



KING'S HARBOR CHURCH

Love God. Love People. Make Disciples.

Living Out the Gospel (1 Timothy 3:8-16)

I. INTRO

- A. Should unity be a goal for the church – OR, is unity the fruit of something else?
- B. It is never enough to call Christians to have unity. In fact, if we do, we'll never get there. Think of it like the Fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control -- Gal 5:22-23), which is the FRUIT of having been with Jesus...
- C. Unity, like the Fruit of the Spirit, is fruit – never the goal. If unity IS a fruit and not the goal, then how do we become unified? Let's take these thoughts into our text for today...
- D. I will read the text, pray, and then see what Paul has to say about unity, deacons and how we are to conduct ourselves as part of God's Church (there's also some mild controversy contained in these verses): *"Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid [greedy] gain, ⁹ but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰ These men must also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach. ¹¹ Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things. ¹² Deacons must be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; ¹⁵ but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth. ¹⁶ By common confession, great is the mystery of godliness:*

*He who was revealed in the flesh,
Was vindicated in the Spirit,*

*Seen by angels,
Proclaimed among the nations,
Believed on in the world,
Taken up in glory.” --1 Timothy 3:8-16 [pray]*

II. BODY

A. Two main points in this passage:

1. **The role of deacons (vs. 8-13)**
2. **The responsibility of the church (vs. 14-16)** [And remember, we’re asking: where does unity come in?]

B. One at a time...

1. **The role of deacons (vs. 8-13)**

a. There are three sub-points we see in these verses:

- 1) The requirements are high (vs. 8-10)
- 2) The opportunities are wide (v. 3:11)
- 3) The reward is great. (vs. 3:12-13)

b. We’ll look at them one at a time...

1) The requirements are high (vs. 8-10) [much like the elders]

a) Godly Character (v. 8):

- i. *Deacons likewise must be dignified* [honorable – there is no mention of gender in the original language]
- ii. *[Not] double-tongued* [telling the truth – not just saying what people want to hear.] The operative word is respectability: “Not afraid to sell the family parrot to the town gossip.” --Will Rogers
- iii. *Not addicted to much wine* [give one's self over to, be addicted to, to be overly occupied with] “*And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit.*” -- Ephesians 5:18
- iv. *[Not] fond of sordid gain* [greedy – Josephus, a contemporary Jewish historian of the day, describes this word as meaning, “deceitful

financial gain”¹] In other words, a deacon is not to be drunk on wine OR money.

b) [Not only are deacons to have Godly Character, they must have:] Personal Faith (3:9): *But holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.* Paul uses the word *mystery* twice – here in v. 9: **the mystery of faith** and then again down in v. 16: **the mystery of godliness**. Both phrases mean essentially the same thing. Let’s focus on the word **mystery** for a few minutes and we’ll come back and connect it to a **clear conscience**...

- i. Here is where we begin to see to the fruit of unity. (We’re asking, “What needs to happen in order for there to be unity?”) When Paul uses the Greek word (*mustērion*) for mystery he’s not saying that faith and godliness are hard to understand – he does not mean that it’s a riddle or a symbolic logic problem that we have to solve.
- ii. Paul unlocks the mystery well in Eph (61 AD – 3 years earlier).
 - First of all, his prayer in Eph 1:18: *“I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know...”* --Ephesians 1:18.
 - Second in Eph 2: 13-15: *“But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.¹⁴ For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups [Jews & Gentiles] into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall,¹⁵ by abolishing in His flesh the enmity [hostility], which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man,*

¹ *Life* 13 [75].

thus establishing peace.” ---Ephesians 2:13-15 (emphasis added)

