

# The Scriptures of the Ordinal

by W.H. Griffith Thomas

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*A true Deacon or minister must possess personal fitness, including readiness for service, reality of character, eagerness of expectation, alertness of activity, and strength of endurance.*

**Scripture:** Luke 12:35, Acts 6:3, 1 Timothy 3:8

**Topics:** "Church Leadership", "Spiritual Integrity"

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## Description

W.H. Griffith Thomas preaches on the qualifications and characteristics of a Deacon as outlined in Acts 6:3 and 1 Timothy 3:8-13, emphasizing the importance of personal integrity, wisdom, and being filled with the Holy Spirit. The sermon highlights the need for Deacons to have a good reputation, practical wisdom, temperance, liberality, sincerity, and to be tested for their faithfulness and genuineness. The Deacon is called to be ready for service, maintain a genuine character, eagerly await the Lord's return, be alert in activity, and endure faithfully, with the promise of blessedness and honor from Christ upon His return.

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## Transcript

Section 1. The Deacon's Appointment (Acts 6:3).

Although the Seven are not actually called Deacons, and although modern scholarship hardly permits us to regard them as the first of the line of men subsequently called by this name, yet the general association of these men with the later Deacons, the work which they were called to do, and the selection of this passage for the Ordination Service, may perhaps warrant us in seeing in the account of the Seven some of the original qualifications of the Deacon, and some of the qualifications still required today. "The person of the clergyman is the life of his work," and the qualifications sought and found in the Seven are certainly required in the modern minister.

I. Relation to Men.

They were to be men of "honest report"; "borne witness to from you". This qualification in the Christian Church is very prominent in the New Testament. "Well-spoken of" means "of good reputation". Let us observe this element in the following passages: Luke 2:52; Acts 10:22, 16:2, 22:12; Col. 4:5; 1 Thess. 4:12; 1 Tim. 3:7; 2 Cor. 8:21; Rom. 12:17; 1 Peter 2:12.

Could anything be more striking or suggestive? And could anything be more necessary and of greater power? It is a real proof of a man's reality, how he stands with his fellows. A well-known clergyman tells a

story of a man who was described as "all right towards God, but a little 'twistical' towards man." But this is impossible. A man who is right with God cannot be "twistical" with man; and, contrariwise, if he is "twistical" towards man, it is a proof that he is not essentially right with God. It is therefore one of the finest tests of a man's life to know how he stands with his associates. What do his College contemporaries think of him? What do the College servants think of him? What do his relatives at home think of him, especially, perhaps, his brothers? What is his reputation in the Church at home with which he is connected? Herein lies the principle suggested by the opportunity given in the Ordination Service for the people to raise any objection to the Ordinand, though of course the qualification now considered is much more, and goes far deeper than anything to which public objection can be made. If we make a Christian profession and are yet careless, unreliable, undependable, what is our profession worth? If our spirituality is not ethical, it is not spirituality.

## II. Relation to Himself.

The Seven were to be men of "wisdom". This means knowledge in its practical application, sagacity, commonsense, practical ability. They were to be engaged in work that would call for this, for they would have to distribute money, administer gifts, and do all without partiality, with absolute integrity. No wonder, therefore, they were to be men of "wisdom".

The minister today is in just as great need of "wisdom". The administration of charity alone calls for it, and there are few greater tests of a man's character than the use he makes of public money entrusted to him. Ministers must be no weaklings, and not even merely shrewd. They must be men of sanctified common sense, men of Christian sagacity, men of impartiality, men of integrity. Wisdom in the Bible always has in it a moral and not merely an intellectual element, and a minister without wisdom will mean a ministry without power.

## III. Relation to God.

"Full of the Holy Ghost." The Holy Ghost is the ultimate fact and factor in Christianity, the essential characteristic, the unique reality. Bishop Thirlwall once said that the great intellectual and religious struggle of our day turns mainly on the question whether there is a Holy Ghost. Bishop Westcott defines this more closely and says the question turns on a belief in the Holy Ghost sent by Jesus Christ according to His emphatic promise. I would venture to give it a still more definite application and say that the question turns on whether we have received that Spirit for life and power in service.

What will the Holy Ghost in the soul of a minister do for him? He will enlighten the judgment, control the feelings, direct the will, and possess and energize every faculty. The natural temperament will be glorified, the natural wisdom illuminated, and the natural determination set on fire.

The measure of the Holy Spirit also is to be noted: "full". This is regarded in the Acts as the normal condition of a Christian man. And the association of this spiritual gift with the work of "serving tables" is particularly striking. For secular work (so-called) as well as spiritual (so-called) we need the fullness of the Holy Spirit. "To the Christian," Archbishop Benson said, "nothing is secular but what is sinful," and for everything in life and service we need the fullness of the Holy Spirit. As "Virtue which is not enthusiastic is not safe," so a life which is not full of the Holy Ghost will lack the supreme element of spiritual power and blessing.

