

# The Will and the Flesh

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 29 April 2007

Preacher: Megan Curlis-Gibson

[ 0 : 00 ] Well, let's pray. God our Father, we thank you that you are a God who reveals himself in the words of Scripture.

And we pray now that we'll not only have understanding, that our minds will be informed, but also that our lives will be reformed and transformed, so that we may be people of godly love for the glory of the Lord Jesus. Amen.

Well, I sometimes wonder, I often wonder, why anyone would want to be a minister. The tensions of dealing with sin and grace.

Sometimes people ask me, how's Holy Trinity going? And a friend of mine who's also a minister and I, we think the answer to that is sin and grace. Because it's always true, there's always sin, there's always grace when you're dealing with a church.

As a minister, to exercise compassion, but also to exercise firmness where needed. To exercise love and acceptance, but on the other hand, rebuke where needed.

[ 1 : 17 ] It's a job where you need buckets of love, buckets of wisdom, extraordinary discernment of people and their motives and actions and thoughts.

Where you need enormous fortitude. Where there is huge pressure on all sides. The pressure to please people who have contradictory views.

We want more old hymns, we want more modern songs. We want to do this, we want to do that. You can't please everyone. So, to be a minister, you need a thin skin, so that you can pastor with sensitivity and love, but you need a very thick skin if you're going to survive.

You need the delicacy to be able to tiptoe through all sorts of minefields of politics and relationships within a church.

But you actually also need the strength to wear the boots when you need to go in boots and all. I often wonder why anyone would want to be a minister. Ephesus in the first century AD, like most churches at some time or other, was a minefield.

[ 2 : 34 ] And for those who've been part of this series so far, I suspect you've already gleaned a sense of that. That this is a complicated church with all sorts of difficult people and groups and competing values and philosophies and theologies and power plays and so on.

It's a place of heresy, but a place of truth. It's a place where there are various sins that are being paraded or perhaps kept hidden.

It's a place where there are different groups wanting control or exercise some influence in some way or the other. And Timothy, God bless him, young man that he was, is entrusted by Paul, the apostle, now perhaps in prison in Rome or probably towards the end of his life.

Timothy, probably up to the age of 40, is entrusted as the apostolic delegate by Paul to this congregation in Ephesus, a church that Paul had founded.

And a church, if you remember, Paul had warned the elders of this church back in Acts chapter 20, when he last met with them at Miletus on his way to Jerusalem before then going to Rome.

[ 3 : 48 ] And so a few years before this letter was written, some say maybe five years, he'd warned those Ephesian elders that savage wolves would come in amongst you. And even from within your own midst, there will be those who seek to mislead or deceive the elect.

And now a few years later, perhaps those very words are being fulfilled. And hence, Timothy's charge by Paul to be his delegate to sort out the mess, to sort out the minefield of the church in Ephesus.

And in 1 Timothy, Paul is both steering and guiding Timothy for the delicacy of the task. He's also stilling him with strength to go in boots and all where needed as well.

And in chapter 5, the chapter that we're dealing with tonight, various groups and issues are being dealt with, in a sense, in sequence through this chapter.

It begins with some helpful reminding advice, I suppose, for any church member, let alone any church pastor. That is that church relationships are family relationships.

[ 5 : 00 ] Because when you're a Christian, you're brought into God's family. We can call God our Father by the grace of God's work in Jesus and the giving of his Spirit to us.

Then if we can all call God our Father, we are brothers and sisters in Christ together. And frequently in the New Testament, Christians calling about other Christians are brothers and sisters.

And so Paul says in the first two verses, I think Paul is laying a foundation for what will follow.

But he's reminding Timothy that, yes, you may need to rebuke, for example, the older men. Don't despise your youth is something that Paul exhorts Timothy in one place.

But if you need to speak harshly, a solemn or severe rebuke is perhaps intended by those words, then Paul's not saying don't do that.

[ 6 : 04 ] But he's saying do it as to a father. That is in love. In a relationship that's got to exist beyond the rebuke. See, it's so easy when we need to rebuke someone, even if that rebuke is right.

Or it's so easy when we're in disputes within Christian fellowship to think only in terms of getting it off my chest or making sure that I'm in the right, but not doing it necessarily in a way that will sustain an ongoing brother, sister or fellow Christian relationship.

