

Gospel shaped respect for leaders

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[0:00] Ah, thank you. Well, good morning everybody. I'm a little dry today, so I'll be reaching for my water fairly often, I think. Well, we're going through the book of 1 Timothy.

! As we know, it's been mentioned. We've had our reading today. And it's a book that contains a lot of instructions. These are God's instructions.

We just remind ourselves before we come to the text. This is what God, they contain things that God demands from his people. And so we'll be looking at that. Last week, we'll go to our, here's the first slide of my talk.

Can we all see that okay? Good. Last week, just to give us some context, we heard about family life within the church and a gospel-shaped respect for each other.

We saw that in the very being of God, there is family. It's God the Father. He has a son. And his name is Jesus. He's the first of many brothers, as we heard from Romans 8.29.

[1:07] We heard about this church family in Ephesus. So this church family were located in Ephesus.

That's from the text from 1 Timothy 5. And if you have Bibles, I forgot to say, please do open them to that text. And we heard about this church family. So we heard about Samuel Sr., St. Joan, and the infamous Gloria Glitzi.

And there's a picture there, which I've shamelessly stolen from Phil Slides without his permission. I hope he doesn't mind. So this is the family, the church family, framed in Ephesus at the time of the early church.

There's a time where there's no state-provided help for anybody or benefits of any kind. So the widows were entirely reliant on the church or husbands if they remarried.

So within the family, we heard that there should be proper respect, gratitude, and value attached to the people there. And practical support for those who really need it.

[2:16] But there are places where that line is drawn when it comes to practically supporting somebody like Gloria Glitzi, the younger widow, had a lifestyle of pleasure and live for the fulfillment of her sensual desires rather than prioritizing her service to Christ in the church family.

Then, of course, there's the flip side to that coin. There are lifestyles of people that should cause us to respond with absolute support and love, such as St. Joan, knowing for her good deeds both inside and outside the church.

There was a clarity to her character, wasn't there, we heard last week. So that's where we are.

We're looking at the church family. And I think the same can be said for pastors and elders, which is our subject today.

So we come to our text and the theme of respect and family continues. It's a very practical text.

There's a lot of instruction in here.

And it tells us that God, as I was saying, demands certain things from his people, such as... And it looks like I haven't put the slide in. And the three main kind of points which we'll look at as we go through, tells us that God demands respect for the elders.

[3:28] It's an essential thing. God requires a balanced view, requires us to have a balanced view in decision-making and a view of others.

And it requires us to have a healthy view. There must be a care and a maintenance taken for God's people. So over the course of the verses, we'll see how this shaped respect is handled in a balanced and healthy way.

And then we'll dip our toes into the beginning of chapter 6, which covers a respect for slaves. So verse 17. Who are the elders in this text?

The elders. I'm not going to draw this out too much in delving into these characters because others have already spoken about this subject in this series of talks. I'd recommend going back to David's talk on 1 Timothy 3.

It was very encouraging. We'll just refresh our memories on some important points that we'll draw on as we go through the text. Firstly, elders are leaders. The text says that they direct the affairs of the church.

[4:34] It's a word that means... I won't try and pronounce this. Presbyteros. Elders direct the affairs of the church.

It's a word that means to stand before or to rule. We come across this role in Acts 20 where the elders are referred to also as overseers and shepherds. Apparently it comes from a word meaning one who goes before and it denotes someone who not just leads or holds office but someone who has about them ultimately a spiritually mature person.

The word is referring to mature men specifically. We know this also from the context of the letter.

There is a feminine form of this word, presbyteros, that occurs only once in the New Testament and we see that up in verse 2 and it's used in the sense of older women.

The word is plural. In fact, eldership in the Bible is always plural. That's what we see. So ideally, and I underline this word, ideally, there would be more than one as a kind of standard for a church. It is an ideal. That's what we would aim for. So there are the elders in our text. So we can say we can add these elders to Philip's list of those in the church family at Ephesus from last week.

[6:00] So let's welcome to the family, Pastors Pedro and Percy. My artistic integrity is in question here, I think.

Maybe it's something that we can get going in the church, having some workshops on drawing stigma. So those are elders. So the text goes on to tell us that these elders are worthy of double honor, especially those who work as preaching and teaching.

