

A Checklist For Choosing Deacons

1 Timothy 3:8-16

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Last week, in 1 Timothy 3:1-8, we saw the qualifications for the spiritual leaders of the church. They were called bishops, but we also call them overseers or elders. We call them pastors. Those qualifications were in verses 1-7, but we're going to jump right into it tonight. Verses 8-13 is the first section, we have the qualifications for the deacons; verses 14-16, we have the nature of the church. So, two things we want to look at tonight, the qualifications for the deacons and the nature of the church. Let's begin reading. Follow with me in verse 8.

Paul says, "Likewise must the deacons," that's who he is going to give the qualifications for, "be grave," or sober-minded or respectable, "not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; 9 Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. 10 And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless. 11 Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. 12 Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well." The reason (verse 13), "For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree," or rank or position, "and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus."

In the church of Jesus Christ, you find you have pastors, deacons, and the laymen or the people of the church, the saints of God. We're all the saints of God, but there's only two offices in the church. The Bible really makes it pretty simple. By the way, the Bible is to be our manual for how the church is to be structured, how the church is to function, and what the church is to do. There's a lot of popular preaching and teaching and books out today about the church and what it should be and do, but I believe it should be back, back, back to the Word of God. The Scriptures should be the manual for us when it comes to the church. When we get to the Word of God, we find only two offices, that of the elder and deacon. The elder is the man we think of so much as the pastor, and we looked at those different words. We looked at the word "elder" which speaks of his maturity. We looked at the word "bishop" which speaks of the job of overseeing. We looked at the word "pastor" which speaks of the fact that he feeds the church, which is the flock of God. He leads and protects the church, so he's a pastor and God's people are sheep.

Tonight, we come to a second office, that is, of the deacons. I want you to notice it in verse 8. "Likewise," or in the same way. Just as there are qualifications for the elders, so also or "likewise" there are qualifications for the deacons. These are spiritual and also their home life, and they are to be hardworking. I'm going to break it down for you. The word "deacons" there in verse 8 comes from a Greek word that is basically three words, diakonos. The word diakonos is translated servant sometimes, and that's what it really means. It means servant, but the word literally in its origin had the idea of a person that was so busy running here and there serving that they stirred up dust. It had the connotation of stirring up dust, so they're just kind of jamming around, going here and there, and they're busy stirring up dust. They're

“deaconing.” They are serving the Lord.

The first reference it would seem as though it's not officially stated in the Bible of deacons is Acts 6. We went through the book of Acts on Wednesday night. You remember in the sixth chapter the church was beginning to grow, that there was widows in the church and they were distributing food to help them. The Greek or hellenistic widows were getting neglected with the distribution of food, so the leaders, the elders, the pastors of the church said, “We need some men, seven of them, chosen to do this task.” They gave the qualifications, “Men that are full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom,” and they picked out seven men. These seven men in a sense became the first deacons of the church. It indicates a little bit about what's going on because the elders said, “We need these men to help serve this food because it's not right that we should,” listen carefully, “leave the Word of God to serve tables.” It is, and I believe it's true, the job of the deacons to support the elders so that they can preach the Word, pray, and focus on the ministry of the Word. The deacons can do the service—the menial tasks, the other things, the “helps,” the work, the background support, taking care of the building today. They didn't have a building in Bible days, but today taking care of the grounds and the finances and the things of the church or doing the logistics in the background—just support ministry. They said, “It's not right that we leave the Word of God to serve tables.”

One of the things that has hurt the church over the years has been elders or pastors that aren't studying, praying, and feeding the church, the household of God, God's Word but rather they're busy doing other things. I like to do other things, and it's a battle for me. I like to do construction around the church or paint or help or work on the grounds. I like to get into those things and I like those aspects, but my calling as an elder or a pastor is the Word of God and prayer so that when you come on Sundays or Wednesdays or other times throughout the week you get fed the Word of God.

