

*¹⁷ The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. ¹⁸ For Scripture says, 'Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain,' (Deut. 25:4) and 'The worker deserves his wages.' (Luke 10:7) ¹⁹ Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses. ²⁰ But those elders who are sinning you are to reprove before everyone, so that the others may take warning. ²¹ I charge you, in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, to keep these instructions without partiality, and to do nothing out of favouritism. ²² Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure. ²³ Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses. ²⁴ The sins of some are obvious, reaching the place of judgment ahead of them; the sins of others trail behind them. ²⁵ In the same way, good deeds are obvious, and even those that are not obvious cannot remain hidden for ever. **6** All who are under the yoke of slavery should consider their masters worthy of full respect, so that God's name and our teaching may not be slandered. ² 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. These are the things you are to teach and insist on.*

Last week we looked at the advice Paul was giving to deal with widows in the church which was quite an issue. Now he turns his attention to elders, then some personal advice and slaves. In chapter 3 the character of an elder is specified, and the same advice is given in Paul's letter to Titus who led a church in Crete. Here he moves on to the payment and treatment of elders.

¹⁷ The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. The Greek word for elders here is *presbuteroi* which means 'older men' who would in Greek as well as Jewish society be those providing advice and counselling. The word *episcopos* is the word used for the office of an elder in chapter 3, which means 'overseer' and from which we have the word bishop. Mixing these two words for 'elder' is a bit confusing. Paul means a church leader who is ruling the church. '*Elders who rule well*' is what older English translations say, and that is what the Greek says. '*Directing the affairs of the church well*' is the NIV translation which appears to be far softer, less controlling, than 'ruling'. The word 'church' isn't in the Greek, as it is implied. Paul appears to be saying that older men run the church, and by implication they don't all preach and teach, which was a stipulation for being an overseer or bishop – able to teach (1 Tim 3:2). It may seem that I'm getting into too much detail here when the main point is that these men are worthy of double honour or double reward, especially those who preach and teach. They are worthy of respect and appreciation is what is meant. And they are also worthy of being paid for their work.

¹⁸ For Scripture says, 'Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain,' (Deut. 25:4) and 'The worker deserves his wages.' (Luke 10:7). The Deuteronomy verse is Scripture, but 'a labourer is worthy of his hire' is probably just a commonsense saying all over the Roman Empire. In Matthew 10:10 Jesus says 'a workman is worthy of his keep/food' when telling the disciples to take nothing with them as they go out, while in Luke referring to the same thing, Jesus says the labourer is worthy of his wages. It is likely that Paul may have heard Luke tell him this while he was travelling with him, but not so likely that Luke's Gospel was available to Paul as a written document or scroll. Some scholars have said it may have been available. The ox threshing grain should not be denied the opportunity to eat some of it, and similarly, the preacher or teacher should not be denied some of the wealth of the people being taught. Paul of course didn't expect payment but in 1 Corinthians 9 he says that as an apostle he, and those like him, have a right to be supported.

³ This is my defence to those who sit in judgment on me. ⁴ Don't we have the right to food and drink? ⁵ Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas? ⁶ Or is it only I and Barnabas who lack the right to not work for a living? ⁷ Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat its grapes? Who tends a flock and does not drink the milk? ⁸ Do I say this merely on human authority? Doesn't the Law say the same thing? ⁹ For it is written in the Law of Moses: 'Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain.' Is it about oxen that God is concerned? ¹⁰ Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? Yes, this was written for us, because whoever ploughs and threshes should be able to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest. ¹¹ If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? ¹² If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more? But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ. ¹³ Don't you know that those who serve in the temple get their food from the temple, and that those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? ¹⁴ In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.

