

Ordaining Office Bearers

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[0 : 0 0] Well, if I could, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read, 1 Timothy chapter 3, 1 Timothy chapter 3, if you're using the Pew Bible, it's page 1194, 1 Timothy chapter 3, and we'll read again at verse 8, what it sets out there, the qualifications for deacons, 1 Timothy 3, a chapter at verse 8, deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain, they must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience, and let them also be tested first, then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderish, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves, and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus. As you know at the close of this service, we'll be ordaining four men, these four men that you see at the front, we'll be ordaining them to the office of deacon. But I want to say from the outset, just to make it 100% clear, this service is not about promotion. These men are not being elevated, they are not being exalted to a position of prominence within our congregation. It's not that they have reached this spiritual plane in their life where they've now made it as a Christian, and they've now received the promotion of deacon. In fact, you could say the opposite is true, because this church service is all about service. And that's what the word deacon means. It means servant. And these four men, they're taking up the office of deacon not to be served, but to serve you as the people of this congregation, and even those part of this community.

And that's why we're considering some of the words of Paul's letter to Timothy this morning, because the letters of Paul to both Timothy and to Titus, they've often been described as the pastoral epistles. And they're called the pastoral epistles because Paul, who was himself a pastor, he wrote these letters, these personal letters to two young ministers, Timothy and Titus. And Timothy and Titus, they were young men in the ministry who were serving the Lord in different places and with different contexts. Timothy was a minister in the urban charge of the city of Ephesus. But then you have Titus.

Titus was a minister on an island. He was on the Greek island of Crete. And Paul wrote these two pastoral epistles in order to instruct and to guide and to exhort and encourage these two men who were in the ministry. But when Paul wrote his first pastoral epistle, which we're looking at this morning, when he wrote this pastoral epistle to Timothy, he encouraged Timothy to stand firm and to continue in the faith and to preach sound doctrine. And the reason for that was because at that time there were many false teachers and there was a lot of false doctrine being taught. But despite all the opposition and all the discouragement that Timothy faced, Paul, he encourages Timothy to keep fighting the good fight of faith. And with that, Paul, he gives Timothy all these instructions and all this advice to teach the Christians in Ephesus so that they will implement it in their lives and live it out to the glory of God. And Paul highlights, he highlights all these various issues throughout this pastoral epistle. He highlights problems such as false teachers. He highlights the importance of prayer. He highlights the role of women in the church. He highlights here in chapter three, the qualification for elders and deacons. And even later on in the letter, he highlights the responsibility of church members. Paul, he squeezes a lot into this pastoral epistle. But you know, above all, Paul's pastoral heart is that both minister and congregation will progress in their faith and continue to serve the Lord in their community for the glory of God. Now what we see in this chapter, in chapter three, is that Paul sets out the qualifications required for elders or overseers, as it's titled. He says that in verses one to seven, and then for deacons in verses eight to 13.

But you know, I just want to say there's no hierarchy in the church of Jesus Christ. I want to make clear that it's not minister, elder, deacon, member, adherent. It's nothing like that. Because as Paul says here in chapter three, there are only two offices in the church of Jesus Christ, the office of elder and the office of deacon. And these offices, they're not stages of advancement. They're not stages of qualification. They're not even stages of knowledge. They are two separate offices with two distinct functions. Because, well, the elder's concern is the spiritual welfare of the congregation.

An elder is, as the Bible explains to us, an elder is to be devoted to prayer and the ministry of the word. Whereas a deacon's concern is with the temporal welfare of the congregation, focusing, as the Bible teaches, upon helping the poor, comforting the widows, and as well as serving in the church. And as Paul stresses in this passage, both offices are equally important. Both offices are valuable to the church of Jesus Christ. But more than that, the responsibility of both offices is solemn. That's why Paul begins his exhortation on these two offices. He begins right at the beginning of verse one. He says, the saying is trustworthy. And Paul says that because he wants to state from the outset that taking office in the church of Jesus Christ, it's a solemn responsibility. It's not about status. It's all about service.

