

MARANATHA BIBLE-PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

24 July 2016

"Present every man perfect in Christ Jesus" (Colossians 1:28)

Address: 63 Cranwell Road, Singapore 509851

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Sunday School: 9.45 am

Sunday English / Chinese Worship Service: 10.45 am Sunday Chinese Worship Service: 7 pm

Wednesday Prayer Meeting: 8.00 pm

The Biblical Roles and Qualifications of Deacons in the Local Church

Introduction

We thank God for the ministry of faithful deacons in our church (and 2 Elders and a Pastor in the Board of Elders as well). They do well to assist the minister of the church in the discharge of his pastoral duties as the 7 elected men to the apostles in Acts 6:1-9. Many fulfilled roles in administrative work, logistics, evangelism and discipleship, finances, helping with the children, music or youth fellowship, Bible Study in the Neighbourhood Bible Class (NBC), Sunday School teaching, ushering and the book ministry (Maranatha Resource Ministry) or even driving the church van or preparation of the food and hospitality ministry. The early church was more effective after 7 deacons were elected to support the apostolic ministry and efficient with faithful stewards who served fervently. But there were prerequisites for these men to be elected in Acts 6:1-7. What then are the qualities mentioned in the Bible with regard to deacons? This is not meant to be an exhaustive discussion or treatment of this subject, but merely a brief explanation of each one, designed to help men evaluate and examine themselves or others who aspire to such an office.

Below is a brief explanation and elaboration of the various qualities from 1 Timothy 3.8-13 concerning deacons :

Verse 8

1. "Grave" or "Sober." The deacon must be a man of dignity or worthy of respect, sober and grave and not given to a frivolous and flippant disposition. The world thrives on light-hearted temporal vanities but the deacon is concerned about things eternal. Serious Christian demeanor and gravity is a warm, attractive attribute flowing from the fear of God and is a rare but requisite quality today.

2. "Not double-tongued." He has the integrity of speech and is sincere and honest. You can depend on his word. Nothing destroys a testimony like deceit and falsehood. Truthfulness is a prerequisite to the diaconal office.

3. “Not given to much wine.” The deacon is to develop self-control or temperance and be disciplined in his life. He carries himself well and is not given to excesses. He does not drink alcohol nor is he addicted in any way. The Bible has many warnings against the potential dangers of wine and strong drink (Isaiah 5:11, 22; Proverbs 20:1; 23:30-35; Hosea 4:11). Drunkenness is a sin and the church must discipline a member who will not repent of this sin. If a deacon has a drinking problem, he will be a bad testimony and will lead others astray on this matter and bring reproach to the name of Christ. No man can have two masters and be effective to the Lord and he is temperate and wise in all things. John Calvin knew the importance of these qualities well in his experience in Geneva and wrote:

It is necessary for them to be provided with not only other graces of the spirit but also certainly with wisdom (and temperance) for without that, the task cannot be properly carried out. They may thus be on guard not only against the impostors and frauds who are far too inclined to begging, and suck up what is needed for the brethren who are in extreme poverty, but also against the calumnies (slanders) of those who are constantly making disparaging remarks, even if there is no occasion for doing so. For as well as being full of difficulties, that office is exposed to unjustified complaints.

4. “Not guilty of filthy lucre.” He is honest and trustworthy to serve the Lord in an acceptable manner. Those charged with handling the church’s money must be free from the love of it. Many financial decisions and other practical matters handled by the deacons must be made before God through much prayer and by faith. The deacons, then, must be more than faithful and reliable trustees or stewards, worthy of the trust of the members in the church. They must have personal faith in God and understand the spiritual aspects of God’s financial program and church program. Churches have often been hindered from supporting missionaries or doing other things God is directing them to do simply because some men involved are not men of honesty and integrity. The Bible has warnings and examples against people who use their office to achieve financial gain at the expense of others (Numbers 22-44; 1 Samuel 2:13-17; 2 Kings 5:20-27; Isaiah 22:15-25). A candidate for the diaconal ministry has to be screened for financial integrity before he can be appointed or elected.