When I was a young Christian involved in a church where they were under a construction project, they were building a bigger sanctuary, I would go down to help them. I would go down to mix mud, carry block, set up scaffolding, and I was just a grunt laborer, but I was just doing as unto the Lord. I wasn't getting paid. I got breakfast and sometimes lunch. I wore out tons of gloves, pants, boots, and it was very hard work, but we did it unto the Lord. I'll never forget a lesson that God gave me. The senior pastor was working right alongside me. He was a hard-working man. He had callouses on his hands, he's working, but he worked so hard and was there on the building so much that he didn't have a message to preach on Sunday. He would, week after week, come to the pulpit unprepared. The people weren't getting fed and taught, and the church starting going into decline because he had left his priority of studying and feeding the people the Word of God. Even as a young man, even before I sensed a call to the ministry, that made an impression on me that the pastor's job is not the physical building or the construction of the building, it's the construction of people's lives by the Spirit through the Word of God. Amen? That's my job, so if there's things that need to be done around here, then you need to get to it. Don't expect me to do it. I might yell at you and tell you you need to do it—I'm just kidding. My job is to study and to teach the Word of God and to oversee the ministry, so the diakonos, the deacons, were there to serve.

Remember Jesus is also an example of this. He said, "...the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." Remember in John 13, as they were in the upper room, Jesus got on the floor and began to wash their feet. He said, "If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet;" what should you do? "...ye also ought to wash one another's feet." The Bible also says who of you would be the greatest among you, let him be the servant of all, so God has called us all to have a servant's heart, to want to serve, minister, and to encourage others. I actually believe that the call to pastoral ministry or to be an elder or a spiritual leader of the church starts with just a desire to serve, just a desire to roll your sleeves up and to do whatever you can do to the glory of God.

I've had young men come to me, "I want to be a pastor." "Okay, well could you go in the bathroom and clean the toilets or wash the mirrors?" "No, no, no, you misunderstood me. I'm called to be a pastor." "Yeah, I heard you right. Get into the bathroom and clean the toilets." If you don't have a heart to serve others, then you shouldn't be in the pulpit. Many times we start where God opens the door. Then, being faithful in the little things, God will graduate us unto bigger or other things. We need to be faithful in whatever God gives us to do, and God will open up other doors of opportunity.

These are the deacons, so there are the elders, also known as bishops or pastors or overseers, and then there is now the deacons, the servants. Now, what are they to be? Notice it in verse 8. They are to be "grave." My King James translation has "grave." They don't come from the grave, they are just to be grave. What that means is connotating the idea of respectable. Respectable is a good translation or that they are sober-minded. They're not flippant. They are serious men (by the way, they are men) and are to take this role as deacons.

Secondly, they are "...not doubletongued." Isn't that interesting, so if you're going to ordain a deacon, you need to look in his mouth to see if he's got two tongues. This term "doubletongued," we would actually say two-faced—says one thing to one person, and another thing to another person. They speak out of two sides of their mouths. They say one thing here and another thing there. Nothing more important than a spiritual leader that they be consistent in their speech and not be a respecter of men or that they be tattlers or liars. I've seen pastors that have a problem with being honest with people, and it's gotten them into big trouble.

Notice the third quality, and by the way, these are qualities that all Christians should have as well. You shouldn't be double-tongued. The third quality is, "not given to much wine." Many of these are the same as last Wednesday night, and the idea is that he doesn't tarry long at the wine or doesn't drink much wine. You could render that concept self-controlled, that they practice self control. They're respectable, honest, self-controlled, and notice number four (verse 8), "not greedy of filthy lucre." We all know what that is, that's money. If the deacons are counting the offering, the last thing you want them to be is greedy, right? Those that count the offering and are accountable for taking care of those things, they need to be respectable and not given to filthy lucre. Peter, in his epistle writing to the pastors, said that you should not do it for filthy lucre's sake. It should never motivate you, in the ministry, that you're doing it for pay or for any compensation. You're doing it as unto the Lord.

