

Jesus and his deacons

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[0 : 0 0] Back to basics, what is the church and where do we each stand regarding the church?! And we looked at what is the church, what do we mean by that? And we said it's a community! of sinners who've repented, who have faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ. They've shown it publicly by being baptized. They have a new life through the power of the Holy Spirit, and they form a new community. This church is precious to Jesus Christ. He cares for the church. He is in union with the church, and actually the union part is the deep underlying truth from which everything else springs. We looked at the qualities of the church, and we could have picked a number of them, but I picked love as being essential to the nature of the church and sweet order. And last week we looked at the foundation principle of servanthood, and I think this too is a deep principle of the way churches work. It is the secret of greatness for Christians, and it is the secret of the way churches function.

And I pointed out, and I think I'm going to stand by this, that there is a cost, and that is death of self. And I don't think we can get past that. Can you drink the cup I drink? Can you be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with? And they said yes. Are we prepared to die to self? And so I clicked too much there. And it's all powered by the beautiful example of the Lord Jesus, who being in the very nature God, did not count equality with God something to be grasped, but humbled himself, and made himself sort of a nobody, and took upon him the very nature of a servant, and became obedient to death, even death upon a cross. So that's what we were looking at last time, and we saw that the churches of Jesus Christ are small versions of his great church. They're communities, so they're one another part of being a church. You can't get away from that. If you're a Christian, you're part of God's church, and that commits you to one another relationships with other Christians in churches.

And when I mention the sweet order, that's part what I'm going to be picking on, the fact that there is structure to churches, to church communities, not just kind of free-floating. There is structure, not a lot of structure, but there is structure. And in due course, God willing, we'll look at the way that unity and diversity work within the church in the matter of gifts in the body. But today, I'm going to be looking at one of the two sort of named official positions that structures the church.

church. So we're not Anglicans. We don't believe you have deacons, archdeacons, bishops, archbishops, presbyters, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. They're not in the Bible. In the Bible, it's much simpler than that. In the Bible, there are two offices, elders, overseers, pastors, and deacons. Of course, there's apostles as well, but I'm talking about in the ongoing church now.

These are gifts of Jesus Christ to his church, elders and deacons. And I'm saying that for us, as we go forward in our life as a church, I believe that our next step together is to recognize those gifts, assuming that God has given us such gifts, which I believe he has.

[3 : 3 5] We've been through a year of testing. We've been through a year of things that we can't do. We've been through a year of real pressure, emotionally, mentally, you name it. But we want to be coming out of that. We want to be building, and we want to be looking for what we can do and how we can go forward. So my methodology is I'm going to look at scripture. So I know one or two people have said, oh, I think so-and-so would be good as a deacon. So I've got a deaf ear to that until we've looked at what scripture says. So that's the right way to do it. What does scripture say would make a good deacon? And so I'm believing in the sufficiency of scripture. It's a sort of fundamental Protestant principle that the Bible is clear, and it has enough in it to make sure that we can run churches.

It tells us everything we need to know for the saving of the lost and the sanctification of his people. The scripture is there so that man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. So everything we absolutely need is there. The key points and the key principles. Now, it doesn't tell us, there's lots of things the Bible doesn't tell us. It doesn't tell us how to play chess.

But that is not a key to salvation. And you can run a church whether or not you can play chess. And it doesn't tell us how to write a constitution. And we've, in previous years, gone through a lot of care about writing a constitution. But it has given us some principles. It talks about being honest. It talks about doing things decently in order. And with those principles, we can engage with the wisdom of this temporary world, which says how you have to write a constitution. So we're sitting in that sort of place with the sufficiency of scripture, but obviously armed with that and through the spectacles of scripture, we can play chess and we can write constitutions. And my understanding of the way scripture works in these matters is it gives us principles. It'll give us some things you say absolutely you must do, some things absolutely you mustn't do. So there are some, I can't think of the word, precepts. There's some things that it says absolutely you mustn't do this and absolutely you should do that. But it also gives us general principles, which we have to weigh up with wisdom. [6:03] And in my understanding of it, if you've got those principles in place and if you've got the precepts, you're definitely not doing what you're supposed not to do, you're definitely doing what you should be doing, there's a whole lot of flexibility. So the way we do deacons here isn't certainly not the same as the way they do deacons at whatever it's called. Let me just think, Christchurch, Haywood's Heath. So over the years, I've spent a while sort of picking their brains.