Verse 9

“Holds the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.” His profession of the Christian faith is characterized by a clean and undefiled conscience and the Spirit leads him. The conscience is a moral agent that God has instituted in every man and it can be defiled or seared with a hot iron if one is not careful to heed its promptings (Romans 2:15-16). As the conscience can be God’s agent for guiding and judging, it should be kept in a clean and undefiled form. The godly deacon is not a hypocrite and has nothing to hide. He should strive to please God in all that he does and to maintain a good conscience before God and men. This Pauline qualification for deacons cannot be compromised. What is this “mystery of the faith?” It refers to the objective and distinctive truths of the Christian faith that is revealed to believers by God through His Word. Alexander Strauch quoted Homer Kent as saying, “The great truths of the faith are not to be held as theological abstractions, but are to be properly employed in daily life. To hold the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience will have no cause to condemn. A pure conscience indicates a pure life.” Therefore there is an awesome responsibility for deacons to live out these

truths consistently and obediently in their lives as a prerequisite to the diaconal office.

Verse 10

“Found blameless.” He has to be tested first to determine that he is not a novice (i.e., new convert), one who is rapidly elevated to office because of his enthusiasm and to “give him something to do.” Paul tells Timothy, to “lay hands suddenly on no man.” (1 Timothy 5:22). The deacon is a man who has proved his worth in the life of the church, and whose spirituality and maturity are evident to all. He is to strive to be “beyond reproach.”

Verse 11

He has a godly wife who is sober, faithful, and “not a slanderer.” There are differing interpretations on this verse of whether it refer to a deacon’s wife or a deaconess. The etymological study of the word is not helpful here as it can refer to both woman and wife in the original. The other place where a woman can possibly be referred to as a deaconess is in Romans 16:1 and that is not conclusive either as it can be rendered as servant as well. Koster (Deacons Handbook, 2000) noted that The Council of Orange in 441 AD decided to drop the deaconess from the church. For five to six centuries, there were none in the church. Women appear later in the diaconal service under the title of Diaconissa, a term normally used to designate the wife of a deacon who assisted her husband in the service of mercy.

Berghoef and Koster (Deacons Handbook, 2000) added that the presence of active and godly female servants in church history is noted and their contributions to the church are commendable. Considering the context and Scriptures as a whole, there are credible favorable evidences that support the view as translated in the KJV as referring to deacons’ wives who are actively serving alongside their husbands or at least an active unordained female servant labouring in the church.

Hence, in summary, these women mentioned here may have been wives of deacons as rendered by the KJV translators. If that is the case, then such women would have ministered to other women, especially those in need of physical assistance and spiritual instruction in the capacity as a deacon’s wife. Some practical considerations like intimate personal counselling and care would indeed have necessitated such a ministry of women to women in the local church and it would not be altogether unreasonable if the deacon’s wife could have helped in this matter.

The wives of deacons, or any serving women, should be person of dignity, with their tongues, appetites, and passions under control. No man can successfully fulfill the requirements of spiritual office if his own wife is undermining him. The two are one; therefore, they must be one in godliness and service too. “It speaks of that combination of gravity and dignity which invites the reverence of others.” The wife of the deacon is to be the type of Christian lady who lives her life with a godly purpose. Her life should cause others to respect her spiritually and morally. She is serious-minded, dignified, and grave, with spiritual dignity that causes others to look upon her with respect. The spiritual “gravity” of the deacon’s wife causes other women to accept her teaching (Titus 2:2-4) and to seek her counsel. The spiritual health of the congregation will be enhanced with godly women like these who are supporting the ministry of

pastors and deacons. The wife must not be a slanderer. The word used for “slander” in 1 Timothy 3:11 is used elsewhere of the devil. The word means “accuser” in Revelation 12:10, and the devil is said to be the accuser of the brethren. He loves to say evil things about people with a malicious goal of hurting them. Slandering refers to gossiping, backbiting, and other hurtful conversation, especially that which is untruthful and mean-spirited. Deacons’ wives are not to be given to gossip and slander that involve deception, untruth, and an injurious and acrimonious attitude and purpose, but rather the building up of the saints with their gifts and talents (Ephesians 4:15).

So the deacon’s wife must be a woman who is especially careful about her conversation, conduct, and attitude towards people. Otherwise she can easily hurt or harm the people in her church and ruin her husband’s ministry with her uncontrolled tongue and demeanour.

