

Devoted 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 April 2022

Preacher: Rev. Murdo M Campbell

[0 : 00] Well, if we could, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling this evening, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read in 1 Timothy 3.

1 Timothy 3, and if we read again at verse 8. Where Paul writes, 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.

And so on. I want to begin this evening by asking the question, Are you a slave or a servant?

[1 : 17] Are you a slave or a servant? And the reason I ask the question is because in the New Testament, Paul uses both slave and servant to help depict and describe our salvation and our service.

In Greek, the word slave is *doulos*, and the word servant is *deacon*. So the word slave is *doulos*, the word servant is *deacon*.

So the question we've been confronted with this evening is, Are you a slave and a servant? Are you a *doulos* and a *deacon*?

Are you a slave and a servant? Are you a *doulos* and a *deacon*? Paul teaches us that we are first and foremost slaves of Christ. We are slaves of Christ.

We're slaves before we're servants. We're a *doulos* before we're a *deacon*. In fact, all of the apostles, when you read their New Testament letters, They all describe themselves as a *doulos*.

[2 : 17] They all describe themselves as a slave of Jesus Christ. Therefore, as Christians, we are all slaves of Jesus Christ. That's what we were singing in Psalm 123.

We are looking to the Master's hand because we're all slaves of Christ. And we're slaves of Christ because there's nothing in the Christian life, There's nothing in the Christian life that gives you promotion or position or prominence.

Only pride does that. Therefore, Paul teaches that if you think that you're important, Or if you think that you're impressive in the church or within the community Because of the office you hold or because of the offerings that you give, Then he says that we completely misunderstand the gospel.

Because the gospel, as you know, it isn't about position. It's not about prominence. It's not about promotion. And it's certainly not about pride. The gospel isn't about status.

The gospel is all about slavery. And it's all about service. Because the call of Christianity is to come and die. We are to deny self.

[3 : 26] And we're to die to self. We're to take up our cross and follow and serve Jesus. And you know, the glory of the gospel is that in order to make us, In order to make us slaves of Christ, Christ became our slave.

In order to make us slaves of Christ, Christ became our slave. That's what Paul says in Philippians chapter 2. He says that Christ made himself of no reputation.

He made himself, our English translation will say servant, But it's actually slave. He made himself a julos, a slave. He was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, as a slave.

But even though we're slaves of Christ, The question Paul wants to present to us this evening is, Are we also servants of Christ? We're slaves because of our salvation.

But are we servants in our service? Do we see that our response to salvation is a responsibility of service?

[4 : 34] Because we're saved to serve. We're saved to serve. Therefore, are you a slave and a servant? Are you a julos and a deacon? Are you a devoted deacon?

And this evening, I'd like us just to consider this section under two headings. The character of service and the companion in service. The character of service and the companion in service.

So first of all, the character of service. Paul writes there in verse 8, he says, 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.

Now, as you know, Paul wrote this personal and pastoral letter to Timothy. He was a young minister who was preaching and pastoring a congregation in the city of Ephesus.

[5 : 37] And Paul had sent Timothy to Ephesus because there were erroneous elders who were soft on sin, they were loose on the law, and they were elders who were just glossing over the gospel.

And their false teaching was infecting and infiltrating and influencing the Christians in Ephesus. In fact, there were so many problems in Ephesus, as we've seen many times before, that Paul wanted to just throw in the towel and walk away completely.

Timothy wanted to walk away completely. But as we see in this letter, Paul, he exhorts and he encourages young Timothy to stay. Stay there, stand firm, stay focused.

And throughout this letter, Paul gives us five Ps. Problems in the church, the importance of prayer, positions of leadership, passion for truth, and pastoring patiently.

He gives us five Ps, problems, prayer, positions, passion, and pastoring. And in chapter 3, which we're looking at this evening, Paul focuses upon the third P, positions of leadership.

[6 : 46] And Paul teaches us that there are only two types of office in the church. There are only two offices in the church of Jesus Christ. The office of an elder and the office of a deacon.

And these two offices, Paul explains, are not stages of advancement. They're not stages of progression or qualification or knowledge.

They are two separate offices with two distinct functions. Because the role of an elder focuses upon the spiritual welfare of the congregation and the community.

And the role of a deacon focuses upon the temporal welfare of the congregation and the community. The strange thing in our free church tradition is that every elder is also a deacon.

I don't know how that one works. Probably because of the few numbers. But Paul highlights problems in the positions of leadership here in the church in Ephesus. Because there were these erroneous elders and there were disobedient deacons.

[7 : 49] They were elders and deacons who were only interested in the applause and the approval of others. They were focused and fixated with position, not pastoring.

They wanted status, not service. And yet their God-given calling as office bearers was to be effective elders and devoted deacons by their commitment, their character, their conduct, and their conversation.

