

Romans 16:1

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[0 : 0 0] This morning, we inducted three new deacons to serve in and, we trust, from our congregation.

I wonder, did you notice anything that all three had in common, other than their youthful good looks, that is, without wishing to embarrass them this evening? Maybe some of you noticed.

I didn't, actually, to begin with, but then somebody pointed out that all were sons of the manse. Well, that was one thing that was true of all three. But that's true, but it's not what I had in mind. It's a much simpler thing that they all had in common, so simple that maybe you're not even imagining what it is. What they had in common is that they were all guys, all men, three men, ordained or inducted to the office of deacon.

Well, so much for gender equality. Now, if you think that's a bit suspect, you should have seen the list of eligible candidates because every last one was a male of the species.

Now, what's all that about? Is it really tenable in the 21st century to maintain what some would describe as a rigidly patriarchal system in the leadership of the church? Now, some of you, perhaps many of you, may be fully persuaded as to the warrant we have for maintaining an exclusively male leadership in the church, or certainly in the formal offices of the church. Perhaps others of you are relatively indifferent to the matter. But I think it would be wrong to just assume that we are all persuaded on the matter. And even more fundamentally, it would be wrong to just assume that we are right to do what we do. Well, that's what we've always done. It must be right. That's what those who came before us have done. So, yes, we don't even need to think about it. I don't think that would be a healthy approach or attitude to take. So, I want us to think about this matter, not only about this matter, but about this matter. And to aid us in our thinking, I want us to meet Phoebe. Phoebe is a wonderful woman who we meet in the final chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans. Her name means bright or radiant. And from what we know of her, we don't know a great deal of her, but from what we know of it would seem that her name fits like a glove. She is a bright and radiant example of loving

[2 : 4 5] Christian service. And controversially, she was a deaconess. Or was she? Well, that's really the question. It's one of the questions that we're going to try and answer in a moment. But we would be doing Phoebe an injustice if we used her simply as a pawn in a theological debate. She has much more to teach us than that. Paul rightly states that all Scripture is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness. And he goes on. And what we learn about Phoebe certainly confirms that reality, Phoebe, and what we are told concerning Phoebe, can teach us. It can correct us. It can rebuke us. It can train us in righteousness. So, I hope that those things are achieved this evening. Not only that we would consider an important matter, you know, why is it that we do what we do in the manner of office in the church? Do we have biblical warrant for it? We want to think about that for a moment. But we want to do more than simply that. We want to learn from Phoebe as a servant of God who has much to teach us. The critical word that we need to grapple with is the word translated as servant there in verse 1 of Romans chapter 16. We read there in the first verse,

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cancra. But you'll notice that in the footnote there in our Bible, certainly in the church Bible, I would imagine in most Bibles you have that footnote, we read that there's an alternative to the word servant, to this English translation of the word that's used. And the alternative we find is deaconess. I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cancra, or another way that could be legitimately translated, a deaconess of the church in Cancra. Now, the Greek word that needs to be translated in some way is the word diakonos. And the meaning of that word is indeed servant. And with that word in mind, this word diakonos, we can pose and try and answer the following questions. The first question is, what kind of servant was Phoebe? And there we'll grapple a little bit with what is the best way of translating the word. And what does Paul mean when he describes Phoebe in this way? What does he have in mind in as much as we can know that with certainty when he uses this word? So, what kind of servant was Phoebe? We also want to look at some other questions or answer some other questions in all probability much more briefly, but I hope helpfully. Who did Phoebe serve? Who were those that Phoebe served? What kind of service did she render? We're told something of that in these two verses. And then finally, how is such a servant to be received and treated? Paul gives instruction in that matter also.

First of all, then, what kind of servant was Phoebe? I want us to do two things in answering this question. Firstly, consider the debate that surrounds the meaning of the word. And then, importantly, answer the question at what I would call a deeper and more significant level. Not that the first part of what we're going to do is insignificant or unimportant, but I think that it is a more important level. First of all, then, the meaning of the word, servant or deaconess or woman deacon.

As we've already said, at the level of the basic meaning of the word, either option is possible and defensible. And given that that is so, what do we do? Do we just toss a coin to see where the coin falls, or can we just choose the one that suits us, what we would like to be, the interpretation or the translation?

And, well, you just pick what you fancy. Is that the manner of determining the matter? What do we do if a text or a passage of the Bible is unclear? How do we respond to that? How do we approach such a situation? It happens often. Here is one example, but there are many others, many others that impinge on, in many ways, much more significant aspects of the truth. What do we do? Well, what we do is we compare Scripture with Scripture. What we do is we employ the Bible itself as its own interpreter.

[7 : 39] Now, this is basic to an evangelical or conservative, in the theological sense, conservative, hermeneutic or method of biblical interpretation. We compare Scripture with Scripture. We use the Bible itself as its own interpreter. In fact, I would say that how we determine this matter or any other interpretive challenge is in some ways more important than the outcome. Now, the outcome is important, but more important is how we get there. You can get to the right outcome by the wrong means, and if you do that, then sooner or later you're going to trip up and be in all kinds of trouble.

But if you're using the right means, then generally, as God would direct, you will come to the right outcome. Not always, but generally I think we can safely say that that is likely. Let me just take a step aside to share with you something that I was reading just in the last day or two that I think illustrates how crucial it is that we have a biblically grounded method of interpretation.

So, what I'm going to say now is a more general anecdote, really, but that I think illustrates how important it is to know how to interpret the Bible in a manner that is faithful to the Bible.

And it's relevant to the matter before us, but it's relevant beyond that. So, let me just share what what it is that I've been reading or I've been noticing just in the last day or two. I was reading on Facebook a thread of comments following a post by a friend of mine who is a minister in the States, and he had posted his thoughts following what he described as a controversial decision by the General Assembly of his denomination. Now, the issue on which he was speaking is not really particularly relevant to what I'm going to say. If you want to try and guess what it was, well, by all means, try and work it out. But it's not really that relevant. Suffice it to say that it involves a departure from the clear teaching of Scripture. So, he posted about this controversial issue. Now, the original post stated, among other things, his own response. And what he said was that he, like Mary, was pondering these things in his heart and seeking guidance. Okay, that was what he said. Then, of course, those of you who are Facebook users will know that others have the opportunity to give an opinion on that, and a few did. Not many, but a few did. And let me just notice one or two of the things that were then said in response. A few posts that included the following.

One of them said this, when the time comes, you'll know what to do. Now, this is a minister who might be faced with a situation where this issue he would have to respond to. And this is the advice he was given. When the time comes, you'll just know what to do. Another post said this, I don't try and guess what God is thinking. Okay. And another post said, let's get into the 21st century. Another post, and this will probably give the game away as to what it was about, said, love equals love. Well, that's very profound and deep and meaningful, isn't it? Well, those were the responses to his original post. Now, the question is, do you see the problem with all of these opinions? I'm sure fine people, but giving these opinions, the problem is that they're a recipe for chaos and complete confusion. I'm pondering these things in my heart and seeking guidance. Well, if the Bible gives clear guidance on something, you don't really need to do much pondering on the matter. When the time comes, you'll just know what to do. Well, that's subjectivity gone wild. You'll just know. Your heart will tell you. You'll know the right thing to do. I don't try and guess what God is thinking. Well, that's fine unless God has actually told us what He's thinking. Now, if He hasn't told us, then by all means, let's not guess. But if He's told us, well, then we don't need to guess. We turn to the Word of God where we can find out what He is thinking on a given matter. Let's get into the 21st century. Well, that's the argument of modernity, and let's be modern, and let's go with the times, and let's not be stuck in the past. All of these well-meaning pieces of advice, recipes for chaos and confusion. Thankfully, there was one redeeming post. I didn't participate in this, I might add, but I was tempted to. But somebody said, we need to follow what the Bible says and not what men think is right. Well, I would give my amen to that one.

[12:30] You see how dangerous it is when we approach a matter in terms of what the Bible says, in terms of doctrine or ethics, without an understanding of how to come to a conclusion grounded in the Bible, a recognition of the authority of the Bible, but also an understanding of how we understand the Bible when the matter is a more difficult one to reach a conclusion on.

But back to Phoebe. How can the Bible help us to choose between the two options that we have in terms of this word? Was she a servant in the general sense of the word, as we are all servants as believers, or was she a servant in that more technical sense of holding office as a deacon, an official position, for want of a better description, within the church?

Our first task is to examine how the word is used elsewhere in the New Testament. Now, time doesn't allow us to look at all the occurrences of this word, diakonos, but suffice it to say that the word is used in both senses. Indeed, in the general sense, it is used of Jesus in the previous chapter. We read from chapter 15. Notice there in verse 8 of chapter 15, we're told, for I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews, a diakonos of the Jews, a deacon of the Jews, or to the Jews, a servant. So, the word there is used in that general sense.

Paul's not suggesting that Jesus was a deacon. No, He was a servant, and it's being used in that sense. In Paul's letter to the Philippians, and in chapter 1, again, it's very clear that the word is being used.

In this case, in its more technical sense, Philippians 1, Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, to all the saints. So, they're all being greeted together with the overseers, or elders, and deacons. So, then it's clear that within the body of believers, within all of the believers, there were some who were deacons in that more technical sense.

[14 : 51] They were all servants, but some were deacons, where the word is being used in that narrower sense. So, it's used in both ways. As I say, there are many occurrences, but what I want to do now is home in one particular passage that is, I think you would say, very relevant and key to coming to a conclusion. And I'm referring to 1 Timothy, and in, well, 1 Timothy, a couple of passages there, but we turn just to 1 Timothy, and then we'll have a look at a couple of occasions there. The first one actually is in chapter 4 and in verse 6. 1 Timothy chapter 4 and verse 6, the word occurs again.

Notice what it says there. 1 Timothy 4 verse 6, Paul is writing to Timothy, giving instructions to Timothy, and he says, if you point these things out to the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus. Minister. But it's the same word. Here, minister is being used in its literal sense of one who minister, one who serves, one who serves a good diakonos of Christ Jesus. It's not referring to the office of deacon, as we understand it, or as it's described in other parts of the New Testament.

The word is being used in a more general sense, certainly in distinction from deacon in the more technical sense. But then, in the same letter, and just in the previous chapter, we find the word again, and there it is being used in its more technical sense. In chapter 3, the chapter is about overseers and deacons, and we can read from chapter 3 and verse 8 to 13. Read this little section, and then we'll comment on it. 1 Timothy chapter 3 and verse 8, 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. Now, we read that passage, and you might say, well, the matter really is very clear. There, at face value, when we read these verses, it does seem evident that the deacons were men. Everything would suggest that it is men that are being spoken of. It's stated explicitly on more than one occasion. Now, if that's the case, well, is that not a clear indicator that we should read Romans chapter 16 and verse 1 informed by that? So, we're saying, well, what does it mean here in Romans chapter 16 verse 1? Does it mean servant? Does it mean deacon or deaconess? Well, in the light of 1 Timothy, it's clear. It must mean servant in that more general sense, or so it would appear.

But if only the matter was so simple. Notice again that in this passage, you have an alternative translation, in this case of verse 11. Verse 11, the translation that we have in the body of the text is, in the same way, their wives are to be women worthy of respect. But notice that in the alternative there at the bottom of the text, we have rather the word deaconesses, in the same way, deaconesses are to be women worthy of respect. Seemingly, you do have two possibilities in terms of translating that verse. Literally what it said, there's an economy of language employed here by Paul. What he says literally is, women likewise must be dignified. Now, the problem is, or not the problem, but the challenge is that the word translated women can also mean wives. Depending on context, you have to determine if it means women or if it means wives. And so, the translators have to come to a view on what it means on this occasion. So, the meaning could be women. In this case, it must be a reference to women deacons or deaconesses, if you wish. Or it could mean, as the translators have opted for as their preferred translation, it could mean their wives. That is, the wives of the deacons who are described. Now, some might argue, and with some reason, that what goes before and especially what goes after would clinch the matter. There in verse 12, a deacon must be the husband of but one wife. Obviously, it's speaking there about men. The language doesn't allow for any other interpretation. And that is something that carries some weight.

[19 : 56] So, there we have a little bit more of the evidence, if you wish, that would help us come to a conclusion. But before we try and come to a conclusion, there's another strand of biblical evidence beyond the examination of how the Bible uses a particular word. And that is the identification of biblical principles that allow us to come to a view on the principle of whether men and women could, should, do, have, in God's purposes, different roles in the church. Generally, it would apply to the matter of deacons or deaconesses, but more generally, is there a principle in the Bible that it establishes that men and women do have different roles and that God has indeed determined that that be the case?