## IV. The Outcome.

As we look carefully at the results of the appointment of the Seven, we see in Stephen alone the outcome of the use of these three qualities. He was "full of grace and power" (verse 8); not grace without power, nor power without grace. No one could resist the wisdom and spirit with which he spoke (verse 10). His personal character is described in a very striking phrase (verse 15). His testimony for Christ was overwhelming (ch. 7), and his evangelistic power was remarkable (ch. 8).

#### V. The Secret.

How, then, was all this brought about? In a very simple way. By "Faith" (verse 5). Faith receives grace; grace gives wisdom; grace and wisdom are shown in character; and character witnesses for God as nothing else can. It is the worker who counts in all work, the speaker in all speech. All genuine speech and service are personal, and everything, therefore, that enriches personality is to be coveted as one of the very best gifts. As an advertisement once read, "It is the power transmitted and not the power generated that counts. Power generated without being transmitted is a dead loss." Stephen and his fellows generated power in the Holy Ghost through faith, and then transmitted it in living force to the Church and the world.

#### Section 2. The Deacon's Portrait (1 Tim. 3:8-13).

Paul here draws for us the picture of an ideal Deacon. It is noteworthy that in the New Testament we read little of his ecclesiastical functions, but much of his personal character. The Ordinal puts its emphasis in the same place. What then are his characteristics?

##### I. Gravity.

The word  $\sigma\epsilon\mu\nu\zeta$  with its cognates means the "deportment which inspires respect". It is a prominent word in the Pastoral Epistles and scarcely found elsewhere. Is there any special point in this in view of the Epistles being addressed to young men? It means the opposite of that lightness which is so often confused with brightness. Bright, but not light. Not a light-hearted creature who counts for nothing. There is to be gravity and yet not gloom. There is a constant tendency to lightness in the ministry which needs to be watched. Jocularly may easily degenerate into flippancy until a minister is not taken seriously. Some clergymen are known on platforms mainly for the jokes they are expected to perpetrate.

##### II. Genuineness.

"Not double-tongued." Lightness may easily tend to unreality. The minister is not to change his opinion with every corner. There is frequent danger of scandal, or at least of gossip, which makes it hard for a minister to avoid unreality. There is also the danger of saying pleasing things for the sake of popularity. But whatever be the temptation, the man must be real, his mind must be made up. He must stand by his word, and people must know that he is a man of his word.

##### III. Temperance.

"Not given to much wine." The text does not teach the necessity of Total Abstinence. But it certainly means such control of himself in regard to wine as will make him an object lesson wherever he goes, and not lead people to shrug the shoulder when he is talked of. Some ministers are known as "diners out," and some have been known to take more wine than was good, without at all becoming intoxicated. If butlers would talk publicly, as they sometimes do privately, they would give many a broad hint as to the drinking capacities of clergymen who come as guests to their masters' houses. So far at least the text takes us,

and yet I will venture to go a step farther and say that in view of "present distress" Temperance for clergymen is best interpreted as Total Abstinence. I am confident that his power for good would be doubled whether among rich or poor if he were known to be a total abstainer. And he would never regret the slight sacrifice of self-indulgence thereby involved, but would rejoice in it as a help to his ministry.

#### IV. Liberality.

"Not greedy of filthy lucre." Are there no dangers in connection with money in the ministry? Are standards so low that no peril is to be feared? There is still a real danger of seeking personal ends in the ministry. I have known of men seeking a good curacy to pay debts contracted before Ordination. I have seen a prominent, almost flaring, advertisement for a curate in a Church paper of which the part in largest print was £200 A YEAR. [1910]

There is a great danger of meanness and stinginess in the ministry. The clergyman is not exempt from the New Testament principle of proportionate giving. Without laying down any rule we may at least say that one-tenth should be regarded as the minimum. And although it may seem a small matter, I would dare to urge that a clergyman should himself give every time there is an offertory in church, his own or anyone else's. The force of example in giving is great and important, and it is not right for a clergyman to urge others to give and never be seen to give himself. Without ostentation and without concealment let him give as the plate comes to him in the chancel, or as he receives it for presentation at the Holy Table. However little he can give, let him do it every time. No list of subscriptions can make up for proportionate and systematic weekly giving in the church offertory. The very act will be a means of grace.

Do not let us say there is no danger, even today, in regard to money matters in the ministry. Balaam, Gehazi, Judas stand out as warnings, and though circumstances change, human nature does not, and it is only too possible for a man to become illiberal, and even mean and grasping, in the ministry.

#### V. Sincerity (verse 9).

As we ponder this verse in connection with the ministry we observe three things:-

1. The greatest thing in the world. "The mystery of the faith." Truth is the greatest gift of God and the choicest possession of man. The "mystery of the faith" is something to ponder and prize.
2. The highest thing in man. "A pure conscience." We may not be able to agree as to our definition of conscience, or our description of it as an element of human nature. But we are clear as to its (a) Existence, (b) Sphere, (c) Supremacy. It is the essential, final, and eternal witness to right and wrong in our life. A pure conscience, therefore, is the highest and most precious thing in life, and it means a conscience true to God's Spirit, God's Word, and God's Will.
3. The noblest thing in life. "Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience." When the conscience unites with the truth of God, and one holds the other, we reach the highest point of life and realize its noblest element. "Holding." Not merely as a record embodied in the Bible; that, certainly, but much more. Not merely as a theory expressed in a Creed; that, certainly, but much more. Above, beyond, and beneath these, it means "holding" it as an experience expressed in obedience. To "hold" is something more than to subscribe to a creed, or to accept a verbal definition. Orthodoxy apart from holiness is one of the most terrible and horrible things in life. We must "hold" the truth. Thus, and thus only, can there be sincerity.