Because their position in the church of Jesus Christ, as Paul emphasizes here, it was a serious role. A serious role which carries with it solemn responsibilities.

And so whether an elder or a deacon, Paul says that even though they're both distinct offices, they're both equally important.

And that's why Paul introduces this section on devoted deacons with the word likewise. You see that at the beginning of verse 8. Deacons likewise must be dignified.

[8 : 53] He emphasizes the importance of the role of a devoted deacon. That he is like the elders. He is to show his commitment, character, conduct, and conversation.

And his commitment, character, conduct, and conversation is to be as important as the commitment, character, conduct, and conversation of an effective elder.

Because both offices in the church, elder and deacon, they are both public offices. They are public offices in a church and within a community.

And as we said before, the commitment, character, conduct, and conversation that's expected and should be exemplified in the life of an effective elder should also be expected and exemplified in the life of a devoted deacon.

And also, in other words, it goes without saying. That's what Paul is saying here all the time. It goes without saying. This should be expected and exemplified in the life of every Christian.

[10 : 00] Because, as you know, there isn't a different standard of holiness when you hold an office in the church. No, what's expected and what should be exemplified in our commitment, our character, our conduct, our conversation, it should be all the same.

Whether we're a minister, an elder, a deacon, or a member in the congregation, we should all have the same commitment, same character, conduct, and conversation.

The only difference, and it's the difference that Paul highlights, the only difference is that an elder or a deacon has a public office. They have a more visible role and responsibility within a congregation and community setting.

And as Paul explains and emphasizes here, just like he did when explaining and emphasizing about the need for effective elders, Paul says that a devoted deacon must be dignified.

That's what he says at the beginning of verse 8. A devoted deacon must be dignified. In other words, just like an effective elder, just like he said in the previous section about an effective elder, he says a devoted deacon must be above reproach.

[11 : 15] He's to have an irreproachable character. An irreproachable reputation. He's to have this irreproachable commitment and character and conduct and conversation.

There's to be no public or private shame or sin in his life that would cause concern or criticism from a congregation or the community.

Because as devoted deacons, he's to be a man of honor and integrity. He's to be diligent and dignified. He's to be reverent and respectful.

He's to be holy and wholehearted. He's to be serious and sincere. A devoted deacon, says Paul, must be dignified. He must be dignified.

But before Paul states what else a devoted deacon must be, he states that a devoted deacon must not be double-tongued, a drunkard, or dishonest.

[12 : 20] He must not be a gossip, a glutton, or a gambler. Because as Paul states, a devoted deacon must hold to the mystery of the faith.

A devoted deacon must hold to the mystery of the faith. Now, what Paul means by the mystery of the faith is what he states in verse 16. He says there in verse 16, Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness, which is the mystery of the faith.

And what he says is, Therefore, the mystery of the faith, the mystery of godliness, is simply Jesus Christ and him crucified.

And Paul asserts and affirms that this is an absolute necessity. This is an absolute necessity for the qualification of an office bearer. He must, says Paul, he must hold to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.

In other words, he must love Jesus, look to Jesus, listen to Jesus, learn from Jesus, lean upon Jesus, and live his life for Jesus. He must be a committed Christian.

[13 : 42] And you know, you read this and you think, Well, Paul, aren't you stating the obvious? Of course he has to be a committed Christian. Because surely you'd expect an office bearer in the church to be a committed Christian.

Surely you'd expect them to hold to the mystery of the faith. But remember the context. Timothy is dealing with erroneous elders. He's dealing with disobedient deacons.

Which means that sometimes you need to state the obvious. Sometimes you need to just put it out there. He must hold to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.

You know, this not only relates to first century Ephesus. This also relates to 21st century Scotland. Because the sad reality is there are many churches in our nation which have elders and deacons who are graceless and godless.

We have many churches in our nation which have ministers who are graceless and godless. You know, there's one minister on the church development track with me.

[14 : 55] And he joined the free church from the Church of Scotland a number of years ago. And he was telling me that when he went to his first charge, he had 53 elders in his congregation.

He had 53 elders in the congregation. And out of those 53 elders, 12 of them were Freemasons. And only three of them were born again Christians.

Only three of them. So you can see why Paul states the obvious here. When he says he must hold to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.

And in order to emphasize this point, Paul explains in verse 10. He says, And let them also be tested first. Then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless.

In fact, Paul says that this is an imperative. A devoted deacon must be tested. He must be examined. He must be proved. And the word Paul uses here is the same word that's used for testing or proving or examining a yoke of oxen before you would buy them.

[16 : 07] Because before oxen were bought, they were often tried and tested. They had to be put through their pieces to see if they were suitable for plowing the field. And in a similar way, Paul encourages and he exhorts Timothy to test and prove and examine the office bearers.

Ensure that they're suitable, he says. Ensure that they're suitable servants and effective elders and devoted deacons in the church of Jesus Christ.

