

What Sort of People Should Be Deacons?

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Preacher: Philip Wells

[0:00] We believe that the church has elders who are like shepherds and teach and oversee the church and oversee the church.

! And we looked at some questions like, how do deacons fit with elders?

Can deacons be female? Can elders be female? And just to short circuit that one, I'll tell you where our discussion came to. We said, can deacons be female?

Yes. Can elders be female? No. And we also looked at, let's just think, the last time we looked at what jobs and ministries need to be done and could be done.

That's what we looked at last time. And I thought we had a very helpful time thinking about the jobs in the church. And the question arose, is all service, does everybody who serves in any way, should they be a deacon?

[1:43] If not, where do we draw the line? And I thought it was quite helpful that as we broke up into small groups and discussed it, and I think people sort of instinctively prioritized areas and tasks.

So they're sort of grouped in various areas, which I'd love to show you, but I can't because it's disappeared. And there were several things that each of the groups came up with and said this would be a good and appropriate task for somebody to be recognized as a deacon to serve in this sort of area.

There were a couple of things that I think we omitted. I'll tell you what they are. I think one thing that we omitted was we didn't have any role for a deacon as a sort of generalist who could step in at different points as the occasion demanded.

We didn't put in the role of a deacon who might have particular responsibility for our legal responsibilities because as a charity we have certain legal responsibilities.

And the deacons take that role on as trustees of a charity. And I think none of us picked up on that. And another thing, I mean we just didn't put it in any sort of list at all.

[3:24] And another thing that we didn't pick up on was any recognition of the church serving the community in terms of good works that are done amongst the community.

So we didn't have anything about ministry to homeless and we didn't have anything about helping in the community. Of course it's not only homeless people that we can do good to.

In the general sense of the community, of the residents, of the things that go on in our community.

So those are three things that we didn't put on our list that might be well worth thinking about.

I'm not saying that they necessarily ought to be deacons, but I'm saying it's things that happen in the church that we didn't think of last time. So I'll write those down.

So there was a general list. General list. Anything to do with trustee responsibilities.

[4:34] Anything to do with community. And... And... And... There could be a wider aspect of that as well. When something in the world happens, like an earthquake or tragedy, the church may feel the way we should have held.

I mean, it's not true for some time, it's true to speak for that. You've got the mic. You've got the mic. Do you want to get deep? Yeah. The mic. I think it's for the tape.

Oh, yes, it's for the tape. Yeah. Say it again for the tape, Jack. There's a wider aspect to community.

There's the immediate community that we live in, the locality, and perhaps our country as well. But there's also the world, when disasters strike, like earthquakes or famines, and some churches arrange for groups of people to go out to help, or to help build an orphanage, or lots of different things could be involved.

Great. Thank you very much. That was on the list last time.

[6:12] Definitely. Yeah. Yeah. We clocked. That was, I think we all clocked that, ministry to children. Yes. Well, I'm not, we're not making such a decision.

We're just saying what jobs need to be done, and we can bring this sort of, we get towards deciding things on October the 24th. So, I do apologise, but that's sort of relating to this question.

And we're not really thinking about elders at the moment, so I'm leaving that other question unaddressed. And I'd like to say something about how do deacons fit with elders.

And you could do it two ways. You could say, here's all the things in the church.

And you could say, that the deacons are responsible for those things. And the elders are responsible for those things. But I think, so that's a sort of vertical division.

[7:25] I think it's probably better to do it this way, and say, the elders have the oversight over everything, in fact. And there are some things, some areas, that the oversight is exercised by delegating to deacons.

So, on that issue of, so we say, children's ministry, if you had a deacon, or indeed a deaconess, who was responsible for, you know, Sunday club and things like that, so let's say children's ministry, they wouldn't be autonomous, they wouldn't be just responsible to themselves, as in this way of looking at it.

So I think that's not the right way to do it. But they would have a responsibility, which goes back to the elders, and to work in partnership, to say, you know, for example, here's some Sunday school material, we think is going to be good, could one of the elders look at it, and check it over, and make sure that it's sound, and helpful, and if the elders are in agreement with that, then we'll go ahead and order it.

So there's a sort of coordination, because this is, we are saying, in that case, that here's a deacon, who has a responsibility for things, which includes word ministry, and it is, but it does relate back to, the elders in that sense.

Does that make sense? So you could use that model, for other ministries, I mean, for example, let's suppose they had a deacon, S, for women's ministry.

[9:13] Let's suppose, I'm just, so again, you would say, okay, that's fine, because we wouldn't expect, one of the elders to be, themselves, a woman, because we just said they can't, but we could have, a woman's ministry, headed up by, a lady, and then there would be a, a link, to the elders, in terms, because there's a, a word ministry aspect to it.