And that's in a sense the parameter, I think, that Paul is reminding Timothy of at the beginning of chapter five. It's not easy for a young pastor to rebuke older men or women for that matter.

And very often in my experience, I've been put in my place, or at least people have tried to put me in my place, by reminding me that I'm young. Certainly in years past that was the case.

And sometimes maybe they were right, but sometimes I think it's hard for older people to accept a rebuke in love where needed, perhaps. And that's what Timothy's got to do as he deals with these rather errant, perhaps heretical elders in particular in this church in Ephesus.

[ 7 : 24 ] Also note at the end of that little paragraph, his relationship to the younger women there as sisters with absolute purity, an idea that keeps cropping up in this letter, I guess there's the natural possibility that Timothy may not be married and maybe therefore is vulnerable to younger women, whether they're intent on him or vice versa.

He's got to make sure his relationships with them are pure, something that we'll see later in this chapter as well. Out of that context then, out of the family context, comes a longer section dealing with widows.

Indeed, quite a lengthy section from verse 3 all the way through to verse 16. Now in our day of social security, in our day of aged care, of life insurance, of superannuation and all that sort of stuff, whilst the care of widows is at one level still an important issue, it's not quite the gripping issue that it seems to be in the scriptures.

And when you think about it, we might think, well, gosh, so many verses here about widows. But actually it's a consistently significant theme through both Old and New Testaments.

We live in a modern age where it's not such an issue, but I know I've read sort of older books, and I was trying to think where I've read this and I can't quite remember, but where somebody is called the widow so-and-so.

[ 8 : 52 ] We wouldn't use that sort of language so much today. We don't quite tend to think of somebody, oh, that's a widow. I'm not quite sure why that is. But certainly in the Old and the New Testaments, somebody is clearly marked if they are a widow.

And in the Old Testament, for example, there are several exhortations, for example, in Deuteronomy 10 and in other places in Deuteronomy, where the care of widows in particular is exhorted of the people of Israel as a whole.

God is described in the Psalms as the defender of widows. Elijah, remember, ministered to the desperate widow of Zarephath, and Elisha, his successor, also cared for a widow in his ministry as well.

And when Israel failed to care for widows, the prophets jumped at them. And so you'll see in Isaiah, in Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Zechariah, Malachi, at least all those prophets, a chastisement on Israel for their exploitation or disdain of widows.

One of the reasons, I think, in the Old Testament why widows are singled out is because of their vulnerability to poverty. They were landless. That is, they would live on land owned by a husband

or, if become widowed, perhaps by their son if there was one.

[10:15] So they were quite vulnerable to be poor. In the New Testament, the same. Jesus spoke against the Pharisees who were devouring widows. He commended that poor widow in her giving of just that little coin in the temple offering.

He raised the widow of Nain's son, for example. And widows is still a theme after the life of Jesus on earth. So the reason for the appointment of some deacons in Acts chapter 6 is tied with the care of widows as well.

That is, a recognition that this is an important social group that Christians, God's people in Old and New Testament times, have to care for.

And James, when he defines, in a sense, what true religion is, says it's the care of widows in a central way. So this is a significant issue. And so it's not odd, then, that Paul deals with it at length here in 1 Timothy chapter 5.

He begins the section by saying a summary verse, if you like. Honor widows who are really widows. Now, he doesn't mean by that that there are some people dressing up in black and they're coming and they've got a rich husband at home and they're actually fabulously wealthy, but they're trying to bludge on the church.

[11:30] I don't quite think that's what he's got in mind. There are categories of widows, as we'll see in these verses, three categories. The word widow literally could mean somebody simply who's not living with their spouse, which may imply being separated and certainly could include being divorced.

But certainly the thrust here are those whose husbands have died. But even that by itself doesn't quite define what Paul means by a real widow. Certainly it is only limited to those whose husbands have died, I think.

But there's a tighter definition, as we'll see. To express honour is not just sort of a reverence to a widow.

It may well have the idea of providing for her. That is, if you're going to honour a widow, it will mean some form of provision financially or in other material sorts of ways.

Now, in verse 4, Paul begins the qualifications. If a widow has children or grandchildren, they, that is the children and grandchildren, should first learn their religious duty to their own family and make some repayment to their parents, for this is pleasing in God's sight.

[12:46] Now, Paul's just reminded Timothy that church members are a family. And true, that is. But there is a primacy in the care of widows for those who are children or grandchildren.

