

'Honour where Honour is due'

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: 31 May 2026

Preacher: Mark Chew

[0 : 00] Well, you might be wondering, even as the passage was being read in Timothy, what I might be going to say tonight.

! And in particular, am I going to use this sermon to my advantage? Well, I hope I won't. Because certainly I don't want to make this sermon about me, nor about Jeff, by the way, even though the passage does concern leaders and pastors.

In case anyone's wondering, let me just make a declaration up front. I'm very happy with what I'm being paid by the church. And I think Jeff agrees with me as well.

Yes, nodding. Yes, good. In any case, it's not like you guys can do anything anyway. It's set by the diocese, so no point complaining to you. As for honor, well, the same goes.

You all treat us really well, and so there's really nothing to complain about. So I'm definitely not going to use this passage to advance my own cause.

[1 : 10] But the topic is about a leader's relationship with the church, which is an important one. Because we've seen, haven't we, that when that goes wrong, it has a significant and detrimental impact on the health of the church.

Now, just take two examples, two extremes as examples. So, for example, if a church views their pastors or leaders as being beyond reproach, then in time, the leaders will think that they can get away with anything, right?

Including abuse and misconduct. There'll be cover-ups, no accountability. And sadly, we have seen those things happen, haven't we, in the church.

On the other hand, if the members think that they run the church, then they start to, you know, behave like the puppet masters, pulling the strings of the leaders to suit their own ends.

And even if they're not trying to control the leaders, the leaders will end up being burnt out, right? Answering to their every back-end call. So, this section then, on elders, is an important one.

[2 : 22] It's the next one that Paul turns to in talking about relationships and godliness in his household, God's household. Last week, I framed this entire chapter through the lens of honour, because that word was repeated numerous times, and we'll see that again in this passage.

And so, today, he moves on from widows last week to elders in this section. So, let's look at it. Verse 17. The elders who direct the affairs of the church, well, are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.

For Scripture says, Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain, and the worker deserves his wages. Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses.

Now, if you look at my outline, I want to deal firstly with the two questions at the top. Firstly, who is the elder? It's a different word used to the one in chapter 3, where we translated it as overseer. But like many others, I think that they are actually interchangeable, because the elder's role here is defined as someone who directs the affairs of the church.

[3 : 40] In other words, someone who oversees. But Paul now says that there are some elders who have a responsibility to preach and teach, while others focus on, perhaps, the governance or the pastoral care of the church.

This, incidentally, if you're wondering, is how the Presbyterians have set themselves up, right? The pastor in their church is the teaching elder, while the other elders look after other things like pastoral care and some of the non-teaching aspects of the church.

Now, we're not Presbyterian, although some of you have leanings towards Presbyterianism. That's great. But we have something similar, don't we? In that Tim Walker, who is our executive pastor, he doesn't have the responsibility to teach or preach, but yet he is an elder, isn't he?

Because he oversees the governance, the property, the finances of the church in partnership, in support of Andrew and the parish council.

But as I say, I think elders here have an overall oversight of the church, which is different to the deacons, which we saw two or three weeks ago, who are leaders with specific responsibilities.

[5 : 00] Now, these instructions don't mean then that we don't pay deacons. Yes, we may, depending on their job. But I think Paul again here is raising the issue of elders because that was a specific concern in those days.

I'll get to that in a bit. But secondly, let's look at what it means for elders to be given a double honour. I think the first kind of honour that Paul has in mind is that of the respect that leaders with God-given authority to govern should be afforded.

So as they lead and make decisions for the church, then to the extent that these decisions are not sinful, they should be honoured and obeyed, even when we don't like it.

It's an horrible thing not to undermine the elders or the leaders or try and, you know, I don't know, create sort of pressure groups or lobby groups to try and agitate for change.

There is, of course, not to say that you can't then voice concerns about decisions made by leaders, but there is a proper process that can be undertaken that actually honours the elders as we raise those concerns.

[6 : 17] So that's the first aspect. But the second is what we find here in verses 18, or implied by verses 18, and that is to honour them by paying them. Paul says he's taking these from Scripture, and the first is a direct quote from Deuteronomy 25, verse 4, which you heard read earlier.