Okay, everybody reasonably happy with that? Right, so let's see what else there was. So this one here, what people are available to serve?

Okay, if you're a church member, make sure you have one of these, if you're just, if you're interested in being a church member, or whatever, you might have to share, because I haven't done enough, for every single person, so you can have one between two, you can have one, because you're sitting on your own, could you pass them, share them, and pass them around please?

So the first thing you do, is spot the, deliberate mistake, on the list. And incidentally, I never got my pens back last time, Julius said, make sure he gets his pens back, but I never did, so.

Okay, can I say, I do not want you, to give me this piece of paper back, and we are not going to, fill in this piece of paper, at this moment.

[10:57] Okay, so I didn't need, you don't need a pen, don't worry about that. But you do need, to think and pray. And I think Mark got missed out. Did you get missed out? And can I have one please?

Have we got enough? There's a spare, can we do, can we do spot the deliberate, so look down the list.

So if you're a church member, you ought to know, all these people by name. And if you are, interested in, belonging to the church, you should, get to know, these people by name, because these are, this is the church.

So can you, so I should say, that I did this list, some time ago. Right, okay, so, I did this list, some time ago, and Maureen is indignant, and so is Ruth, actually.

Am I right? Yes, you see, I said I did it, some time ago. So Sylvia, is already promoted. Catherine, number 19, is in Peru.

[12:20] David and Wendy, are on there, but Ruth isn't, and Maureen isn't. Am I right? Is there any other, deliberate mistakes, that I hadn't noticed? Really?

Yeah, Stefano and Katia. Yeah. Yeah. Yes, well, exactly, everybody's got an up-to-date one. So my point is, simply, that in our grand thinking about deacons, and all the qualifications, that we think they need to have, and everything, it has got to boil down, to people on this list. Okay, so Superman, is not on the list, nor Spider-Man, nor any other, superheroed, person, but just us.

Now, you did say, I put, 7B, I've put, John in there, so I must have, been having faith, all those, months ago, when I did this list. But, um, so have that, have that list in one hand, and turn to, 1 Timothy, 1 Timothy, chapter 3.

[13:53] Have I put, have I not put you on as well? Oh, okay, Corinne. I don't know how I managed, I don't know what list I must have got this off, but it must have been a long time ago, mustn't it?

So, if you're a church member, you were given a, you were given an up-to-date list, so perhaps you should forget this one, I've just handed out, but you were given an up-to-date list this morning. So, 1 Timothy, chapter 3, verse 8. So, this is what it says, deacons, likewise, like elders, in fact, are to be worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, not pursuing dishonest game. They must hold the mystery of the faith, the deep truths of the faith, with a clear conscience. I think the emphasis is on the clear conscience, that they're not hypocrites. They genuinely hold the truths of the faith.

They must first be tested, then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons. In the same way, their wives, or perhaps the women deacons, are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers, but temperate, and sort of self-controlled, sober-minded, and trustworthy in everything.

[15:32] And I take this to be, if they are married, a deacon must be the husband of but one wife, must manage his children and his household well.

Those who have served well, gain an excellent standing, and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus. So the excellent standing, some gain to them, perhaps of spiritual growth, and assurance, or something like that.

But these are the qualities, that we're to look for. And I'm not going to sort of go down the list, and give people marks out of ten on that.

But I think we do need to have this in our minds, that we're looking for quality of people in this sense. So it's not saying they're Superman, or Superwoman, but really just saying that they're Christians, in a reasonably mature, and reasonably developed way.

So in other words, if somebody still has a real problem with alcohol, they're not the person to be a deacon. That's what it says, isn't it?

[16:54] They're to be, and if they're to be people who are known in the community, for cheating, and letting people down, then they're not to be deacons.

Because it says they're to be worthy of respect. So it's interesting, isn't it, that a criterion for a deacon, is what do other people think of you? What do people at work think of you?

What do people in your class think of you? And that reputation thing is important. not pursuing dishonest gain, having a clear conscience.

Verse 10, they must first be tested. So some sense of checking out that a person doesn't just talk the talk, that walks the walk, but walks the walk, and so on.

So it's important just to remind ourselves of that, but I don't really intend to take it any further unless anybody wants to ask any questions about that. So I don't think this passage is talking about super-Christian.

[18:06] I think it's just talking about a Christian who's reasonably developed and consistent.

Does that make sense? Right. I've come to the end of the things that I wanted to say, not least because some of them have disappeared, but I've come to the end of the things I wanted to say.

Is there any questions that anybody would like to raise, or comment they would like to make? Because I think the next thing we should do is pray, and then we could indeed sing, and then we could stop.