[6 : 47] But, you know, Paul's teaching here in verses eight to 13, the teaching about deacons, it actually applies to all of our office bearers here today, and those who aren't here. Not only because the qualifications which Paul sets out, it not only applies to everybody just because the qualifications are very, very similar, but also in our church practice, all of the elders serve on the deacon's court. All of the elders serve as deacons. Therefore, this passage, verses eight to 13, it applies to all of our office bearers, whether they are an elder or a deacon. In fact, this passage applies to every Christian, because the standard of qualifications which Paul sets out for elders and deacons, it's not in any way a higher standard above what is expected of any Christian. The standard of Christian living is the same. But office bearers, they ought always to be aware that their office is a public office, and their position is a public position in the church. But, you know, when Paul sets out these qualifications in verses eight to 13, the qualifications for office bearer, he highlights four things.

He highlights the office bearers, he says, he highlights his character, his conscience, his companion, and his confidence. He highlights his character, his conscience, his companion, and his confidence. So let's look first of all at his character, the character of an office bearer. He says in verse eight, deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. You know, Paul begins his qualifications of deacon by saying deacons likewise, likewise must be dignified. And Paul uses the word likewise because the character, the conduct, and even the conversation of a deacon, it is as important as the character, conduct, and conversation of an elder. Both are important because both offices are public offices, and both offices require office bearers to have a dignified character, conduct, and conversation. Now the word dignified, it means to be honorable, or to be worthy of respect. And they're to be worthy of respect because of their character, their conduct, and their conversation. Now it doesn't mean that they're faultless, doesn't mean that they're blameless, doesn't mean that they're without sin. But it does mean that they're to possess an irreproachable character, conduct, and conversation. Because the public office of an office bearer in the church, it's an office that is public, and everyone can see it. And Paul is emphasizing here that there should be nothing in the Christian character, conduct, or conversation that would even compromise the office bearer's reputation, or even the reputation of the church of Jesus Christ. As an office bearer, Paul says, he's to be a model and an example of Christian living in his character, conduct, and conversation. But as I said before, this not only applies to office bearers, it applies to all Christians. Because there is to be nothing in our character, our conduct, or our conversation, or our conversation that would compromise our reputation, or the reputation of the church of Jesus Christ. But you know, with this positive statement that an office bearer is to be dignified, Paul follows it within three negative statements. He says that an office bearer must not be insincere, he must not be an excessive drinker, and he must not be greedy. And again, all these characteristics which an office bearer possesses, they highlight the public importance of his office.

They highlight the importance of his character, his conduct, and his conversation. And these characteristics, they're certainly relevant to office bearers, because an office bearer must possess sound speech, self-control, and sincerity. And that's what Paul highlights here, when he says that they must not be insincere. He must not be double-tongued. He's to possess sound speech, because his conversation will certainly reveal his character, and his conversation will also reveal his conduct.

And you know, is that not what Jesus taught us? Jesus taught that from out of the heart, the mouth speaks. And Jesus says that out of the heart of man come evil thoughts, sometimes sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these things, say Jesus, come from within, and they also defile a person.

And so for Jesus, he says to us, take care of your heart, because out of the heart the mouth speaks. And even James, James in his New Testament letter, he reminds us that we need to tame our tongue, tongue. Because the tongue, it's a fire. It's a world of iniquity. It defiles the whole body, he says. And it sets on fire our course of nature, and it's set on fire by hell itself.

[12 : 39] My friend, we need to possess sound speech, healthy speech, not gossiping, not backbiting, but sound speech. Because sound speech, says Paul, will lead to self-control.

And self-control will lead to sincerity. And you know, again, Paul's character reference for office bearers, and indeed all Christians, it's important so that there will be nothing in our Christian character, conduct, or conversation that will compromise our personal reputation, or the reputation of Jesus and his church. And so an office bearer's character must not be for the good of himself, or the good of his own glory. No, the office bearer's character, conduct, and conversation must be for the good of the church, and for the glory of God.

You know, when it comes to these qualifications for an office bearer, Paul not only highlights his character, he also addresses his conscience. His conscience, that's what we see secondly.

We see that in verses 9 and 10. His conscience. He says, they must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience, and let them also be tested first. Then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. Now in these verses, Paul goes deeper than the outward appearance, because he addresses our conscience. And he says that we have to have a clear conscience. But you know, in the day and age we live in, we don't like to talk about our conscience. We don't like to even think about the fact that our conscience is God-given. We were created with a conscience. And believe it or not, our conscience is there for our benefit. It's there to correct us when we do wrong. It's there to challenge us when we break God's law. Our conscience, it's there to remind us that we're accountable to our Creator, and that we need to turn to this Saviour, Jesus Christ. Our conscience is very important. It's there to remind us that we're accountable to our Creator, and that we need to turn to the Saviour, Jesus Christ. And you know, if I can, just for a moment, you know, my unconverted friend here today, I'm sure there are times in your life that you're more aware of your conscience.

Maybe you're more aware of your conscience every time you come and sit in church. But sadly, what many people do, and maybe you do this too, maybe you ignore your conscience. You might experience what we would call a conviction of sin. You might think, I need to sort myself out. I need to commit my life to Jesus. You might even feel that, well, you're acknowledging that you're not committed as you should be. You're not saved. You're lost. You might admit all these things. But even though you're aware of your condition, what often happens is that when you walk out the door, you silence your conscience, you leave it till next week. You leave it. But my unconverted friend, and you know I love addressing you, because I love you so deeply. How is your conscience today? How is it with your conscience?

[16 : 13] Does your conscience bother you? Or do you just suppress and silence that God-given conscience? Does your soul bother you? Or do you just ignore it? Do you put it off for the moment? Do you just leave it till a later date, or till next week, or a more convenient time in your life?

But you know, my friend, does it not get tiring for you that you're being told every week when you come to church that you need to be saved? Does it not get tiring that you're doing nothing about it, and your conscience is still bothering you? Do you not get fed up with your conscience bothering you? Do you not get fed up of the fact that you're being weighed down all the time, and you're being reminded that you need to commit your life to Jesus Christ? And one day, and you're being reminded of this again and again, one day you're going to die. And you're going to wake up in hell because you never dealt with your conscience.

And the awful thing about hell is that your conscience will be let loose on you. Your conscience will bother you for all of eternity, and you'll never stop it because you won't be able to deal with it like you can deal with it today. You can deal with your conscience today by committing your life to Jesus Christ. And you know me by now, I don't say that lightly.

I say it because I love you. I say it because I have a burden for you. I say it because I have an earnest desire that you'll be saved. But the only way to be saved, the only way to have a clear conscience is to do as Paul says here, hold to the mystery of the faith. Hold to the mystery of the faith. Lay hold of the mystery of the faith. And what is the mystery of the faith? The mystery of the faith is what was previously hidden, has now been revealed. And in fact, Paul, he explains what the mystery of the faith is in verse 16. He says, Great indeed, we confess the mystery of godliness. He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

My friend, the mystery of the faith is Jesus Christ and him crucified. And that's what has been revealed to us. That's why we have the Bible. It's there in all its clarity. Jesus has been revealed to us in the person of Jesus Christ. God has been revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. He has died on the cross to take away our sins. And by faith in him, by commitment to him, we have the promise of eternal life. That's the mystery of the faith. And Paul says, lay hold of it. Lay hold of the mystery of the faith. Because it's then that you'll have a clear conscience. So how's your conscience?

[19:07] That if we trust in this Jesus and if we commit our life to him, we'll have this hope of forgiveness, the promise of eternal life. We'll have a clear conscience. And my friend, the only way, the only way to have that conscience clear is by committing to Jesus Christ. And Paul says, this is a must for a deacon or even an elder, an office bearer. He must hold to the mystery of the faith. He must have a clear conscience by his commitment to Jesus Christ. In other words, he must be a committed Christian. And that might seem like an obvious point to make, that an office bearer in the church of Jesus Christ must be a Christian. But sadly, there are many churches in our nation where office bearers are not Christians. But Paul says it's a requirement. They have to have a clear conscience. They have to be committed to Jesus Christ.

But says Paul, in order to know that they're committed to Jesus Christ, they have to be tested first. They can't just be put into office because they're available. They have to be tested, he says.

They have to prove themselves that they're qualified to take office in the church. And that's what Paul says in verse 10. Let them also be tested first. Then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. And you know, the word Paul uses for testing or proving that an office bearer is qualified, it's the word for testing or proving oxen before you would buy them. Now, we don't do that nowadays.

But when this was first written, you would put oxen through their paces and you would see if they were suitable for working in the ground and pulling a plough behind them. And in a similar way, Paul is saying before office bearers are ordained, they must be tested. They must prove that they will be suitable for their office and useful in the congregation for the church of Jesus Christ.

And I know that these four men here today, they feel very inadequate and very inexperienced because they would all say that they're relatively young in the faith. But the thing is, they're further on in the faith than the seven deacons who were first appointed in the early church. The first deacons in the early church, they had only been Christians for three, maybe even four months when they were appointed and ordained. So in comparison to the first deacons, the four men here today, they're veterans, you could say. And they've certainly proved that they're ready. They're ready to put their hand to the plough and they're ready to work in the kingdom of God. And so when Paul sets out the qualifications for an office bearer in the church, he draws attention to his character, his conscience, and then thirdly, his companion. His companion. Look at verse 11. Their wives, he says, likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. When Paul draws attention to the wife of an office bearer, he begins verse 11 the same or in a similar way, he began verse 8. Paul said in verse 8, deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued. Then he says in verse 11, their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers. And from the similarities of these verses, some have concluded, some even argue that Paul is now setting out the qualifications for women deacons.

[23 : 02] And they make that claim because the word wife can also be translated as woman. But I'm sure to the relief of many of the women in our congregation, this argument, it falls flat on its face when you go to the next verse and says that a deacon must be the husband of one wife. And to insist on women deacons after that, it would lead to far bigger issues and a greater, and many greater complications. And so in these verses, Paul is highlighting the importance of an office bearer's wife.

But Paul doesn't insist that an office bearer must be married. What else? Paul himself would be disqualified. He was never married. But Paul is affirming that the wife of an office bearer has an important role.

And you may be thinking to yourself, especially those who are the wife of an office bearer, or soon to be the wife of an office bearer, what on earth does his wife have to do with being an office bearer in the church? And Paul says, everything. Everything.

Because Paul highlights that the marriage of an office bearer conveys a message. The marriage of an office bearer conveys a message. And his wife, he says, must have a suitable character, conduct, and conversation that's fitting for the office that her husband holds. Now, Paul doesn't insist that the wife of an office bearer has to be a Christian, although that is preferable. We would love everyone to be a Christian. We would love everyone to follow Jesus and be committed to Jesus. But it's not a requirement. It's not a requirement for her husband to take office in the church. What is required, and this is what Paul stresses, is that the wife of an office bearer lives like her husband.

She lives her life like her husband. He says that she must be dignified. She must have a dignified character, conduct, and conversation. She must be honorable. She must be worthy of respect because of her character, her conduct, and her conversation. Of course, like her husband, it doesn't mean that she's faultless or blameless or without sin, but it does mean that she's to possess a dignified character, conduct, and conversation. And Paul says, like her husband, she's not to be a slanderer.

[25 : 28] She's not to be a gossip. She's to control her tongue. She's to be sober-minded. She's to possess self-control, and she's to be faithful to her husband. And you know, the reason Paul mentions the office bearer's companion is because of the public office that an office bearer holds in the church. Because an office bearer's wife is not to bring the name of her husband or even the name of the church into disrepute. But, says Paul in verse 12, if an office bearer is married, he has an important responsibility to his wife as a husband and as a father. He says in verse 12, let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. And with this Paul, he reminds office bearers that even though they take office in the church, it's not to be to the detriment or to the neglect of their family. Because what an office bearer is in public must also be what an office bearer is in private. And Paul draws attention to the private life of an office bearer when he says that he must be the husband of one wife. Again, this doesn't mean that he has to be married. But if he is married, he's to stay married. He's to be faithful to his wife. He's to love his wife.

He's to love his children. He's to care for his wife. He's to care for his children. He's to be committed to his wife and he's to be committed to his children. He's not to flirt with other women. He's not to put himself in a position that would compromise his marriage or even his witness as a Christian.

He's to be the husband of one wife. And by being an example in his marriage, Paul says he will be an example to his family. And by being an example to his family, he will manage his household well.

And you know, my friend, the marriage of an office bearer, it conveys a message. And the message it must convey is a message of stability, security, and service. The marriage of an office bearer conveys a message. And the message is a message of stability, security, and service. Because that's the office of an office bearer. It's an office of service. It's not an office of status. It's an office of service.

And this is so important because what we are as an office bearer in public must also be what we are as an office bearer in private. And so when Paul sets out the qualifications for an office bearer in the church, he highlights his character, his conscience, his companion. And then lastly in verse 13, he highlights his conscience, his confidence. I'm getting confused with my C's. His confidence.