They do it differently, but we can do it differently as well. So the sufficiency of Scripture, form and freedom, I think gives us the basic form and then within that there is freedom as we shall see. Principles and flexibility within those principles. So we're going to do a study this morning, so I'm not going to apologize. You have to use your brain.

Please, you know, wind it up and get it going. And I'm going to look at words and, you know, you just have to go along with that. It is going to be a study. And first of all, I'm going to look at the words. You have to bear with me in this if you're not very interested. I love words, but if you're not very interested in words, you just have to make the best of this you can. Words for servant and slave and deacon and things like that. Then we're going to look at the Acts 6 passage that Christopher read to us and get what we can from that, which I think is principle of differentiated ministry. Then we're going to look at the 1 Timothy 3 passage, which I would say is the minimum qualities for a deacon. I say minimum because it's not saying everybody who fulfills these qualities ought to be a deacon. It's not saying everybody who fulfills these qualities ought to be a deacon. But it is saying if they don't fulfill those qualities, they should never be a deacon. Minimum. If they don't fulfill those qualities, they should never be a deacon. Get that point? And then we'll continue that in discussion this evening and we can clarify it and just talk about the practicalities of how we've done things and how we're planning to go forward and what to look for. And I hope we can have a few prayers before we go home this evening.

Okay. With me so far? Yep. Good. Look at some words. God has used the Bible, which is written in a certain cultural context. It is in a context, the Old Testament, where people had servants, where there were masters and servants, where there were mistresses who had handmaids. Hands up anybody here who's got a handmaid that they have at home who helps them put on their gown and do their makeup.

Estelle's being nudged. We don't live in that context in the Old Testament, nor in, and similarly in the New Testament, that was the context, and God has chosen words from that context. We don't, most of us don't live like that.

[9:17] Today in the UK, the nearest we get is employer-employee. That's the nearest we get to that. Or, if you go back, I don't know, a hundred years and go to Downton Abbey, and you did have that sort of thing. You had servants from whom you expected loyalty and faithfulness, and who came under the protection of the great house. So there's Lord Grantham from Downton Abbey, and there's Mr. Carson and...

She became Mrs. Carson. It was Mrs. Hughes, wasn't it? But in case you're not familiar with Downton Abbey, he's the Lord who owns the big house. Oh dear, it doesn't show up very well, does it?

Any chance of killing those lights a bit? Mr. Carson is the butler, and he feels a great loyalty to Lord Grantham, and Lord Grantham feels a great loyalty to him. He is totally in service to Lord Grantham, but he wants to be, he's pleased to be, he's in a sense proud to serve, and I think we perhaps need to get that thought when we're thinking about serving and service. It's an honour for Mr. Carson to serve Lord Grantham, and Lord Grantham feels a great protection and loyalty towards his servant. So I want to say that service and authority structures, although they can be

abused, there is an inherent goodness in authority structures.

The Trinity contains an authority structure. The son is delighted to do whatever the father asks him to do, and the father loves his son and shows him everything he does. It is not an abusive relationship, so we mustn't think that anything to do with authority is in essence evil.

There is rightly done, there is a sweet order to it, and you find it in the Trinity, and we can find it in some of these human relationships. So God is using words from this context. So the word for a servant in the Old Testament, or one of the words, is Ebed, and we knew somebody whose name was Abed. You might know, and if you've got people from that sort of culture, you might know people whose name is Ebed or Abed, and there are Bible names Abed-ed-dom, which means servant. So when Abraham wanted a wife for his son, he sent his servant. So just notice, you remember the story, don't you? The servant went off and found a wife for Isaac near the well. He was given an enormous amount of delegated power.

[12 : 35] So being a servant isn't necessarily an oppressive thing, and it isn't necessarily something... No, let's put that the other way. A servant can have an awful lot of authority. It can involve great trust and responsibility. When God speaks about Abraham, he says, Abraham was my servant.

For the sake of Abraham, my servant. And it just reminds us that there is an honor in being a servant. If the Lord says of us, Rachel, my servant, or Roger, my servant, he's speaking about something that's an honor.