Notice verse 9. I love this, "Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience." That would be the fifth quality for choosing a deacon, holding the mystery of the faith. The word "mystery" in the New Testament means something that cannot be known unless God reveals it. It's something that cannot be known apart from revelation, and it's also something that was not known in the Old Testament but now is revealed or now is explained by God. The point that I would make here is that they must be sound in belief and behavior. Notice they're, "holding the mystery of the faith," that's doctrine, that's biblical truth, "in a pure conscience," that's sound in behavior. There is nothing more important for leadership in the church than that they be sound doctrinally, knowing the Word of God. There are a lot of churches that don't have a doctrinal stance. It's just kind of a catch-all of you can believe whatever you want and so forth, but it's important that the church take a stand on doctrine. The fact that it's "the faith" is referring to the objective truth, the body of faith, that we believe in. This is what Jude was talking about when he said, "...that ye should earnestly contend for the faith," catch this, too, "which was once," and for all, so no new revelation, "delivered unto the saints."

Do you know the faith? Do you know what the Bible teaches about God? Do you know what the Bible teaches about Jesus? Do you know what the Bible teaches about the Holy Spirit? Do you know what the Bible teaches about the Bible? Do you know what the Bible teaches about salvation? Do you know what the Bible teaches about the church? Do you know what the Bible teaches about angels, fallen angels, demons, and satan? Do you know what the Bible teaches about the end of time and the coming again of Jesus Christ and the Great White Throne Judgment and all these things? If not, why not?

You know, we do have a book store here and there are doctrinal books in there where we actually feature a book called, A Survey of Bible Doctrine, by Charles C. Ryrie. That's the book that I recommend you start to get your feet wet, and you use that in that systematic study of what the Bible teaches about these important things. You use it with an open Bible and dig into God's Word. If God's going to raise you up as the leader in the church, then you better be a man or a woman that's grounded in the Word of God. So, I would say, you're sound or orthodox in belief and in your behavior. It's in that order, by the way, because what we believe determines how we behave. The church is all about behavior today, and we've abandoned doctrine. There's so little doctrinal preaching. That's one of the reasons why I'm preaching through Romans 8 right now to kind of counter balance that. What we believe determines how we behave. It's important that we have right belief ushering in right behavior. So, they are sound in the Word.

Notice sixthly (verse 10), "And let these also first be proved," or tested, "then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless." The concept here is, and remember when we read the qualities of an elder he was not to be a novice. That word means newly planted. He's not to be a new or a baby Christian. What it's saying here is that you ought to test them and look at and examine them. Some churches have a philosophy that I think is a big mistake; that is, to get people to stay in the church, you get them active in the church. I'm all for active in the church, and I think you should get active in the church and find some niche to serve in, but you first need to make sure that you're committed to the church, that you're a part of that church,

that this is your home, this is your fellowship, this is the church that you have committed yourself to be a part of and then you begin to serve. We don't just put newcomers in ministry.

I remember in years past I would get calls sometimes, "Hi. I'd like to come preach at your church." "Uh, I don't know you. You don't come here." "Well, I'm a prophet of God." "Really. Well, this is a nonprofit organization." I've had Moses, Elijah, Jeremiah, and the apostle Paul call me. It's like if we don't know you, you're not going to preach, you're not going to be a spiritual leader, you're not going to be a deacon in the church. You're not even going to be an usher here if you don't first prove yourself that your conversion is real and genuine, that you have been born again. We want everyone serving at Revival because they are strong in the Word, strong in the Lord, and they're doing it out of a pure motive; so we're watching and checking you out, and I actually check who comes on Wednesday nights, who goes to small groups, who comes to prayer meetings, who serves the Lord, who has been coming for awhile, and we kind of look at people. They do something simple, and then they grow and we get their attitude and their heart. Constantly, people just start coming to our church and immediately want to be on pastoral staff or preach on Sunday morning. It's such a dangerous thing, even any area of ministry is dangerous. I know you can swing the pendulum too far the other way and never let anyone else serve the Lord and that's a danger as well, but it does say in verse 10 that they ought to be proved. That means put them to the test to see how they do and if they're faithful.