Verse 12

A good manager of his home. The deacon must be “one wife’s husband” (i.e., he is faithful in the marriage bond), and he must be a good manager of his own household. His children do not behave in an unruly way; he keeps his children under due control with all dignity. Church leaders are required to keep their children and spouse under their control with honor and dignity and be the head of the house. The apostle adds significantly that if a man knows not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God (1 Timothy 3:5)? Notice that God requires that the deacon be a man who rules his household “well.” He must be a godly, biblical father and husband with a good family life. God simply gives a reasonable standard for the church officer. He must be doing a good job in his home. His home is where he is in charge as the head of the home. If a man cannot guide and manage his own home properly, he has no business trying to guide the flock of God in a local church. Any serious problem in the home should be resolved before a man is considered for a responsible church office. The home is a good test case if the man can render spiritually edifying services to the people of God effectively in the church as a whole.

The deacon should be teachable and diligent and be able to communicate biblical truths clearly to others, if necessary. The deacon needs to be careful of not only manage the dynamics of his teaching but also be spiritually sensitive to other people in the church. He needs to serve God and his people with a meek and gentle spirit. He recognizes that he should seek to diligently study the Word of God and know it well and apply it in his life before teaching others (2 Timothy 2:15; Ezra 7:10).

Verse 13

The man whose conduct is consistent with his office of deacon gains great respect in the church (1 Timothy 3:11). In summary, as Paul has said clearly in 1 Timothy 3:8-13, a deacon should be grave, to know and hold to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience, be the husband of one wife, rule his children and household well, not be double-tongued, not be addicted to much wine, not be given to filthy lucre, but be faithful in all things. Likewise, the wife of a deacon must not be a slanderer or gossip or a tale bearer but be sober and faithful in all things.

Conclusion

We need to encourage, support and pray for our office bearers in our church in the coming elections as the Lord leads us. It is a privilege and a grave duty to serve the Lord, for those

called to be His servants as deacons and elders today. There are stringent qualifications delineated in the scriptures for those who are truly called of the Lord to prevent the abuse of the position. We need also to uphold our missionaries, preachers, pastors and elders too, and their families, in the new session as they serve the Lord in our midst, that they be faithful custodians and trustees of the manifold grace of God.

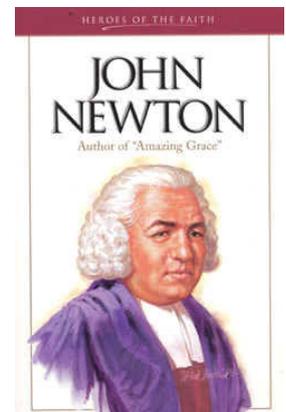
Jack Sin

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Book Review : John Newton – Author of ‘Amazing Grace’

This book is about a hymn writer named John Newton. He is the author of ‘Amazing Grace’. “For over two hundred years the song “Amazing Grace” by John Newton has been sung and loved by Christians worldwide. It is included in hymnals of most traditional and evangelical churches. Almost everyone knows the first verse by memory :

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.



But not everyone knows that when Newton wrote that song he was not being merely poetic, but truthful and grateful. Few who sing those words know how much of a wretch he really had been—how sinful, how blasphemous, how licentious and rebellious against God and man.

Nor do many know of his great love for a woman who sustained him through his terrible punishment as a deserter from the British navy; “ (Adapted from preface, p4).

At first, before I read this book about his testimony, I always thought : Maybe he is not as bad as I think. But I was wrong.

After I read his story, I was so touched and happy that God was really been watching over him, despite him being so evil.

So, if you have not really known his story or have not really come to know Christ yet, let me share with you this amazing, miraculous and wonderful story about how a wicked person like John Newton was saved. I hope that all of you will be touched by this ‘some what almost seemingly impossible story.’

John was a very wicked person. His mother was actually a Christian. She prayed for him often, no matter what. But unfortunately, John’s mother died because of a very serious illness. It was so bad that she became excessively weak. Then you must be thinking : what about John’s dad?

Well, sadly, John's father was a slave trader so he often travelled. Since John's father was so busy, John was sent to another place to live. Thank God, the people that he was sent to live with were very kind. They were named 'The Catlett'.