And he speaks about Abraham that way. Who is Abraham? He's my servant. And of course, depending on whom you serve, this is an enormous honor, or this can be an enormous honor. That's why I started with Psalm 1, 2, 3, which exactly puts us in the place of being the Lord's servants. Our eyes look to you. As a servant looks to his master, as a handmaid looks to her mistress's hand, so our eyes are upon you.

In this sense, it's an honor for us to be servants of God. And one of the hymns said, make you his service, your delight, your wants shall be his care. It's a wonderful thing to say to the Lord, I want to serve you. I want to serve you with everything I've got. It's my delight to do what pleases you. It's not a grind. It's not something I want to break free from. It's my delight to serve you. And when we're in our right minds, that's what Christians say, isn't it? Isn't it? Isn't that what we would say? We want to serve the Lord and to please him. In the New Testament, so we've got a number of words here. Doulos, we looked at the other day, which is servant, can be translated slave.

And then this, I'm not quite sure I'll pronounce this. I'm going to say bes, ped, which means it's related to the word P-A-I-D, ped, for which we get pedagogy, pediatrics. And pedagogy and pediatrics mean, what does the ped mean in that? Child. So this is related to that. I don't think it's exactly the same word, but we might say boy. In a South African context, that would be an offensive way of referring to a person of color. I'm just trying to phrase this very, very carefully. It would imply sort of a demeaning relationship.

[15 : 34] You're getting me on this. I think in an American context, if you said boy to a person of color, a male person of color, it would be offensive because you're saying slave or subservient. But anyway, in the New Testament, that's one of the words for servant. It's not used offensively. It's just, you know, that's the word that's used. So in Matthew chapter 8 verse 6, the centurion said, Lord, my servant is suffering, my Bess, my P-A-I-S. He's not using it offensively. He's saying, I care about this servant and I call him my boy, my lad, one of my lads, one of my chaps. He's at home. He's ill. And it worries me. Can you do something about it? And the Lord says, I will heal him. And the centurion says, I myself am a man under authority. I say, go. And this one goes. I say, come. And this one comes. I say to my servant, do this. And he does it. And there the word is do loss. So we've got this word for boy and we've got this word for slave. And this would have been the same sort of territory. And when the voice comes from heaven about Jesus, here is my servant whom I uphold. It's this word boy. Here is my boy whom I uphold. Here is my lad, the lad who does what I ask him to do. And in when they pray about the persecution in Acts, I always got puzzled because in the authorised version it says, they have conspired against your holy child Jesus. Child, that's a funny translation in there. But it's that word boy, your servant. So it's a word, another word for servant. And here are servants who are given various talents and responsibilities.

That's, you know, the one about giving servants. They're called the do loss. And it says, when it refers to Jesus, he took upon himself the very nature of a do loss, a servant.

So we've got those words. And then I'm now gradually coming to this word that we're interested in, diakonos. Not the same as do loss, but related to it. Diakonos is a waiter or a servant. And you get a word. So that's a noun. This person is a diakonos. You get a verb, to deacon or to serve. And you get a noun, diakonia, the service that is rendered. So the person who does it, the thing that they do, and the result of it, all related words. And I think that the emphasis on this is a supply of goods and services to the benefit of others. So Mr. Carson is in a sense working as a deacon. He supplies, supplies, and he benefits, and he works for that. And in the New Testament, I think the color of the word is not so much to do with authority as benefit. If you're doing, if you're deaconing, you benefit other people. So in John chapter 2, I don't know why I put two extra numbers there, Mary says to the servants. You remember which is the turning water into wine? She says to the servants, do whatever he tells you. And that word is diakonos, to the waiters or the people who are providing the service or the caterers. She uses diakonos there. In Acts 11.29, the disciples, each according to their ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea, sending it via Barnabas and Saul, and the word we translate help is diakonia, service, practical service. They sent money to help the starving believers in Judea. And the diakonia, in this case, was money, the service that they sent. So diakonia can mean ministry. Diakonos can mean minister, sometimes translated minister. And one time Jesus is said to be a deacon. He is diakonos to the circumcision to confirm the promises so that the Gentiles may glorify God in Romans 15 verse 8. So most of the time Jesus is said to be either the boy, the servant, or the doulos, the servant, and one time he's the deacon servant. But we're all in the same sort of area.