Notice that they "...use the office of a deacon, being found blameless." That word "use" is repeated a couple of different times in this section. It doesn't say fill. You know, a lot of people like to fill an office, but they don't use the office. I've actually seen men that are serving the Lord and then you say, "You know what? We're going to make you a deacon," and then they get a deacon badge (we don't give deacon badges out, by the way) and they're shining it all the time. They're walking around, "Check out my deacon badge," and they stop deaconing! They just walk around showing off their deacon badge, so sometimes titles can ruin a person. It's better to just let them deacon—let them serve—rather than give them the title and it goes to their head. That's what Paul said, "...lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil." Notice too, in verse 10, that they "...use the office of a deacon, being found blameless." In other words, they're living lives that are above reproach. No one can bring an accusation against them.

The deacons' homes have to be in order (verse 11), "Even so must their wives be grave," the same word used of the deacons in verse 8, "not slanderers," do you know the word "devil" means slanderer? This is in the feminine. It actually means she-devil. She must not be slandering or attacking people or some translations would have gossip. It's a good idea if the wives of spiritual leaders are not gossiping. "...sober, faithful in all things." It is important that you not only test and prove them, but that you look at their marriage, their wives, their families, their homes. You maybe interview their wives and check out what kind of a way does he treat his wife and how does he treat his children or how does he run the home. It doesn't mean that your children are perfect, but it does mean that you're at least committed, trying, and making an effort to govern and oversee the home, so the importance of the pastor's wife, the importance

of the deacon's wife.

There have been many men who feel called to ministry whose ministries have been ruined because their wives aren't women of godly character. There have been many pastor's wives that have ruined churches because they have not been women who are grave, sober-minded, committed to God, and to His Word. It's so very important. They're not to be gossips. They're to be respectable, sober-minded, not intoxicated with worldly philosophies, and they're to be "faithful in all things." Then, it says, "Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife," again, the idea of married and committed to their one wife, faithful to her, "ruling their children and their own houses well." Their home is to be in order. As I said, that doesn't mean their children are perfect—they don't glow in the dark, they don't have halos—but they are committed. If they neglect their home, then they can be disqualified in their job in the church.

Last, but not least (verse 13), those who are to be deacons, or diakonos, servants, they are to be hard-working servants. It's not for the fainthearted. He says, "Here's the reason why these qualifications are important and necessary," "For they that have used," again, not just filled but actually used, "the office of a deacon well," they've done a good job, they've worked hard, actually "purchase to themselves a good degree," in my King James translation it means that they have a respectable position in the church, and they should be respected, prayed for, and appreciated in the church. There's been too many times that churches have abused or taken advantage of or not loved and supported and cared for their leaders in the church and that's a tragic thing, but these guys who do this have, "purchase to themselves a good degree," or rank or position, "and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus." That's a marvelous thing. They are to be serving, faithful, and they'll be used by God.

I think about Moses, how he was sent out to watch sheep for many years before God called him to serve the people of Israel. I think of Joshua who served Moses, and then God called him. I think of David, who was a shepherd, and God called him. I think of Jesus, who was a carpenter for 30 years before He was called into ministry; and Paul the Apostle who made tents, indicating in the Scriptures that for about 10 years of his Christian life—the first 10 years—he was just making tents in Tarsus before he was called to go into full-time ministry. The key there is they are faithful and that God will open the doors and lift them up.

Just a little footnote before we leave these deacons. Again, when you go back to Acts 6, two of the seven deacons that were chosen—one of them was Stephen and the other was Philip—Stephen became a mighty preacher and was the first Christian martyr. Philip became the evangelist that God used so mightily. Where did they get their start? Serving food to widows. They started humbly. They rolled up their sleeves, they weren't afraid to get their hands dirty and started serving these widows, and God used them in a mighty way.

In verses 14-16, we have the nature of the church, and it's a marvelous passage. Let's read it. Paul says, "These things write I unto thee," speaking to Timothy, "hoping to come unto thee shortly: 15 But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God," the church is, "the pillar and ground of

truth. 16 And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." Now in these verses, Paul opens, writing to Timothy, with giving him (and we've looked at them before in our study of 1 Timothy) kind of the background and the reason why he wrote this epistle. This is actually the key to understanding why 1 Timothy was written, so when he says, "These things," he's talking about this letter of 1 Timothy, "write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly." Timothy was in Ephesus, and Paul wanted to come to him and be with him.