That is blood relationships. It's not that the church will have no concern for those people, but there is a primary concern to be exercised by those who are, by ancestry, the children or grandchildren of those widows.

And it seems that perhaps there were some Christians here who were saying, well, the church will look after my mother or my grandmother. And we might think, well, that's a bit unusual.

But let me tell you, it does in practice happen, even in my own experience. There are people who, in effect, expect the church to do all sorts of things that they themselves are not prepared to do, whether they, the children, grandchildren, are Christian or not.

There is a primary blood relation responsibility. And so for those of us who have mothers, who are widows, or maybe grandmothers who are widows, we have a primary role of concern and care for them.

[13:56] And so if you look down to verse 8, whoever does not provide for relatives, and especially for family members, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

That's a pretty stinging rebuke to you or me if we're not caring for our mother, grandmother, who is in need and expecting others to do it.

Now, verse 5 then deals with the real widow, anticipated in verse 3. The real widow, left alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day.

Now, by this, I think, Paul is not sort of despising the person who is really a widow, whose husband's died, but has children. He's not saying, well, you're not really a widow. I mean, they are a widow. But in a sense, the real widow that the church has got to take a care for, a primary care for, are those who are left without anyone, without children or grandchildren.

They are the ones who are the church must say, well, we now have a primary role of care for this person. But it's not simply the fact that they're a widow. Because see what verse 5 says, the person

who set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day.

[15:16] That is a person whose life shows a religious piety and duty to God, or devotion to God. The words, I think, echo the widow, Anna.

Anna is mentioned at the time of, well, soon after Jesus, when Jesus, rather, is presented in the temple in Luke 2. There was a great prophet, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then as a widow to the age of 84. Presumably she'd been widowed when she was very young, maybe even in her 20s.

She never left the temple, but worshipped there with fasting and prayer, night and day. Same expression that Paul uses in this verse. And at that moment she came and began to praise God and to speak about the child, Jesus that is, to all who are looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. So Paul is commending pious widows who are left without anyone, but are still exercising a faithful loyalty to God. Presumably not a bitterness because they've been widowed, or because they're vulnerable to poverty, but somebody who nonetheless is loyal to God and serving God in their religious devotion, night and day.

[16:45] Paul goes on then to contrast the real widow with another third category. We've got the first category that was mentioned are the people who really are widows, but they've got children and grandchildren to care for them.

The second category in verse 5 are those who've got no one who are religiously devoted to God. The third category, and the final category really in this whole section, is the widow who lives for pleasure in verse 6.

She is dead even while she lives. You see, the real widows show godly character. That's verse 5. These ones, they are to be provided for.

This is somebody who lives for pleasure. She may be old, she may not be old. It sounds like a person who's thoroughly indulgent, and some say that the language of living for pleasure has probably got some sexual overtone, whether she's just living around or maybe even living as a prostitute.

Maybe this is the sort of woman that's described back in chapter 2 in all their fancy hairdos and braided hair and gold and pearls and so on. And so verse 7 rebukes.

[17:58] Give these commands as well so that they may be above reproach. That is, to rebuke these indulgent widows. Not an easy thing, I suspect, for young Timothy to do as the apostolic delegate in Ephesus.

Paul goes back now to the real widows. Let a widow, verse 9, be put on the list if she is not less than 60 years old and has been married only once and she must be well attested for her good works.

Put on the list. Sounds very formal and presumably it was. The language is a formal sort of list. In the description of the church in Joppa in Acts 9, the widows of Joppa is referred to as a group as though maybe they are a fixed list.

And that, I think, is behind what Paul is saying here, that there will be in the church in Ephesus a fairly defined group of who are the real widows to be cared for by the church in Ephesus.

And three criteria. Age is one. They must be at least 60. That's a fair age in those days. People still lived to an old age in those days even though life expectancy as a whole was much lower.

[19:14] But once you got to be an adult, the chances are you could still live relatively old age back then. Not only were they to be over 60, but verse 9 also says married only once.

That is not just talking about literally having been married to once, but it's a statement of fidelity or faithfulness. Same expression is used but in reverse when speaking of the bishops or the overseers at the beginning of chapter 3.

That is, the woman is to have been a one-man woman, so to speak. Faithful to her husband. That is, it excludes those who were married only once but maybe were not faithful.

And it certainly excludes those who maybe have been married more times as well. But more than that, part of the criteria. Verse 10, She must be well attested for her good works.

Not something that Timothy alone is to judge. Well attested means widely accepted and acknowledged that this is a person of good works. And then some examples of those good works.

[20:17] One who's brought up children. I don't think it expressly excludes those who might have been childless. But those who did bring up, had children, they'd been brought up, brought up well,

presumably, by the mother at least.

Somebody who's shown hospitality, one of the Christian virtues that is described back in chapter 3 as well for the leaders of the church. Somebody who's washed the saint's feet. That may be literally those who've come to their home as you show hospitality.

You literally might wash their feet as an act of service and cleanliness. A typical thing you do in the dusty Middle East. And of course we know of Jesus doing that to the disciples' feet the night before he was crucified in John 13.

She also has helped the afflicted and devoted herself to doing good in every way. It's a parallel description really of verse 5. Here is somebody who's devoted to God not just in sort of prayers and staying in church but actually in practical ways of service for the benefit of others, maybe in greater need than herself.

Well, this is compassion to such a person. But it's compassion with discernment. That is, it's not handing out sort of, you know, food packages willy-nilly to anybody who says, well, I don't have a husband.

[ 21 : 39 ] Oh, we'll have some food. That is, there's some discernment here. But real compassion is to be exercised, real generosity to be exercised for those who qualify to be on the list of real widows.

Imagine the fine lines, though. I mean, it looks simple at one level. But can you imagine having a church discussion about whether such and such a widow has been well attested to good works? Oh, well, you know, she's done some good things, but no, you know. My goodness. At one level, it's straightforward. It's setting parameters. But imagine the wisdom and discernment you would need to put it into practice.

Who is on the real list? It could actually be a pastoral nightmare. I'm not meaning to despise this, of course. But I'm just recognizing that the need for discernment and care is quite high.

Now, the problem in particular that's perhaps undergirding all of this are younger widows in particular who are living the good life, it seems. Maybe the same group as was mentioned back in verse 6, the widow who lives for pleasure.

[ 22 : 51 ] And now we get in verse 11 and 12, refuse to put younger widows on the list, maybe simply those under the age of 60. But then perhaps this has been conditioned by what's going on in Ephesus.

For when their sensual desires alienate them from Christ, they want to marry. And so they incur condemnation for having violated their first pledge.

Now, that's very strong language. I don't think Paul is speaking against younger widows remarrying. The language of alienating them from Christ is very strong language.

And most likely, Paul, addressing a situation in Ephesus, is addressing those younger Christian widows who perhaps are flirting with or having relationships with or maybe even marrying unbelieving men.

And the first pledge at the end of verse 12 is literally the first faith. And so, again, it seems that what Paul is attacking are those widows, Christian, who now are going outside the church to find a marriage partner.

[ 24 : 04 ] And they're giving up, therefore, their first faith because in marrying into a man who's a pagan's family, you would in that society most likely be expressing an acceptance of the pagan religion of the husband.

In addition, in verse 13, they learn to be idle. Maybe that's because they're being given handouts, in a sense, from the church that they ought not really deserve.

And in their idleness, or maybe because they're already wealthy and they're trying to get more money out of the church, they're gadding about from house to house. They're not merely idle, but also gossips and busybodies.

That is, they're not really busy, they're idling, but they're busybodies. They're doing actually a lot of mischief. They're saying what they should not say, either things that are just nonsense, either things that are heresy, or perhaps things that are undermining of people, relationships, and church unity. Maybe that's the same group of women, or maybe it overlaps with the group of women described back in chapter 2, who are wanting to teach and wanting to take control of the church. Instead, Paul says, Paul's instruction to marry does not mean outside the church, but within, that is that they stay Christians.

[ 25 : 39 ] And it seems from what we saw a couple of weeks ago in chapter 2, that these are women who are somehow domineering over husbands, and maybe are not wanting actually to marry, certainly not wanting to have children.

Part of the argument of chapter 2 is dealing with that, as it is here in verse 14. I would have younger widows marry, bear children, but he's not simply silencing the women either, because they are to manage their households.

That is, to manage their family. And it's a strong word that's being used. You know, we often think that the Bible is simply patriarchal, the man's the head of the family, but this is a strong word, oikodespotes.

Oiko, from where we get, say, economy, echo sort of words, is the house. And the despot of the house, well, it's not really a despot, it's where we get the word despot from, but it's somebody who's got quite a significant rule over the house.

That's what these women are to exercise in marriage. Paul is pushing them back, in a sense, into Christian marriage, rather than this sort of over-emancipated, domineering woman trying to exercise control over the church and over society as well, for which, as I said three weeks ago, there's significant documentation about these sorts of things, the new Roman woman in this first century AD.

[ 27 : 01 ] Notice, too, that in verse 14 at the end, so as to give the adversary no occasion to revile us, and some have already turned away in verse 15 to follow Satan, the adversary and Satan in parallel there, and maybe showing that those who would oppose the church or be adversarial against the church are actually under the influence of Satan, as mentioned in verse 15.

That's an issue back in chapter 2 as well. The snare of the devil is also mentioned twice, in effect, in chapter 3, in the instructions to the overseers in the first part of chapter 3.

What it seems to be saying or hinting at is not just bad behaviour, but actually heretical beliefs and teaching from these women as well.

The heresy leads to godlessness, something that we've seen through 1 Timothy. The gospel leads to godliness, and only the gospel leads to godliness.

And heresy always leads, in the end, to godlessness. And these women, in their behaviour, are showing that heresy has taken root in their lives.

[ 28 : 11 ] They're idle, they're gossips, they're busybodies, they're living indulgent lives. In summary, three groups. The younger, the gadabouts, that have been rebuked fairly strongly in these verses 11 onwards to 15.

They're not to get financial support from the church. Second group was the widows who have family to support them, mentioned back in verse 5, and then in verse 16.

If any believing woman has relatives who are really widows, let her assist them. And then the real widows. Mentioned earlier as well, back in verse 3 and 5, and now at the end of verse 16, let the church not be burdened by those who've got family so that it can assist those who are real widows, as defined in the verses earlier on, verses 9 and 10.

Well, here is a careful exercise that balances compassion and rebuke. It shows discernment. It shows a priority to godliness of character and behaviour in other people.

It shows a willingness to be generous to those who are truly in need. It shows a primacy of blood relations. It shows a concern that the church is not overburdened where it ought not to be.

[ 29 : 37 ] It rebukes those who are trying to bludge, in effect, on the church's compassion. From one tricky area to another, though, we move on to the issue of elders in verse 17 onwards.

And again, there's elements of minefield, of wisdom, of discernment that Timothy is going to need at every point through the rest of this chapter. The elders in verse 17 and 18, let those elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in preaching and teaching.

For the scripture says, you shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain, and the labourer deserves to be paid. The good elders are deserving of double honour.

Some suggest that may mean double payment, that they get an honorarium, and maybe that should be doubled, possibly. Or maybe it's just rhetorical. That is, a two-fold honour, that is, they're paid an honorarium for their ministry, as well as that they receive the sort of respect from the rest of the congregation in honour of them as well.

It implies, by the word especially in the middle of the verse, that some elders didn't teach and some did, and especially those who preached and teach, or literally those who labour in word and teaching.

[ 30 : 56 ] So it may not be preaching, the expression is labour in word, but probably that's what's implied. And that's why in some reformed traditions, you end up with two groups of elders, the ruling elders and the teaching elders.

But it seems to me that the ruling elders include the teaching elders, at least in here, but it's still hard to put it all together even in 1 Timothy when you've got overseers and deacons back in chapter 3.

It seems that church order has got some elements of flexibility about it, I think, in the New Testament. One of the striking things here is notice that Paul is referring to scripture.

Now that's not striking because he does it all the time, but notice what scripture he refers to. Well, it's Deuteronomy, so that should give you a bit of a thrill, as it does to me. You shall not muzzle an ox. Well, he's not saying that ministers are oxen.

What he's saying is that if the Old Testament can say that the working ox is able to be sustained or fed as it treads out the grain, well, how much, even more, a labourer for the gospel should be paid?

[ 31 : 56 ] It's an a fortiori argument, as they're called, that is from something that is in a sense weak to something that is much stronger. If the weak, the ox, is looked after, how much more the gospel minister?

But what's really striking when Paul says, looking at scripture, is not actually the Deuteronomy quote, let me say, but the next one. The labourer deserves to be paid. Where in scripture do you find that?

In Luke. Here is Paul writing 1 Timothy sometime in the 60s, perhaps, AD, quoting as scripture a verse we find in Luke.

Now, some say that 1 Timothy is not written by Paul, it's written much later, I don't have any time for that argument. Here is an acceptance early of the scripture of parts of the New Testament.

We see little glimpses of this elsewhere in the New Testament, it's not unique. But we see early on a recognition that some of what we call the New Testament is regarded as scripture very early in church history.

[ 33 : 01 ] One of the thorny issues that I think verses 17 and 18 is alluding to is the payment of ministers. And that's a thorny issue in many, many churches, let me say. And it's one reason why I'm very thankful to be an Anglican minister because in many respects it's taken out of the local congregation's hands.

And so we have a centrally defined, minimum payment for ministers. But I know that in independent churches that is not always the case. And sometimes it can be a very divisive issue in a church where church members usually don't want to pay the ministers as much as they, you know, too much because they don't want to blow their budget.

And sometimes that becomes a thorny and divisive issue. Clearly that seems to be alluded to here that those ministers, especially those who are doing well, ought to be paid double honour.

is what Timothy says here. A key strategy of the devil is to bring down churches because they're the gathering of God's people. And the key strategy to do that is to bring down ministers.

And the devil does that by accusation. He's called the accuser. And accusations against ministers are all too common today. People are often saying about him, oh, he's a bully, he's a lazy person, he's a drunkard, he's sleazy, he shows favouritism, he wants power, he likes this group and not that group, he spends more time with them and not with us.

[ 34 : 26 ] The accusations come all the time, to be honest. Ministry is a daily test of godly integrity and character. It's perhaps because ministers are so often under attack that Paul goes on as he does in verse 19.

Never accept any accusation against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. Well, again, Deuteronomy is where you find the two or three witnesses.

Paul knew his Deuteronomy pretty well as he ought. And he's saying, therefore, that one person's word is not enough. When you've got one person's word against another, innocence is presumed. That's an Old Testament standard, but it's actually a good standard still to maintain. If one person says one thing and one another and there are no other witnesses, then in the end, innocence is to be presumed, especially when the accusations, as Paul says here, are against those who are

elders or leaders of the church.

But he says, he's not just blind to thinking that elders will only ever do right. As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all so that the rest may also stand in fear.

[ 35 : 47 ] Well, that wouldn't be an easy thing for Timothy, young Timothy, to do to those who are elders in Ephesus. That is rebuking in public those elders who persist in sin.

Of course, every elder fails. Every minister of a church fails. We all sin. I do too. Some of you may be surprised. Most of you won't be. The issue is whether they persist in sin, whether they keep on sinning, whether they're deaf to the rebukes or the corrections or suggestions that other people might make to them.

That's the issue, whether they persist in sin. And they are to receive a public rebuke. Public in the sense of within the church. That may be after private rebuke.

That seems to be the pattern of Matthew 18 that somebody would go to the person in private and say, this is a sin that you're doing. And I think that's suggested by the language of persist in sin.

That is, they're sinning, they've been rebuked privately, but they're persisting in sin.

So now we get to a public rebuke. Not an easy thing, I think, for Timothy to do. And to be honest, certainly not even to do a private rebuke, which from time to time any minister will have to do.

[ 37 : 04 ] The result, or the purpose rather, is so that the rest may fear. Again, it's language that comes from Deuteronomy 19. That is, rebuking sinners is a deterrent to others so that they don't sin in the same way.

Well, Paul knows Timothy's in a minefield. He knows he needs wisdom and discernment beyond his years and so very solemnly, he says in verse 21, in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels.

Notice the three witnesses that Paul's just referred to two or three witnesses. I warn you, a solemn warning, to keep these instructions without prejudice, doing nothing on the basis of partiality.

It's so easy to be partial and it's so easy to have favourites. Most ministers find people trying to ingratiate themselves with the minister.

Uriah Heep lives in every church, it seems to me. That is, there are people who want to win over the favour of the minister, sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously.

[ 38 : 14 ] It often happens. And it's so easy as a minister to show partiality or favouritism. That's, I think, why Paul gives this such a solemn warning.

It is so hard to get right. In Ephesus, the false teaching elders were dismissed, it seems, and therefore, presumably, a need for new elders.

Paul cautions Timothy in verse 22, do not ordain, literally just do not lay hands on anyone hastily and do not participate in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure.

That is, you don't have to be quick or hasty to find another elder. Take your time so that you understand who is the right person.