#### VI. Proof (verse 10).

The true minister needs to be tested. He is not to be a novice, and there must be no accusation levelled against Him. "Blameless." His life must be unchallengeable. The criterion of testimony is very simple but very searching. It is the test of reality. Not brilliancy, but faithfulness; not scholarship, but spirituality; not capacity but genuineness. By all means bring out scholarship and capacity if possible, but never without the essential elements of faithfulness, spirituality, and genuineness. Someone has said that it took Moses forty years to try to be somebody, then it took him forty years more to find out that he was nobody, and then forty years more to see what God could do with a nobody.

#### VII. Reward (verse 13).

The man who fulfills the above-named requirements will not go unacknowledged, unrewarded, unblest. The "good degree" is a "good footing" towards God (Ellicott), and certitude towards man. The reference is not to office but to influence. Faithfulness gives capacity and provides opportunity for higher, fuller, and better service, and this is the reward of true ministry. Not higher office, but more and better service to glorify God.

#### Section 3. The Deacon's Attitude (Luke 12:35-38).

We can readily see the kind of minister required by the Church of England through the Scriptures chosen for the Ordination Service. The first, second, and third thing is personal fitness. Let us consider this in the light of the passage read as the Gospel for the Deacon's Ordination.

I. Requirements. 1. Readiness for Service. The loins are to be girded. In view of John 13:4 and Ephesians 6:14 we at once see what this means. There must be no hindrance. The flowing robe tended to hinder effectual service, so it was girded up and raised, leaving freedom of movement for work. The minister of Christ must be similarly "ready". There is a great possibility of "entanglements" (2 Tim. 2:4), and no man who so entangles himself can war a good warfare. There is also a distinction to be drawn between "weights" and "sins".

Weights are matters which, while not wrong or sinful per se, are nevertheless liable to hinder. Every man who is about to enter, or who has entered, the ministry, should make it a subject of special personal dealing with himself in the sight of God in regard to entanglements and weights. Are there any personal habits or tendencies which hinder the fullest possible exercise of every faculty in the service of God? 2. Reality of Character. "Your lamps burning." The figure of a light is connected with two elements in Scripture: the light of truth and the light of holiness.

And these two are to be ever burning. The oil of grace bestowed by the Holy Spirit is to be in constant use. Our souls fed and supplied by communion with God in Christ will ever be ready because real, and nothing can make up for the girt loins and the burning lamps. 3. Eagerness of Expectation. "And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord." The coming of Christ is a great reality in the New Testament. It is the goal of all things individual and corporate. The Christian man and the Christian Church are depicted as "looking for that blessed hope".

Why is this not so now? It is one of the most practical doctrines of Scripture. It is brought before us in at least forty aspects. It is referred to in at least three hundred passages. It is regarded as the great incentive to holiness and service. "Seeing then that all these things should be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?" Shall we not see that our ministerial life is dominated henceforward by the thought of eager expectation for the Coming of our Lord? 4.

Alertness of Activity. "They may open unto Him immediately." They were to be ready for their Master without any delay. What a picture of alertness. Is this so in our life? Are we thus alert and ready? Ships' companies give passengers a supply of labels, and among them is one for large packages which are "Not wanted on the voyage". Are there not many things in our life which are "Not wanted for the voyage of life," and which, if we got rid of them, would minister to alertness for Christ and His Coming? 5.

Strength of Endurance. "Blessed are those servants whom the Lord when He cometh shall find watching." The second watch was from nine to twelve, and the third from twelve to three, just that part of the night when watching is most difficult. The servants are depicted as under a genuine test, and so it is with the Christian minister. His task calls for endurance. He is always on duty, and the need of strength is constant, pressing and imperative. These are the requirements demanded of the true Deacon. Are they not enough to make us cry out, "Who is sufficient for these things?" But there is another side. God never requires without encouraging and inspiring.

## II. Rewards.

1. Blessedness. The Master realizes how splendid the service has been and acknowledges the faithfulness of His servants by pronouncing them "blessed".

2. Honour. They are to be served by Christ. What we are to God He will be to us.

There is perhaps no test of ministerial life so accurate as that of the Second Coming of Christ.

(a) It tends to fearlessness. "And now, little children, abide in Him; that, when He shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming" (1 John 2:28).

(b) It inspires to love. "We shall see Him."

"O the joy to see Thee reigning,

Thee, my own beloved Lord!

Every tongue Thy Name confessing,

Worship, honour, glory, blessing

Brought to Thee with one accord, -

Thee, my Master, and my Friend,

Vindicated and enthroned,

Unto earth's remotest end

Glorified, adored, and owned!

(c) It prompts to devotion. Loyal service ever follows the conviction that He may and will come.

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