Well, that certainly is the position that we hold as a church, and we have reason for doing so. It's a position that in the recent past, when I say recent, I'm talking about the last two or three decades, a position that has been given a name. It was already a position held, but it didn't have a name. But now it has a name. It's sometimes referred to as complementarianism. A complementarian position is one that considers and argues and believes in the light of Scripture that men and women have been given by God different roles in the church. We're equal in the sight of God, but we have different roles that, as the Word suggests, complement each other. One isn't greater than the other, but we have different roles that complement each other, hence complementarianism. Well, it's a big word, and let me read you a paragraph from the Gospel Coalition Statement of Faith under the heading Creation of Humanity. I won't spend time explaining who the Gospel Coalition are, but they give a helpful explanation of what this means, this concept or this idea of complementarianism. Interestingly, under their discussion or their presentation of what they believe concerning creation, the creation of humanity. Listen to what they say. Adam and Eve were made to complement each other in a one flesh union that establishes the only normative pattern of sexual relations for men and women, such that marriage ultimately serves as a type of the union between Christ and His church.

In God's wise purposes, men and women are not simply interchangeable, but rather they complement each other in mutually enriching ways. God ordains that they assume distinctive roles which reflect the loving relationship between Christ and the church, the husband exercising headship in a way that displays the caring, sacrificial love of Christ, and the wife submitting to her husband in a way that models the love of the church for her Lord. In the ministry of the church, which is our particular concern this evening, both men and women are encouraged to serve Christ and to be developed to their full potential in the manifold ministries of the people of God. The distinctive leadership role within the church given to qualified men is grounded in creation, fall, and redemption, and must not be sidelined by appeals to cultural developments. Well, there's a lot there, and we're not going to go in and discuss it in detail, but it summarizes what we're calling this complementarian position, which is the one that we hold and which explains why we do what we do. Now, on this theological foundation of complementarianism, we could say that it's possible theologically that the office of deacon is reserved for men.

That's a possibility given this theological principle. The eldership very clearly is in the light of what Scripture says that we're not going to look at now. But though this position makes it possible that the office of deacon would be reserved for men, if God is so designed that that is a role for men as distinct as a role for women, I want to stress that to hold a complementarian position does not require you to hold that the office of deacon particularly must be an exclusively male preserve. Holding to that principle doesn't then necessarily lead to that conclusion in the matter of deacons. In summary, what kind of servant was Phoebe? Was she a servant in a general sense, as we all are, or was she a woman deacon or deaconess? I would veer towards a servant in that more general sense, but I'm very open and very relaxed, to be quite honest, about others coming to a different conclusion. A different conclusion, it seems to me, is entirely defensible from Scripture. Now, I hope what we've done, certainly what we've tried to do, independently of the conclusion reached, I hope what we've done is helpful for us in the matter of how we approach a difficult text on what might be deemed an unclear matter. I think how we do that is so important, not only in this matter, but in many others. Now, I said that we would try and answer the question at a deeper or more significant level. You know, what kind of servant was Phoebe? So, repeating that question, what kind of servant was she? Well, and I would hope that you would cling on to this, perhaps much more firmly than anything that has gone before. She was a servant like Jesus. What kind of servant was she? She was a servant like Jesus. In the previous chapter, we've already noticed how in chapter 15,

Jesus is described as a servant of the Jews for the benefit of the Gentiles. The language is, Christ became a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth. Well, we could paraphrase that and introduce Phoebe's name and say, Phoebe became a servant of God's people on behalf of the gospel.

[26 : 05] And in the light of this reality of Phoebe as a servant of God's people on behalf of the gospel, the question of whether she was or was not a deacon in the technical sense, though not unimportant, is certainly a matter of secondary importance. And for us, the question that is urgent and important would be, are you a servant like Jesus? What kind of servant was Phoebe? But moving on to the other questions, and we'll deal with these very fleetingly, what, who did Phoebe serve? Who did Phoebe serve?

Well, she's described in our passage as a servant of the church in Cancria. Now, the preposition there, of a servant of the church, can be understood in the sense of belonging to the church. She was a servant who belonged to the church in Cancria, or it could be understood as one who was in the service of, towards the church in Cancria. I think both are true, but the second possibility that she was a servant towards the church in the service of the church highlights an important truth in answering this question, who did Phoebe serve? It highlights the truth, or it highlights the place and the importance of serving God's people. We are the church, God's new redeemed community, and our witness to the world is or should be grounded in how we love and serve one another. So, Phoebe served her fellow believers, as Paul highlights, including Paul himself. That's what he states very clearly.