The second is word for word something that actually Jesus himself said in Luke 10, verse 7. But I think because the Scripture of the day was from the Old Testament, Jesus himself takes this principle from what we read earlier in Deuteronomy 24, verse 14 and 15.

And that's to say that a worker should be paid for his wages or her wages promptly. And it says even there that they should be paid each day before sunset because they were poor.

That is, they were living from paycheck to paycheck. They were counting on the paycheck in order to be able to survive. Now, it's well understood even in those days that the reference to the ox is not a reference to the animal that's going round and round in the treadmill, right?

It's rather a metaphor for expressing the broader principle that those who labour, like the ox, should be paid. Hence, even this poor worker here is not to be muzzled.

[7 : 41] That is, they ought to be paid as they go. Otherwise, they would not be able to eat like a muzzled ox. And so this is true, Paul says, for the elders of the church because managing God's household was time-consuming.

And for some, it probably cost them their livelihood. That is, they couldn't go out to work because they were looking after the church. And so Paul says it's only fair, really, to pay them for this sacrifice of effort and time.

Not only that, I think when we pay someone, we actually recognise the importance of the work, don't we? It shows that we actually value the work that they do.

And the church members are saying we value the elders' work because it enables God's household to thrive. And that's the same with us.

You know, I know some of you are really handy DIY people. But let's say you've got a car you need to kind of time for a service.

[8 : 46] Some of you will do it yourself. But actually, most of us, we will pay someone to do it, right? Get the job done right. Particularly if it's a repair that is important.

And if we value our car, some of us don't. But if we value our car, we will pay someone to make sure that everything is done correctly, right? So it's the same principle here. And it's particularly true, Paul says, for those who teach and preach.

Why? Because if the church values sound doctrine and application to life, if it values safeguarding the church from false teaching, and therefore their own salvation, then those who have the responsibility to teach and preach need to be given the time and effort to do it well.

And so they should be set aside and freed from the concerns of where they will get their income from to feed and clothe their family. I, for one, I'm very blessed that here at HCD and St. John's, you all share this view.

And, you know, most of you don't begrudge pastors like me spending time in our studies to prepare. Not just with sermons, but writing Bible studies, writing my weekly newsletter as well.

[10:08] Because all of that is a constant feeding of the congregation or the church with what you need, God's Word, in order to thrive, in order to grow spiritually.

Now, some of you even get to the point of such generosity that you sort of feel embarrassed to trouble us with the struggles of your life. And you sort of say, oh, they're too busy.

Let's not bother them. But on that front, I just want to assure you that actually pastoral care, which is what kind of having those conversations are about, is an important part of helping us to preach and teach well.

Because understanding God's Word and explaining it, it's just one aspect of teaching well. It's important. But the other part is to apply it to your lives, right?

And if I'm not in touch with the things that you're going through, your struggles or your challenges or your joys, then I wouldn't be able to fully apply God's Word to your lives.

[11:08] Now, as I said, I think Paul raises this issue with elders because the church at the time was probably new and fetching, and they probably initially didn't pay the elders.

And the elders probably didn't want to make a fuss about it because they were talking about their own self-interest. So I think what Paul is doing here is to raise it so as to impress upon them that the long-term health of the church here mattered.

And therefore, to set aside elders to do these jobs well was important. Now, Paul also adds another aspect of honour, and that is not to entertain spurious accusations against elders.

Now, we all know how easy it is, isn't it, to cast aspersions on someone's character, right? Just need to throw in an innuendo here or there, you know, raise an eyebrow when someone's talking, you know, jump to conclusions when we don't have all the details.

That's not good, is it? And we shouldn't really be doing this to anyone. But Paul says, especially to your leaders, because if their reputation is tarnished without cause, it actually impacts the rest of the church as well.

[12:30] Thus, Paul says that accusation should only be entertained when there is credible evidence of wrongdoing. And in his case, the threshold there is that there should be two or three witnesses.

Not hearsay from two or three people, but two or three witnesses or people who've seen it done.

Now, conversely, that also means that elders are not beyond reproach.