[28 : 25] Verse 13. For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus. Paul concludes his teaching on the qualification for office bearers by emphasizing that their service is not self-service. And their confidence is not to be self-confidence.

Because to be in, to insist on self-service and to promote self-confidence. Well that goes against the foundation of Christianity and even the Christian church. Because in order to be a Christian, Jesus says you must deny self. You must deny self if you want to be a Christian. If you want to follow me, you have to deny self and take up your cross and follow me. And the example which Jesus sets out in the Bible is an example of service. It's not an example of status. The gospel clearly tells us that Jesus came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. And you know, service was at the heart of Christ's death on the cross. And service should be at the heart of the Christian church.

Because Jesus himself, he was an obedient servant. He became a servant who was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. And as Paul says to the Philippians, Jesus is your example.

Therefore all office bearers and indeed all Christians are to follow in the servant-like footsteps of Jesus Christ. And because Jesus has served us well by dying in our place, by giving to us the promise of eternal life, because Jesus has served us well, Paul says that we're to serve him well by giving our all for the good of his church and the glory of God. We're to give our wholehearted service to Jesus, not our half-hearted service to Jesus. And we're to do it, says Paul, with confidence.

Not self-confidence. No, no. Boldness, he says. Boldness with your faith. We're to be bold with our faith in Jesus Christ. We're to step out of our comfort zone and our holy little huddles and serve our church and our community for the glory of God and the extension of Christ's kingdom. And you know, we will serve our congregation and our community well, both as office bearers and as Christians. We will do it by living Christ-centered lives that seek to bring glory to God. But you know, particularly office bearers, we have a responsibility and it's we. I'm included too. Don't ever think I'm just addressing them.

[31 : 20] I'm an office bearer too. We have our responsibility to ensure that our character, our conscience, and our conversation is both Christ-centered and gospel-focused. Because as those who hold office in the church of Jesus Christ, we are to be an encouragement and we are also to be an example to those in our congregation and also in our community. So that our utmost desire is that they will come to know this wonderful Savior who loved us and gave himself for us. That's what it's all about. That more and more will come and confess Jesus Christ as Lord. And so as we come to ordaining new office bearers in the congregation, Paul sets out for us the qualifications for an office bearer.

And he highlights his character, his conscience, his companion, and his confidence. Well may the Lord bless these few thoughts to us. Let us pray.

O Lord our gracious God, we give thanks to thee for thy word. Thy word that is the only rule to direct us on how we may glorify God and enjoy him forever.

And we give thanks Lord that thy word not only gives to us the way of salvation, but it also gives to us directions on how we are to work in the church of God and how we are to serve.

And Lord we thank thee for all these directions and we pray that we would apply them in our lives and bring glory to thy name. We confess Lord that we faint and fail, but we give thanks to thee that thou art the God who fails us never.

[33 : 03] O continue with us then we pray. Lead us and guide us by thy spirit that thou wouldst go before us in all things. For we ask it in Jesus name and for his sake. Amen.

Amen. We're going to sing again at this time in Psalm 19. Psalm 19 again in the Scottish Psalter.

It's on page 223. Psalm 19. And we're singing from verse 11 down to the end of the psalm.

Psalm 19. It's a psalm that reminds us that God reveals himself to us. In verses 1 to 6 God reveals himself through creation.

In verses 7 to 10 God reveals himself through his word. And then in verses 11 to the end of the psalm as well. We have to apply what God has said to us in our lives.

[34 : 02] So Psalm 19 and verse 11. Moreover they thy servant warn how he his life should frame. A great reward provided is for them that keep the same. Who can his errors understand?

O cleanse thou me within from secret faults. Thy servant keep from all presumptuous sin. And on to the end of the psalm of Psalm 19. To God's praise.

For all of them thy servant born.

How he his life should frame. O cleanse thou me within from secret faults. For all of them that keep the same.

For all of them that keep the same. Who can his errors understand?

[35 : 08] O glenst thou me within From secret walls thy servant King from all priests and just sin And do not suffer them to have dominion over me Then righteous and innocent I draw much joy The words which from my mouth proceed

The thoughts sent from my heart Accept, O Lord, for thine my strength And my Redeemer are Amen