

# EXCELLENCE IN MINISTRY

## Starting Strong—Doing What’s Right in the Work of Ministry

### The Dignity of Servanthood

#### 1 Timothy 3:8–13



### LET’S BEGIN HERE

You can’t put a price on a good name. An honored and respected reputation is worth more than “silver and gold” (Proverbs 22:1). In fact, we could write in bold letters this very proverb across the last couple of messages of this sermon series—the ones dealing with the necessary qualities for the office of overseer (1 Timothy 3:1–7). We could do the same in this message, too, because a sterling reputation for those who serve as deacons in God’s church is just as essential (3:8–13).



### LET’S DIG DEEPER

#### 1. Deacon: A God-Given Title

Nicknames can be fun, but sometimes they can be ugly and cruel—and not just in the hands of children. Sometimes coworkers and neighbors give us unflattering nicknames, especially if they know we follow Jesus and adhere to a certain moral code. Names like “parson,” “friar,” or “deacon” are popular ones. Little do the mockers know that “deacon” isn’t a negative nickname; it’s a God-ordained title that comes straight from the Bible.

#### 2. Deacons: Analysis of True Servants (1 Timothy 3:8–12)

By twenty-first century standards, the Jerusalem congregation of the first century was a “mega church.” Within thirty years of its founding, the church, in many ways, looked and functioned like a modern-day church. And what began as a necessity to meet a need at the beginning of the church—the need for deacons to serve widows—had, by the time Paul wrote his first letter to Timothy, become an established office within the church.

Men of Dignity



## Quotable

*For the  
Christian, the title  
“servant” is a  
compliment.  
Why? Jesus was  
God’s servant.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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**Starting Strong—Doing What’s Right in the Work of Ministry**  
**The Dignity of Servanthood**  
*1 Timothy 3:8–13*

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Not Double-Tongued

Not Devoted to Much Wine

Not Fond of Sordid Gain

Clear Conscience

Beyond Reproach

Women . . . *Likewise*



**A CLOSER LOOK**

***Women Elders, No. Women Deacons, Yes.***

Paul made it clear that within the confines of the faith community, women were not permitted “to teach or exercise [spiritual] authority over a man” (1 Timothy 2:12). And because this was a primary responsibility of overseers (3:2, 5), the clear implication is that women are to be excluded from serving in that office. But does this mean women are excluded from all official positions within the church?

First Timothy 3:8–10, 12 refers to the qualifications of *male* deacons, but verse 11 seems to refer to the qualifications of *female* deacons: “Women must likewise be dignified.” What are we to make of this reference? Scholars are divided on how best to interpret verse 11, offering three alternatives.

First, *the verse refers to women in general*. This seems unlikely because Paul already made a universal statement about women in the congregation (2:9–15). Sandwiching a general comment in the middle of a specific list regarding deacons seems schizophrenic.

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Second, *the verse refers to the wives of deacons (or perhaps to all church leaders, including overseers)*. The Greek noun *gyne* can be translated “wives” or “women,” depending on the context. According to some interpreters, Paul was speaking about the wives of men in church leadership, since they serve alongside their husbands. However, this view has its problems. The possessive pronoun *their*—as in, “their wives”—appears nowhere in the original language. Paul took care to identify his subjects in other places. It would be out of character, therefore, for him to be ambiguous here. And the phrasing of verse 11 parallels verse 8 almost exactly, especially with the use of the word *likewise*, indicating that *women* and *deacons* are synonymous (and not a reference to deacons’ or overseers’ wives).

Third, *the verse refers to women who serve as deacons—deaconesses*. This interpretation makes better sense of the parallels between 1 Timothy 3:8 and 11. This view also makes sense because in the early church deacons didn’t exercise spiritual authority over the church; deacons served the congregation. Furthermore, this interpretation better fits the context—that deaconesses, like deacons, must demonstrate godly character. Specifically, deaconesses are to be women of respect, honesty, self-control, and trustworthiness.

Husband of One Wife . . . Good Manager



### LET’S LIVE IT

Servants are rarely heralded with praise. They usually do their work unseen and unknown. But in Paul’s conclusion, he conferred two laurels, respect and reward, on all those who “serve tables”—those men and women “who have served well” (1 Timothy 3:13).

Deacons “obtain for themselves a high standing.”

Deacons also “obtain for themselves . . . great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.”

**In what ways does your church demonstrate that it holds deacons in high regard?**



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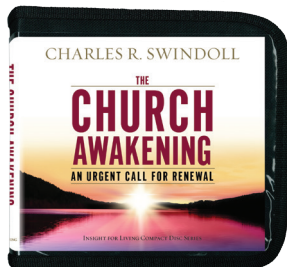
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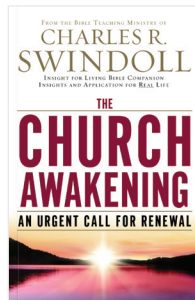
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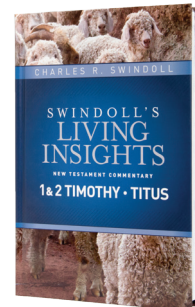
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