

Prayers

Opening prayer

We praise You Great Lord of all Creation
You are the One who makes all things perfect!
You are the One who knows what is right and wrong!
You are the One who graciously forgives our sin!
You are the One who liberates us for Glory!
Alleluia – AMEN!

Prayer Suggestions

General theme of the week: TRANSPORT

1. For yourself

Give thanks to God for every means by which you get about in daily life, and ask the Lord's blessing on any journey you are planning, whether for holidays or for work

2. For your friends and family

Give thanks to God for your family and friends; pray that a generous spirit will pervade your relationships so that help will be offered to those who need it especially in getting about from place to place

3. For the church and its work

Pray for the work of the church amongst travelling communities and those who are always on the move

4. For your neighbourhood, your country and the world (News)

Pray for the transport needs of your country. Political decisions are taken all the time about transport, which affect the lives of billions; pray that God will speak to politicians through people of faith and goodwill, so that wise decisions are taken

Meditation

You know all things about everything, O lord;
and yet You give of Your time to me.

You hear the sounds of the Universe, O Lord;
and yet You listen to what I say.

You are truth and justice personified, O Lord;
and yet You save me from my sin.

You create new things every day, O Lord;
and yet You rejoice in all I do.

You speak Your Word to the Universe, O Lord;
and yet You whisper in my ear.

Forgive me when I am selfish, O Lord,
and fail to give my attention to You.

Bible Study

Bible passage – 1 Timothy 3:8-13

⁸ In the same way, 'helpers' must be of good character, not deceitful, not addicted to drink or greedy for money; ⁹ they must take hold of the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰ So let them first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are without fault. ¹¹ Likewise, women must be of good character, not given to gossip, sober and faithful in all things. ¹² Deacons must be husbands of one wife, and capable of managing their children and households well; ¹³ for those who serve well as deacons gain a good reputation for themselves and show great confidence in their faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Review

Paul gives advice about the character of those to be appointed deacon in the church.

This passage of 1 Timothy is about the qualities required of those who aspire to work in the church as 'helpers' (3:8), for which the Greek word is 'diakonos', or deacon. If you read yesterday's study you will quickly realise that this passage says little more about Christian character than what Paul said previously about 'bishops' (3:1f.). Many of the specific qualities mentioned are identical, though some are a little different, and it is difficult to spot any substantial difference between the two. Both speak of the need to be sober and of good character, and both talk about the need to maintain family order (an issue discussed in yesterday's study). So what was the purpose of these two offices of church leadership within the early church? Little is said by Paul, but it does appear that women may be 'deacons' (see v11) whereas they do not get a mention in the discussion about bishops. However, we are on the wrong track completely if we try to formalise hierarchies and structures of leadership out of passages like this and others in the New Testament, in order to justify historical divisions between the major churches today. If a passage such as this is used for such purposes, then it is robbed of its power.

In the highly structured church organisations which dominate church life for many today, the office of 'deacon' in one church is part of a stepping-stone towards a different office of 'priesthood', and in another it is a respected office of general service within local church life. In addition, some are highly attached to the structure of deacon, priest and bishop, and others to the more non-conformist pattern of 'eldership and diaconate'; and there are strong feelings amongst many about which is 'right', with some Christians having little to do with those who use the 'other' model. How awful it is that God's guidance about the governance of the church has been used to justify vastly different leadership roles which now create divisions between Christians; divisions of 'principle' which different churches have repeatedly said are non-negotiable! I fear Satan has made the most of our inability to read God's Word with the same open hearted attitude with which it was given to us.

Personally, I prefer to suggest that a good model of leadership in the church is to be found in the head of the church, Jesus Christ, who is our 'prophet, priest and King'. I will not expand on this here because it is not the subject of our passage, but it is quite wrong for us to take this and other passages in the New Testament and suggest that through them God has fixed for us a model of leadership which each church must follow!

Here in the third chapter of 1 Timothy, Paul advised Timothy firstly about the office of 'bishop' and then 'deacon'. These were not static leadership roles with tight definitions about status, rank and role, and our first conclusion must be that this text gives us no grounds to say what a 'deacon' should be or do, just as the previous passage (3:1-7) did not say anything about what a bishop was or should 'do'. Secondly, Paul says nothing here about the different types of ministry required by the church in order for it to function as Christ's body; for that we must look at Romans 12 or 1 Corinthians 12, or perhaps Ephesians 4, and the famous 'Gifts of the Spirit'.

The most obvious thing about 1 Timothy 3 is that both roles described are characterised by one spiritual property, which is 'service'. Why should we imagine that any form of leadership in the church should be anything else, given that Jesus 'took a towel ... and washed the disciples feet ... and said "Go and do likewise"' (John 13:4-15)? The implication is clear; every level of structure which the church sets in place must show that it is a form of service. It is also wise to express the same point from a different but important perspective; we should not expect our leaders in the church to behave like managing directors of companies or politicians, whatever their duties or responsibilities within the church (we should certainly not expect our leaders to behave like society's wealthiest, for example, or let them).

Within this passage there is also a good basis for emphasising that good leadership is based on humble and modest attitudes, controlled behaviour and lifestyle, and rigorous faith and devotion, even in the home. These are the primary requirements for all in authority, whether treasurers, evangelists, administrators or preachers. I am not sure that we can find anywhere in scripture the idealised models of church leadership which Christians of later years have unrealistically built on scriptures which offer spiritual guidelines for those in positions of responsibility. The best thing we can do with these scriptures is to use them as they were intended, as a guide for all who would serve the church in whatever capacity. It is not worth attempting to

justify the role or status of a 'deacon' within any current model of church leadership from this text, because this is not its purpose. However, we will build up the church of God if we make sure that everyone who serves God's people becomes aware that this scripture has something to say to them.

Discipleship

Questions for groups

1. Discuss in your group the spiritual qualities which are described by this passage of scripture.
2. Do the qualities described within this passage fit any particular leadership role in your church more than others?
3. Is it right to aspire to have a 'good reputation' (3:13) for the work you do as a Christian?

Discipleship challenges

- *Pray for any in your church who hold the office of 'deacon'. Find an opportunity to talk with anyone who holds this office about what they understand their duty to be and how it relates, if at all to this passage of scripture.*
 - *Consider how you measure up to the standards of faith and behaviour mentioned in this passage. If some of this seems impossible for you, why is this so, and do you think it affects whether or not you should hold office in the church?*
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Final Prayer

Keep me honest, Lord God, I pray. Show me how my life might reflect truth and integrity in the eyes of others; not so that I can claim anything for myself, but so that I might simply do Your will, and accomplish what is right. I ask this prayer in Jesus' name; AMEN
