

Honouring Godly Leaders

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[0 : 00] Now, as lots of you know, and as I've said, some of us were away for the weekend, the teens and the students, some who went away and worked hard to help them on the weekend.

Some of us went just for fun, being there with them. And I see lots of tired faces this evening. We know we are tired, but it was so worthwhile, so worthwhile.

And one of the things that made it so, so special was the sense of family, family at the weekend. That's part of what a weekend like that is about.

I guess everyone under one roof, nowhere else to be, and just bonding together over Jesus, over our love for him and his gospel.

But as great and as special as that is, I want to say this evening that that is just not for weekends away like that.

[1 : 05] No, family. Family is what we have Sunday by Sunday as we get together here to worship God.

In a far less intense way, maybe, than being all under one roof like that for a weekend. But in a far more natural and normal way, we are God's family.

If our faith is in Jesus Christ, we come together as his family. Someone who's new to our church here at Bonacord said to me at the lunch last weekend that one of the things that struck him as he came in, as he saw the church for the first time, is that he said Bonacord is a complete church.

A complete church. What did he mean? He said a church with people from every generation. Young, old people in between.

People from all over. People from Scotland, from Africa, from Asia, from Europe, from England. But, he said, but this is what makes it complete that this church felt for all its diversity like a loving family.

[2 : 24] A loving family. And I was so thankful to hear that. So blown away. Because that is not something that we create. We could not make that happen.

That is God's work, growing his family here. A sign that the church really is the household of God. God's family home.

And Paul, in this letter to Timothy, is in the middle of reminding him some of the implications that that truth has for his life, the life of the church, and the witness of the church.

Now, if you just glance down with me, chapter 5 and verse 1. Paul writes, if we remember, Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father.

Treat younger men as brothers. Older women as mothers. Younger women as sisters. With absolute purity. What's he saying? The church is your family.

[3 : 27] Mothers, brothers, fathers, sisters. We are family. Now, last week, we saw Paul's teaching on treating older women as mothers. Saw both children honoring their own mothers and grandmothers in their old age.

And the church honoring older women in that case. Widows in the church family who had no one else to turn to. And so I hope we can see the flow of thought here.

That now, from chapter 5, verse 17, where we read, Paul's still chasing this idea of church family. Except now he's turning to focus on treating the older men as fathers.

Fathers. Now, where do we see that? You ask? I hope you're asking. Where do we see it? Well, verse 17, Luke. The elders who direct the affairs of the church, well, are worthy of double honor. So elders, that's male leaders in the life of the church, are worthy, he says, of honor. Which is the very same word he's used in 5, verse 3 to speak of the widows.

[4 : 39] Honor those widows who are really in need. So what's this passage really dealing with? Well, Paul is calling Timothy and the church to honor godly leaders.

Last week, honoring the godly and helpless. This week, honoring godly leaders. How should the church honor leaders when they lead in the way that God wants his leaders to lead?

Now, I've got three points tonight. We're going to spend most time on our second point, where Paul spends most time in this passage. But firstly, and briefly, look at how Paul says godly leaders are to be honored financially.

Honoring financially. Now, I don't want to spend a lot of time on this for all sorts of reasons. Partly because it's far more relevant in other church settings than our own.

Okay, so in our church setting, in the Free Church of Scotland, a lot of this is absorbed into the structure. So normally a church can't call a minister if they can't support a minister.

[5 : 48] But it's worth just touching on because Paul's point is to deal with valuing God's word rightly, which helps us think more widely about money in the church.

What do I mean? Well, just look at these verses again from verse 17. The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially whose work is preaching and teaching.

The scripture says, do not muzzle an ox while it's treading out the grain, and the worker deserves his wages. So Paul's talking about elders whose work is preaching or teaching God's word, the teaching elder.

And he's saying they're worthy of a twofold honor. Double makes it sound like twice as much. It's not that. Rather, something that is in two parts.

And a part of that honor, he's saying, is clearly financial. Paul quotes Deuteronomy 25 there about the ox. It seems to have been his kind of go-to verse for this idea that even if an ox working on a farm gets to eat some of the product that the ox is working hard to produce, then surely servants of the word should get their living out of the giving of the church that they serve.

[7 : 09] It's not a very flattering comparison, is it? Farm animals. But he's simply saying that if this is how God treats farm animals, surely ministers shouldn't be treated worse.

But then Paul quotes Jesus. The worker deserves his wages. That comes from Luke 10 and verse 7. And this is super significant. What do you notice about how Paul quotes Jesus there?

He introduces that quotation at the start of verse 18, for Scripture says Scripture. Why is that significant? Well, for Paul, the words of Jesus are as good as Scripture itself.

Remember, the four Gospels at this stage were not bound together into a Bible. Well, whether this saying was perhaps passed down by word of mouth through the body of apostolic teaching, perhaps it was written down in other sources Paul had access to.

Well, for Paul, those words of Jesus are equal with the Scriptures of the Old Testament. So weirdly, if we want to know for certain that the New Testament has an equal authority to the Old Testament, well, just look at what Jesus says about paying gospel workers.

[8 : 31] Because for Paul, that is as good as God's word. So what are some of the implications of this for us tonight? Well, as I say, it's absolutely nothing to do with me, because you already provide so well for our family, the mants, the stipend, and I'm so thankful for your giving in the support of a minister like me in this situation.

One implication that the free church has arrived at for every congregation is that in the light of the rise in inflation, the basic stipend is increasing by slightly more than had been due.

It's not very dramatic, but I'm thankful. I'm thankful for that because it is a sign that our wider church takes seriously what Scripture says about paying its workers sufficiently.

Okay, no one's going to get rich preaching the gospel, but the church recognizes we need enough to live on. And more than that, I'm thankful because it shows that our church puts its money where its mouth is, if I can put it like that.

We say that God grows his kingdom as his word goes out. That is how God works in the world, by his word. And so it is good to know that word ministry is valued with more than simply words, but in pounds and pennies also.

[10 : 03] I guess closer to home, one implication. This is why we have a pulpit supply fee for visiting preachers. It's not necessarily a reflection of how much work has gone into the sermon they deliver, but more a reflection of the honor that we show to the preached word by honoring the one who has preached it with a financial gift.

There's also implications. I've touched on this whole area before of training new ministers. How about that? Well, the new free church training model requires congregations that have a minister in

training to contribute to his income.

Not the whole thing, but maybe a third of what he'll live on. And that, again, is a way of showing honor to those who will work and are giving their lives to work and are training to work in the preaching and teaching of the word.

You'll have heard the phrase, voting with your wallets. The idea that we all kind of vote for the world that we want to live in by the way that we spend our money.

Well, the church paying servants of the word is one way, Paul says, that we vote for what we value in the world. Let me illustrate this.

[11 : 31] There's a well-known minister in Australia. He tells the story of a time in the church where the plumbing was broken, needed fixed, and it was going to cost \$15,000 Australian dollars to fix the plumbing in their building.

They didn't have \$15,000. But this guy made a strange decision. Whenever \$15,000 came into the church, he says, he delayed fixing the plumbing and hired another gospel worker.

So the plumbing didn't get fixed for a while, but he said it's the gospel that grows God's kingdom, not pipes and drains. And so that's where the money needed to go as a priority for the church.

Now, it's an extreme example. I'm not saying we should do that. But it illustrates the point, doesn't it, that God puts value on his word, and so we honor those who preach the word financially.

We put value on God's word by honoring financially. But where Paul spends most of his time, and therefore where we'll spend most of ours, is on the second point, okay, which is honoring godly leaders spiritually.

[12 : 49] Spiritually. Spiritually. Now, because we are tired, ironically, we've got more points tonight. Four mini points that I hope will help us to follow this along, okay?

Firstly, then, mini point one, honoring godly leaders spiritually. How? Firstly, by not bad-mouthing them. So that's verse 19. Look, do not entertain an accusation against an elder, unless it's brought by two or three witnesses.

Now, it would be really easy to think or imagine, wouldn't it, that Paul at this point is kind of showing preferential treatment to leaders over and above the people who they are meant to be caring for.

Why should a complaint against an elder need two or three witnesses to back it up? But we need to see at this point, straight away, that this is the same protection that God offers to all his people in his word.

We read earlier, Norman Redford from Deuteronomy, God said a case could only be brought against someone in court on the evidence of at least two witnesses. Otherwise, it would have been easy, I suppose, for somebody who had a grudge against you to bring it to court and ruin your life with a false accusation.

[14 : 12] And so in God's land, everyone was granted this protection from the strongest to the weakest. They were equal in the eyes of the law.

Whoever it was, it took at least two witnesses to bring a case. God loves justice. He does not want to see false cases brought against people.

And Paul is saying that's still true of leaders in the church. Leaders should not be denied the protection that God grants to you all simply because they are leaders.

