant.”

Verse 11 is sandwiched between verses about deacons. If it is a separate office, why didn't Paul finish with the deacons and then deal with the deaconesses? Why did he intersperse that verse in the middle of all the qualifications related to deacons? On the other hand, it is perfectly natural if verse 11 is describing the wives of deacons to put them there.

Finally, when you look at how the word "women" that introduces verse 11 is used in its closest context here, it refers to "wives" in both cases. In verse two, "must be the husband of one wife." But notice verse 11 says "Women must. . . be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things. Deacons must be husbands of only one" and here is the same word "wife" or "woman" as it could be translated. So, the closest context of Paul's use of this word seems to dictate that these are "wives"— "wives" of deacons. Our church, as many of you know if you have been here any time at all, believes, as I do, that these women in verse 11 are the wives of deacons and not female deacons. But there are other good churches and others that we love and appreciate who would disagree on that point so it's not going to be a matter of contention.

Alright, so those are the deacons. What is the application for the rest of us? Most of you here aren't deacons, so, what do you do with all this? Well, there are actually some huge points for each of us. First of all, the fact that there is an office in the church given to serving elevates the various serving gifts and their value in the church. If you have not a teaching gift but a serving gift, Christ by elevating that gift to the point of an office, elevates its importance. You remember in 1 Peter chapter 4, Peter talks about the kinds of gifts. First Peter chapter 4 verse 10 he says, "As each one has received a special gift," talking about the spiritual gifts "employ it in serving one another"—we are all to serve one another whatever kind of gift you have— "as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." And then he takes the spiritual gifts and divides them into two categories. I love this because it just simplifies everything. He says listen, there are speaking gifts and there are serving gifts. So, you have either a speaking gift or a serving gift or a combination of the two. Then he says, whoever speaks, if you have a speaking gift, you are to speak as one who is speaking the very words of God, the oracles, the utterances of God. Every Sunday morning before I get up to teach and sometimes on Sunday evening, I remind myself of this verse. I am to speak to you with the gift God has given me as one who speaks the very

utterances or oracles of God. I am not on trial when I stand up here. You and I both are on trial before the Word of God.

Then he says “whoever serves”—here is the other category of gifts. You have a serving gift. You are to serve as “one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

You see, as He included an office for deacons of servants, elevated the value of service in the church. If you have a teaching gift, don't you dare undervalue the gift of those who serve. And if you have a serving gift, don't you dare envy and long for a teaching gift. God has elevated both to the highest degree in His church by granting an office to those who teach and an office for those who serve.

Secondly, the role of deacon also highlights the role and responsibility that we all have to serve. Just because you are not a deacon doesn't mean that you get out of this. This is the responsibility we all have. This word is used to describe the role and duty of Christian leaders in the New Testament. Matthew 23:11 Jesus talking to His apostles says that “the greatest among you shall be your servant.” In 1 Corinthians 3:5 Paul says what is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believe. Those at the highest level of leadership are supposed to be servants and not just those in leadership, every single Christian. And I won't take you there because of time but let me just remind you of the incredible example of our Lord on the night of before His crucifixion when He punctuated the value of service as He took the towel, and He washed the feet of His disciples. And then He says that this is the kind of service I want you to do toward one another. This is our responsibility.

And finally, when you look at the role of deacon, the office of deacon helps us grasp that faithfully serving the Lord in His church, serving faithfully, brings the highest divine commendation. In other words, those who serve really are great in the kingdom of God and will be great in the kingdom of God. Look at 1 Timothy 3 verse 13. Here is how Paul finishes off his discussion about deacons. “For those who have served well as deacons” not just serving but

serving well, that is, in the right way, commendably “obtain for themselves” two things: “a high standing and great confidence.” A high standing before God, I think is the reference here. And great confidence before God. I think here Paul is saying the same thing Jesus said, and that is, they are great in the sight of God.

You know, we shouldn't be surprised by that. Turn back to Mark 10. This is the parallel passage to the one I read earlier. Verse 41, the ten were indignant with James and John. Jesus calls them, he explains to them how Gentiles think of authority and greatness and He says that that is not how I define greatness, verse 43. Look at verse 45. “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served.” Think about that for a moment. Just let that rattle around in your brain for a second. He didn't come as the King of the Universe “to be served but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many.” You say, “But yeah, but that was in the days of Jesus' humiliation while He was here on earth.” But what does He tell His disciples that He intends to do in the future in the kingdom? He said that He Himself will take on a towel and what? Serve us. So, when we serve one another, we are merely reflecting our God in the person of Jesus Christ who faithfully serves us now as our intercessor and will serve us literally in His kingdom. May God give us all the hearts of servants. That is true greatness in the kingdom of God. Let's pray together.

Father, we confess to you that we have so absorbed this world's standard of greatness that it clouds our view of reality. Father, I pray that You would sweep all of that away and that You would help us to truly and genuinely understand all that greatness really means in the kingdom of God, that it means serving others. Lord, I ask that You give us that kind of heart. Thank you for our Lord Jesus for the mighty example He was, and is, and will be yet in the future of serving. And Lord may we not be afraid to truly serve one another. Thank you for giving us an office in the church that reminds us of the value of serving. Thank you for the men that you have raised up here who so faithfully serve in this office. Father, I pray that they would be an example to us all, those who gird on the towel and serve. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen

