

Deacons

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- [0 : 0 0] All right, well this morning we are continuing our journey through 1 Timothy. It is a letter in the New Testament that was written by the Apostle Paul on behalf of the Lord Jesus to Timothy, who was stationed in the church at Ephesus.
- And in this letter we receive instructions about how the church ought to conduct itself. Last Sunday we heard about how the church should be led.
- We heard Paul lay out the requirements for overseers. And we looked at a number of other passages in the New Testament, which when we take them all together, give us a clear framework for leadership in the church.
- We saw how the church is to be led by a group of men called elders or overseers, whose primary responsibility is to shepherd or pastor the church, to lead, to teach, to protect, and to care for the people of the church.
- And we saw from several passages that overseers are to have authority in the church and that the rest of the church is to submit to and follow their leadership. So Paul has laid out the requirements for overseers in the church in chapter 3, verse 1 to 7.
- [1 : 1 7] And now he will do the same for the official position of deacon from verses 8 to 13. Let me read it for us straight out of the Bible.
- 1 Timothy 3, verse 8. In the same way, deacons are to be worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain.
- They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. They must first be tested, and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.
- In the same way, the women are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers, but temperate and trustworthy in everything. A deacon must be faithful to his wife and 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. Now it's very important at the outset to know that when the Bible speaks about deacons, it is much less clear than it is about elders.
- [2 : 3 3] Aside from this passage that we just read, there are only two other mentions of deacons in the New Testament, and they're just mentions. There's no job description given for deacons in the New Testament.
- The passage we just read is not a job description. It doesn't tell us the role of deacons. It merely states the requirements to be a deacon. And so because the role of a deacon is much less clearly defined in the Bible than elder or overseer, we should be much more charitable and gracious with other Christians who come to a different understanding and practice on this matter.
- Let's look quickly at the other two passages which mention deacons. The first is Philippians 1.1. Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons.

So this is just Paul and Timothy addressing a letter to the church in Philippi, and they mention the overseers and the deacons as being recipients of the letter. However, there's not a whole lot to learn about deacons here, but there is something.

Overseers and deacons are two distinct groups. They're two distinct roles or offices in the church. They're not the same thing, which means that deacons are not the ones that oversee, direct the affairs of the church.

[4 : 02] As we saw last Sunday, that's the role of the overseers or the elders. So the role of a deacon is not to lead or direct the affairs of the church, and it must be something other than that.

For one reason or another, and I think this is more common in Baptist churches than in some others, many churches today have slipped into a form of church leadership where they're being led by a board of deacons.

And it's kind of confusing. Some of these churches don't even have elders. A group of deacons has kind of become the authoritative decision-making group in the church, like a church board.

And in some cases, they're functioning like elders, or they're trying to, even though some of them may not meet the qualifications of elders. And then there are fights and power struggles happening between pastors and deacons boards.

And this is what can happen when we don't carefully follow the instructions and the pattern given us in Scripture regarding elders and overseers in the church. Whatever deacons are, they're not the overseers of the church.

[5 : 14] The second mention of deacons happens in Romans chapter 16, verse 1. Paul's writing to the church at Rome, and he says, I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Centuria.

I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of his people, and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been the benefactor of many people, including me.

And here's where the debate and the lack of clarity begins. Some of your Bibles say Phoebe, a servant of the church in Centuria. Some say Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Centuria.

Why the difference? Very simply, the word deacon is the word servant in Greek, diakonos. And so the question is, is Paul referring to her as an official deacon of the church, or is he referring to her just as a humble servant of the church?

This also raises the question of whether women can be deacons in the church, and we're going to get to that later. But you can see how the clarity for us already isn't there.

[6 : 25] These are the three passages that speak of deacons in the New Testament. So how can we get to an understanding of the role of deacon? Well, there are some clues and tidbits that we can bring together that will at least rule out some things and narrow it down so that we can get something of an understanding of this role.

As I just mentioned, the word deacon is just the word servant. So that's a place to start. And it seems obvious from this list of qualifications in 1 Timothy 3 that it was an official role or designation which some were given.

So an official servant of the church. We already saw from Philippians that it's not the role of overseer. And we see that here too because there's a separate list of qualifications for elders than there is for deacons or for overseers than deacons.

So an official servant of the church who is not among the authoritative leadership of the church. And then next we could do a bit of a study on the word for servant in the New Testament and look at its various forms, verb, noun, masculine, feminine.

And this has all been done by Christian commentators and scholars. And there's some good insight to be gained here as well. First, we see that the base meaning of this word, deacon or serve, has the meaning of, according to William Mounts in his commentary, to wait at table.

[8 : 01] So we're kind of talking about serving like a server in a restaurant kind of serving. where a person does kind of a lowly job of service for another person just for their benefit, to meet their need.

But then we see as we go on that this word was generally applied to all kinds of service where a person was doing something for the benefit of others. The apostles referred to themselves as servants of Christ, servants of God.

Some translators use the word minister or ministry to translate this word. It's used to refer to the work that Tychicus and Timothy and Epaphras did for the churches, supporting or serving the cause of the gospel.

This word's also used to describe rulers and law enforcement and what they do for the people. In Romans chapter 13, they are servants. The majority of uses reflect this kind of lowly work done for the benefit and need of others, but it can refer to all kinds of things as well, even leadership kinds of roles.

And so all of this suggests that the role of a deacon could be a variety of things. It suggests that it isn't limited to serving tables kind of service, but likely includes any kind of need-meeting role that's done for the benefit of others.

[9 : 29] Now there's another piece here that can kind of guide us into an understanding of this role, and that's when we continue studying this word serve or servant in the New Testament. We very quickly bump into this fact that every Christian is called to serve or to deacon.

Jesus said it this way, speaking to his disciples. He said, The greatest among you will be your deacon, for those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

Or the Apostle Peter, writing to the churches, said, Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to deacon others as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.

And so, logically, we infer from this that the official position of deacon in the church is about more than just serving in the way that we're all called to do. Otherwise, why would there be these specific requirements?

In 1 Timothy. Many of you serve in various ways in the church, but we don't all need an official title or role for every little thing that we do.

[10 : 45] Can you imagine if at November meeting we had to elect the deacon of alive for the first week of every month, or something like that? You know, it'd just be ridiculous. We are all called, we are all commanded as followers of Jesus to serve, to wash the feet of one another, following Jesus' example, to use whatever gifts and abilities God has given us to serve one another.

But this official role in the church of deacon is something more than that, for only a few. Let's look at the specific requirements that Paul lists here.

In the same way, deacons are to be worthy of respect. That was the same word that Paul used above to describe the way that an elder must manage his family, in a manner worthy of respect, a dignified manner.

So an elder and a deacon, both, must have a good reputation. A deacon must be sincere. Quite literally, he must not be double-tongued.

A person who speaks out of both sides of his mouth, or who says something but doesn't really mean it, this is about integrity of heart. A deacon must be sincere.

[11 : 59] A deacon must not be indulging in much wine. That's just another way to say what Paul said about the elders. Not given to drunkenness.

And so addictions or substances would disqualify a person. A deacon must not be one who is pursuing dishonest gain.

So he's not a person who's shamelessly greedy for money, or material things, or a person who will do anything to get ahead, to get more money, more possessions.

A deacon must be a person who is holding to the deep truths of the faith, with a clear conscience. And deep truths, I think, is a really good translation here.

This refers to the things that God kept hidden in the past, but has now revealed. There are a good many mysterious truths of our faith.

[12 : 59] Things that are unpalatable to this world, with its wisdom. Things that God has kept hidden for generations, and then now has revealed and made known through his son Jesus, and through his apostles.

A deacon must be a person who is holding onto those things, present, continuous, with a clear conscience. So they're not a person who's filled with doubt, or skepticism about the things that are revealed in God's word.

Verse 10. A deacon must first be tested, and then if there's nothing against them, let them serve as deacons. Now most translations render this the same.

They must be tested first. But there's nothing stated about what the test should be. What kind of test is this? Is it a task that they must do? Is it a responsibility to look after for a period of time?

Or is it a written examination? The word here means to make a critical examination of something to determine its genuineness. At the least, this means that we should not be in a rush to fill positions, or to put someone in an official role of service in the church.

[14 : 19] There needs to be time allowed for a person to be known what's really inside them. Is there good fruit coming from their lives?

Fruit that shows the genuineness of their faith. So I would suggest that this is not so much about coming up with some kind of a test for this person to do, or something that we do to them and see what's inside of them.

Maybe more like a careful examination. We look at their character references. We talk with them. We talk with those who know them.

We give time for their true self to come out. We ask them questions about their spiritual life. And we listen carefully. We watch them closely to see how they conduct themselves.

Do they actually meet these requirements laid out in the scriptures? We're going to come back to verse 11, but let's go down to verse 12.

[15 : 24] A deacon must be faithful to his wife and must manage his children and his household well. These are the same requirements that were given to elders.

We heard this last Sunday. Sexual purity and faithfulness in the marriage to his spouse are required. And he must manage both his children and his household well.

And it's here that I think we get another hint of what the role of a deacon is. Do you remember what Paul said to the elders about this? He said that they must be men who manage their households or families well because how can they take care of God's church, which is a larger family, if they can't even manage their own immediate family well.

So Paul's already given us the reason for why this is required for elders. And it's logical that a similar rationale now applies to deacons.

Something about their role involves skillful managing of people, skillful managing of a household. The implied logic here, I think, is that the person must be skillful at those things in the home because those skills are required for deaconing in the church.

[16 : 44] So this is another clue. A deacon is an official servant of the church who's not among the authoritative leadership of the church, but whose service may include leadership or coordinating or administration of some kind for the church.

And this good character and reputation probably means that this is a kind of service where it's important to have a trustworthy, designated person in charge.

Some measure of financial stewardship may be involved. Or perhaps it was important that some need be met quite regularly and consistently. So this would not be the same as, you know, a person signing up to do church cleaning twice a month.

This is probably more like the person who oversees the whole schedule for church cleaning and ensures that it's getting done every week and that the supplies are there for the volunteers when they come to do it.

There's more of a leadership or coordination of people and administration involved. We are all called to deacon, but it proves very helpful at times to have someone in the church appointed to an official role of service where regular leadership is necessary.

[18 : 01] Or where we need to have a designated, trustworthy person. We could go a Sunday or two or even three without vacuuming the sanctuary carpet.

But if part of our church's ministry was the weekly delivery of meals for people in our community, well then we would need to have somebody that's overseeing that very closely, ensuring that those are delivered every day for those people that rely on that.

Now we might at this point wonder, well, why don't the elders just do that? They're leaders in the church. And this is where our final passage pertaining to deacons comes in and offers wisdom.

Now this passage in Acts chapter 6 doesn't mention deacons, not by name anyway, but as you'll see, it gives some wisdom. It leads us in a direction, I think, about what deacons and their role is to be.

Acts chapter 6 verse 1, In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, this is just after Pentecost, as the church was first being established in Jerusalem, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.

[19 : 15] So the twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the Word of God in order to wait on tables.

Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word.

This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit. Also Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, Nicholas.

They presented these men to the apostles who prayed and laid their hands on them. So the Word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

So the church in Jerusalem in its earliest days had a problem. Some widows in the church family were missed on the daily distribution of food.

[20 : 22] And the twelve apostles called the whole church together and they proposed a solution, a kind of work that was required and the word there is, it's the word deacon, deaconing, a role of service.

But the apostles also knew that they had been specially charged with deaconing the Word. That's also the same word there, the ministry of the Word, the deaconing of the Word of God.

And if they were to take their time to distribute food each day, that would be taking away from the time that they needed to do that job that Christ gave them to do of teaching and instructing in the Word of Christ.

And so they came up with this solution. They proposed that a group of spirit-filled men of faith be appointed to look after this responsibility. And at this time, the church in Jerusalem was well into the thousands.

So likely, these six men alone were not even able to look after all the widows. They probably would have had to get others to help and be in a bit of a coordination or leadership role to see that it got done.

[21 : 31] Now, these men were not called deacons, but it seems very clear that they did the work of a deacon. And probably this is meant to give us wisdom about the purpose of deacons in the church.

Now, in the church, we have elders. We don't have apostles. And we won't even think of ourselves close to that. But we are charged with shepherding the flock and with teaching the Word of God, with preaching, with directing the affairs of the church.

And other important needs in the church that rise up can easily divert or pull our elders away from that job that they're supposed to be doing. And this seems to be where the wisdom of the apostles here in Acts 6 really kicks in.

By appointing people into official roles of service, qualified people, solid in their faith, people who can take an area of responsibility and look after it and provide the necessary leadership or coordination or administration, the overseers, the elders, can then focus on overseeing and the ministry of the Word, the overall leadership of the church.

Matt Smethurst, in his book titled Deacons, says, deacons are shock absorbers. He says, not only was there a pressing need in the church here in Acts 6, but there was a threat to unity.

[23 : 00] And these men were able to kind of come in between and serve so that that threat to unity was resolved and so that the pressing need was met, which then freed up and allowed the apostles to do the work that Christ had given them to do.

So according to this logic or wisdom from Acts 6, deacons not only look after an important area of need or responsibility in the church, but they support the leadership of the church.

They help keep the elders focused on church leadership and teaching by serving in areas of need that would otherwise draw the elders away from that. I hope that a picture of what deacons are is beginning to come clear and emerge in our minds as we think through this.

A deacon is an official servant of the church who is trustworthy, dependable, skillful in managing people and the affairs of the household. They're not the overseers of the church, but they seem to support the elders by looking after particular needs and responsibilities within the church so that the elders can focus on teaching and preaching and overall church leadership.

So what kind of service or needs are we talking about practically here? I think the Lord has probably in some ways left the job description a little bit ambiguous or vague for a reason.

[24 : 31] Could it be that the role of a deacon is made to suit all kinds of needs that may arise in whatever community that we find ourselves in? All kinds of service. Matt Smether's little book on deacons, which is available in the church foyer on the mailboxes, is full of real life examples of deacons, both in modern times and in church history.

They do everything from overseeing soup kitchen outreaches to hospitality in the church to facility maintenance to various types of regular member care for people with disabilities or for the elderly, for widows, meal train coordination, secretarial or administrative work.

Probably the question that we need to ask ourselves is, what are the pressing needs of our church or our community that we're called to meet, but that in doing so it would pull the elders away from their primary work?

That's where having deacons makes sense and enables the church to grow and to continue to move forward and minister. And it's probably worth stating that with this understanding of a deacon, there's not a need for a deacon board or for them to kind of gather every month and have meetings together.

Each deacon would just be overseen by the elders, those authoritative leaders in the church. There's no evidence in the Bible of there being kind of two power blocks in the church like, you know, elders here and deacons here and like Senate, Congress.

[26 : 06] It's not like that. This is the diagram that I came up with and it's just my own thing, but you've got the local church. Jesus Christ is the head of the church.

He is the chief shepherd and then he has instituted that there be elders or overseers who are responsible for shepherding the congregation, the church members and then in and among the church members are deacons.

They are in those support roles. They're mobilizers. I didn't put them in between elders and church members because it's not like a hierarchy structure like we see in the Catholic church with bishop, archbishop, cardinal.

It's different than that. To give an example, if there's a serious problem in the church, you wouldn't go to the deacons and then the deacons go to the elders.

Any church member would just go straight to the elders. Unless, of course, it's something that pertains directly to what the deacon is responsible for. This is not a serious problem, but let's say that a light bulb burns out somewhere in the church.

[27 : 13] Would you come to the elders or to me? But if we had a deacon in charge of overseeing the maintenance of the facility, you would go to him. And that would keep that from even going onto the elders' plate.

That's really the point of a deacon. But if you find out that there's somebody in our community who's in urgent need of something that costs thousands of dollars, you wouldn't go to the deacon who serves as treasurer.

You would go to the elders. That's a big decision. That's something we really need to talk about as a leadership team. Let's come now to this verse that we skipped over, verse 11.

And this is where we really open up the debate. In the same way, the women are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers, but temperate and trustworthy in everything.

Now this verse causes all kinds of debate because some of you sitting here now are looking at your Bible and you're wondering, why does my translation say something different? My Bible says their wives must be all these things.

[28 : 25] It's been translated in two different ways. Depending on which one you have, it'll look like one of these two on the screen. So are these qualifications for the wives of the deacons or are these qualifications for women deacons?

And most translations have a footnote at this point just to let you know that the other way of translating it could be the correct one or at least is a valid one.

What's going on here? If we peel back the English here and we look at the original Greek, the first three words here are gunaikos, hosautos, semnos.

Quite literally, women, likewise, dignified. So you put that into the flow of the context. A deacon must first be tested, then if there's nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.

women, likewise, dignified. Not malicious talkers, but temperate and trustworthy in everything. So the Greek word for women here can mean both woman or wife.

[29 : 37] They actually only had one word and it did double duty. In English, we have two distinct words, woman and wife, but back then, just a single word. And usually the context makes it really clear whether it's woman or wife.

And so translators have been making their best guesses here as to which is meant. And most of the translators at least acknowledge that this is a guess and the other translation could be the right one.

So that's why the footnote. So either Paul is giving the qualifications for deacons and then in the midst of this list acknowledges that in the case of women who come to be deacons, these are the requirements.

Or, he's saying that one of the requirements for deacons is that their wives must meet this small sub-list of requirements in order for their husbands to serve as deacons.