Moving on to verses 19 and 20: *¹⁹ Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses. ²⁰ But those elders who are sinning you are to reprove before everyone, so that the others may take*

warning. Paul repeats Jewish law that says there must be at least two witnesses to substantiate any accusation. It may have been different for the Greeks, and we have moved away from the need for two witnesses for a prosecution to succeed. This can result in pitting one person's word against another, with the defendant having to prove innocence rather than the accuser prove guilt, and the judge or jury deciding who is more credible – accuser or the accused. But it is clear that in Ephesus some leaders deserved to be reprovved before everyone on the testimony of two or more witnesses for sinful behaviour. If the rebuke were ignored, then the person would be put out of the church. Church discipline must be fair and seen to be just. This is emphasized in the next verse. ²¹ *I charge you, in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, to keep these instructions without partiality, and to do nothing out of favouritism.* It would seem that partiality and favouritism were issues that concerned Paul in the early church. In the synagogue, there was a clear pecking order with some treated better than others. Jesus mentions this several times where the rich and influential people sat up front and the humble were relegated to the back, and so needed to be invited to come forward to be honoured. The Roman world was as full of class distinctions as our society today. While we don't have reserved more spacious pews for the rich, it wasn't long ago that this was common in many churches. Known generous donors would be treated with more respect when the leadership's incomes depended entirely on what the offering raised each week. While all should be treated with respect, disrespecting those better off with more influence on church affairs would have had repercussions when they wanted to do things that were contrary to what needed to be done. Justice requires impartiality whether in the church or elsewhere, without favouritism. Two tier justice is unacceptable anywhere.

²² *Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure.* This reminds Timothy to take care that the right men are appointed, discerning the character of any being ordained. In James the laying on of hands refers to healing, but here it is about ordination. As for not sharing in the sins of others and keeping oneself pure, how are we to interpret this? If we participate in the sins of others, we become responsible for them, and unable to rebuke others for sins we can be blamed for ourselves. Participating is a strong word, as the church leader would then be a bad example to others and as we have seen elsewhere in this letter, people would be led astray by imitating the behaviour of their leaders. Sinfulness in church leaders is so often hidden from the eyes of the congregation, like adultery or family neglect. What we might call poor behaviour - bullying, greediness, fondness of wealth for example – leads to that being imitated by others because it is seen as acceptable. Even though a leader may not sin, condoning sin is a problem, because the world believes that loving one's neighbour equals approval and affirmation of others, regardless of their sinful behaviour. 1 Corinthians 13, so often quoted at weddings, includes verse 6, *'Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth'*. It may seem that delighting in evil is more geared to the participation in sinfulness, but it also relates to accepting or affirming sinfulness. We have the truth revealed in Scripture and so must keep ourselves pure and shun evil behaviour. While those who have not accepted Christ as saviour will be living in sin using God's standards, those who have accepted Christ will be prompted by Holy Spirit to repent and put right what they are doing wrong. For example, unmarried couples living together who accept Christ will want to get married, drug users will want to get clean, drunkards will want to stop getting drunk, and swearers will stop taking the name of the Lord in vain.

²³ *Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses.* Paul gives personal advice to Timothy. Water until the nineteenth century was never treated, by filtering it through layers of sand nor was it treated with chlorine or copper sulphate to kill germs. The water in Ephesus may well have been polluted and people knew that a bit of wine added to water killed some germs, in the same way people drank weak beer because the fermentation process was linked to not getting ill from drinking polluted river or polluted well water. This verse has been used by many to say it is OK from Christians to drink wine, as Jesus and the disciples and pretty much everyone did in the Roman world. Getting drunk is to be avoided.

²⁴ *The sins of some are obvious, reaching the place of judgment ahead of them; the sins of others trail behind them.* ²⁵ *In the same way, good deeds are obvious, and even those that are not obvious cannot remain hidden for ever.* Paul reiterates what he has already said about sinfulness. Not all sins are obvious and many will remain hidden. Good deeds that are not obvious are rewarded in heaven because nothing is hidden from the eyes of God. Paul is reminding Timothy to act when sins are obvious, while those that are hidden will be judged by God. The way God wants the church to be organised is for Godly men to deal with those who sin openly – firstly for their own good and secondly for the good of the fellowship. Modern ideas of tolerance of those who sin openly were not and are still not acceptable. Six of the seven churches in Asia received rebukes. No one likes to be rebuked, no one likes to be publicly rebuked, but the leaders are accountable for their lack of action towards unrepentant sinners. Claiming that it is unloving to rebuke sinners shows a complete misunderstanding of what love is. Love involves sacrifice as Jesus sacrificed himself for us on the cross. Hard choices may have to be made, unpleasant conversations to be had to steer people away from sins they see as both enjoyable and acceptable in their eyes but are unacceptable to a holy God.