Has anybody got any questions they would like to raise, or observations to make? I think you mentioned testing.

Well, yeah, testing. I think it could mean a number of things.

[19:24] I think the sort of things that would be included is if somebody is given a portion of such a job, and they can see what it's like, and it can be seen whether they can actually manage to do that.

It might well be that somebody tries something and then says, actually, this is not for me. I can't really, you know, now I can see what it's really involved. This is not for me.

So that might be such an outcome. I think that it's talking about seeing people take responsibilities of a lesser degree, and to be proven that they can do those things.

So I think it's saying it's not wise to put somebody into a position of responsibility unless you've got something in their CV which says, well, they did do this, and they did do that, and they've managed that.

That's as far as I would go on that, or as far as I can think at the moment. I had a thought.

[20:51] I was thinking during the week, as I do, about these matters, and I thought, well, there's a lot of jobs in the world, and people who have no faith at all do perfectly well in taking on voluntary work outside of the work, the kind of paid work arena, and they managed to do that work perfectly well and experience success in that.

And I thought, well, what's all the fuss then about this Deacon stuff because we could just get Bob from down the road to do some of it if he wanted to do it.

So I thought the difference must be something to do with faith, but I haven't really fathomed that, but that was just my thought. Thank you.

It is an interesting thought because the Bible is clear about the people who do service in this sense so they must be believers, and they must believe in and live in a way that's consistent with that.

And then the Act 6, about the distribution of food between the Hebrew widows, the Greek-speaking widows, it says, look for people who are, let's just quote it, known to be full of the spirit and wisdom.

[22:26] And you think, well, they don't really need that, do they? All they need is to be able to count and probably have a small vehicle. They could go down to Sainsbury's and bring the sandwiches back.

But in fact, it says, it's saying, in the assembly, even to do relatively, you know, it's relatively, I don't know whether, would it be fair to say it was an undemanding thing?

Maybe it was demanding in a way we don't quite realise. But it does require spiritual, spirituality. So, I mean, things like, often things need to be done with sensitivity.

So, in a, in a work capacity, if you're not up to the job, you just get fired. And it might get fired in a very insensitive way. But if there's somebody who, let's say, I'm just plucking things out of the air, wants to teach Sunday school, isn't very good at it, then somebody's got to say that to them in a, in a way which doesn't make them stumble.

So, sensitivity, spirituality, wisdom, is, is needed. Now, I'm sure there are things like, you know, when this plastering was done up here, we didn't ask that the plasterer should sign a doctrinal basis or anything because he just, he just did it and that's fine.

[24:04] I think he did. Oh, well, it's all falling off. So, there are some things that we would say, well, you don't have to be a deacon to do that, you don't even have to be a believer to do that.

But these things that are sort of close to the heart of the running of the, of the Christian church needs faith and spirituality. Thank you for the question.

The sheet that's been handed out with the two columns that we could think about people against character eligibility and service gifts. Yes. The only other one, I wonder, what you think is, sometimes people who have good character and can do certain service, they're actually quite bound up with other responsibilities, aren't they?

Yeah. And sometimes, although they might fit very well ticking boxes on those first two, for another reason, it might not be the right time just because they're particularly overwhelmed or, yeah.

That's a very helpful comment. Thank you, David. Yes. In a sense, I suppose what it's saying is that they have the gift in terms of something that's permanently built into them, but they don't have the gift in terms of their time and providential situation.

[25:30] So, I think that's a helpful comment. Yes, we've got to take all the things into account. And I think I'm encouraged to say that when we were discussing with groups last time, I think there was a sense we were taking things into account like that.

You're going to get a microphone now. I just wondered if you discussed about how people are nominated.

No, we haven't done anything about the mechanism of it, the mechanics of it. It, in Acts 6, it does, it is not meant to be something that, in Acts 6, the apostles didn't do the choosing and say, this is our decision, submit to it.

They said to the congregation, these are the criteria, these are the sort of people we're looking for, you go and choose them. And it doesn't say how they did it.

And I think we want to try and retain that sense that it isn't just the elders in a darkened room, not that we do meet in a darkened room, sort of stitching it all up, but rather that the whole congregation is involved, hence us taking quite a lot of time to talk this through so that everybody says, that's what I think, that's what, that's, we're agreed on this together.

[27:11] So I think, I think Ben, you were saying that in, in the sort of church that Anya would be aware of, it wouldn't happen like that. No, the pastor would be able to do who he selects and can't live it.

Yeah. Okay. Okay. Well, we're doing it the opposite. If anything, we're sort of veering to the opposite extreme, saying we're not going ahead until we've discussed everything. Thank you.