Now, I say all this to you. And I realize that I have to preach this first of all to myself. You might sit there and think, Poor, Myrtle, this is a high standard.

And I look at it and I think, Myrtle, this is a high standard. Because, you know, more often than not, in the context and culture that we're in, we often think that we're unsuitable, unworkable, unserviceable oxen that should be just left and not used at all.

Because we feel that we're inadequate. We feel inexperienced for the task in hand. But, you know, when you go to Acts chapter 6 and you consider the first deacons appointed in the early church, they were appointed as devoted deacons in order to enable the elders to be effective elders.

[17 : 31] But these devoted deacons in Acts chapter 6, they'd only be converted about three or four months. And like everyone who's ordained as an office bearer, every single office bearer, they feel inadequate.

They feel inexperienced for the task. But the thing is, about those in Acts chapter 6, and the thing about us, is that when we put our hand to the plow, we are not to turn back.

When we put our hand to the plow, we're not to turn back. And so, are we a slave and a servant? Are you a julos and a deacon?

Are we devoted deacons? That's the question we're asking this evening. So we see, first of all, the character of service. Then secondly, the companion in service.

The companion in service. He says there in verse 11, their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderish, but sober-minded, faithful in all things.

[18 : 31] 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.

So Paul introduces the companion in service by using the same word he did in verse 8, the word likewise. You see that there.

Deacons likewise must be dignified. Verse 11, their wives likewise must be dignified. And Paul states that the wife of an effective elder or the wife of a devoted deacon, like her husband, she must be dignified, which is the same word that Paul used in verse 2, and also verse 8, and now here in verse 11.

She must be dignified. Like her husband, she must be above reproach. She's to have an irreproachable character or an irreproachable reputation.

Like her husband, she's to be a woman of honor and integrity. She's to be diligent and dignified. She's to be reverent and respectful. She's to be serious and sincere, just like her husband is.

[19 : 47] Like her husband, she's to have an irreproachable commitment and character and conduct and conversation. Like her husband, there's to be no public or private sin or shame in her life that would cause concern or criticism from the congregation or the community.

But as we said before, the commitment, character, conduct, and conversation of an effective elder or a devoted deacon is as important as the commitment, character, conduct, and conversation of every Christian.

Every Christian. But Paul goes further here when he states that the commitment and character and conduct and conversation that's expected, it should be exemplified in the life of the wife of an effective elder or a devoted deacon.

And it seems that the reason Paul highlights and homes in on this point is because whether they're aware of it or not, just like their husband who holds a public office within the congregation and community, the wife of that office bearer, this is what Paul says, the wife of that office bearer is just as visible and just as public.

Therefore, she has, in many ways, a role and a responsibility within the congregation and community. Now, Paul isn't saying that the minister's wife or the elder's wife or the deacon's wife has an office in the church.

[21 : 25] Not at all. Because the role and responsibility, the role and responsibility of the wife of an office bearer is to first and foremost lovingly support and strengthen their husband.

That's what they're called to do. First and foremost, support and strengthen their husband so that he, in his God-given office, so that he can fulfill his role and responsibility within the congregation.

And that's the reason Paul highlights and homes in on the wife of an office bearer. And it's interesting that he does. He never had a wife himself. And yet, he emphasizes the importance of the wife of an office bearer.

Because, as Paul teaches here, she's to be a help to her husband, not a hindrance. The wife of an office bearer is to be a help to her husband, not a hindrance.

And as you know, Paul repeatedly, not only in this letter, but in other places in Scripture, he repeatedly emphasizes the order and the organization of the creation as our example for the order and organization of the church.

[22 : 41] So in order to emphasize Christ's church, he says that Christ's church is not a church of chaos and confusion. It's one of order and organization. And it's all based upon God's order and organization of the creation.

And we've seen this, we saw this in chapter 2, where God has given, God-given roles and responsibilities to men and women. Because, as Paul explained and emphasized in chapter 2, the church is to follow the order and organization of creation.

Adam was created first, then Eve. But when highlighting and homing in on this wee section here, verses 11 to 13, when Paul talks about the role and responsibility of the wife of the office bearer, he says that she's to be a help to her husband and not a hindrance.

Because the order and organization of creation is that Eve was created to be Adam's helpmate, not Adam's hindrance. Eve was created as Adam's helpmate, not Adam's hindrance.

And it was only when Eve listened to the serpent, we see that in Genesis 3, it was only when Eve listened to the serpent and put her wants and her wishes before her husband, that's when she became a hindrance rather than a help.

[24 : 08] What's more is that the order and organization of creation, where Adam was formed first and Eve, it re-emphasizes and reaffirms the point that although women are not to hold an office in the church, they are valuable and they are certainly visible.

And they're to be valuable and they're to be visible because they do have a role and they do have a responsibility. Because, and we see that even in the other pastoral letter to Titus.