She has been a great help to many people, including me. Phoebe served her fellow believers, but Phoebe was also a servant of the church in the service of others, believers from other churches, and we are sure others who were not members of the church but were in need of help of one kind or another.

I think it's reasonable to conclude that Phoebe was ready and willing in the name of the church, representing the church as a member of the church. She would serve them also. And ultimately, in serving God's people, Phoebe was serving God. In serving the bride of Christ, she was serving the groom. In her service of others, she was serving her Lord. Who did Phoebe serve? What kind of service did she render? Well, we're told by Paul, we're told that she has been a great help to many people, including me. Now, the word translated help there in the original Greek literally means one who stands in front of. And from that, it has the idea of a protector or, as here, a helper. Now, some suggest that it can have a more specific meaning of somebody who was a benefactor. And from this, it suggested that Phoebe was a

Cancrian Lydia, a woman of means who was able to financially provide for gospel workers and for gospel ministry. Now, that may be true, but there's certainly not enough here in the text for us to conclude that with any degree of certainty, I think it's preferable to understand the word in its more general and obvious sense that she was a helper. She helped the saints, and I'm sure others. She helped. She was a helper.

[29 : 42] Doesn't sound very dramatic. Doesn't sound very glamorous, but that's who she was. She was a helper. And the words that came to mind as I was thinking of her as a helper were, Oh, for a thousand Phoebes, because we need helpers. And let me just suggest some of the characteristics of the help that Phoebe gave to others. I think certainly we can say that her help offered and given to others was grounded in gratitude. She was conscious that Christ became a servant of the Jews on behalf of and for the benefit of the Gentiles. And she was grateful for that.

She was conscious of how her Savior had served her, and in gratitude, grounded in gratitude, it was her delight to serve and to help others. I think we can also say from even the little information we have that her help was proactive in character. I don't imagine Phoebe as being somebody who was sitting just waiting to be asked. I can't imagine her as somebody who was very passive, sitting in her home, perhaps a very large and luxurious home for all we know, if some of the speculation is true, we don't know if it is, but waiting for somebody to knock on the door and ask for help. No, I'm sure Phoebe was proactive in being sensitive to the needs of others and offering her help to others. I'm sure also that the help that she gave reflected her person and her circumstances, the kind of person she was, the character she had, the circumstances she was in, the means that she had, the level of wealth that she had, all of these things would be reflected in the kind of help she gave. And of course, that's true of us also. We will not all be able to help in the same way. We have different gifts. We have different opportunities. We have different circumstances. And I'm sure the help that Phoebe gave reflected who she was and the circumstances, the God-ordained circumstances that she was in. I'm sure also that her help was unseen by many. Paul commends her. He speaks of how she's been a great help to many people. But I'm sure if you ask Paul, well, give me a list of all the people that Phoebe has helped, Paul would just laugh and say, well, I can't do that. I know she's helped lots of people. I can give you a list of many people, but I certainly don't have an exhaustive list, because she helped so many people that Paul knew nothing of. And indeed, I'm sure those in the very church that she was part of would have known very little of. This is the kind of help that Phoebe gave. But then finally, Paul also touches on the matter or answers the question, how is such a servant to be received and treated? Well, what does he say there in verse 2? I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she may need from you.

How are we to receive? How are we to treat helpers in the church? Well, we're to receive in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints. To receive in the Lord, I think, simply indicates that we are to receive them as Christians, as brothers and sisters. In the particular circumstances of Phoebe, it would seem that Phoebe was the one who Paul was entrusting this letter to, and she was the one who was going to carry the letter to Rome. And the letter, in a sense, almost served as an introduction to the fellowship in Rome. It identified her by the very carrying of the letter. And so, Paul is contemplating that Phoebe arrives, and he's concerned as to how she will be received. And so, he urges the church in Rome to receive her in the manner that they ought. Receive her in the Lord as a believer, as a sister in the Lord. But he says also, in a way, worthy of the saints. The question here is whether the worthiness applies to Phoebe. Is Paul saying that she's worthy of a good reception? Is that what he's saying?

Or is he rather speaking of the manner of the reception, that it should be worthy of Christians? There's a way of receiving fellow believers that is appropriate and becoming of Christians.