And you can imagine this has translators and commentators divided because issues of gender and the role of women are really hot-button issues. So I'm going to put before you very quickly both cases and I've borrowed significantly from that book on deacons that's in the foyer.

[30 : 52] There's a very helpful appendix at the back that covers this. The case for wives of deacons in this passage. First of all, in Acts 6, the Jerusalem church chose six men to serve the widows and only men.

Second, all other uses of this word in the chapter are translated as wife and not woman. If Paul really means female deacons, why not use some kind of feminine form of the word deacon?

Why wouldn't he just refer to women generally like this? Paul gives marital faithfulness standards for elders and male deacons, but why not for female deacons?

Why doesn't he say she must be the wife of one husband? Then there's the flow of this whole section. It seems strange to kind of go all over the place and have elders, then male deacons, then female deacons, then back to male deacons.

Some people describe this as you get whiplash trying to read through this section here. Some argue that since deacons have servant-like responsibilities, they would often call on their wives to assist them, and so the wife, too, had to meet the requirements.

[32 : 15] when it comes to Romans 16.1, this side of the argument says, well, Phoebe, she wasn't a deacon, she was just a servant, because that word is usually translated servant in the New Testament.

And finally, people have noticed that the kind of work that deacons do often requires having a measure of authority over men, and that would put women in an awkward spot when we look back to what Paul said earlier in 1 Timothy chapter 2, verse 11 and 12.

When I summarize all that, I have to admit, that's a pretty cohesive and reasonable-sounding case for why deacons should only be men, and verse 11 refers to their wives.

But then let's hear the case for female deacons. First of all, Scripture never forbids women deacons. It does forbid women teaching or having authority over a man, which would clearly exclude them from being elders or overseers, but deacons are not an authority over the church.

And nowhere in the Bible does it say submit to your deacons like it does to elders or overseers. They keep watch over your souls. It doesn't say that. It only says that about elders or overseers. So why forbid but the Bible doesn't?

[33 : 38] The side says Paul never meant deacons' wives in this passage in Timothy. If he did, there were clear ways to say the wives of them or their wives or their own wives must be.

They had possessive pronouns in Greek as well as articles, but Paul didn't use them because he wasn't referring specifically to their wives, but to women who likewise could also be deacons.

Every time Paul uses this word for women in the plural in this letter, it's always translated women and not wife or wives. The last time Paul said women likewise in chapter 2 verse 9, we all recognize that modesty was a principle for all women and not just for wives.

So why don't we read it the same way when we come to this passage about the deacons? Number 5, while the structure and flow does seem a little bit like whiplash, it is still orderly and logical.

An overseer must, here's the requirements, a deacon must be and three things listed. Likewise women, in the case of women who are deacons and three things listed.

[34 : 58] Back to the men for a second and then a general blessing for all who serve in this role. Number 6, why would Paul list qualifications for deacons' wives but not for elders' wives?

Can Paul really mean that only the wives of the church's official servants should be carefully scrutinized and not of the church's authority bearing leaders? Many people will argue that a man's wife, her character could make or break whether he could be a deacon, whether he was suitable for the role and if that's the case, well then how much more should Paul have stated this same requirement for the elders right out of the gate?

Therefore, this makes much more sense if Paul is referring to women deacons. Number 7, we're almost at the end here, Paul could not use the word deacon with a feminine form because that word didn't exist yet.

The feminine form didn't come into use until later and at this time it meant service or ministry. And so this was the brief logical way to refer to female deacons at the time.

As far as Romans 16 verse 1 goes in Phoebe, people on this side point out that Phoebe is called the deacon of a specific church. Most of the times where a servant is used, it's more generally referring to a servant of God or a servant of Christ.

[36 : 26] But in this case it's a servant of the church of Centuria and I find it persuasive. Even though Phoebe is the deacon of this church specifically, right now she's in Corinth where Paul is writing from and she's being sent to Rome and Paul is saying that she's been the benefactor of many so it seems that she's serving all over the place, many different churches, and yet she is the servant specifically or deacon of the church of Centuria.

It's more likely a reference to her official position or title than to her humble attitude. Then we look at how women are entrusted with great responsibility and leadership within the home and the family.

Read Proverbs 31, the description of a wife of noble character. Look at all the things that she does in that chapter for the household. Because she is trustworthy, she does all kinds of things for the benefit of her family.

She earns money, she invests, she trades, she sells, she buys a field, she starts a side business, she watches over the affairs of her household, literally.