Nothing too contentious so far. The next few verses have been used by slave owners to justify slavery.

All who are under the yoke of slavery should consider their masters worthy of full respect, so that God's name and our teaching may not be slandered. ² 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. These are the things you are to teach and insist on.

However, the Old Testament banned slavery for beyond 7 years, and that period of servitude would be the result of having to pay off a debt. After 7 years, a slave who didn't want to be set free could be enslaved for life. The life of many slaves was not all about being in the hot sun in cotton or sugar cane fields. Many had relatively easy lives as servants with light duties getting board and lodging provided as well as having wives and children. Having slaves was seen as normal in the days of Moses as it was until the eighteenth century in the West, and is still seen as acceptable in many societies in Africa and Asia. For the Christians in the Roman world, slaves were a fact of life. Paul seems to be endorsing the established order where Christians – and they were unlikely to have been Jewish converts because the Jews remembered they were once slaves in Egypt – who were Greeks had slaves they deemed to be their property. Greek society like Roman society depended on slave labour to work the land, build the roads, man the ships, do the domestic tasks, and keep the economy going. Believing masters who had slaves were to treat them well and believing slaves were to respect and serve their masters well. Today we quote Galatians “there is neither free nor slave for we are all one in Christ Jesus” and Genesis that we are all made in the image of God to justify abolition of slavery. Paul also advises Philemon to set his fellow Christian slave, Onesimus, free. But the difference between the slaves in the New World transported from Africa was racial difference – the slaves in Europe and the near East looked to the same as everyone else, spoke the same languages, lived in the same countries for centuries – and the fact that the African slaves were bought to do hard manual labour in tropical and subtropical areas. Given that Africans were also deemed inferior intellectually and culturally added to the difference in treatment of slaves in the New World. They were often not treated well.

The eighteenth-century abolitionists, along with those campaigning for better treatment of prisoners, were Christians who wanted societal change through changes in the law. Up until then Christians expected individuals to change their behaviours in following Christ, but not to upset the established order of society. Kings and princes are set in place by God. Good rulers would follow God's commandments, while bad ones would still be respected and obeyed. As disciples, what is our first duty? To make Jesus known. Campaigning for change in society – and there are many things that need to be addressed – is secondary to preaching the Gospel. Making the rich poorer and the poor richer without either accepting Jesus as Saviour results in them being denied eternal life and condemns them to being judged by Father God without Jesus paying for their sins.

Is it easier to campaign on some issue than share the Gospel? For many the answer is undoubtedly yes, while for Paul and the apostles, nothing was more important than sharing the Gospel.

Is it easier **not** to point out what the Bible says about sinful behaviour, where sinners will push back to justify themselves and accuse Christians of being judgmental, than remain silent, tolerating and ignoring what is obviously upsetting to all God's people? We may say we need to be bold and strong, but so often the church leaders are fearful of upsetting anyone. They do not like confrontation, and find it hard to rebuke people for fear of being accused of being judgmental or even hypocritical. Timothy was probably young, inexperienced, and timid. Paul wants him to be wise and bold, standing up for Jesus and protecting the flock. That applies to us today. Protecting the church from outsiders is as necessary as from insiders. Outsiders today will want Christians to affirm their secular opinions when they are not in line with the Bible. Outsiders are quick to condemn a few human failures and tar all Christians with that brush, forgetting the church is about forgiveness and compassion. The church is made up of saints who sin, and the good works and benefits the church provides society are ignored because the secular news is only bad news, and good news isn't news. Insiders will seek to compromise on issues, will seek to justify sinful behaviour and as such will not be examples of what a Christian should be. They are a greater danger as they have taken their eyes off Jesus and will lead people astray to follow a religion instead of a relationship with Jesus.

To sum up, what can we take from these verses? Church leaders need to take responsibility for those in their care and the people need to accept their authority in matters of preaching, teaching and discipline. Church leaders need to be examples to others. They should not be afraid to rebuke when necessary, and they should put people out of the church who are clearly unrepentant and delight in their evil ways. The toleration of openly sinful behaviour results in people going astray, and imitating what is sinful because no one speaks up and exercises proper discipline in the church.