Now, why would Paul need to say that? Why might the church need to hear that? Well, we know, don't we, how easy it is to complain about leadership, whether it is the bad boss at work, always making life a misery, whether it is the government of our country always making the wrong decision, whether it's mom and dad at home, always restricting our freedom, whether it is the elders at church leaders are often first in the crosshairs, aren't they, when things go wrong or just not going the way that we want them to go.

And so church leadership, being an elder is a role that at the same time brings honor and yet puts you in a vulnerable position. You are putting your head above the parapet in leadership.

[15 : 43] And Paul's simply saying that in the church, there shouldn't be a risk of a stray shot or friendly fire, taking out a leader without a fair trial.

Now, let me be clear, we're not talking here about not wanting honest questions. We want honest questions, hard questions to be asked.

We're not talking about fair criticism. Okay? We cannot say, we cannot be criticized. That is wrong.

That is proud. Rather, we are talking about situations, perhaps when gossip is spread in a way that damages people's reputation, a way that perhaps anonymous complaints begin to spread through a

church and be taken up and gain traction, perhaps a church where people are more willing to believe the worst about a leader than they are willing to have an honest conversation with that leader himself.

Okay? Those are all ways of entertaining accusations without giving a leader due honor. And again, that's not a special protection for the elders of the church.

It's a protection we should all enjoy. But it's easy to bypass that with our leaders when we are unhappy with the way that things are. Now, I'm not aware that we have a problem with this here at Bon Accord, but it does happen in churches.

[17:15] It does. So this is a good opportunity, perhaps, for me to say that if you do have, ever, a concern, a complaint, a question, a criticism about my character, my conduct, okay, please do not stay silent.

I do not want that. Okay, speak about it. But please, first, speak about it with me. And then, speak about it with the elders.

And be prepared to back it up with evidence. And then, if it is not being settled, take it to presbytery. Okay, that is a fair trial, an open and transparent process that our church gives us for dealing with failures in leadership.

What please not to do is talk about it among yourselves without having the intention of bringing it up in an open and transparent way.

But what happens then if, when those things are investigated, it's found, actually, that the leader in question is guilty? Well, secondly, Paul says, justice goes both ways.

[18:26] Paul says, the church and its leaders are to show no partiality. Okay, justice goes both ways. See, that leaders must be equally protected, but also equally punished if the accusation is true.

Just have a look there at verse 20, where he says, but those elders who are sinning, you're to reprove before everyone so that they, the others may take warning.

So Timothy is not to show any special treatment to these guys just because they're leaders in the church. That's why the title of this sermon is honoring godly leaders because, Paul says, we are not to show any honor to sin in leadership.

There is no honor for leaders caught in grievous sin who don't repent. And that verse, verb, sinning, has a continuous sense there. So the ESV, another translation, puts it like this, persisting in sin. The idea is, of course, not that a leader ought or could never sin. We know that we do sin. We are sinners. We are people.

[19:40] There is only one sinless man, Jesus Christ, and praise God, okay, that he is the head of the church and not me and you, the one sinless king. Rather, Paul is speaking about a failure in Christ-like character.

We saw this before in chapter three, remember, a consistent pattern of sin and un-Christ-likeness that resists being challenged or changed. Or sometimes even a breach of trust and a breach of godliness so serious that it disqualifies a leader from leading even if he does repent.

And if that is the case, well, Paul says Timothy is not to spare feelings. Instead, he is to reprove that person publicly as a warning to the church about the consequences of ungodly living.

And he's really strong in that. He underlines, bolds that in verse 21. Luke, 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 favoritism.

Nothing out of favoritism. Now, why so strongly worded? Well, who might Timothy need to reprove in the church that he is in? Well, who else is in this church?

[21:05] The false teachers are there. Okay, false shepherds, wolves in sheep clothing. And we know, don't we, already, if we've followed this series, the false teachers have a superiority complex.

Okay, they are literally preaching their own made-up ideas as gospel truth. And so, they are not going to take a challenge from Timothy just lying down, are they?

This young man, Timothy, has the solemn duty of disciplining the old boys in Ephesus. And to do that, he would need real gods.

And it was only knowing who he was ultimately answerable to that would get him out of bed to do that. Paul lays on him this solemn charge before God, Christ, and the angels.

The whole heavenly court is laid out before Timothy. And that is not a court in which you want to be found guilty of neglecting to protect the flock of God in favor of protecting wolves in sheep's

clothing.