- iii. Two weeks ago we talked about SHALOM (Heb concept for PEACE: universal flourishing) being disrupted in the Garden of Eden by sin. What we see in Eph 2 is that SHALOM has been reintroduced to humankind through the death and resurrection of Jesus. The fullness of SHALOM will be restored when Jesus returns.
- iv. Whenever Paul uses the word “*mystery*” he is referring to Jesus as the unfolding of God’s rescue plan of salvation that had been hidden until the “eyes of our hearts are enlightened.”
- v. So, going back to v. 9, when Paul speaks of *holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience*, he’s saying a deacon needs to understand, in a deep and life-changing way, what happened on the cross -- and do that with a **clear** [*katharos* clean, innocent, pure] **conscience**.
 - The conscience is that part of the human psyche (or soul) that induces anguish and guilt when we violate our value system. There are also feelings of pleasure when we act in accordance to our value system.
 - Jonathan Edwards likened our conscience to a sundial with Scripture as the sun.
 - What Paul is saying is that a deacon’s conscience needs to be informed by Scripture.
 - **This is a dominant thought in 1 Timothy** – remember 1:5: “*But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.*” --1 Timothy 1:5

c) *Public test* (v. 10): *They must first be tested...*

- i. This is a reference to a **character and reputation test**.
 - ii. Someone has said **we're all like sponges** – when we're squeezed whatever is inside will come out – and it is especially true under the pressures of ministry.
- d) [We'll come back to v. 11] Domestic Harmony 3:12: *A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well.*
- e) Here is a summary statement describing deacons: There is elder like respectability with an informed belief that holds to the mystery of a realized gospel gift, a living belief rooted in a clear conscience, a tested life that exudes godly character. There is a helpmate (if married) who embodies the deacon's qualification. There is gracious domestication – in relationship to spouse and children. All of this gives a deacon an excellent standing with people both inside and outside the church – so that the deacon's authority goes far beyond words. [Notice there are no gender distinctions in the summary statement...]
- 2) [Going back to v. 11] The opportunities are wide (3:11): *Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things.*
- a) This verse raises the **minor controversy** of the passage. Does it refer to deaconesses, or to the wives of deacons?
 - b) The Greek word for "women" can mean a woman of any age, a wife, a widow, or a betrothed woman.
 - c) It is interesting though, that in the verses above regarding eldership, there are no prerequisites listed for the wife of an elder.

- d) ****It is almost universally accepted that women are certainly to serve as deacons – along with the men.²**
 - e) One commentator said that Paul envisions male deacons but certainly does not insist on it.
- 3) The reward is great (vs. 12-13): *Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.* The deacons that have served well get a two-fold reward: **first** before people, and **second** before God.

2. **The responsibility of the church (vs. 14-16)**

I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long;¹⁵ but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.¹⁶ By common confession, great is the mystery of godliness:

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Was vindicated in the Spirit,
Seen by angels,
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Believed on in the world,
Taken up in glory.” --1 Timothy 3:8-16 (emphasis added)*

- a. Paul’s mounting call to godly conduct in unpacking the characteristics of elders and deacons culminates in what is the **key (or thesis) text of the whole letter**. [Ransacking a book.]
- b. There are two sub-points here:
 - 1) Our Conduct (v. 15)
 - 2) Our Confession (v. 16)
- c. We’ll (briefly) look at both:
 - 1) Our Conduct (v.15) -- The call to godly conduct is not a challenge to pursue a self-generated “bootstrap,” NIKE godliness.

² Edmund Clowney, Douglas Moo, John Piper, Thomas Schreiner, and Robert Strimple all see that Phoebe held the office of Deacon in the church (see Romans 16:1). It is well documented that women served as deacons for the first 1000 years of the church and John Calvin reinstated Deaconesses as part of his reforms of medieval church polity.

- a) **Rather, it is the worshipful response (imperative) to the truth (indicative) of the gospel.
 - b) One author said it this way: The Lord Jesus Christ is the burning essence of godliness—its radiating nuclear core, engulfing all who would surrender to His sacrificial love.
- 2) Our Confession (v. 16) The confession of this creedal hymn or prayer confirms and articulates the deep theological meaning of “*the mystery*,” which points to the pattern of life that lives out the gospel message in adoration, worship, with empathy, justice, and graceful interactions.
 - 3) Paul cites part of a hymn that was most probably known by the Ephesian church. It describes some doctrinal highlights of God’s rescue plan in sending Jesus.
 - 4) Charles Spurgeon refers to this verse as, “The Summary of True Religion.”