Verse 12, and she is to be honored for doing all this. Her husband, who is the head of the home, praises her for these things. And when we look at 1 Timothy, it seems that Christ's main command is that we should function like a family in the church.

[37 : 53] many Christian men entrust their family finances to their wives. They praise them for the good job they do. Can we not have women serve as a treasurer in the church?

Finally, to all that we can add that in the history of the church that followed, they had female deacons right from the earliest days after the New Testament was written.

It's as though they didn't see a prohibition of women or a reference to deacons' wives at all. We have historical documents dating back to within 20 years of the Gospel of John being written that refer to deaconesses.

And so there's quite the case to be made either way. I certainly don't condemn or judge those who go the other way, but I think that the case for women deacons in these passages is a little stronger.

And what may be surprising to some is that there are a good number of respected conservative Bible preaching Christian pastors who agree. This isn't a left versus right issue or a woke versus traditional kind of issue.

[39 : 03] As long as we're defining the role of deacon in the way that the scriptures point us, not as overseers or the board of the church, but as official servants who coordinate, manage, administrate to meet a particular need or serve a particular group, I believe both men and women can be deacons in the local church.

And if there is a need for someone to be a deacon and it's a kind of ministry that involves teaching or counseling or discipling men, well, we look back to chapter two and we just put a man in that role instead.

Otherwise, I don't see why women can't be called upon for this role in the church today. there's lots more that could be said about elders and deacons.

This is kind of our church's one-time go through this portion of scripture. If you have more questions or thoughts or wonderings, we have some helpful little books in the foyer called Elders and Deacons, and you're welcome to take one of those home and read it, and when you're done with it, you can just bring it back to the church.

We're going to cut the discussion of deacons off at that point, and we're going to turn now to the Lord's table. With all this talk about deacons and authority and leadership in the church, I hope that it affects the way that we see Jesus.

[40 : 27] Consider a few words from Jesus' own mouth. The Gospel of Mark. When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. Jesus called them together and said, you know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles, lorded over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them, not so with you.

Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Two of the apostles had their mother put in a good word for them with Jesus. They wanted greatness and glory. They wanted to sit at Jesus' right hand and his left hand in his kingdom.

And when the other ten heard about it, they got angry. They were fighting over this. In their minds, they craved the position. They wanted the status. They wanted the title.

They wanted to be in leadership and have that authority alongside Jesus. And this jockeying and fighting over position went right up until the moment of the Lord's table.

[41 : 50] We hear in one of the Gospels. They were fighting at this over the Last Supper. And Jesus just sliced through all this pride and vanity and selfish ambition.

He said, no, you guys are not to be leaders like they do leadership in the world. Greatness is not to be found like that. Greatness is found through servanthood, through deaconing, through meeting the needs of others.

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. Jesus was the ultimate deacon.

Even though Jesus is the Son of Man, the glorious Son of Man foretold by the prophets, the Son of God, the King, the Messiah, he saw our great need for forgiveness, for atonement, for a ransom to be paid, and he came down into our world to serve us, to meet that need at the cost of his own life.

He set us free from our sins when he died on the cross, and it was a gift of love for all who will seek God's forgiveness, for all who believe.

[43 : 18] We are all called to deacon. We're all called to serve one another in love, and the truth is that we have all failed to be as we should. Just like the disciples, we've all stood there waiting, waiting for somebody else to get down and wash our crusty feet while we put them up.

But Jesus stands in stark contrast. He is holy. He is radiant. He bends down and washes our feet. He bends and carries our cross.

He is innocent, and we the guilty. And beneath all of this service is his love for us.

I encourage you in these moments to think back just over this past week, over all the ways that we have blown it. All of our failings, all the times that we fell short of God's glory and goodness, all the moments where we could have been deaconing, but instead we chose to live selfishly for our own pleasure, our own pride.

But now look to this table, which reminds us of the cross. The bread reminds us of Jesus' body, which was broken for us.

[44 : 44] The cup reminds us of Jesus' blood, which was poured out for us. It was at the cross that all of our sins, failures, and guilt were forever forgiven and atoned for by Jesus, the one who came to serve us.

And so let's reflect on that together as the elders come forward and pass out the bread and the cup. And if you believe this, please join with us and partake with us. We'll wait until everybody has been served, and then we'll eat and drink together.

Thank you. pour with you, not work.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[46 : 53] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[49 : 23] Thank you.

Thank you.

For our forgiveness. Thank you that we don't need to earn it, but that you offer it as a gift.

May you be glorified. May you be glorified. May you be in our remembrance and our celebration. Amen.