If the credibility threshold is reached, then the church needs to take it seriously and not just protect the leader because of their status.

Because what is more important than the honour of the elder is God's honour and the honour of God's household, which is what I put down there in the third bullet point.

Because if the reputation of the elders impact the church, the honour they receive carries with it a weighty responsibility not to abuse it for the sake of the church.

[13:32] And so if elders, after they are investigated, have sinned, Paul says, verse 20, You see, whether they do right or wrong, because they are leaders, elders set an example for others.

They set the standard by which everyone else will also be expected to follow. And so Paul is saying here that if the church then knows that even the leaders are not spared discipline when they do wrong, then that is a warning to the rest of the church that this is how important or this is how serious sin is in the church.

Now for us today, and I know there's been some kind of few incidents going on in recent times, we have some people in the church now, Christian leaders, whose ministry actually reaches beyond the local church, right?

Because of internet, books, social media and all that, a Christian leader can have a global reach in his ministry or her ministry. And so I think here, the before everyone then also applies to the reproving, that the reproving needs to reach the same audience as the ministry of that person. It's a bit like, I don't know whether you're familiar, but in media, there is this protocol that says if you need to retract an error, the newspaper or the television channel or whatever need to actually retract the error through the same channels that it has been made, right?

[15:18] So you can't just, you know, make an error, broadcasting it through the television and then try and sort of put a little retraction in a little small column in a newspaper and think that nobody will read it.

No, you need to go back out to the same audience that you went out with. And so this applies, I think as well, for Christian leaders. And you might think it's overly harsh. And I've spoken to one or

two of you in recent times who thought that that was the case because the person's not given the privacy to repent.

But sadly, I think it's necessary for the sake of those who have been influenced by the ministry of the person. And actually for the leader, it's helpful as well because that's part of the process of repentance to understand the consequences of their sin.

That their sin actually has impacted more than themselves. And so the greater the honor that is accorded this leader, then the greater the consequence will come when they fall.

Which is why Paul now says also not to appoint people to leadership hastily. This is the same instruction that's given in previous weeks when he talks about not appointing a recent convert.

[16:35] But to look after or look out for their track record. Well, Paul now says this in the form of a charge. I charge you, Timothy, he says, in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels that is in heaven, that's how serious it is, to keep these instructions without partiality and to do nothing out of favoritism.

Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure. Stop drinking only water and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses. I have nothing to say about that final sentence. I don't know what it's about. But some people have commented, for example, and maybe Kingley might feel the same way, that the ordination process for the Anglican Church is actually too long.

That is, we make candidates go through too many steps before we appoint them. Now, I'm not saying that, you know, the Anglican Church has got it perfect and we can't make things better. But actually, the idea that we would take time to assess potential ministers and then allow them to do the same for themselves is actually not, in and of itself, a bad thing.

And here, even at HDD, on a local level, we do the same as well. So, us as pastors, we would often say to people who have just joined the church that if they like to serve, that, yeah, they start in small ways, that we wouldn't immediately put you into leadership.

[18:01] It's not because you don't have the experience or, you know, the gifts or whatever, but actually, it's to allow you or allow us, both sides, the time, really, isn't it, to assess your suitability and, in particular, the character of the person.

Because once you've been appointed to leadership, it's actually very hard to reverse that decision if something goes wrong. I mean, you can do it, but it will cause a lot of harm.

And besides, putting people into leadership before they are ready runs great risk of causing harm to the people they lead. That may also be why Paul comments in that next sentence there about not sharing in the sin of others.

That is, if we who do the appointing do it without care, and we do it even though there are red flags as well, then if those we appoint then fall short, we actually are responsible.

We are accountable to God. We, in some sense, share in the sin that they commit. And that's also why I think Paul says that we are not to appoint people out of favoritism.

[19:15] You know, I get along with this person, so I'll appoint them. Or they're just like me. Or we've got a special relationship. Or even worse, that they're rich and they can have influence.

They might bring benefits to the congregation. Because none of these things will make up for poor character. And if you appoint these people and things go wrong, that would be a disaster.

