

Recognising deacons

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 20 September 2015

Preacher: Philip Wells and others

[0:00] This is what we're looking at at the moment, the matter of deacons. And if we manage to discuss, I'm going to pass around the microphone so that you can be heard! And that the recording will be useful to anybody who wasn't able to be here but would like to know what we're talking about.

So you remember we used this Windows technology and we were looking at the difference between now then. Does that work if I do that? Can you see that?

In my little spotty thing. Right, okay. Elders and deacons and we said that Jesus was the model elder because he's the great overseer and he's also the model deacon because he's the one who came to service.

And we said last time that a servant, that deacon is a sort of servant and a waiter is a diakonos, a deacon. And we said that it's a noun.

Ooh, I didn't mean to do that. A noun. And so that is a deacon. It's also a verb, to deacon. So both of those are in the Bible.

[1:16] So Jesus did not come to be deacon but to deacon, to serve others. And we discussed this a little bit last time and I brought these principles that we should be getting what we do from the Bible and we should be interpreting the Bible harmoniously and comparing passage with passage and weighing up and balancing up what the Bible says.

I said that it was a fair observation that the Bible, particularly the New Testament, tends to speak in terms of principles rather than rules.

And principles tend to be more applicable to all places and all times. And Jesus' church is existing in lots of different places all down through history.

We observed that the Bible can speak in a number of different ways. It may command something that you must do, like love one another. It may forbid things, say you certainly shouldn't have elders who can't teach the Bible, for example.

And it also gives freedoms, I believe, some things it doesn't particularly speak about and says, well, what will fit best with you?

[2:39] So we're able to adapt. We're able to be radical. Radical meaning just go to the root of things. And, you know, maybe it's never been done before, but if that's the principle of the Bible, then we can do that.

And we can also, I believe, have a certain amount of flexibility. And then last time I reminded all of us that the church belongs to Jesus Christ the Lord.

So although we might be anxious, you know, what's going to happen? Actually, it's Jesus, Jesus, who's concerned about the church. And we might say, well, I can't see how this is all going to work out.

Well, the Holy Spirit is the one who gives gifts. So we should be thinking in terms of miracles, God doing things that we hadn't thought we could do, but he can do.

And our job is to walk in obedience and faith. So I think that's what we're doing this evening. We're just going forward a step at a time. And that's what we're trying to do.

[3:44] So what I had for this evening was I've got some questions that I think need to be dealt with. And I thought I would ask you whether you thought they were sensible questions.

And then we could deal with them, not necessarily starting at the top, but somewhere in there. So these are the questions that I thought were worth dealing with. So number one is how do deacons

fit with elders?

Okay, so how do they fit together? What's the difference between them? Then I thought question two, can deacons be female?

And I suppose you also ought to ask the question, can elders be female? So that's a question that we need to be clear in our minds about. Here's another question.

What jobs and ministries need to be done or could be done? So in Acts chapter 6, which we looked at last time, the thing that needed to be done was some of the widows felt they weren't being looked after properly when food was distributed.

[4:59] So that obviously needed to be sorted out. So it would be a useful thing for us to sit down with a piece of paper and say what sort of things need to be done in our church.

And I think a particular case in point is our invaluable brother, Ray, who is in fact sort of, out of the goodness of his heart, ended up being three people.

And as and when he steps down, we'll need at least three people, maybe more, to replace him. So just in case you didn't know, he's acting as, he's being the treasurer, he's doing that work, doing the work as church secretary, and he's also doing administration.

So that's an awful lot, and as I think some of us are acutely aware, including Ray himself, that's a very burdensome thing and should not be something that we just allow to continue.

That's one of the particular things that we need to address ourselves to, although not necessarily this evening, but we do need to address ourselves to that. Here's probably question four, depending on whether I did the numbers right.

[6:11] What people are available to serve? So there are, on my church members list, there are 35 names. I think one of them is Catherine Crompton.

I haven't seen her around for a long time. What's she up to? In case you don't know Catherine, she actually got married, and she's serving as a missionary in Peru, and she's about to have a baby.