Paul wrote to Titus and he said about older women in the congregation and younger women in the congregation. He said that the older women in the congregation are to teach the younger women.

They're to take them under their wing and disciple them, to love their husbands and to teach their children. And, you know, of course, some looking at this section will ask and maybe even argue.

I've had the arguments before. They'll say, well, what about Phoebe? Was she not a deaconess? And the answer is no. Phoebe was someone who served in the church, but she didn't hold the office of a deacon.

[25 : 23] She wasn't a deaconess. If she was, that would completely contradict the teaching of Paul here. In fact, if you're using an NIV Bible, it will, Paul, when you read from the NIV, Paul categorically states that office bearers are to be men.

Therefore, Phoebe wasn't a deaconess, but she was a woman in the congregation who sought to use her gifts to serve the Lord. And throughout his letters, Paul, we've seen it before, Paul applauds and admires women for their exemplary and their contribution and their commitment to the church of Jesus Christ.

Because when you look at the church in Philippi, there was Lydia and Lodia and Syntyche. When you consider the church in Rome, there's this list that Paul gives at the end of his letter where he talks about all these women who are serving in the church.

He talks about Phoebe. He talks about Junia, Mary, Tryphonia, Tryphosa, Persis, and Julia. All these female servants who were serving, but they didn't have an office in the church.

They weren't deaconesses. They desired to devote their gifts for the glory of God and the furtherance of the kingdom. And needless to say, that's still needed in the church today.

[26 : 52] It's still needed in the 21st century because the church needs everyone to work together. We're all slaves because we're all saved. We've all experienced and received the gift of salvation.

We're all slaves of Christ, but we're also to be servants of Christ. We're all slaves and we're to be servants. So the church needs everyone to demonstrate and display a God-honoring commitment, a God-honoring character, a God-honoring conduct, a God-honoring conversation because our response, and this is what Paul is getting at all the time, our response to salvation, the gift we have received, our response to the gift of salvation is our role and our responsibility of service.

We're to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. We're to imitate and emulate our Savior. And so Paul is asking us this evening. Are you a slave and a servant?

Are you a Jew loss and a Deco? Because we're saved to serve. We must always remember this. We are saved to serve.

We're saved to serve. Well, may the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, when we consider Thy Word and the standard that it sets for us, O Lord, we feel that we often faint and we fail and we fall so far short.

[28 : 40] But we thank Thee that Thou art the God who has called us to be slaves of Christ. And we pray that we would seek to serve Him daily wherever we are working, wherever we are witnessing, whatever we are doing.

Help us, Lord, always to have that servant-like heart, to be serving Jesus, to even give a cup of cold water in His name and to know that it is done in His name, the name that is above every other name.

Help us, Lord, to be serving in our prayers, to be serving in our giving, to be serving in our time, to be serving, Lord, in any which way that we can, that we would do it all for Jesus because Jesus, our suffering servant, has done it all for us.

O Lord, help us to respond. Help us to respond as slaves, to respond in service, to be faithful to Jesus. Bless us then, Lord, we ask.

Bless Thy Word to our souls. Help us to keep our eyes firmly fixed upon our Master's hand, to walk with Him day by day and to hear His voice speaking to us in His Word.

[29 : 51] Go before us and we pray. Cleanse us, we ask, for we ask it in Jesus' name and for His sake. Amen. Well, we're going to bring our service to a conclusion this evening by singing in Psalm 19.

Psalm 19, again, in the Scottish Psalter. Psalm 19, it's on page 223. As you know, Psalm 19 is a psalm which speaks about God's revelation.

Where God has revealed Himself through creation, that's God's general revelation, and then God reveals Himself through His Word. That's His special revelation. We have general revelation verses 1 to 6, special revelation verses 7 to 10, and then verses 11 to 14 which we're going to sing is all about our response to God's general and special revelation because we are to respond in service.

We're to serve the God who has revealed Himself and saved us. We're to serve Him. That's what this psalm emphasizes to us.

It says in 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?

[31 : 29] O cleanse thou me within from secret faults thy servant keep from all presumptuous sin. and do not suffer them to have dominion over me. Then righteous and innocent I from much sin shall be.

The words which from my mouth proceed, the thoughts sent from my heart, accept, O Lord, for thou my strength and my Redeemer art.

So let's sing these verses in conclusion. Verses 11 to 14 of Psalm 19 to God's praise. For over they thy servant war, how he his life should frame.

How great reward provided it is more than the keep the same.

Who can his errors understand? O cleanse the me within?

[32 : 48] From secret faults thy servant keep from all reasons of just sin.

And do not suffer them to have dominion over me.

There I just and innocent I from my sins shall be.

The words which from my mouth proceed the thoughts said from my heart accept O Lord for thou my strength and thy redeemer heart.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forevermore. Amen.