

Qualifications for Deacons

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[0:00] We'll read the last half of this chapter, beginning at verse 8. Having spoken of the qualifications for the overseer, he now says, Deacons, likewise, are to be men 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, their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers, but temperate and trustworthy in everything.

A deacon must be the husband of but one 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.

Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions, so that if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.

[1:27] Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great. He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory.

If you found yourself in the position of being the head of an airline company, one that transports people, who would you hire as your pilots?

Who would you pick to fly your planes that are going to transport human life? Would you hire somebody that had never flown an airplane before? Would you hire someone fresh out of pilot training, whose only experience was with a single engine Cessna?

Would you hire somebody that had logged many hours of flight time, but had developed a drinking problem? I dare say we wouldn't hire any of those people.

We would hire trustworthy, proven, reliable pilots, because those planes are carrying precious cargo, and airlines are going to have to be discerning who they hire at every turn, from the mechanics who work on the planes, all the way up to the pilots who fly them.

[2:53] And here in 1 Timothy 3, Paul is making the case that the church, sort of like an airline company, is so important that you can't just pick anyone to fill its offices.

They have to be particular people. And we've learned about two jobs, two offices in the church, overseers or elders and deacons. And seeing the roles that each one fills in the church and the qualifications for overseers, tonight we consider the qualifications for deacons.

But we also want to consider the significance of these things. Why is the identity and character of the leadership of God's church so important?

Why do we have to be so careful in our selection of these men who will lead the church? We'll see that it's because the church is such a special place, such a significant place to God and for God's work in the earth.

And isn't that why Paul's writing to Timothy in the first place? There's trouble in the church in Ephesus. And so he writes to deal with those problems there because problems in the church can't be ignored.

[4:03] The church is that important. It's that significant. And so we're going to focus in on deacons for the first half tonight. And then we're going to focus in on the church to see why it's so important that we have faithful elders and deacons.

Just looking at the significance of the church from what Paul writes for us here in 1 Timothy 3. So we start with those qualifications for deacons. Some parts of the list are a lot like what we saw last week with overseers.

And we're not going to emphasize all of the same things where there's that overlap. But some of these things are unique to deacons. And as we saw with the elders, they're office specific. They're particular to deacons. They're not, again, just a random list of things. No, if you're going to have deacons, they need these characteristics for a reason. And as you hear these things and these requirements, think of our deacons.

Praise God for them, that He's given us men like this. Pray for them. Because just as a pastor can't do and be the things that we saw last week in his own strength, deacons can't either in their own strength.

[5 : 15] They are just as dependent upon the help and strength of God. So pray for them. Pray for men in the future that would fill this role in our church. But be grateful to God for what He's given us and pray for these men that serve us in this way.

We'll see what they must be and what they must not be, just like we did with the overseers. And the first thing that deacons must be is they must be worthy of respect. They must be, the word is serious.

Older translations use the word grave. And we think of someone somber in appearance. And that's not to say a deacon doesn't know how to have a good time, but he knows how to be serious when the occasion requires it.

He is not flippant. He's not foolish. He is worthy of respect. He's earned that respect. Who do you want counting the offerings after church? Somebody who's grave and careful or one who has no regard for things that are serious and doesn't know when to be serious and everything's all happy-go-lucky.

And that's not the kind of guy you want as your deacon. He has to be serious-minded, deserving respect from the people. Verse 9, He must hold the mysteries of the faith in a good, pure conscience.

[6 : 24] Or the deep truths of the faith. The mystery of the faith. If they're going to hold to that mystery that's now been revealed, if they're going to hold to that truth of the faith, then they must do it with a clear conscience.

They have to understand what they believe and conscientiously affirm it. We do believe these things. That's why one of the requirements for our deacons here is that they be in agreement with our church's confession of faith.

Confession of faith. They have to understand it and agree with it. And they have to hold those things with a clear conscience. They can't say they believe one thing while they actually believe something else.

They can't say they believe God's Word and then contradict it by the way they live. They have to hold those truths of the faith with a clear conscience. Now somebody might say, why?

Why does a deacon have to hold to the truths of the faith? Deacons don't have to be apt to teach. That's not in the list. They don't have to be able to teach. And so why do they need to know the truth of the faith if they don't have to teach in the church?

[7 : 26] Well, why is that? And we want to make an observation here that's generally true, but specifically here for deacons. What you believe always, without exception, affects the way you live.

It affects the things that you do. What you believe always and without exception affects the way that you believe. And so if you want your actions to be right, your beliefs must be right.

If deacons are to be the arm of the church in carrying out the ministry of mercy, handling the funds, caring for the building, then they must be working from the same theological basis as the church. Take a deacon who doesn't, for example, believe that God is sovereign to care for and provide for His people. How's that going to affect his work as a deacon? Well, he's going to begin to think that it all rests on his shoulders.

That if God isn't sovereign to do these things, then it depends on Him. And he's going to work himself until he's so stressed out that he can't handle it anymore. And if he doesn't believe that God is actually going to provide for His people, he's going to be worried every week.

[8 : 31] The offerings are down this week. What are we going to do? He's going to be tight-fisted when it comes to ministering that mercy to those who are in need. And it's going to affect the way He lives if He doesn't hold firm to the truth.

Now, that's true for everybody, but we're talking about deacons tonight. And then that deacon who doesn't believe that God is going to provide His doubt and His worry are going to set a poor

example from the flock.

There are myriads of ways. Bad theology can lead to bad practice. And so deacons, he says, must hold to the truth. Good. It's going to affect the way they serve. It's going to affect the way they minister to others around them.

And man, they need to have that clear conscience. Holding to the truth with a clear conscience. And that will be demonstrated in their lives. Striving to keep their conscience clear before God and men. You'll know them by their actions.

You'll know they hold to the mystery of faith by the way they live. Again, what they believe will show in their actions. And they'll need to be able to claim those beliefs with a clear conscience.

[9:30] That was a problem in Ephesus. There were people that had abandoned a good conscience. There were false teachers who had had their conscience insured. And Paul says, that's not the kind of guy to have in the office of deacon.

He must be sincerely holding to that truth. Verse 10, He must also be tested first. Their lives are to be examined, analyzed according to the standard that's set down here.

Does he fit these things or not? Is he the things that we see here? One commentator said, the testing is to be a thoughtful and careful evaluation of a man's life by a congregation aware of these needed qualifications.

We know these qualifications. Do they fit? Does the man fit them? He's to be tested. And then, proving blameless, let him serve in the office of deacon.

Or here it says, if there's nothing against them, then if they prove to be blameless, and that word blameless is almost, it's a very similar word to the one for overseers, above reproach. We test them, and then we find that they are above reproach.

[10:35] There's nothing where we can lay hold of them with which to accuse them. And so they're to be tested, and if they prove blameless, then put into office.

Maybe you wonder why that's not required of overseers. Why isn't that testing one up in the overseer list? It is. It's just not made explicit. Just the list of qualifications imply that they have to be tested.

If they've got to be above reproach, you've got to examine them to know that. Later in chapter 5, Paul will say, don't be hasty in the laying on of hands. That not being hasty, that period of examination is implied there.

And so, deacons and elders must be tested and blameless. It must be a man of one woman. We spoke of that last week. Same words here. A one woman man. If he's married, he's faithful to his wife.

If he's single, he is pure, not engaging in any sexual activity. And something we didn't talk about before, but it's true for both elders and deacons. If a man isn't faithful to his wife, do you really expect him to be faithful to the church?

[11:39] And faithful to the God that he serves? If you see it in one area of his life, it's going to show up in this other area. And so he must be a one woman man. And notice again, that the deacon must be a man.

Remember, a woman is not to have authority in the church over a man. And so a deacon is to be a man. And then verse 12, he must be a good manager of his children and his house.

They must, and that's the same word of the elder, they must lead and care for their children and their house well. It's a mark of character and their effective leadership in the home that will carry over into the church.

If you can't, if a man's house is in a financial mess, do you really want to put the finances of the church in that man's hands? Well, no. And so he must lead. He must care for, he must provide for his own house well.

He must lead his house well. If he's not effective in caring for his family, should the church entrust their ministry of mercy to that man? Well, no, because he must be a good manager of his children and house.

[12:45] That's what he must be. But there's things that he can't be either. There's a list of he must not be. And the first thing is in verse eight, he must not be double tongued.

The NIV has it as a positive. He must be sincere, but it's, he must not be double tongued. He can't talk out of both sides of his mouth. He can't say one thing to this person over here.

And then 10 minutes later, walk over here and say something totally different to this person. The deacon can't talk to a person that he's about to, the person is in need.

They're going to give compassion, say, Oh, I understand your situation. We see that it's not your fault. We want to be of help to you. We want to be of aid to you. And then as soon as he's done, go and say to somebody else in the church, you wouldn't believe this guy.

This guy is in such a financial mess. He's a, he's a train wreck and it's his own fault. He's dug himself a hole so deep. They'll never get out of it. I can't imagine being that foolish with my money.

[13:41] That's a double tongued deacon saying one thing over here and something different over here. And a deacon can't be double tongued. He must be sincere. It will undermine his own credibility as well as the office of deacon, as well as the church if he is double tongued.

So he must not be double tongued. He must not be indulging in much wine, addicted to wine, devoted to too much wine, is the language.

If a man, again, is mastered by his drink, you don't want the mercy ministry or the finances of the church in his hands. There are things that it's good to be devoted to.

Paul will tell Timothy later in chapter four, be devoted to the public reading of the work. Good. He's already said, don't be devoted to, to endless genealogies and, and foolish myths.

And here, don't be devoted to too much wine. Again, it's not a prohibition against the use of alcohol. It is a prohibition against the abuse of it, being mastered by it, being controlled by it, being drunk with it.

[14:47] So if you're, if you're out to dinner and, and you see one of your deacons or your elders, and they're having a drink with their dinner, it doesn't mean they're disqualified from the office of elder or deacon. Now, if you're out and you see them drunk, then we've got a problem.

And so a deacon must not be mastered by too much wine, must also not be fond of dishonest gain. They must not be shamelessly greedy for money. Hope it's obvious why this would be a requirement for deacons who are in charge of collecting the incoming offerings, distributing them accordingly.

How easy it would be to just skim off the top. People put cash in that offering box, and there would be no record of it. Goes in the pocket, and nobody ever knows the difference. Easy to doctor the books, and change things up a little bit, and make a little bit more money disappear, a little bit by a little bit over time.

So you can't have a man who is greedy for money in the office of deacon. You want men with whom you don't even have to think twice about these things. They're so honest and faithful, and that's been proven that you don't have any qualms about entrusting them with that task.

[15:53] You don't feel like you need to peek in the room where they're counting the money afterwards, because you trust them. And that's the sort of man that you want. Again, you think of Judas, and what the love of money did for him, and how it destroyed him.

Deacons must not be fond of sordid gain. But then there's a word about deacons' wives in verse 11. I skipped over it, and I haven't forgotten it.

We're going to come back to it now. Right in the middle of these requirements for deacons. There's requirements for them before that, and then after that. But right in the middle, there's this verse about deacons' wives. Now, why is that there?

Some people think it's talking about deaconesses. And the NIV, even for some unfathomable reason down in the margin, has or deaconesses. That is not a translation.

That's an interpretation. The word deacon is not in that verse. The word serve is not in that verse. It's impossible to get that as a translation. Now, that's an interpretation that some people have, but it can't say deaconesses.

[16:59] It's not even in the verse. The word's not there. But many people take this, and they try to get it. Well, here they're talking about deacons, and how deacons must serve, and they must be certain things. And so this category must be female deacons.

I think the NIV gets it right in the text. In the same way they're wives. It's a word for a woman or wife. It's the same word that's used. A husband of one wife. A man of one woman.

And I'm not going to go into all the reasons why I believe that it's wife. If you want them all, there's lots of them. We can sit down and talk to them.

I don't think that would be the best use of our time tonight, to nail down the translation here, wives, is the best one. Suffice it to say, in the context, Paul has already said a woman is not to have

authority over a man in the church.

And a deacon is in a position of leadership and authority. And so it's clear that it can't be a woman. But rather, it is their wives who are in view. Again, I'd be happy to go through it point by point.

[18:03] Exegesis, if you want it nailed down more firmly later. But why? Why talk about the wives of deacons here? One of the possible reasons for including them, beyond that it's a sign that a man has his house in order, that he's ruling his house well, is that there may have been then and there are now situations where it wouldn't be appropriate for a one woman man to go on his own.

Each situation is different. But imagine a deacon who has a ministry of mercy to a widow in particular. And it wouldn't be good or a good testimony. It wouldn't be appropriate for him to be alone with that woman.

Then he should take his wife, his capable helper, with him. Wives can be of great help to their husbands. And it's true for the wives of deacons as well.

And some might say, well, why is it not included in the list of overseer's quality? Why doesn't it talk about the elder's wives? Surely that's important as well. I think it's because wives can enter into the sort of service that a deacon provides.

A wife can minister mercy to a widow who's in need. But the wife of an overseer can't enter into the oversight of the church because a woman can't have authority over a man in the church. As often as I joke with my wife saying, I don't think I'm ready to preach.

[19:23] Can you preach for me this Sunday? That's never going to happen by God's grace, okay? Because that's not appropriate. It's not fitting, but it would be fitting for the wife of a deacon to help in ministering to a widow who is in need.

The roles are different. And so these ladies, these wives of deacons will have a significant impact on their husband's service, their ministry, as will the wives of overseers and elders, for good or for evil.

I think particularly in the area of hospitality and their reputation. But Paul's not focusing on the elders' wives here. It's the deacons' wives. And so what must they be? Some requirements for these wives.

And if you're not the wife of a deacon tonight, which is most of you, these are still things that should mark you as well. And so don't turn off the switch for a moment.

But these wives must be worthy of respect. Same word that's used for their husbands.

Serious-minded. Deserving that respect. They must be temperate.

[20:29] Even-keeled. Level-headed. They can't be blown about by everything that happens to them or is said about them or about their husbands. Their husbands are in a prominent place which will leave them open to attack and criticism.

And it will be difficult for a wife to field some of that and take some of that on the shoulder. And she's got to be a temperate, even-keeled woman who doesn't fly off the handle back at the person who's accusing her husband.

Who's not spouting. Who's not gossiping about that person behind their back because they've said something bad about her husband. She must be temperate. But she must be, and then this is pretty all-encompassing, faithful in all things.

Trustworthy in all things. We don't have time to talk about every possible thing that could mean. But she must be a trustworthy, a faithful woman. You think of a deacon who's going to... He collects the offerings after church and the bank's not open at night, so he takes them home with him.

You don't want a woman that's going to be raiding the church's stash before it makes it to the bank to be deposited. That might sound silly, but she's got to be faithful in all things. Trustworthy. And she must not be slanderous.

[21:44] Not speaking ill of others, that too will ruin her husband's ministry of service with her mouth. A woman who is a gossip, always speaking ill of people behind their backs, will ruin a deacon's faithful ministry.

Can you imagine a flippant, easily ruffled, unfaithful, gossiping, slandering woman accompanying her husband to the home of a widow in the church?

And the wife of this deacon has bad-mouthed the widow behind her back. She's spoken evil of her. She's given the cold shoulder to her. She's blown her off when she came seeking comfort.

She's blown up at her when she's been challenged by her. And anyway, the deacon and this unfit wife walk up to the door of the house of the widow and they knock on the door and the widow sees

the wife and she said, Go away.

I want nothing to do with you. That's the kind of wife that's going to destroy a man's ministry of service. And so, the wife of the deacon must be these things.

[22:48] Well, why does it matter? Why all of these qualifications for elders, for deacons, even for the wives of deacons? Some might say, Oh, come on, Paul.

Who cares about... And Paul's answer is, it's the church. And the church is that important. But somebody might say again to Paul, But come on, the problems in Ephesus are not all that bad. What's a little vain speculation? What's some innocent chatter about nothing? Some arguments? Some false teachers? It's no big deal. It's just the church. And so, you shouldn't be so uptight. Relax, Paul.

Why all these detailed, heavy qualifications? Man, the church in Ephesus has a little trouble. And Paul goes off the deep end about all these things their leaders all of a sudden need to be.

What gives, Paul? It's just some old wives tales. Do we really need to be that careful in choosing the leaders of the church? Can't we just have the guy that can't hold down any other job as our pastor and get by?

[23:50] What's all the fuss? Why even bother writing a letter to Timothy? Well, Paul's already given us a hint. We saw it a couple weeks ago. He said that this is a good work.

If an overseer desires this, or if a man, if anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, desires a good work. And then he's commended deacons at the end in verse 13. Those who have served well gain an excellent standing, great assurance.

But that might just add to it. Why is it such a good work, Paul? Why the great reward for the deacon? And so he tells them in verses 14 and 15. And he starts by saying, I want to come to you soon.

Paul would rather deliver this material face to face with them. But he knows that it's possible he's going to be delayed. So if I'm going to be delayed, I'm writing it just in case I don't get here soon enough to deal with these problems.

And so he's writing. But whether it's written or delivered face to face, it's the same message. He's writing so that Timothy, and therefore so the Ephesians might know how. Verse 15. You will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household.

[24:55] I love that Paul's practical. He's writing so that you might know how. How to conduct yourself in God's household. And people haven't been conducting themselves properly. He's writing so Timothy will know it.

He can teach it, model it, enforce it, and then the people will know. So there won't be any more vain speculation, any more foolish talk, any more false doctrine, any more bad consciences and shipwrecked faith and unqualified leaders and women leading men and men coming in and leading in prayer with hands stained by sin that's unrepentant.

Paul says no more of these things. That is not how you're to conduct yourselves in the church. Let's get some good leaders in the church that will be able to lead and prevent some of these things from happening.

Do you all know how to conduct yourselves in the church? The marks of good elders and deacons will be marks of good members as well. Do they characterize you? You've had a church full of people that are temperate and self-controlled and hospitable and not greedy for money and aren't addicted to wine.

You've got a church full of people that are going to be a blessed place where people love one another and love the Lord and serve Him faithfully. And that's why a letter to a young minister like Timothy isn't just relevant to pastors or to ministerial students.

[26:16] It's relevant to all because it tells us how to live in the church. But still you say, why the fuss? What's the big deal about the church? Why is it so important that we conduct ourselves so carefully in the church?

I've been saying the church, but that's getting a little bit ahead of Paul, isn't it? What's he call it first? So that we know how to conduct ourselves in God's household. God's house.

The house of God. Ties in nicely with what he's already talked about. An overseer's got to be a good manager of his house. Deacon's got to be a good manager of his house. And a good leader in the house of God.

Now the house of God, that is just loaded. The phrase alone shows us the significance of the church. The house of God. In the Old Testament, it was usually a reference to the temple. The one that Solomon built. In the Gospels, it's a reference to the temple that was rebuilt. After the people came back from exile. And you can read about that.

[27 : 15] That building of that temple that Solomon built in 1 Kings. And it's glorious. It's remarkable. And it's a long, long chapter. It's 1 Kings 8, I think.

That's given over to the building of the temple. And it talks about the stonework that was involved in cutting the stones away. So there would never be any noise of chiseling of stone in the house of God.

And then how that was overlaid with wood. And all of the cedar and cypress that was brought in. And how that was overlaid with gold. And how all these things were made of gold and bronze. And it's a glorious place.

And you begin to think. You're reading that chapter and you're like, It's pretty extravagant. Our building's not overlaid with gold. We didn't hire Hiram from Tyre and Sidon to send Cyprus over all the way across the Atlantic.

And then bring it up a river somewhere through the Gulf up the Mississippi. And get it here. Why doesn't our building look like that? Well, we'll get there in a second. But when you're reading that, you begin to get the idea that the house of God is really important.

[28 : 20] It's really significant. This is where God is going to meet with His people. Where He gathers with them. It's a glorious place. It's a beautiful place. But then when you get to the New Testament, you begin to see the real splendor of the temple.

It's not the building itself. It's God's people. And so, yeah, we need a building to meet in. But we don't need it overlaid with gold. Because the significance is the people that are in it.

We are the holy temple. We are being built up into a holy priesthood. We are a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit. God's people are the house of God.

With Jesus as our great and perfect high priest. It's this important because we are the people of God. And this is where God has chosen to manifest Himself in the world.

We're the church of God. The people of God. The house of God. Turn over with me for a moment to Hebrews chapter 10. Whoever wrote Hebrews understood this. He understood the significance of the house of God.

[29 : 21] Being the people of God. In a glorious place. Something where we must be careful how we conduct ourselves. Hebrews chapter 10. We'll begin in verse 19.

He says, Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the most holy place by the blood of Jesus. By a new and living way. Open for us through the curtain that is His body.

And since we have a great high priest over the house of God. There it is. The house of God. And that high priest. That's the language of the house of God. The great high priest. And that's, of course, Jesus.

Verse 22. Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart. And full assurance of faith. Having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience. And having our bodies washed with pure water.

Does that sound like it doesn't matter how you conduct yourselves in the house of God? Like it's no big deal? No. These are God's people. They've been purchased with the blood of the great high priest. And so we draw near with a clear conscience having been cleansed.

[30 : 21] Verse 23. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess. For He who promised is faithful. And then, again, it doesn't matter what we do. It doesn't matter about the people of God.

It doesn't matter if they have good leaders. It doesn't matter how they conduct themselves. No.

Verse 24. And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing.

But let us encourage one another. And all the more as you see the day approaching. You see how He draws these themes together. He's concerned about how we conduct ourselves in the house of God.

That's what He's talking about. The house of God is that important that we have to come with a clear conscience. That we come and we consider how we can spur one another on towards loving good deeds.

That we don't forsake assembling together. It's that important. He says. And that's why it's so important to Paul, to the Ephesians, and why it must be important to us. You can go back to 1 Timothy 3 now.

[31 : 21] Now, it's important because this is where God has invested Himself in the earth. It is these people for whom God sacrificed His Son.

It is these people. It is you for whom God sacrificed His Son. The church is that important to God that He gave His own Son for them.

That they might be saved and be His people. And so we cannot be careless how we deal with and how we care for the house of God. The house of God is so much more than just a building.

It's the people. You know, a building can't really be persecuted, but people can. A building can't be shepherded, but people can. And so here we are.

You are the house of God. And that's why it's so important that Paul takes the time to write to Timothy to correct some of these problems. And to say, this is the sort of men you need leading the people of God.

[32 : 22] Because it is God's house. They bear God's name. But Paul's not done. He says it's the house of God. You'll know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household.

Which is the church of the living God. There's that word church. A church, again, a reference to people. The called out ones. Those chosen by God.

Saved by His Son. And they're not just anyone's church. They're the church of the living God. This is where God, the living God, meets with His people.

This is where God manifests Himself in the earth. This is where people can see God. They see Him in the church. This is where He has made His truth known. And He is the living God.

And to misbehave among God's people is to draw His frown. To not properly care for His people will bring a fearful accounting on the day of judgment for shepherds.

[33 : 20] Hebrews 13.7. Again, I think the author of Hebrews understood these things very clearly. Hebrews 13.17 and 18. Obey your leaders and submit to their authority.

They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden. For that would be of no advantage to you.

And then He feels the weight of it. Pray for us. We are sure that we have a clear conscience and desire to live. That's our word. Conduct ourselves honorably in every way.

You see that shepherd, He's writing. He says we want to conduct ourselves honorably in every way. And we want you to obey your leaders because we're going to have to give an account to the living God. And so the shepherds must live honorably.