And that accounts for why she hasn't come to very many of the meetings recently. I wanted to say something about the position of deacon. Perhaps I'll say that in a moment.

That was number five. Number six, flexibility. I want to say something about that. And, oh, six, seven.

Another thing about flexibility. And, oh, press the button by mistake. Go away. And then this question about the way we organize ourselves.

[7:16] So the question, is all word ministry? Does that mean if somebody's doing word ministry, they're bound to be an elder? And then the question, is all service something? If somebody's serving, do we make them a deacon?

So all service. And if not, where do we draw the line? And I think that's an important question for us. I mean, we're all supposed to be serving, so should we all be deacons?

I think that's not quite what it's meant to achieve. Okay, so those are eight questions. So did any of them strike you as reasonably worth considering?

Male and female. That's always a good one, isn't it? Would anybody else like to discuss the matter of male and female? See, I know who to look at to see whether they're going to do that.

Okay, well, let's do that. So, splendid. Yeah, well, that's fine. That's fine with me. So what Brenda had said was she thought all the questions were worth discussing.

[8:27] And if there are other questions that you think are not on the list that we should have discussed before we come to make a decision, then tell Chris or myself and we'll try and include that.

So shall we look at the deacons being female and can elders be female? So let's look at 1 Timothy 2.11, please, first of all.

Okay, we're in 1 Timothy chapter 2. Might as well read it from the beginning of the chapter, 1 Timothy chapter 2, which says, I urge then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving may be made for everyone, for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.

This is good and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man

Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men, the testimony given in its proper time. And for this purpose I, says Paul, was appointed a herald and an apostle. I am telling the truth. I am not lying. I am a teacher of the true faith to Gentiles.

[9:52] I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing. I also want women to dress modestly with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds appropriate for women who profess to worship God.

A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man, but she must be silent.

For Adam was formed first, then Eve, and Eve was not the one, sorry, and Adam was not the one deceived. It was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.

But women will be saved through childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness with propriety. Okay, well that's a nice, easy text for us to begin with.

So, let's think of it in context. First, Paul is writing to Timothy in Ephesus, and presumably he's writing because he needs to write, because things are going wrong, and things are being forgotten, principles are not being applied, and he needs to bring in a correction.

[11:21] So, could we assume in verse 8 that the men had forgotten to pray? I think that would be a reasonable assumption from the fact that he says to the men, I want you guys to be praying.

Perhaps they were busy getting angry with one another and disputing, and he's saying, guys, that is not what you are there to do.

I want you not to be doing that, but I want you to be the people of prayer. He's not saying that women shouldn't pray, but I think he's addressing a particular problem of saying, men, don't forget that you should pray.

So, I think that's the sort of thing that's being said there. And then the next couple of verses, let's assume that they needed to be said, because the opposite is happening. And in these early churches, let's suppose there's powerful, rich women, and they've got into the habit of coming along to church with an absolutely stunning regalia.

So much so that even if they come in late, everybody has to stop and look, almost give a round of applause as so-and-so comes in and takes their seat in full view of everybody.

[12:54] And he's saying, you know, that behavior for women is totally inappropriate. I don't want you dressing up so that you draw a lot of attention to yourselves with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but I want something much more appropriate in terms of, well, certainly in terms of modesty and decency and propriety, but also remembering that it's not what you look like, really, it's how you behave.

And I want you women to be clothed with good deeds because that's a reverent thing to do. We're not concerned really with your makeup or your hair or where you got your clothes from, but really the heart that produces good deeds.

And then he says, a woman should learn in quietness and full submission. So I suspect what's happening is that the lady or the ladies that have been coming in power dressing and perhaps even say, excuse me, pastor, can I just take the stage for a minute?

And then telling everybody what's what and teaching with authority. And, you know, whatever word you'd use for it, but, and he's saying that is not the right place for a woman to be standing up in front of the congregation of the Church of Jesus Christ and telling them, this is what you should do, this is what's what.