So the word work there, it isn't just simply work. It isn't something done just in your spare time, something small. It means hard work whereby you toil and you break a sweat.

And I do stress here that the text is talking about, when it talks about preaching and teaching, it's talking about the specific role of elders. Not to all who just happen to have a gift of teaching, by God's grace.

It's a unique gifting and role in itself. So Romans 12 actually separates out the gift from teaching, from the gift of leading.

[7:06] And the word leading in that Romans 12 text is actually meaning, again, to manage or to rule. I'll just read over that quickly. We have different gifts according to the grace given us.

If one's gift is prophecy, let him use it in proportion to his faith. It's from verse 6. And just moving on down the text in verse 8, it says, if it is leading, let him lead with diligence.

There's two separate tasks there. So all overseers have to be able to teach according to the qualifications from 1 Timothy chapter 3, but not all people teaching are necessarily overseers.

So when it comes to this double honor, we are specifically talking about overseers here, elders, shepherds. So they're worthy of a double honor, and it means a perceived value.

Paul goes on to explain what that means by quoting scripture. He draws that out. Firstly, from Deuteronomy 25 verse 4, where he says, do not muzzle a ox while it is treading out the grain.

[8:18] There's a picture there I found, which is royalty free. So no captions necessary. But it's a picture, an illustration by a Georgian artist called Niko Pirosmani.

Niko Pirosmani. I'm probably not pronouncing that correctly, but if you wanted to look him up, there he is. So these days, we have machines to harvest the grain. I had a great time learning about this, because I really was a bit ignorant to how all of this is done.

I just, you know, like anybody, go to Asda and pick up the loaf of hovis. These days, we have machines, but before the days of machines, people would gather up the wheat, and they put it on the floor, and this floor was called a threshing floor.

And then they would attach a sledge to an ox. Now, this sledge was a big piece of wood, and in the wood, they'd have all these big stones embedded into it. And what would happen is, they'd lead the

ox round in circles in this threshing floor, and the sledge would drag over the wheat, and it would separate the grain from the wheat.

Really interesting process. So as the ox was going round, he'd see the grain on the floor, and he'd bend down, and he'd nibble on the grain.

[9:32] This was a just reward for the ox, isn't it? He's pulling the sled, and doing all of the work, with the hard graft. There's no reason why the ox shouldn't eat. And that's why Paul is using this example, and he's saying, don't muzzle the ox.

Don't, you know, let him eat. Let him be sustained. Let him have his reward for the work. These elders are worthy to have their reward for the hard work.

It doesn't mean, let's tie a big piece of wood to our elder and make him walk in circles. That's why he goes on to quote Luke also. So he's quoting from the Old Testament.

He goes on to quote the New Testament. It's Paul, and he says, the worker deserves his wages. This double honor is deserved. But it doesn't just end with honor.

We tend to think of honor in a very one-dimensional way in this society, in terms of respect. The term incorporates value, a price paid. These elders are not just worthy of the, the normal honor that we think about every day, but the resources that they need to do the job, to oversee the church family.

[10:46] So the question is, why does the text emphasize, especially those who toil in preaching and teaching? Well, elders, all elders should have that ability to teach, as we've heard.

It's a prerequisite of the position. If you're blessed to have a plurality of elders leading the church, maybe, this is a general held view, I think, from what I could gather, maybe some would prefer to really focus on preaching and teaching, as opposed to maybe those who might oversee administration, or supervise some other areas.

This is likely what Paul was getting at, but I'll just add a rhetorical question to this thought, and I'll say, what good overseer doesn't labor over God's work?

Interesting question, isn't it? How can you shepherd a flock without really knowing God's word? 2 Timothy 3, 16, 17, we've mentioned this a few times in this series, says, all scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

So I would lean towards saying that any elder that rules well is not going to do so without laboring over God's word, because without it, they would not be thoroughly equipped.

[12:15] So an emphasis is placed on those who labor in preaching and teaching, because how can a church survive without that? It's crucial to a church. The elders toiling in laboring are doing so, in God's word, for the church family, and they are worthy of the double honor.

This is what the text says, this is what God says. That is, just to recap that, a particular respect and a sufficient sustaining wage in proportion to the work.

The worker deserves his wages. But there is a qualification there. That is, that they also have to rule well, i.e. commendably correctly.

So knowing God's work isn't enough, is it? They have to be living it out. The double honor isn't there to fund a lifestyle, much like we've heard about Gloria Glitz.

It's not there to fund a lifestyle that doesn't agree with God's word. And so, we ask, are they living up to the list of qualifications from 1 Timothy 3?

[13:28] But for those who rule well, and are obedient to God's word, God attaches this value to them, and that's the value that the church family should acknowledge and respect.

Paul continues into verses 19 and 20. Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it was brought by two or three witnesses.

Those elders who are sinning you are to reprove before everyone so that the others may take warning. Excuse me. So the position of elder is a prominent position.

People in those positions are usually more likely to be challenged or accused of something since the role often includes things like giving instructions or sometimes telling people where they are going wrong.

So Paul says to Timothy, if there's an accusation, make sure that there's sufficient evidence. Before you go pointing the finger, the sin needs to be verified.

[14:36] And this is an established biblical principle. Deuteronomy 19 verse 15 says, A lone witness is not sufficient to establish any wrongdoing or sin against a man, regardless of what offense he may have committed.

A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. What this doesn't mean, I think it's worth saying, is that the minute an elder does something wrong, we take them and throw them before the church and say, sort him out.

You know, that something might just be a mistake. It might be just a moment of poor judgment. You know, people aren't perfect. We all make mistakes. So obviously this requires wisdom and discussion.

If an elder accidentally steps on your new white shoes during the church lunch and he's busy talking and he doesn't apologize, it might be an idea to speak to him before you go gathering witnesses and then throw him before the church.

Look at my white shoes. Matthew 18 verse 16 says this, If your brother sins against you, go and confront him privately. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.

[15:49] But if he will not listen, take one or two others along so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. And here we have that language again.

So I appreciate that this is something that requires some courage, doesn't it? Some people struggle with that. Some people don't. It's not easy to go to someone and say, Hey, you know what? I'm a little bit offended at what you've done.

And they might just say, Oh, what have I done? And you can have a conversation and draw it out. But we're all capable of being wrong. But going and speaking to your brother, your church, family, it's the honourable thing to do.

It's the right thing to do. It honours them as an elder. We're all capable of being wrong. Here's a picture that I spent way too much time on of two bunnies. The season, the season, I'm thinking of farming.

The situation seems obvious, doesn't it? This poor little bunny is not going to get a good harvest. But the other bunny is feeling rather proud of himself because he's going to get a good harvest.

[16:57] Sometimes things aren't always what they seem. I'll let you laugh that out.

He's going to eat well tonight. Even the most seasoned and experienced of people are capable of being wrong. It's just the way it is.

We're imperfect beings. There was only one who was perfect. That is Jesus Christ. So take the time to speak to him if this occurs. Get to the root of the matter. You see what I did there?

One person did. Then if the elder does not confess, others may need to be involved in a conversation so that the truth might be established.

This takes wisdom and prayer which I think offers something towards an explanation as why it's preferable to have more than one elder if you can. Verse 20.

[17:56] If the elder is to be proven guilty he is to be rebuked before everyone so that others can take warning. That's certainly strong language, isn't it?

It's a strong thing to do. Elders are to be an example to the flock in their lives. We know this. Here we see not just the good examples. If a situation arises whereby an elder's lifestyle is not matching up to what God expects, not matching up to God's word, this is to be an example too so that others may not be led the same way.

Again, I don't think this means simple mistakes. Nothing is gained by the church knowing that Pastor Pedro, that's quite hard to say, Pastor Pedro stepped on your new white shoes.

What good would that do? No. I think obviously if it's a situation where a person is not responding and it needs several people to have the conversation, if there's no repentance to the sin, it does require wisdom, discussion and it would need to, the church discipline would need to go forward.

[19:13] I think I've lost my place. What am I doing? Here we go. So then the church would need to know what's going on, what's been occurring

because it may be that this discipline is needed if the elder is found to be living that lifestyle which contradicts God's commands, action would need to be taken because that person might not be fit for that role.

So then the church would need to know what's happening and it's not for the purpose of gossip and it wouldn't be for the purpose of finger pointing or self gain but so that it would, the people of the church will stand in fear of sin.

That's one of the reasons isn't it? That's what the text says, stand in fear of sin but also for the restoration of that person. That's the crucial part of it. Discipline doesn't happen because you want to cast somebody out.

That's never the way. It's not the way families operate. You want to restore that person. You want to put them on the right course and bring them back in. So fear of sin, we could say, would act as a prevention and warning to others to be tempted into leading the same lifestyle so that others would not be tempted to lead the same lifestyle.

Moreover, that it would lead to a reverence, not of anybody, but of God's word as the ultimate authority in the church. This means that the church family have a responsibility as well.

[20:51] That responsibility is to have a balanced view of our leaders. Not to be worshipped or followed without question, but at the same time, they are worthy of the double honor.

We don't need to invoke church discipline the minute a mistake is made. Elders are worthy of respect. They're not just elders, they're not just a title, they're our church family and crucially our brothers in Christ.

Verse 21. So Paul takes this idea of having a balanced view and he runs with it and he attaches some very strong language to it by saying to Timothy in this letter, I solemnly charge you in the sight of God and Jesus Christ and the elect angels to keep these instructions without partiality and do nothing out of favoritism.

That's a strong word, it's a strong image to be invoking, isn't it? So, as we have our ordered church family here on earth, we also stand before God's ordered heaven.

God the Father Jesus, the Son of all creation at his right hand and there are elect angels and no one, no one on this earth has a more balanced view than our God who hears and sees everything absolutely perfectly.

[22:14] Ecclesiastes 12.14 says, God will bring every work into judgment including every secret thing whether it is good or whether it is evil. Therefore, Paul is saying to Timothy, judge fairly in everything because you stand before the holy judge.

It's a challenging thought, isn't it? It certainly brings out questions about what we do in our in the dark and in the light as it were in private and in public.

So the words in the text here, the key words are partiality and prejudice or sorry, partiality slash prejudice and favoritism.

The idea is, as we were saying, is one of balance. It's not leaning one way or the other unfairly. It's prejudice. means coming to a conclusion before you have established all of the facts.

This involves assumption, maybe through past experiences with that person or even things you might have heard on the grapevine. So a person might be inclined to say, Andrew definitely took the chocolate cake from the church fridge because I've seen him eat chocolate cake and he is a key to the church.

[23:33] That wouldn't be a fair assumption, would it, in this hypothetical situation? That's prejudice. And then we have this word favoritism which is a similar thought but leans in favor of this imaginary person called Andrew.

If anybody here is called Andrew that I've missed, I apologize. I should have used a better name than that. More uncommon. So a person might be inclined to say, Andrew couldn't possibly have taken the chocolate cake from the church fridge because I know his mum.

That wouldn't be a fair analysis of the situation either, would it? I'll just put these examples but the point I'm making is in establishing the truth of sin there must be a balanced godly way of seeing things.

This is what God is demanding in his text. Timothy, it is to bring order to the church at Ephesus with God's help is to do so in a way that is in keeping with this good leadership.

Not just in the settling of sin and matters of discipline but in all things. That's what the text says. Do nothing out of favoritism. Fairness must be present within the eldership.

[24:44] And this requires prayer I think by implication. Sometimes the truth of the matter might be unclear. We don't know all of the truth of every situation.

That's something God does. And so we pray don't we because who better to ask than the perfect judge who sees absolutely everything. Verse 22 Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands and do not share in the sins of others.

Keep yourself pure. So we have this image of laying hands on someone. In the book of Acts chapter 6 some of the practical things that needed to be done within the church were not being done so the apostles needed to appoint people to take up these roles.

Acts chapter 6 verses 3 and 6 if you wanted to look that up. And so they did assign people and they used this symbolic act of laying hands on people.

It usually happens it's something we still do today when appointing someone to a position or office of responsibility within the church they lay hands on them and they pray for them. So we know from the context that Paul is saying don't be hasty in appointing others sorry in appointing elders.

[26:01] I think the same would apply to deacons as well as we read in 1 Timothy 3 they're to be tested first but we are talking specifically about obviously. So there's a serious responsibility here because if this process is rushed and the church ends up with someone ruling that is perhaps unfit to rule or doing very questionable things that could damage the church and the people making the decisions to put these people in charge put these elders in charge the text says could find themselves partaking in sin that's a very very strong message to hear isn't it no one wants to be involved in someone else's sin keeping yourself pure it takes discernment it takes time and prayer and this is for the sake of purity of God's church again humans can't see into the depths of someone else's life and heart but God can prayer is essential to this so appointing an elder this process as we know all too well it takes time it takes care it takes detail it takes attention

I do think there is a flip side to that coin if that's what church needs that does need to be a point where a decision is made it's a very very difficult process we can pray over our church as we go through this difficult process ourselves verse 23 a little wine stop drinking only water and use a little wine because your stomach and frequent illnesses that verse jumps out at us doesn't it one minute we seem to be talking about responsibilities and discipline and church elders and Paul suddenly stops and he addresses Timothy directly and he says stop drinking only water use a little wine because of your stomach it doesn't immediately fit in quite how we'd like it but Paul comes let's look at the context properly Paul comes from saying keep yourself pure in the context of the church and sin and many have linked this verse directly with the wine to say that Paul is talking about drunkenness

I think there's a sense of that here but because the word he says he's a little wine I think he's saying yeah okay a little bit is good but really the subject of volume has already been tackled earlier on in the letter so I think the inclusion of this health condition is perhaps Paul saying to Timothy keep yourself healthy I think this is the overall point in a spiritual and in a physical sense and again we come back to this idea of being the example honouring God through taking care of our bodies Timothy has to be an example in this our bodies which are the temple of the Holy Spirit given to us by God we have to look after them the reason why he's mentioning wine I think is because back in that day humans had no idea about bacteria there was a lot of bacteria around and you know Timothy's drinking only water so he's filling himself with bacteria so I believe if I'm correct that they used to mix water with wine to kind of even that out a little bit or sometimes they drink wine I think that's what is going on there but Paul is saying it's okay to have a little your health is important health is extremely honoring way to keep ourselves healthy so that we may be fit for service and a good example to others we then come to verse 24 and 25 this is very very challenging language I struggle with this one if I'm being honest the sins of some are obvious

reaching a place of judgment ahead of them the sins of others trail behind them Paul is continuing the theme continuing the thought of sin in people's lives in the context of elders he's coming back to that and he's saying I think maybe that he's talking about false teachers in Ephesus but it could include a variety of things that could that will contradict

God's word some sin is obvious and open going ahead of them meaning leading them into judgment you see it straight away you see it before you see them if a person leads a lifestyle of open sin you will see that first and you'll know that an appointment as an elder or deacon maybe is not appropriate for that person at that time because they might not meet the qualifications needed they wouldn't if they were leading open sinful lives care and conversation still would need to happen for that person as I was saying the theme of restoration is important the idea is to bring that person back in but by being watchful and aware of what God God's word says means that in this case problematic situations for the church can be avoided however the flip side to that is some sin is hidden this is what

[31:36] Paul says it trails behind them to some the sin isn't obvious it crops up later and often unexpectedly which could potentially have a massive impact on the church I'm going to say that makes confessing our sins all of us as a church really so important for each other and the elders James 5 16 says therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective it's easy to say it's my sin it's my responsibility nobody needs to know about it but confession is a powerful way to keep the church healthy and to actively look after each other so our culture here in England we have what's called the stiff upper lip if you've never heard of that that kind of means being determined in the face of problems nothing wrong with that determination is good but it does tend to mean that people don't reliably convey the truth of their feelings you could go into work and have two bruised eyes and your shirt could be torn and you're going in with a limp and you know missing teeth and put someone and say to you how you doing

Tom yeah all good that's our culture confess your sins get off your chest pray for healing and be healed Paul goes on to say in the same way good deeds are obvious even those that are not obvious cannot remain hidden forever and he's drawing up this idea of balance again it's okay looking for the hidden sin it's also important to actively look for the good things as well isn't it good things cannot remain hidden forever!