And then the sheep must live honorably. And then the shepherd will be able to give an account of how he shepherded to God. The author of Hebrews is concerned that the shepherds and the sheep order themselves rightly in God's house.

[34 : 21] This isn't just any organization. It's not just a club. It's not just something that's no big deal. This is God's people we're talking about. Purchased with the blood of His Son. It's God's house.

His church. And to drive it home, Paul says, it's the pillar and foundation of the truth. This shows its great significance in the eyes of God as well.

This doesn't mean that the church decides the truth. And until the church puts its stamp of approval on truth, it has no meaning until the church says, this is God's word. No, this is God's word with or without the church.

Catholics would take this verse and twist it. It does mean that the church is the place where God has deposited His truth. It's where He's entrusted His truth. He's given it to His church.

And it's why Paul often, when he writes in these pastoral epistles, he talks about sound doctrine, the body of sound doctrine, the faithful teaching, the truth. And it's important that the overseer be able to teach.

[35 : 25] He's got to understand that truth. And he's got to be able to teach the truth. And our deacons have to be able to hold fast to the mystery of the faith. They've got to understand that truth. Because this is where God has entrusted His truth.

The church is to be the place where God's word is proclaimed. Where it is preached faithfully. The place where that word is faithfully lived out before a watching world.

It is from the church that the truth is sent out into all the world. So that some from every place and time might be part of the church. It's here in the church that the truth is loved and read and studied and memorized and sung and obeyed and preached.

The church is the pillar and ground of the truth. And that's why it's so important that the church have faithful leaders. That the members of the church conduct themselves aright.

If it's not this way, the truth will suffer. The truth will receive a bad name in the world. Here's the truth. And if the church loses it, who's going to pick it up and carry it on to the next generation? Nobody.

[36 : 30] This is the only place in the world that cares about the truth. Not just this church, but the church. God's people all over the world. And so it must guard that truth and be faithful to proclaim it. It's the greatest importance.

And Paul in verse 16 is going to give a summary of that truth. Verse 16 is so packed and loaded with truth, we're going to save it for a separate message. But here's a summary of the truth.

And you see it centers on Christ. He appeared in a body vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, and taken up into glory. There's the truth that the church must hold on to.

The truth that the church must be faithful to proclaim. And so the question for us tonight is, if the church is that important to God, and it is.

The church is His people. It is where He has deposited His truth to be preserved and proclaimed from generation to generation. The church is the place where He manifests Himself, where He reveals Himself, where He pours out His blessing on His people.

[37 : 29] If the church is that important to God, so important that there's a list of qualifications for those who would lead it. And it's a high standard. If it's that important to God, is it that important to you?

Is the church, is the people of God, are the people of God as important to you as they are to Him? If it is, then several things will be true of us.

We'll be there. When the church meets, we'll be there. Let us not forsake assembling together. It's the church of God. It's the house of God. We'll be there when it's open.

When we are there, and when we aren't even gathered together, we'll love God's people. And that will show in the way that we serve them. These will be the dearest people on earth to us. The people that we love to be with.

The people we love to fellowship with. The people that we delight to serve. The people that come alongside us and serve us when we are weak. We will pray for God's people if we love them.

[38 : 28] If they are as important to us as they are to God, we will pray for them. We will pour our hearts out in prayer for them. And we will think of those who are hurting and suffering and bring them before the throne of grace. We will pray for her leaders, her elders and deacons that they might be faithful.

That they might be able to give a good account. And the day when they're called to account, we will pray for God's people, for her leaders. We will give time. We will give effort. We will give money to the church if it is that important to us.

As the church is important to you as it is to God. Are you devoted to it? Not to a building, but to God's people. It's the church of the living God. It's his house.

It's you. And me. It's that important. And isn't there great comfort in that? To know that the church is that important to God.

To know that you are that important to God. To know that I am that important to God. That he is going to preserve his church. That the gates of hell won't prevail against it. He didn't make that promise about any other institution.