He says that is not God's order, that is not the way it should be. And so he says, a woman should learn in quietness and full submission. So I've got my Greek New Testament somewhere.

[14:44] I could tell you about the word quietness. It doesn't mean silence. It just means a sort of quietness of spirit so that it isn't, you know, the women or the woman laying down the law for everybody else.

And he gives, the reason that he gives here goes back to creation. Number one, Adam was formed first, then Eve.

So there's an order in creation. And then he refers back to the fall and says, Adam was not the one deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a sinner. It's not saying that Adam didn't become a sinner.

He became a sinner through deliberate rebellion. But with the woman, it was more to do with a sort of the subtlety of deception. And I think he's drawing a conclusion from that.

And then this difficult verse, verse 15, women will be saved through childbearing. So I think it's impossible that he would say you get converted by becoming pregnant and giving birth to a child.

[15:58] But I think what he's saying is, he says something similar about Timothy later on. He says that we're saved by doing the thing that God's called us to do.

That's the road to salvation. So if you're a traffic warden, be a good traffic warden. That's your road to salvation. You do that. And for most of the women, it would have been the responsibility and the privilege of having children.

And he says, well, that's, you know, don't try and not be that. That's what God's designed you to be. And do that. And that's your road to salvation.

Now, I know not all the women would have been married and not all of them would have had children. But I think if you look at it in context, he's saying that for most women, that's their road to salvation.

And for a single woman who's able to serve the Lord, not through childbearing, but serve the Lord as a single woman, that's your road to salvation. That's a viable road. Don't be wishing that you were something else because that's what God's called you to be.

[17:11] And if you're a person of faith and love and holiness, then that's how God wants you to go forward. So, this passage, I would say, is saying that the role of standing up in front of the congregation and preaching, teaching with authority, this one role is not appropriate for a woman.

Okay, so I just talked about the passage. So, would anybody like to come back with any comments or questions? So, you're allowed to do that if you're a woman because you're not...

You can ask a question in a respectful way unless you want to say, you're a stupid idiot, why did you say all that? Which in which case I would say that was not respectful. I don't know really, you just stood up and held out your hand.

I agree with what the passage said, but with being a deacon, not to come and preach on the stand, but doing work like being an administrator and things like that, so would that mean all roles are completely taken away because you can't preach on the stand?

But what about the other small jobs like helping with treasury or administrator? Thank you very much, Argie, for the question. And your question is exactly right because what I was trying to say on this is that I think this says elders cannot be female.

[18:59] Okay, so standing in what elders do, they can't do that. So, if we're all happy with that bit, I will then go on to say...

Oh, there's another question. Yes. Does that mean that women can't speak at all from the front, that there is nothing that they can share?

I don't think it teaches that. So, what's the distinction between teaching with authority and having something deep and meaningful to share with the church?

Yes, that's a very good question. I'd be interested to know what other people think. I think, for me, in terms of preaching, there is a part of preaching or a thread of preaching which is actually saying this is not negotiable.

This is what we have to believe. This is how we have to live. Or, in fact, as it's done from the front, this is how you have to live. And so there's an authoritative aspect to that which I don't think you can get away from.

[20:15] Things like somebody saying, you know, this is my testimony, or this is what struck me from these verses, or this is how I was blessed in thinking about such and such, I think does not necessarily have that authoritative sort of finger-pointing thing to it.

And I think brothers and sisters can equally say things like that. That would be my take on it. Does that answer your question? I think in part, but I think the line...

Ben, could you pass the microphone? I think in part, but I think the line can appear a bit fuzzy, and I'm not sure...

I say that because our daughter has recently spoken at her church, and I don't know whether that would be considered as teaching with authority.

I'm not sure. I've obviously heard it. Yeah. On community. It was on community. So that's my... Yeah.

[21:28] Well, I do actually think there's a cultural aspect to this as well, because in some cultures, if a woman stood up and said anything, it would be taken as being disrespectful to...

and taking the role from men. But I think in our culture, there's various... various types of communication, which I think we would all say is not disrespectful, is not taking authority over a man.