[20:19] So I just tried very quickly to give you a feel for the different words because they're going to come up now. So let's turn to Acts chapter 6 and going to go through Acts chapter 6 verses 1 to 7 with the choosing of the seven in my Bible. We might find it says the appointing of the first deacons in your Bible or something like that. So very quickly, but I don't want to do it properly, but I don't want to burden you with it. Here we are in the early life of the New Testament church and a problem arises, a specific internal problem. They had enough external problems, but the specific internal problem about food distribution. In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. And the word for distribution there is diakonia, the daily deaconing, serving of food. So there's the pizza that they were going to have and the question was how you cut it up to make sure that the Hebraic widows have enough and the Greek-speaking widows have enough and there was a problem about it. And the apostles, so the twelve gathered all the disciples together and said it would not be right for us to neglect the, there's no word there in the proper translation, to neglect the Word of God in order to wait on tables. So the word, have you got something like that, to wait on tables in your Bible? So the word wait is diakonia, to deacon tables. So they say that we've got various things to do, we're not going to leave the Word of God to deacon tables, to become waiters of tables.

In other words, they say there's different things needed doing, we can't do them, we can't do both of them. We need to be doing that task and other people need to be doing that task. And in particular, the apostles are saying there is the Word of God and prayer which mustn't be distracted or squeezed out by some very practical matters about cutting up pizza. So then they say to the congregation, brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom.

So he says, this is another looking word, you look and look out among you the seven men who are, I'll come to that in a moment, but he turns it back on the congregation. He doesn't say, leave that to us, we'll sort this out, we'll put an advert in evangelicals now or something like that.

It says, you look and see from within you who could do this. And notice that although it's only dividing up a pizza and handing it out to the right people, there are spiritual qualifications required. Verse 3, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. And I find that quite striking. You know, it's a very practical task. And you'd expect him to say, just choose somebody who's good at spreadsheets and who's got a car and can count. But he says, no, this needs to be done by spiritually minded people. Choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. So not just catering skills, not just goods for the spreadsheet, but something deeper. And then they say, we will place them. The translation says, we will turn the responsibility over to them. In the original it says, we will place them over this need.

[24 : 29] So the apostles are not independent of this. They don't just say, go and do it. We're not that bothered. They say, we will bless this. We will delegate this authority. So it's not, they're not totally independent of the apostles, but they are given responsibility to look after it. And it's, we will place them over this need. And meanwhile, it says, we will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word. So we'll be devoted to prayer and the word for deacon again, we will be deaconing the word. So I'm sorry to have to be pointing out, but there's something going on under the translation about deaconing. There's lots of deaconing going on. There's deaconing the word and there's deaconing tables. So those two sort of divisions, the deaconing of the word, which is over here, and the deaconing of tables, which is over here. And I just stop and say, apparently, even the miracle working apostles couldn't do both tables and word and prayer. I'll just stop and say that the New Testament has got some remarkable miracles in it, which I presume to be the high water mark of miracles, got some remarkable miracles in it. But one miracle that isn't there is these guys, they say, we can't, you know, even if we pray about it. That's not the sort of miracle that God does to enable us to do all these things, because we can't. We'll do this bit, you do that bit. And if there's a miracle in there, it's God showing you who these people are that can step up and do this practical need.

Okay, does that make sense? And as we follow it through, everybody thought this was a good idea. And that's nice, isn't it, when the whole church says, yeah, there's some wisdom in this. This is from the Lord. The proposal pleased the whole group, and then there's a list of people that they chose. They presented these men to the apostles who prayed and laid their hands on them. So, there was something good about this. Everybody said, yeah, that's good, we've achieved something. We didn't achieve it in the prayer meeting, we achieved it in the business meeting. That was a good, that was a good members meeting. We ended up with a good result. We thanked the Lord for it. And the apostles placed their hands on these people, and the apostles give them backing and blessing. And what have I put? Prayer. Yeah, and they prayed. So, this whole thing is covered in prayer, but it isn't just done by prayer. It's done by some congregational activity, some thinking, some delegating, some processes.

[27 : 26] And we notice at the end of that, verse 7, so the word of God spread. And that's lovely, isn't it? They got their act together as a church in this very practical way, and so the word of God spread.