[39 : 31] Only the church. This is the place that God has promised to protect and keep and guard. That's comforting to me. And so you can say, oh, come on, Paul. It's not that big of a deal all you want.

But I'm glad it's that big of a deal. Because it shows how important it is to God. And what a blessing that is to us. And so the last question then is, are you a part of this church?

Are you a part of the church of God? The house of God? It is a great responsibility. You have to conduct yourselves rightly in the church. We've seen that.

But it's a great privilege as well. Surely you can see in these things that God loves his church. That he's provided for its care and protection until Jesus comes again.

It's in the church where he meets with his people and pours out his blessing on them. It's here the truth is proclaimed. And you know that truth. You don't have to wait until next week to hear about verse 16.

[40 : 32] You know about Jesus. You know he's the Son of God. You know he's the Savior of sinners. You know that if you would run and come to him and trust in him. And be done with yourself and your sin.

That he'll save you and receive you. And you can be part of the church. Part of this great blessing. But you still think that there are things better than the church.

There's something better for you. And that's what's keeping you back. The world is offering you, you think, something that's better than what the church can offer. But make sure you understand this.

God has wonderful plans for the church. Wonderful plans for the church. To preserve it. To keep it. And he's preparing the new heavens and new earth. It will all be renewed and glorious.

Not fallen like we see it now. But beautiful. Even with streets of gold. And he's preparing dwelling places there for us. Mansions. He's got big plans for the church.

[41 : 33] Jesus as the center. Glorious place. Far more glorious than Solomon's temple ever was. That's what God's preparing for the church. And even now, he's blessing us, isn't he?

It's a glorious place now. Far more so when we get to heaven. He's got great plans for the church. But there is no such preparation. Or such grand preparation for those outside the church.

For those in the world. What's being prepared for you is a lake of fire. Where you will suffer forever. And right now, the world might seem much more attractive than the church.

But I guarantee you. That the church is the place to be. Now. And in eternity. The house of God. Far better than the alternative. The world.

Those outside the church in eternity. Will be in a place of unspeakable torment. And so which will it be for you? I pray that God will open your eyes to the glory of this church.

[42 : 33] And draw you into it. And the glory of this church is Christ. The Savior is his church. Again, we'll get there next week. Come back next week and hear about Jesus. In verse 16. It's glorious. But you can come to Jesus right now.

And trust in him. And be a part of this church. And part of his plan for all of eternity. And so may God open our eyes to the glory of the church. The importance and the significance of it.

Let's conclude by singing of the glory of the church. In hymn 269. The church. Zion. The city of God. Is blessed by God. It's kept by him. It's preserved by him.

Blessings for the church. Far greater than anything the world could ever offer you. The last couple of lines of the hymn that we're going to sing. Hymn 269.

Fading is the worldling's pleasure. A worldling is somebody that loves the world. Not part of the church. Fading is the worldling's pleasure. All is boasted, pomp, and show. Solid joys. Lasting treasure.

[43 : 31] None but Zion's children know. None but the children of God. None but the household of God. Let's pray. Our Father, we thank you that you've made many here to be Zion's children.

That we do have solid joy and lasting treasure. And that we anticipate an eternity of glory. With Christ as the glory of heaven. Amen. We thank you that he is the glory of the church on the earth. We pray that you would make us faithful to carry ourselves in a way that represents his name. In a way that's pleasing to you. Help us to bear ourselves in a manner that's faithful to the truth of your word.

Here is the pillar and foundation of the truth. Make us faithful to that calling. We pray that you would draw others into your church. Add to the number. Draw others into your household of faith.

That they might trust in Jesus. And find themselves in this group of people who are so privileged. So blessed. Let the world deride our pity. Let them mock us.

[44 : 29] And we pray that you would give us grace to take glory in Jesus' name. And to be willing to suffer for that name. Knowing that our position is far better. Far greater. Not for anything that we have done.

But all for your grace. All because of what Jesus has done in our place. And so we thank you tonight for Jesus. That he purchased a people for you. A people to be called.

The house of God. The church of the living God. Give us grace to live up to the calling to which you have given us. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.