Paul says, "But if I tarry long," if I can't get to you, "that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God," I want you to know how you ought to behave in the church. Mark those words in verse 15. In 1 Timothy, and I believe it carries into 2 Timothy and Titus, are instructions on how to behave in the church, how to get along in the family of God, what the leaders of the church are to be, what they are to do, how the church is to be structured, what the church's purpose is, and what it's all about. That's really the background and the insight into 1 Timothy, and I believe that it's important that the church today get back to the Bible, that we use that for our manual on church structure and church ministry.

Notice he describes the church here, and this is a marvelous description. There's three descriptions of the church if you're taking notes. The first is that it is the family or the household of God. He says, "...that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God," stop right there. That word "house" is literally household, meaning family, so you have a house, you have a family, you have a wife and kids and you're a family in a household. The imagery there is of the church as the family of God, and that we're to love one another in the family of God.

Look over quickly to 1 Timothy 5:1-2. This is just a quick example. Paul says, "Rebuke not an elder, but intreat him as a father," so how are you to treat the pastors? As fathers. "...and the younger men as brethren," you're to treat them like brothers because we're in the family of God, so you've got spiritual fathers, you've got your brothers, and then notice verse 2, "The elder women as mothers; the younger as sisters, with all purity." Isn't that great? This is how we're to relate to one another in the family of God. We're to show respect to spiritual leadership as our spiritual fathers. We're to look at the older women in the church as our mothers, the other younger men as our brethren, and the younger sisters we're to view them with all purity, that they are our sisters in Christ and that's because we are the family of God—we're the children of God, God is our Father in heaven. The church is not a building. The church is not brick and mortar, drywall, steel, asphalt, carpet or pews. The church is people, and we need to remember that. It's about the people and not about the building. We're the family of God. God is our Father.

Notice the second picture of the church, that is, that of an assembly. Paul describes it as the church of God, "which is the church of the living God," stop right there, "...the church of the living God." Here you have in your English Bible the word "church." The word "church" there is the Greek word *ekklesia*. The word literally means assembly or more appropriately the called

out assembly. In the Roman-Greco world they actually had the senate and their other bodies of politics and leaders, so they were an assembly. Whenever you had an assembly or a group of people, they would actually call it an ekklesia, a called-out group, a called-out assembly; so Christianity just picked that concept up and applied it to the church. We think of a church as a building—here's the church, you know, there's the steeple; open the doors, there ain't no people, kind of a thing. You can open the doors and the church isn't here—when the people aren't here, the church isn't here.

A couple of things, and you can do a whole study on each one of these concepts, but you need to understand the church is ekklesia. It's called out. Called out in what sense? First, you're called out of darkness, called out of the world, to become the children of God. So, we're the called of God. We're called by God. God calls us by His grace, so He calls us to not just assemble on Wednesday night or Sunday, but He calls us out of the world. The second way that God calls us is He calls us together. Some people say, "Well, I can be a Christian, and I don't have to go to church." Yeah, that may be true. You don't have to be a Christian without going to church but to be a good Christian, a healthy Christian, a strong Christian, you need church. You need the people of God. You can't do it on your own. You need fellowship, and you're to be commended. You're here on a cold, November night, you know, and you're here in church. You take the time to come to and be a part of a church, and I hope and pray that we can finish early enough tonight.

My last few Wednesday nights have been very lengthy. I told them back stage, "I'm going to try to be brief tonight." I think of the Scripture that says, "Let my people go." I'm afraid you're going to come in with placards some Wednesday night, you know, "Free the slaves" or something. The worship team will be out in just a minute to lead us in a couple of songs, but we're to be called together. Encourage others to come on Wednesday night. Encourage others to come to the small group studies. Come on Sunday. Be committed. Be faithful.