And I think that would be a great thing if we could come back in a couple of months and say, we've appointed deacons, they're bedded in, this is good, and we can now see the gospel progressing. That would be great, wouldn't it? Before I go on, if you've been thinking carefully, you might say, well, hold on a minute. I'm not quite convinced about this, because you're telling me this is about deacons, but you just told me they're all deacons. The apostles are deaconing the word, and these seven are deaconing the tables. So, they're all deacons, aren't they?

And I say, well, yeah, they're all doing ministry, but I think it is valid to say there's a differentiation between one sort of ministry and another. And I would say you get the same differentiation in 1 Peter chapter 4 with a classic little passage which says, the end of all things is near, therefore be clear-minded and self-controlled so that you can pray.

Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over to a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very word of God.

[29 : 13] If anyone serves, he should do it in the strength that God supplies, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. And he has that same differentiation. If you're speaking, speak as one speaking the words of God. If you're serving, serve with the strength that God supplies.

And there's sort of two areas that are not the same, and even the apostles couldn't do both of them. Let's put it that way. And then I stopped to say, well, actually, that's not a hard and fast rule, because the apostle Paul did break off his evangelism to take the gift over to Jerusalem.

So even this isn't a hard and fast rule. By and large, Paul did ministry of the word and prayer, but he did do some deaconing as well. So another objection in Acts chapter 6. Well, you're telling me they're deacons, but actually in the next chapters they end up being preachers. And I say, yep, so what? I mean, that's great, isn't it? They started off with one responsibility, and they moved on to something else. You know, why not? And then you're going to say, well, there were seven of them.

Have we got to have seven deacons? And I say, I think that is a specific. I don't think it's saying you've always got to have seven. I think it just happened to be seven. And you're going to say, here, they're men. Deacons always got to be men. And I'm going to say, no, I don't think deacons have always got to be men. This was a specific to this instance. But principles are not quite the same as specifics.

And the principles that I think we can draw is that differentiation. People can't conveniently and normally commit themselves to ministry of the word and prayer and slicing up pizzas as well. [31 : 08] I think there's a principle here of congregational involvement. You look and see who God has provided. And I think there's a principle of spiritual qualifications. I mean, it's a matter of wisdom here, isn't there? But he doesn't just say, make sure they're good with a spreadsheet. He says, these people need to be full of the spirit and wisdom. So having spiritually minded people in positions of responsibility is important. And I think here's another principle that they're meeting a specific practical need. Our practical needs aren't the same, but we have specific practical needs. Okay. Now then, let's go now to 1 Timothy chapter 3. And while you're turning to 1 Timothy chapter 3, I just observe that there are deacons of the church, but it never says anybody is a doulos of the church.

And I just noticed that. It never says there's an official position as being a doulos of the church. We're doulos of God. We're servants of God. And that's our prime doulos. We're doulos relationship, but we can have deacons and service within the church.

There's a lot about diakonia. Paul says, I'm a minister. I'm a minister. I'm a deacon of the new covenant. And he talks about the diakonia, the ministry that brought death and the ministry of the spirit. So I'm coming on now to deacons of the church, specifically mentioned as deacons. So Philippians 1 verse 1, where the boys and girls helped. So the saints at Christ Jesus in Philippi, overseers and deacons. So there was, it seems to me, clear that there was a recognized group of people who were the overseers and a recognized group of people in the church who were the deacons.

[33 : 21] And these are specific people who, I think if you're going to call them deacons, it must be because they are prime examples of what it is to serve. They're sort of servant-hearted. And you would say, if you want to know what being a servant is like, look at such and such a person. The way they are, that's service. That's why we call them a deacon. They lead in service. So I don't think it means they do absolutely everything themselves, but they're leading in the matter of service.

And they function as deacons, actually do something. They produce an end result, whether it's slicing up pizza or whatever it is. So these, there are a specific group of people named deacons. And there's one other specific person named as a deacon who's a lady. And this is in Romans 16 verse 1, I commend to you our servant Phoebe, a deacon, servant of the church in Kentria.

It's just one fragment of something that Paul is saying, something he's not really teaching about deacons. But he mentions this lady. And I think the fact that he calls her a deacon of the church is significant. That's how he refers to her. She is a deacon of the church. She leads in this matter of service. She's recognized as this. That's what they call her. And that's what the apostle Paul calls her. Okay. So let's come to 1 Timothy chapter 3. And I'll pause to draw breath.