By having a balanced view elders are to lead the example of maintaining the health of themselves and the other elders the health of the church and the glory of God we come to the end of this chapter and we are just very quickly going to look into chapter 6 verses 1 and 2 it's very very light touch on this because this could be another sermon all on its own but we're thinking of gospel shape respect and respect for our elders in all of these processes and things and these verses continue in this form just by addressing other people within the church so the slaves so slavery is a very difficult subject for us to talk about and interpret because of the age that we live in particularly in the west it's tempting to think that we live in a society and a time where we progress beyond slavery let me say it's absolutely not the case 49% of the world 49% of countries in the world it's still lawful to have slavery there's still lawful slavery this still goes on today this is something something we do need to think about so in the time of the early church slaves or bond servants were an ongoing part of that world and there's not enough time for me to cover the history in that but there are many resources out there that do but I want to make one important point from this text that we read earlier the verses aren't saying that the institution this is something that often comes up in conversation

I have atheists a lot of atheist friends and often it's one of the things that they say God thinks slavery is okay no that's not true this isn't an institution that pleases God it is a human institution it's an institution that sees people treated as objects and that's not what God wants for people God wants to see us as the text says within the context of the church family sees people as family that does include showing love to people who aren't Christians okay Genesis 1 27 says so God created man in his own image in the image of God he created him male and female he created them even slave owners are made in the image of God but because of sin humans have corrupted the nature

of authority for their own purposes all sinners without exception need to be shown God's love and in verse 2 even when the masters of the slaves are Christians those under the yoke of slavery would serve them all the more that's challenging isn't it we picture ourselves potentially being in slavery and we think can we really live up to that can would we really be able to follow the word would we really be able to set that example but the

Christians are not to despise their owners because they were brothers and maybe should know better but to love them because they love the Lord we know as Christians the word says the Lord is with us in any circumstance he never leaves us and never forsakes us so our circumstances don't determine how obedient we should be to God's word we set the example we represent God and we represent the teaching and the doctrine of Christ the word of God our help comes from the Lord we have strength in him in every difficult circumstance that's our text we've covered quite a lot and actually making fairly good time let's draw some conclusions hopefully I've managed with

[37:29] God's help to draw some important things as we've gone through this text I won't be making any elaborate conclusions I think we've tackled the things as we've gone on are a few things I think we can just remind ourselves of today so firstly we like many churches find ourselves in this difficult position where we read from God's word about a plurality in eldership almost abundant when you read the text and yet we struggle we seem to be struggling finding one right person to step into this role if we're being really honest with ourselves I think we find ourselves in this position after a really difficult couple of years and it's very easy to be discouraged and frustrated and say well let's just do something about it because COVID has changed the way we live it's changed the way we interact and there's a lot of varying opinions on that listen often difficult circumstances can unbalance our view of things

I'll put my hand up on that I'm very guilty of that very unbalanced views over this time found it very confusing time our text today speaks of a gospel shaped respect for overseers not blindly following them or funding them to do whatever they choose to do because they have an important title but because they are our brothers they are our family and God says that they are worthy of our support as they supervise the running of the church and they wrestle to keep the authority it's God's authority that's the word of God as the foundation of the church and I think we can encourage each other as Calvary to say that we're really blessed with that certainly in the 11 years that I've been here it's always been about the gospel of Jesus the word has always been at the center of everything whether there have been mistakes made or not and we have I think a very good people have always said the Lord has blessed us with a family mentality this is something that God has really done well within this church so we support our elders we support our leaders and we trust them we do that with confession forgiveness compassion care provision but also wisdom and discernment which we've seen from the text and we help each other in keeping the word of God centered to our lives even when we make mistakes now that's my conclusion for the church I have a conclusion if you're not a Christian you happen to be listening to this happen to be watching at home because you might think none of this applies to me actually I don't go to church I don't have an elder to you I say quite simply there is a reason why the leader is to be an example in the good and the bad there is a reason why the servant is to serve joyfully and there's a reason why the Bible is the center of both of their lives they all point you towards one amazing person and that is as I put on my slide a leader that never sinned a friend that forgives a king that came to serve a servant that died for his family and a master that conquered death so that you could live forever this is the son of God Jesus Christ and the ultimate authority that we all can count on Amen