In all my years as a Christian and as a pastor, the people who flourish spiritually are people who are planted in the house of the Lord. It's a priority of their life. You don't let other things get in the way—being a part, being involved, being committed, being in fellowship. It's so very, very important. We're called together as the ekklesia, and then we're called to go out. What did Jesus say? "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." So, we're called out of the world, we're called unto one another, then we're called to go out and to preach the gospel. We meet in this building, then the church leaves and goes out into the community.

Guess what else is going to be happening to the ekklesia? We're going to be called up. Amen? "Come up hither," the book of Revelation says. We call it the rapture, the harpazo, when "the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up...to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." The church is going to be a part of that rapture. The saints that died in the Church Age will be resurrected, and the saints that are alive and remain when the Lord comes shall be translated. It will be a glorious thing! We're called out of the world, called together, called to go, and one day we'll hear His voice, "Come up," and we'll be called to meet the Lord in the air, so we're the assembly.

Notice thirdly, that we are “the pillar and ground of the truth,” and I love this imagery of this picture of the church. This is from the world of architecture—the structure, the building. We’re the pillar, the ground, the foundation of truth; and that truth, of course, centers in the Person of Jesus Christ. Where do you find truth? You find it at the church. You find it in the church. We’re the people of God. There are so many lies being promulgated in the world today. We have the truth. Amen? We need to live the truth, to proclaim the truth, to take out the truth to the world that is around us. We’re both the pillar—we support and defend the truth—and we’re the ground—we stand on the truth—those two aspects of holding the truth high, proclaiming it and being grounded, so we are orthodox in the truth of God’s Word.

Paul closes this marvelous section with what is viewed by many to be, and I think rightfully so, at least a creed if not an ancient hymn. There are some places in the New Testament, in the epistles, where you have perhaps what was actually sung by the early Christians, that it was actually something they would sing when they gathered. We find it here in verse 16, “...great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.” They had this marvelous hymn of praise or this creed that the Christians held to. Isn’t it interesting that in the end of verse 15 he just mentions the church as, “the pillar and ground of truth,” and what does he go into? This creed or hymn that he says (verse 16) is “without controversy.” In other words, there’s no question about it. This is truth, and then he breaks it down. (If you’re taking notes, write them down.)

First, there is the “mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh,” here we have the incarnation and the crucifixion of Jesus Christ—God manifested in the flesh. It didn’t just happen at Christmas, all during the earthly life of Jesus Christ He was God in the flesh. When you’re talking doctrine about Christ, the Bible teaches He was fully God and fully man in one Person—fully God, fully man, one Person, Jesus Christ; two natures, one divine and one human, but sinless. It speaks of His incarnation and His crucifixion.

Secondly, we have His resurrection. Notice it says there that He was “...justified in the Spirit, seen of angels,” this is speaking, I believe, of His resurrection from the dead. The Holy Spirit quickened His mortal body, and He came out of the grave. It could also be the fact that He ministered in the power of the Holy Spirit and performed miracles during His time upon the earth. When He rose from the dead, there were angels surrounding the tomb that Easter Sunday.

Thirdly, notice the proclamation of the gospel, “preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world.” So, we preach or proclaim the gospel or the good news. Jesus said, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel.” Lastly, (verse 16) “received up into glory.” That is His ascension and exaltation. In this creed or song that the believers sang, you have His incarnation, His crucifixion, His resurrection. You have the proclamation of the gospel, His ascension, and His exaltation. There you have it. They would sing this. They would praise the Lord, and then they would go out and proclaim Jesus Christ.

When we go out as the church into the world, we are preaching Jesus Christ, right? That He came the first time, He suffered and died, took our sins on the Cross, was buried and rose from the dead, ascended into heaven and He's exalted at the right hand of the Father, but there's one more thing left—He's coming back! Jesus Christ is coming again, and the church makes a big mistake if we stop short of that. I believe that Christ will return. He will come in power and glory and majesty, and that's the believer's hope. We talked about it Sunday morning, and we need to go out and proclaim it to others. Amen? Let's pray.