

# Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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## Deacon Qualifications: Part 5

*Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus. (1 Timothy 3:12–13)*

Paul applies the same family qualification to deacons as to the elder. In these lists of qualifications, I do not believe Paul requires that officers in the church be married and the father of children, but he does include these traits to make a point that a church should know about any man prior to considering him for ordination. How does he relate to the people closest to him? Does he lead because they respect him, because they fear his angry outbursts, or do they not respect him at all? His leadership and interpersonal dynamics with the people closest to him will mirror to the church what they should expect from him in the church. If they do not approve of his family leadership, they should not ordain him to either office, for they shall also not approve of his demeanor in the church office. I was ordained several years before I met my wife-to-be and got married. However, the men who mentored me observed my interaction with people outside the pulpit and outside the church to assess my qualities in this area prior to my ordination. I have known a few ministers who either did not get married at all, or who married late in life. The late Elder Pat Byrd married his childhood sweetheart in his fifties. Neither of them had ever married. He teasingly would quip, "I wanted to be sure I was old enough to know what I was doing." Elder Byrd was a sound, able and beneficial gift to the churches where ever he ministered. A tremendous maturing occurs in a healthy, godly marriage, a change in the man that nudges him down the road to spiritual maturity as well, but it is certainly possible for a man to gain that maturity without marriage. Paul's qualification, I believe, focuses on the maturity of character and of faith, not the man's marriage status.

There is some debate regarding whether Paul was married or not. We read of Peter's wife and mother-in-law in Scripture, but we never read a word about whether Paul was married or not. In 1 Corinthians 9:5 Paul defends his—and all the apostles'—right to be married, among other things, but he does not indicate whether he was married or not. His frequent and honorable mention in his writings of godly women who assisted his ministry affirms that he maintained a mature, godly, and healthy respect for the women in the churches where he labored. Married or not, these passages

affirm Paul's full qualification under this requirement.

*For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.* Paul wraps up his list of qualifications for deacon with a summary statement that we could as easily apply to the elder, or for that matter, to every church member who faithfully fulfills his/her holy charge in the church.

How did Paul indicate that a godly man "purchases" this "good degree" and boldness in the faith? The word translated "degree" refers to rank, status, or standing. We use the English word to refer to someone who invests years and structured, intense study to earn a college degree. As with a college degree, so with this "degree" in the church, there are no shortcuts, no easy ways to sidestep the "price" of the degree. Sadly for our culture, we live in an age when a lazy man or woman may enroll in a bogus college, pay a tidy sum of money and literally "buy" their diploma. Such a diploma is not worth the paper it was printed on. It is bogus and factually worthless. I once knew a man who though completing only a high school education became quite successful in a technical trade. Perhaps because of personal insecurities—I don't know—he discovered a "college" through which he could do little or no actual work, but with the right payment he could "buy" a doctoral degree. He paid the price and immediately started changing all his identifying records to read "Dr." ABC. However, the fruits of disciplined study and research did not accompany this shortcut. Years later the good doctor wrote me a note in which he described something that had "surprised" him. He spelled "surprised" as "susprized." He hung a piece of paper on his wall, he received his mail as a "Doctor," but he did not gain the discipline or knowledge that normally accompanies a truly earned degree. As with education, so with the "school of discipleship" in the church, there are no shortcuts, no easy ways to get the title without investing in life-transforming work that indeed does transform one's life. No man can retain his old way of life and "earn" this degree.

Paul describes the process by which a man in the church truly earns the respect of the church by investing the work and discipline necessary for the

“good degree.” The man demonstrates the grace and stability of his experience and the maturity of his faith that enables him to stand on solid ground in the church’s respect.

In addition to his “purchasing” a good degree, this man also manifests that a fruit of his labor in the church demonstrates “...great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.” Consider the following definition of “boldness.”