Okay. You still with me? Yep. Okay. So we're looking at 1 Timothy chapter 3 from verse 8. And I noticed the word likewise. And the likewise means that the... He's referring back to what he said about the elders. So really, I should have done that bit first, but I haven't. But we notice that there is a likewise, meaning that deacons are not the same as elders, but they're not a million miles away from being elders. So there's likewise, deacons likewise. And let's look at the words that it says here. Deacons likewise are to be... Now my translation says men worthy of respect. Hands up if you've got men in there. It's just me. Okay. Let me tell you that the word men has been put in by the translator.

[36 : 14] It doesn't say men. It just says to be worthy of respect. Deacons likewise are to be worthy of respect. I'm not very familiar with this word. It's used a number of times in the pastoral epistles. It's saying worthy of respect. Well, worthy of respect is the translation here. And I think he's talking about a quality of character. The best I could get at it, and you might be able to improve on this, is that you would say about this person, if I had children, I would like my children to grow up like him or her. I think you'd be saying that would be worthy of respect. Look, little Eustace, see the way that Rod Thomas behaves. When you grow up, I'd like you to be like him. Worthy of respect. Yes?

Or put it another way and say, if only everyone in the church behaved like that person, it would be a fantastic church. See that again? So you could say, look at the way so and so. Just watch what that person behaves. Just see how, if everybody in the church was like that, it would be brilliant. That's quite a testing thought, isn't it? Or you could put it another way. These are spiritually serious people, perhaps using the idea of seriousness. Okay, in our modern culture, everybody has to look happy and carefree. Thank you. I think that New Testament looks at it a little bit differently and says, we're looking for spiritually serious people, people who mean business with the Lord. You notice this in photographs, actually. In all the photographs, I don't mean this as a criticism, it's simply an observation. If you look at all the photographs in the Sussex Gospel Partnership, pictures of the ministers, they all are going, like that. I'm not sure whether my photograph might be doing that as well. If you look back in the front of the old theological books, like Benjamin Breckenbridge Warfield in his books, the picture of Benjamin Warfield looked like this. Or, so I suppose in those days, seriousness was valued. I mean, that's just a quibble, isn't it? Looking at spiritually serious people, rule of thumb, rule of thumb, it's just a rule of thumb. Can you rely on them to be at the prayer meeting? A mark of a spiritually serious person? So, I was going on to, worthy of respect, sincere. Have I messed this up? I think I probably have. [39 : 15] I think I've now gone on to, no, no, no, I have. Not double-tongued. Just bear with me a second. I think where it says sincere, I looked it up and it says not double-tongued. And there's a quality here to do with speech. To do with speech. And then it says not, let me just try and think what it said.

I think it was not pursuing wine. You might think these are all rather far-fetched. In the churches in Sri Lanka that I've met, they say, you know, we had a real problem with Deacon so-and-so because he came to the church meeting drunk. And you think, oh, that wouldn't happen. Or we had a problem with Deacon so-and-so.

He tried to swindle the pastor out of the land that the church was on. We think this is not realistic, but it is realistic. So, here it says not given to much wine. In other words, not habitually solving problems by turning to alcohol, or I guess turning to anything else illegitimate to solve our problems with. And then it says not pursuing dishonest gain. Not a shameful gain person. Not somebody who is after money. And again, in some of those contexts, that is what people are after, money. And here it says we want people who are totally, you know, money doesn't motivate them. They're not attracted by making money. And then it says they must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. And yeah, I find this a bit difficult to enlarge on. I think what he's saying is we want somebody who is deeply Christian. We want somebody who we know is motivated by the things of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[41 : 24] And we want somebody who walks in the light. So, you know, walking in the light, it doesn't mean it's sinlessly perfect, but it does mean when you sin, you confess your sin and turn from it. You know, when you're wrong, you apologize. And these sorts of things. This is people who are genuinely Christian.

The conscience thing, I'd love to go a bit further with the idea of conscience. But walking with a clear conscience, keeping short accounts with God, not saying that we never sin, but having sinned, it matters. I'll put that right with the Lord and with anybody else if I need to.