That is, take time to exercise discernment in these matters. And it's so easy to fall into the sins of others. It's so easy as a person, as a Christian, as a minister, to end up, in a sense, caught between battles between two people or disagreements between two people.

[ 39 : 20 ] It's so easy to retaliate evil with evil. It's so easy when somebody might be personally attacking to respond in a personal attack back that is wrong. And so, Paul says, do not participate in the sins of others.

Keep yourself pure, which may be simply sexually focused. It may be much broader than that as well. Last week, we noted at the beginning of chapter 4 that some people in Ephesus were saying that people had to leave fairly monastic sorts of lives, forbidding marriage, abstinence from foods. And maybe that's behind the next instruction. No longer drink only water, but take a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments. Maybe Timothy's not drinking any wine because he doesn't want to be regarded as a drunkard, something that prohibits leadership in chapter 3.

Maybe he's only drinking water because of these people who are trying to live very monastic and simple lives. Paul says, for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments, have a little wine. We might think that's a bit unusual, but in those days, the options for drinking were pretty limited. It was water and wine, more or less. That is, you didn't have a fridge to store things.

[ 40 : 33 ] There were no fruit juices around unless you just ate straight from the fruit from the tree. So fermentation was the only way of preservation. Well, Paul finishes this section perhaps quoting a

well-known saying.

It looks a bit like that in verse 24 at least, maybe not 25. The sins of some people are conspicuous and precede them to judgment, while the sins of others follow them there.

So also good works are conspicuous and even when they're not, they cannot remain hidden.

Sometimes the people, the sins of people are very obvious. You can tell a mile that they're drunkards or philanderers or they're swearing, blasphemers or whatever it is.

That person's judgment is known well in advance. That is, in a sense, they're using the language of verse 24, their sins are preceding them to judgment. You know where they're heading because their sins are so obvious.

Other times, sins are hidden. They only come out a bit later when you get to know somebody a bit better. That's what the second half of verse 24 is saying. The same for good works. Sometimes it's obvious from what a person's doing.

[ 41 : 41 ] They're not parading it. They're just obviously a person of good works. Other times, the good works may be more hidden and not always so initially obvious. Paul is cautioning Timothy for discernment in these verses and the preceding ones.

Timothy's not to judge on first impressions. He's to be careful and wise. So this is a minefield of ministry and Timothy needs to be cautious and wise and discerning. Paul is saying in effect that people can be a little bit like icebergs.

As you first meet them, you think, hey, this is a really good person. I want to get this person onto the vestry or to be an elder or my key supporter and then you begin to realize actually there's all sorts of undercurrents and motivations that are mixed or compromised underneath.

Or it may be that at first impressions, oh, I'm not sure this person's really got what it takes but actually you realize there's much more substance underneath. That's what Paul's saying in verses 24 and 25.

We're all mixtures in a sense of good and bad. He's cautioning Timothy to be competent. Well, as I said at the beginning, I often wonder why anyone would want to be a minister.

[ 42 : 47 ] I often wonder why I ended up being a minister as well because when you read chapters like this, you think, well, who is competent for this task? Who has got the discernment, the wisdom, the impartiality, the strength, the delicacy, the compassion, the thin skin and the thick skin at the right times to do all of this?

Because a church in a sense is a bit like some bits of society where there's all sorts of competing tensions and in Ephesus it's a particular minefield of heresies going on and all sorts of wrong behavior not only by the women but in particular it seems by some women.

in the church in Ephesus. Well, thankfully God does equip. He gives Timothy his spirit of power and self-control and love, something that Paul emphasizes to Timothy in the first chapter of the second letter to Timothy.

This sort of chapter I think ought to not only instruct those of us who are ministers but for most of us who are not to pray for those who are the elders, the leaders of churches and congregations.

But also to pray for ourselves to pray for godliness in all aspects of church life not just by the leaders but by everybody. To pray for the proper loving compassion of widows and others in real and genuine need.

[ 44 : 07 ] To pray for proper loving discipline of those who are errant or heretical or immoral. To pray for impartial godly discerning leadership. To pray that the church is not brought into public disrepute.

A thing that I haven't touched on much here but runs through this letter as well. To pray that Satan has no opportunity or that the adversary has no opportunity to revile the church.

And to pray that God's powerful gospel's goal of godliness will be evident in all members and all parts of church life.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[ 45 : 09 ] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.