...a state of boldness and confidence, sometimes implying intimidating circumstances—‘boldness, courage.’ προσερχώμεθα οὖν μετὰ παρρησίας τῷ θρόνῳ τῆς χάριτος ‘let us boldly approach the throne of grace’ He 4:16; μὴ ἀποβάλητε οὖν τὴν παρρησίαν ὑμῶν, ἥτις ἔχει μεγάλην μισθαποδοσίαν ‘do not lose your courage which brings a great reward’ He 10:35.<sup>1</sup>

Confidence in the midst of intimidating circumstances permeates the idea that this word communicates. We go to the throne of grace with the confidence of faith, but anyone who goes there with no sense of intimidation at the idea of literally talking with God fails to grasp the reality of prayer.

We live in an age of increasingly hostile ideas to our faith. Far too many Christians try to hold onto their faith, all the while trying to accommodate every hostile idea to it that they encounter. They spend more time “apologizing” for their faith than boldly standing on it. Consider this example from the past. Augustus Strong was a highly educated and highly respected Southern Baptist leader in the late nineteenth century. I have owned his *Systematic Theology* for decades. It is one of the most scholarly and extensive texts of its kind that I’ve ever read. Strong lived in the shadow of two major challenges to historical Christianity, the introduction of “textual criticism” in the form of skepticism regarding the actual text of the Bible, and the mad rush of our culture to embrace evolution, an ancient idea, but one that, prior to Darwin’s influence, was best known as a core belief of many pagan religions, not a respected scientific principle. Strong tried to find a way to embrace evolution and the Biblical account of creation. In the process he lost his credibility in the Christian community. No believer can compromise his/her faith by embracing non-faith, non-Biblical ideas, and maintain any degree of credibility in the faith.

Paul’s description of the man who honors his office emphasizes that he pays the price and stands his ground in the faith. The noble result is great boldness in the faith, despite the intimidation of unbelievers in the world, however strongly they

claim the cover of science or other forms of credibility from outside Scripture and outside the faith set forth in Scripture. Science should be reserved for verified and verifiable facts that are clearly demonstrated by the natural world in which we live. If a principle is in fact true science, it will be as true today as it was five hundred years ago. The truly “scientific” discoveries regarding gravity, for example, are no less true today than when first discovered. We’ve learned more about gravity, but we’ve repeatedly observed that those first experiments and conclusions were indeed factual. In this simply point, evolution fails the test of true science. Since Darwin attempted to morph evolution from religion into science, how many times have the “scientists” had to retract old ideas and conjectures based on “...the latest discoveries....” Unlike the true scientific advances regarding our knowledge of gravity, however, each “latest discovery” refutes the old ideas and tries to affirm new ideas. If a man today proposed the precise ideas first posited by Darwin as “true, verifiable science,” he’d be laughed out of the halls of science. The beautiful reality of God’s handiwork, the personal stamp of His presence, appears in the world around us, and it spreads from the increasingly verified “intelligent design” at the sub-microscopic level all the way to the expanse of constellations.

Christians do not ordinarily claim to be scientists. They should only do so if they have gained the disciplines and credentials that would so qualify them. I am thankful that a significant number of credentialed scientists increasingly embrace the Biblical account of creation. However, though the Bible quite gloriously affirms God’s personal stamp on His handiwork (Psalm 19, for example), the man of bold faith need only affirm a simple, but core principle of faith.

*Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear. (Hebrews 11:3)*

This verse affirms the first four words of our Bible, “In the beginning God....”

A mature and wise man in the faith stands boldly on his faith. He does not constantly compromise it or apologize for it. This is the kind of man a church should consider for its respected offices. He didn’t “buy” the diploma; He paid the price of true discipleship, and he lives it in the midst of life’s trials and the intimidation of an unbelieving world. He continues to pay the price of true faith in the heat of life’s trials. You observe how this man deals with difficult situations and difficult people, and you respect his godly faith and wise grace with honor and respect. He applies the Bible to his life. Thank the Lord for such noble men in the faith. And thank the Lord for their “classy” wives in the faith as well.

<sup>1</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, vol. 1, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament : Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., 306 (New York: United Bible societies, 1996).

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Worship service each Sunday  
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.  
Pastor