So, for example, telling people... I don't know... telling people good practice in community, I think is not teaching with authority.

It might be passing on information. My friends in Sri Lanka had great trouble with one lady teaching Greek in the theological college. And I personally, I don't see a problem with that at all.

I don't think teaching Greek is teaching to be disrespectful to the authority of men or something like that. And the other question would be, what about leading Bible studies?

[22:47] And I would say that there is a way of leading a Bible study which a woman could do, you know, facilitating, pointing things out. Not necessarily saying, well, you're wrong, because leading a Bible study doesn't usually involve saying that.

It's not taking an authority so much as facilitating. So I would say there's scope. Does that answer the question? Yeah, that is helpful, because I think, from our daughter's point of view, I would say that it is a church that very much believes in male leadership, but does have, or give opportunity for women.

But I know some churches might not like women at all at the front in taking that role. So I was just trying to see whether you would say that there is a distinction, although, albeit a little bit fuzzy at times.

I guess it's a hard attitude whether or not as well you know that you are in submission in that sense to the leadership. I think there's a sort of a subtlety about it like that.

What I would say is I've been once or twice to places where a lady has been preaching, and I think the effect of it has been that because in her own conscience she knows that there's something not quite right about laying down the law to everybody, so what happens is that preaching does not include that.

[24:15] And it sort of lacks some of the gutsiness that preaching should have. That's my sort of testimony of hearing godly ladies say things.

There's nothing wrong with what they said, but I think there's something quite fundamental about what Paul's saying here. Full stop.

Thank you. No, that has... I'm sorry it's taken up a lot of time. It's helped me. Thank you. Okay, anybody else on this subject? Yeah, I just wanted to put forward what might sound a slightly sexist view, but I think at the time the Bible was first laid down, it was a subsistence economy, and generally things at the time was that the man went out and worked, and the woman stayed at home as a housekeeper.

So I just think that maybe, although that was correct at the time then and the way things were then, I'm not quite sure that God would say it's the way things should be now.

I must admit, it's not one part of the Bible I've looked at in detail, but I wouldn't say that God believed women were second place to men. I just thought maybe it's something we could think about and look into a bit deeper at some time.

[25:35] Okay. You made a lot of good points there, Ben. Thank you very much. The Bible is written in a certain culture. That's certainly true. And I think there are cultural things in the Bible.

So I would say, personally, there's a place where it says that a woman should wear something on her head. Yes. And I would say... As you would see, there is always pictured by him. Yeah.

Yeah. And I would say that in our culture, that does not convey the same message that it did in their culture. In their culture, that was a sign of submission. In our culture, wearing a wedding ring shows that you are in a married relationship.

And so wearing something on your head, I would say, although people are free to do that if they wish to, but I don't think the Bible is commanding women to show submission, to show their right respectfulness by wearing something on their head.

Pache. But so that's... So I think there is... But in this passage, it is not...

[26:42] He does not say it's because of the culture. He says it's because of creation. No, I have to leave part of the Bible I've not really looked at in detail. Okay. Yeah. Certainly something worth discussing.

Yes, it is. Yeah. Yeah. And thank you very much for that. I want to move on because I haven't talked about deacons yet. This is all about elders. So...

Yes. Yeah. Yes. Well, I think if people have that question, we might as well answer it, mightn't we?

So the point about deacons is that it is not a role which is focused in authority over.

It is a role to do with serving. So... The Bible does not give the same prohibition about deacons as it does about the people who stand at the front and preach.

So... I deduce from that that it's perfectly okay for deacons to be ladies. and... if you look at Romans 16 verse 1, it's one of the examples where you could make a case that this lady is exactly this, a deaconess.

[28:19] So Romans 16 verse 1, I commend to you our servant Phoebe, a servant of the church in Kentria.

And it says a deaconess. So here's an example which, I mean, it isn't a... an exact proof, but it can well be an example of a lady who is known as a deaconess of the church.

Okay, full stop. Anybody want to make any observations, questions about that? Has Chris got any wise words to say?