And that's how this person lives the Christian life. It talks about them being tested. They must first be tested. So I suppose there is this idea of giving people smaller tasks and responsibilities, see how they get on with them. And if they are blameless, if there's nothing against them. Blameless, again, does not the same as sinless, but it means sort of spiritually competent. It means they can do that work in a way that you don't say, oh yeah, but such a blunder with this or such a mistake with that. Reliability, I think perhaps would be a thought there. And then he goes on to their wives. I think wives is a correct translation.

They're to be women worthy of respect. And it talks about them not malicious talkers, not slanderers or gossips. And I guess he's saying that there's a potential weak area here. Very important that we're not gossips. We're a sufficiently knowledgeable congregation that we know one another. And we know one another's, you know, we pray for one another where we need to pray for one another. But we've got to be careful that doesn't turn into gossip. You know, putting other people down without resolving whatever it is with the person concerned. We mustn't be doing that.

[43 : 46] So not slanderers. And then temperate. Temperate. Temperate is a geographical word, isn't it? Temperate zone.

What does it mean? It means sober, sensible. That's what temperate means here. Sufficiently serious spiritually to be sober and sensible. And faithful, trustworthy in everything.

This is the deacon's wife if he's married. So the spouse matters as well. There's something all round about this. It's not just faithful in something, but trustworthy in everything. That's just a trustworthy person. You can trust them in every area, not just in the bits that they're interested in, but all round. And then he goes on to say the deacon must be the husband of one wife. And I think, again, we put this in context. I don't think he's saying that every deacon has to be a married man, nor that every deacon has to be a married woman. But if married, then the marriage should be normal, so not, you know, a homosexual marriage, and stable and faithful.

Marriages are all, you know, we all have to all work at our marriages. But it shouldn't be a flawed marriage. So a husband of but one wife, and must manage his children and his household well. And what it actually says is standing before his children and his own house in a good way.

So not artificially bringing the children into compliance just on the outside, and certainly not doing that in an abusive way, but managing the family well. And I just hasten to say that's not meant to be put a pressure on people to have perfect children, because children are not perfect.

[46 : 07] And to feel that one is under pressure to have perfect children is just too much. But to make a reasonable job of managing the home, you know, not neglecting the home, and having the right blend of consistency and patience and firmness and kindness and love.

And I think I would say a willingness, an ability to take this responsibility. So the deacon that he's envisaging here is somebody who's taken the responsibility of marriage and family, and is living up to it, and upholding it, and doing, you know, as good a job as you can do in this fallen world.

Yeah. Now, just moving on through the text, those who have deaconed well gain a good standing.

Those who have deaconed, there's another word for well, you see, or good. Those who have deaconed well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.

This is another text that always puzzled me. I'll have a go at it. Those who have deaconed good achieve a good standing.

[47 : 27] I think that's what it's saying. It's a good standing. So you could put it on your CV and say, I was a deacon. And that's a good thing to have done.

And he says assurance in the faith. There's a sort of boldness there in the faith. And what came to mind was this, that you might meet somebody, and in conversation, they speak boldly and with assurance, and they say, I boldly climbed Mount Kilimanjaro in the height of summer or in the monsoon season or something like that.

And I sailed single-handed across the Atlantic. And you think how bold and confident somebody must be if they've done that, you know. What I've achieved. But I think it would be even better to say, I was a deacon in the church of Jesus Christ.

I think there's a boldness and a sense of achievement at having served as a deacon. I think that's what he's saying. Don't envy somebody who's climbed Mount Kilimanjaro, the mountain, or sailed single-handedly across the Atlantic.

I mean, all credit to them. Wow, amazing. But if you've been a deacon and you've served well, in God's eyes, that's better. So what have we looked at?

[48 : 55] I have taken time and have gone on a little bit longer, but we have studied this, and I hope helpfully. We looked at the words with the idea of service and providing of benefit.

We looked at the principle of differentiated ministry. All service, but even the apostles can't do everything. Looked at the minimum qualities of a deacon. Not saying that they're super-Christians or sinless, but there's a maturity and an all-roundedness and an exemplary nature to them.

They're not people who are flawed and have still got big lessons to learn. That's what we've looked at, and we can discuss that together this evening. I hope that's helpful. Let's sing a song together.

Thank you.