Jesus...

Was revealed in flesh	Incarnation
Was vindicated in the Spirit	Resurrection
Was seen by angels	Witnesses to redemption
Was preached among the nations	Adoption offered to Gentiles
Was believed in the world	Ensuing belief
Was taken up in glory	Ascension/Present reign

- 5) **Ultimately, it points to Jesus Himself as the essence and source of all godly conduct.

III. CONCLUSION

- A. We unify around the “mystery” of the gospel revealed. 1 Timothy (and the rest of the PE) is known more for their instructions on behavior than for their theology, yet I hope you can see that our behavior is based on a theology of the cross that gathers and unifies the people of God.
- B. Out of our gratitude for the gospel we respond with loving God more, loving people more, and making more and better disciples.

- C. **Elders are the servant leaders in the church and deacons are the leading servants in the church.** Deacons serve alongside elders, supporting the ministry of the Word, caring for specific needs in the body.
- D. **Deacon Boards:** Some people argue that the church should have a board of deacons. They base this primarily on Acts 6:3-6 and here in 1 Tim 3:8-10. However, there are several problems with this view.
1. The term deacon is not used in Acts 6:3-6 or anywhere else in the chapter.
 2. There is no evidence here that the apostles were establishing some type of precedent or setting up a permanent deacon board or any kind of board that was to be perpetuated in the church.
 3. Even though here in 1 Tim 3:8-10 it does refer to a plurality of deacons, Paul doesn't tell us **how** they functioned. The term deacon means servant. Thus we can assume that they served the church in some way, but it isn't stated whether this was some form of a governing board or in some other role.
 4. It's evident that Scripture doesn't mandate a Deacon Board (it is described, but it is not prescribed.) Instead, it gives each church the freedom to establish a deacon board if the church desires to function with one.
- E. The requirements for a deacon DO suggest that there would be substantial contact with people – and their relationship to the elders suggests that the deacons were more involved with the day-to-day needs of the community.
- F. Here's my suggestion: Form short-term *ad hoc* teams to accomplish certain tasks and then disband. This will give lots of different people distinct opportunities to serve in significant ways without committing to years at a time. We've had a home-school mother of five serving on the ST...
1. The Transition was a deacon team.
 2. The Search Team is a deacon team.
 3. Bryan Collins, as Pastor of Business and Finance, has a Financial Advisory Board (FAB)

4. In some ways we can consider our staff to be vocational deacons. (I would recommend that – at this time – the only staff member to serve as an elder would be the Lead Pastor.)

G. Here's the bottom line: Every Christian is called by God to aspire to the qualifications of a deacon, rooted in an unfolding knowledge and delight in the gracious gospel gift of Jesus Christ.

P.A.S.S. Questions For KHC Community Group Leaders

Sermon Dates: Feb 25-26, 2017

Sermon Title: Living Out the Gospel

Sermon Passage: 1 Timothy 3:8-16

P - Participation (get everyone involved in the dialog)

1. When was a time in your life where you experienced genuine unity with other people?

A - Application (makes it personal)

1. Consider two categories of qualification—*character* and *ability*. How do the qualities mentioned in these verses divide into these two categories?
2. What qualities stand out the most to you?
3. What qualities do you think you are strong in? Weaker in?

S - Scripture (thinking biblically is a learned behavior! :-)

4. What is the difference between the role of deacon and elder?
5. "Deacon" simply means "servant." In the passage it seems that deacons deal with the more practical affairs of church life, rather than with teaching. Given that, why do you think the point about doctrine in verse 9 is made with so much emphasis?

S – Sharing (aim for a time of honest reflection, authenticity, and transparency in a safe atmosphere modeled by you).

6. How are leaders selected in our culture? How about the church?
7. How should we select leaders in the church?