Now, of course, these two things do happen from time to time, unfortunately. And when that happens, then those who have appointed the leaders need to make things right.

And I know that in the past, the church sometimes have tried to cover things up because they think, oh, you know, that would protect the reputation of the church. But actually, when all these things come out, it just makes the church complicit in those sins.

And so hopefully, as churches, we've learned from these things. Now, Paul then goes on in verse 24 and 25 to say that the sins of some are obvious, reaching the place of judgment ahead of them.

[20:20] The sins of others trail behind them. In the same way, good deeds are obvious, and even those that are not obvious cannot remain hidden forever. Now, a couple of reasons why Paul might say this here.

Firstly, maybe it's just to reinforce again, not to appoint leaders too hastily. But I think also as well, Paul is saying here that whatever happens, whether you're a good leader or bad, all will come out eventually.

And so it's both a warning and an encouragement for all of us who are leading. How we lead will reveal our character over time. There is nowhere to hide.

So if on the positive side, we lead well, even though initially, you know, we're not the most charismatic of leaders, that people would just gravitate and, you know, we're not popular, or if the things we try, the results are not apparent immediately, well, Paul says, don't be discouraged because your good deeds will become obvious.

The Lord knows what He's doing through you. Keep serving faithfully and then one day, one day, it will prove itself. And that's a great encouragement, isn't it, when ministry is tough, that we are to keep going and be faithful, provided we're doing it in a way that's pleasing to God.

[21 : 46] But on the flip side, it's also a warning, isn't it? If you're lazy or you harbor greed or have some sin that's unrepentant, then be sure that those things will catch up to you eventually.

You may hide for a time, but God will not be fooled. And I think this statement here is not just applied to leaders, isn't it? It can apply to all of us, that eventually, anything we try to hide will become obvious.

God Himself already knows, and we will not escape it on Judgment Day. That we can be sure of. But God, in His wisdom, may choose to expose it to others in this age as well.

So, let me give you an example of myself. For example, I don't know if you realize, now, I take it you understand laziness is a sin as well, yeah?

I don't know if you realize, but it's actually easy for a pastor like me to get away with not working hard. You're not surprised. Good. I could use AI to write all my sermons, right?

[22 : 57] Somebody told me that actually that can be detected, but it might even sound better than what I'm giving you now. I could get away with not doing pastoral visits, and that's with the older folk, right?

Nobody checks my diaries. I could pass up opportunities to follow up on new members or, you know, people who want to know about Jesus that come through the email.

I can not reply. And, you know, with enough experience, a pastor can easily just keep the Sunday services going without too much thought or preparation.

We are an Anglican church after all, and there is the prayer book that we can just mine for all sorts of liturgy. The hymns or the songs we sing, we have a list of 40.

We can just put it on auto-select or whatever, random select, and just play four every week, right? And, you know, some of you are quite new to this church, so you wouldn't know the sermons that I gave 10 years ago.

[23 : 55] I could bring them out again. I mean, don't check the website, but anyway. But, you know, the thing is, God knows, right? And over time, it will become apparent in the congregation as well.

Right? Because if you're not fed properly, if Jeff, I, and Steph, and the others don't feed the flock properly, your spiritual health will suffer. Right?

False teaching will come in, people will fall away and wouldn't be followed up, and your general godliness will decline or wane, right? Because you're not being encouraged to do the right thing. Now, why am I saying all this? Because I think, firstly, please uphold us as pastors in prayer and, respectfully, keep us accountable.

Right? Ask us how our spiritual life is going, how our prayer life is going. check on our marriages if we are married or family life. I'm not saying this so that you can make me feel guilty because I probably will, but actually, I want to ask, encourage you guys to do this with us so that you can motivate us, actually, to please God, to kind of nip things in the bud, as it were, if things go wrong.

[25 : 12] And, we're not above such temptations. Nip it in the bud for the sake of God's household, of the flock.

Because for those of us who lead, it is important for us to keep watching our life and doctrine closely because, as Paul says, we will save both ourselves and our hearers.

That's you. Okay, enough about elders. As I said, it was not about me, although I did finally make an illustration about me. But let's complete this section now by dealing with masters, which is chapter 6, verse 1 and 2, or more appropriately, slaves and their honor to masters.

So, all who are under the yoke of slavery should consider their masters worthy of respect so that God's name and our teaching may not be slandered. Those who have believing masters should not show them disrespect just because they are fellow believers.

Instead, they should serve them even better because their masters are dear to them as fellow believers and are devoted to the welfare of their slaves. Now, I think again that perhaps there was an issue with slaves at the time, not a bad issue.

[26 : 23] I think what may have happened is that slaves who are new believers suddenly found that they have this newfound status of honor in the church, something they didn't have outside with their masters.

And so, it's probably jarred with them that here they were, brothers and sisters in Christ, and then out there they were still just slaves with no rights. But Paul here urges them not to let the honor they now have as God's children turn out to be a poor testimony to the world and in particular to their masters.

Don't slander God's name or His teaching by being disrespectful to your earthly masters. That is, don't let them say, oh, what kind of God do these Christian slaves worship?

Because, you know, instead of becoming better people, they're now becoming worse after they become Christians. Christians. So, if you look at my outline, for masters generally, they should communicate through their actions this message, that because God is my master, I will treat you with respect.

As for Christian masters, in particular, there's even more reason for them to respect them. And so, they should say, God is now our master, yours and mine, and so I will treat you with even greater respect.

[27 : 39] And Paul here uses the word devoted, because the Christian master is not just a brother or sister in Christ, but if they're obedient to God, they will be genuinely devoted to the welfare of their slaves.

That is, they are actually a blessing to the slaves, and therefore, even more reason to be honoured and respected. Now, today, of course, there are not many slaves around, particularly in Australia, but I think we all know that we apply this, don't we, to our own employers and bosses, because when people know we are Christian, how we conduct ourselves is a powerful witness, isn't it, for good and bad to the Lord Jesus.

And whether we respect and honour duly appointed authority can give God and the Bible either a good name or a bad name. So, if we disrespect our bosses, or if it's not about bosses, but our companies, you know, if we don't honour the company's policies, I've been there, look, there are lots of policies, some of them we don't like, right, you know, about travel allowances, or how we record overtime, you know, they're too strict.

But if we don't like these policies, we still need to obey and honour them, isn't it? Because if we don't and we ignore them, or we try and bend the rules, and they find out that actually, well, this person's a Christian, well, that gives God a bad name, isn't it?

Gives Jesus a bad name. And I say this as well to those of you who still have parents who may not be Christians at home, because sometimes it's easy when you're a Christian to think that you no longer need to honour them, because they don't share your beliefs.

[29 : 30] They believe in things that actually are wrong, right? Some time back, there was actually a Christian who was a keen leader and wants to teach the Bible. But then an older Christian found out that actually he wasn't honouring his parents at home, right?

He was dismissing their views as being unspiritual. And because of that, he didn't feel like then he needed to answer to them. Then he became lazy and started not to pull his weight at home.

Well, the older Christian wisely taught him to pull up his socks because he may call himself a keen believer in church, but he was actually being a bad witness for Jesus at home.

So, over the last two weeks, the focus has been on honour in God's household. Everyone in it is honoured, that is, all of us have honour because we're God's children. Just by simply believing in Jesus, we are honoured.

But we've also seen then that Paul talks about specific people, whether it's the widow or the elder or masters, that have a particular honour that goes with their situation.

[30 : 43] For those who are in authority and leadership, like elders, that extra honour actually also comes with greater responsibility because what they do impacts not just their lives but the life of their hearers.

And then finally today we will warn that no matter what we do, God will see. We cannot hide. And everything that we do, good or bad, that's a reflection of our character, will one day catch up on us.

And so the encouragement is to live lives worthy of the gospel, to train ourselves in godliness, so that when all is revealed, it will show us to be children of God.
Let's pray. Father, strengthen those of us who are leaders so that both in the church and outside we will uphold the name of your son Jesus and also of your glorious name.
Thank you for the honour of being your children and so teach us not to slander your teaching in how we live. Help us to follow how Jesus lived, our servant king.
[31 : 56] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.