Yeah, give him a microphone, then he'll have to say something wise. Yes, yes, I think the servant point is very helpful.

And what I notice is that the way that women serve contributes something rich and complementary to the way that men serve And that it's very healthy in the church to find both those forms of service taking place.

[29:47] And that I think particular insights and perceptions that women have equally different sorts of insights and perceptions that men have.

and the service together of that is a very healthy attribute. So, that's a bit of a pragmatic statement, but I feel from the word that there is at least there's a kind of a silence on the matter of male or female on that.

and from the general tenor of the New Testament the way that the church is behaved the dignity that's afforded to women by Paul in Romans 16 for instance a number of the women are named as sort of fellow workers hard workers in the gospel and so forth.

So, there seems to be a sort of seamlessness in the way that Paul describes the church's activity in that way. Thank you very much. I think that is a very important thing to be said, yes, that right back in the beginning when the man was made in the creation account it says it's not good for him to be alone.

He can't manage it on his own. He needed the helper that was made for him and it's saying something quite special isn't it that what men can see you know they can't always see everything it needs a woman to see some things and what men can say they don't always say what needs to be said in the way that a woman can say it so the deacon position I think is able to express that diversity and complementarity Mrs.

[31:41] Wells just I don't know if everyone is aware that we have a woman leading the children's work at the moment in our church so it's not as if there aren't any women in leadership in the church but obviously she's not preaching she's heading up the children's work just in case people weren't aware of that and in the past we've had Lady Deacons so Janet who was here a couple of weeks ago wasn't it who was sitting over there she was a deaconess in time past testing so I won't pretend this is my wisdom this is something I read and so in regard to the salvation via childbirth and so it strikes me that actually well women have a very special role

because

Mary gave birth to Jesus and so she bore salvation via Jesus as it were in the same way that salvation has been carried down generations from Israel but she had the great privilege of being the mother of Jesus and so in that sense salvation has come via childbirth because if Jesus wasn't born then we wouldn't be saved and then also it also means that men can't have children but women can so women have been given a special privilege in that sense that they have a different dynamic from men in that sense thank you yes thank you very much indeed thanks Ross well I'm going to say that time is pretty nearly gone because I don't want to trespass into communion time let me just pick out one thing here

I thought it was worth pointing this one out number five you probably all thought this anyway but sometimes it's worth stating obvious things when we're talking about people being deacons we talk about church offices and things like that it's not sort of like getting a knighthood it's not an honour which you just have so you can wear it like a badge look at me I'm a deacon sort of thing it's actually if anything the complete opposite because to become a deacon is to be committed to serving so it is a serving role and serving actually costs something so and it's not without sacrifice so we should bear that in mind we're sort of calling people really to be prepared to make a sacrifice and to serve one of the things that we say when we become church members is

I am willing to serve according to my ability and my time and talents and money so when we sign up as church members we say I'm willing but yeah I'm just sort of repeating myself now serving costs something and even if it's just the fact that somebody who's a deacon is going to spend one evening a month going to a meeting that's what has been in the past to discuss things together well if you're doing that you can't be at home with your partner or going and playing golf or whatever else you might have been doing on that evening you can't do that it's a sacrifice and so I just wanted to point that out because it's an important point let's unless anybody wanted to comment on that I've often thought that you know if you was sort of chosen as a deacon you would have a good name because you there's lots of sort of strictures if you like you know that you have to be to be a deacon you can't be this or that you've got to be this and that so in that respect

I think it's a good thing because a good name is better than gold and silver thank you very much yes yes you're quite right and that's worth saying because what we're doing recognising deacons is we're saying that here's somebody who in the assessment of the congregation is a person who is worthy of respect sincere not indulging in wine not pursuing dishonest gain holding the deep realities of the faith with a clear conscience they've been tested they run their family well they have a good reputation with outsiders and if they serve well they gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus so it is a recognition isn't it so it is if you like a pat on the back but it's a pat on the back which is accompanied by a sack you'll see what I mean yeah thank you for saying that it's really helpful okay we're going to sing together let's sing a