And, the most funny thing is : John fell in love with their daughter, named Mary, who was 14 years old. Of course, Mary was way too young at that time to marry. However, John always thought about her and never gave up on her. He was even worried about Mary getting herself another man to marry when she was much older. And this worried John so much that he never even thought about earning money to feed Mary. He even hardly worked because of that.

I can tell you how sinful John really was, and how he became so sinful. John actually knew that there is a God. However, he started questioning this truth when he read a book by an atheist, and thus thought that there was no such thing as God, or the devil. He was so into reading the book that he became an atheist himself, which was very bad.

Well, he started swearing and cursing a lot. He even thought his father had never loved him and it was only his mother who did. He became to like swearing so much that he affected other sailors too, as he worked on a ship.

There was even once when he held a 'party' and pretended to be Jesus, trying to turn water into wine and doing other weird stuff like telling jokes from the Bible.

But, there was one occasion when something terrible happened to him.

He was brought onto the British navy ship named Harwich by the 'press gang'. One day, he deserted from it and was severely punished. Let me share with you how painful, cruel and heartless the punishment was.

First, the captain put him in irons. He lay in the small dark prison room of the ship, cursing and raging. He cursed the captain, the crew, God and fate. When the door finally opened, he knew what was waiting for him. The captain ordered the other sailors to strip him and seize him up. They tied his feet together and stripped him to the waist. Using the 'cat-o-nine-tails', the captain ordered to give him twelve swishes. How cruel! How did they do it then?

The boatswain's mate grasped the cat-o-nine-tails with both hands, lifted it over his head and with great force, swished it through the air onto John's back. It was so painful that at each thud, John writhed in pain, but refused to let a word escape from his lips. What did come from between his gritted teeth were hissed curses at the assembled men. Defiance, hatred and pain distorted his face into sheer ugliness.

Angered by John's rebellion that he displayed, the captain ordered for others to do the same too. He was followed by others, each administering a dozen lashes.

Repeatedly, the thongs cut through the air. John felt blood run down his naked back and into his shoes. He saw blood spattered on the grills and floor. The pain was so unbearable. Even I

cannot imagine how much pain went through. It must be very painful. But thank God, after he had fainted from his beating of hundred over lashes, he received treatment from a doctor.

But you can say that all these punishments were actually from God trying to change his proud personality. It was because of this pain that he became more humble.

John was also a very lazy person too, before his attitude became better. He always made empty promises because of Mary. And because of that, the Catlett changed their behaviour towards him.

Then, when did John become a Christian? It all happened on a ship, after John managed to find a way out of a jungle where he got lost in. John thought that the ship would peacefully bring them to their destination, but it was not true. John actually was questioning whether or not God was real or not, whether or not there really was a hell and heaven. John was like Jonah and you can almost say that John was the cause of the storm. However, this storm caused him to pray for God's help. Before he never prayed to God, but God had always been sustaining him.

The storm changed John's life and behavior from a wretched sinner to a Christian. All praise and glory to God for this miraculous and amazing change! God really never abandoned John before and always kept him alive.

After the change, John became more hardworking. Since he knew he had changed a lot, he decided to go back to see Mary, who was not married yet.

They finally married on February 1, 1750. Eventually, John also became a pastor and hymn writer. His famous hymn 'Amazing Grace' really showed how grateful he was to God for this amazing grace.

Conclusion

Romans 5:8 tells us, '*But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*' I hope this testimony of John Newton will encourage you to read his story. It is long but meaningful. May we all be encouraged by John Newton's story about his life.

Joy Seow
13 years old

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Pray for Wang Zhan Ying's recovery and baptism.



The Chinese Choir presenting a gospel item at the evening Chinese Service.



Pray for every Sunday Chinese evangelism as this bus goes and pick up workers from 4 locations.

Preaching at Kulai BPC service and pray for their church camp in September 2016.



Elder Daniel Tau sharing with the MYAFers.

Theme for the Quarter :

Extraordinary Spiritual Examples in the Old Testament for our Emulation

English Worship Service

The Call and Equipping of Moses

(Scripture Text : Exodus 3:1-22; Responsible Reading : 1 Corinthians 1:1-31)

[*End of MM*]