And I think that's really what Paul has in mind, that the manner in which Phoebe is to be received should be worthy of Christians. What does that look like? Well, receiver with joy, receiver with respect, receiver with generosity, receiver with thankfulness, receiver in a manner worthy of believers.

[34 : 19] Is that how we receive strangers who appear in our midst? Particularly if they are believers coming amongst us, be it as visitors or perhaps coming to live in the city, how do we receive them? Do we receive them in a manner that is worthy of the saints? But then also we're told how she is to be treated. Give her any help she may need from you, Paul says to the Christians in Rome. Give her any help that she may need from you. It's a very big ask in many ways. Any help. We don't know what help she might have needed. But whatever it is, the believers are encouraged to do all that they can to provide that help to Phoebe. It's to be given to her.

This isn't some commercial arrangement. They are to generously give to her whatever help she needs. And of course, they're to give according to the need that she has. And I think there's a, what we might call a pleasing symmetry in this request or in this exhortation that Paul addresses to the church in Rome.

Phoebe is one who has helped others, who has helped many. And so she in turn is to be helped by others. I remember when we lived in Peru, this really happened more often, I suppose, because we were surrounded, or perhaps not surrounded, but there were many more people with immediate material needs than would be the case in Aberdeen. And so it wasn't uncommon that, you know, help would be sought. I'm not saying that I went out of my way to find people to help, but plenty of people would come and need help or ask for help of one kind or another. And in the measure that we were able to do so, we would try to help them. And often they would say, well, how can I repay you? You know, how can I pay you back for this help that you've given to me? And my standard answer would be, look, let's be realistic. You're not able to do so. You know, you're about to go somewhere else. You're about to travel. But I would say this to you. When sometime in the future, your circumstances are different, and you're somewhere else, and somebody comes to you and asks for help, all I ask is that you help them. And there's a symmetry there, isn't there? Phoebe helped others in her, in Cancra. And then when she goes to Rome, well, there were people there to help her, helping one another. And again, I would say, I don't know if I've got hymns on the brain now, but oh for a thousand Phoebes. Oh for a thousand Phoebes. In fact, not a thousand. A hundred would do. If we had many Phoebes in Bonacord, and we do have, but in the measure that we have, Phoebes, servants, helpers, then we will be blessed and be of blessing to others. Phoebe, a servant like Jesus.

That's the bottom line, if you wish. That's the most fundamental truth about her that we would hold on to and be challenged by. Oh for a thousand Phoebes. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you that you give gifts to your church. We thank you for men and women who you give, who serve others, who are helpers to others. We thank you that we are all called to a sacrificial service. We all have the opportunity to be helpers. Our circumstances are different. The opportunities that we will have will be different. But we pray that we would all seek to be like Phoebe in significant measure, seeking opportunities, perhaps in a quiet, unseen way, to help those in need. That our concern very particularly and especially would be for our brothers and sisters in the faith, but that it would go beyond and extend beyond them to others also. We do thank you for the Bible. We thank you that as we have been reminded of even this evening. It is God breathed, and we come to it with confidence and assurance that it is the very Word of God. We also recognize that there are occasions when we're unclear as to its meaning in a particular circumstance or occasion. And we pray that you would help us to meet that challenge with humility and with care and with wisdom. That we would be humble to listen to others and to the wisdom of past generations, but particularly that we would turn to your Word, and that we would be able to employ Scripture and compare Scripture with Scripture, and with your help and by the direction and guidance of your Spirit, come to conclusions that are true and pleasing to you.

All of these things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Now let's sing again as we praise God to close our service this evening. We're singing from Psalm 24 in the Scottish Psalter.

[39 : 22] Psalm 24 verses 1 to 5. It's on page 230 in our psalm book. Psalm 24 verses 1 to 5. The tune is Winchester.

The earth belongs unto the Lord and all that it contains, the world that is inhabited, and all that there remains. Psalm 24 verses 1 to 5. We'll stand to sing.

Psalm 24 verses 1 to 5.

Psalm 24 verses 1 to 5.

Psalm 24 verses 1 to 5.

[41 : 18] Psalm 24 verses 1 to 5.

Psalm 24 verses 1 to 5. Psalm 24 verses 1 to 5. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all now and always. Amen.

Thank you.