[22 : 13] Yet, this does happen in churches. It does, believe it or not, in the same way that leaders have been unfairly harmed by false accusations.

So, leaders have been unfairly protected from true accusations. And I don't think there's much that does greater damage to our witness as a church or to God's honor in the world than when the church is willing to protect evil because the one who commits the evil is important or significant. Okay, who's ever heard this from somebody? Perhaps it's something you've said yourself. Okay, look at the wrong done by the church. Look at the scandals.

Look at the cover-ups. Look at the evil that exists in the church and its leadership. How could I ever believe anything that the church had to say to me? Have you ever heard something like that? Have you ever said something like that? Okay, it damages, doesn't it, the witness of the church when it protects evil in its leaders. So, that cannot be.

[23 : 24] The sad thing about what that person might say is that it's true. How can they believe what the church says when it is not willing to deal with her leaders on those same terms?

Now, sometimes that involves difficult decisions being taken, difficult words being said. But Paul is clear that we are not to honor ungodly leadership in any way.

But, but the culture of a church can get in the way of due process, can't it? That's what Paul picks out next. Says there's to be no negative peer pressure.

Timothy is not to give in to negative peer pressure among leaders. So, verse 22, don't be hasty in the laying on of hands. Do not share in the sins of others.

So, what's going on here? Well, hastily laying on hands is kind of speedily putting someone into a position of leadership. Remember, laying on hands is what happened when elders and ministers ordained into their offices.

[24 : 29] And I guess we can see why that might have been tempting for Timothy to do. Okay, Timothy perhaps is very lonely in the church. Okay, he has a big job to do.

He has people to reprove. And he has perhaps friends in the church, people he gets on with. And he thinks, well, maybe I'll put this guy forward as an elder.

We'll work together. We'll serve together. It'll be great. But that kind of favoritism doesn't necessarily do anyone any favors just because you get on with someone.

Of course, it doesn't make them a good leader. It doesn't necessarily even make them a good influence. I heard a story once about a guy in a church. He seemed really loving, really generous. He was very warm. He talked to all kinds of people. He was an example to the church. And so the church put him forward as an elder. They laid hands on him.

[25 : 29] He took on that leadership role. But overnight, his character just kind of changed 180 degrees. He started being really heavy-handed with people, started threatening people if they didn't do what he said.

and the elders confronted him about this behavior. Why is he doing this? And his answer was something like this. Well, before, I was really frustrated with this church, but I didn't have the authority to do anything about it.

But now, I do have the authority. I intend to use it. Now, the issue, of course, isn't that this man's character had changed, but that the church didn't know him well enough to know what was hiding underneath the loving exterior.

So, not being quick to make someone a leader is a way of avoiding the second part of this verse. Okay, not sharing in the sins of others. Kind of quickly putting people into leadership can end up introducing sinful pressures into a leadership of the church which skews the whole direction of the church if it's not dealt with.

Verse 23 is a prime example of how that's happened in Ephesus, Luke. What's the peer pressure that Timothy's given into? That's a strange kind of peer pressure, isn't it?

[26 : 52] Paul says, stop drinking only water and use a little wine because you're of your stomach and your frequent illnesses. What's the peer pressure Timothy's given into?

Weirdly, the peer pressure not to drink alcohol. Okay, remember this is part of what the false teachers were teaching. Certain foods and drinks were not on the menu so apparently Timothy's taken that to heart.

He's just drinking water. Now it's clear it's not just for his health, his health suffering. Drinking untreated water wasn't very good for you back then and it wasn't for his spiritual health either

because Paul says one way he should keep himself pure and not be sharing in the sins of others is by having some wine now and then.

Now I should say there's plenty of good reasons for us to perhaps abstain for wine for a certain time in certain circumstances but none of those apply to Timothy. Rather he has chosen this because of negative peer pressure from sinful and deceitful teachers to deny God's good and gracious gifts. And Paul is simply saying stop participating in their lies. Resist the temptation he says to bring untested characters into leadership and resist the temptation to give into ungodly influence in leadership that puts pressure on you to share in sin.

[28 : 32] Fourth kind of mini point then as a kind of summary perhaps of what we've looked at. Lead in light of eternity. Not in terms of what is going on here and now.

Look to the future. The sins of some are obvious reaching the place of judgment ahead of them. 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.

Perhaps you're thinking tonight this is a lot to handle in terms of dealing with sin in the church. It's dealing with godliness in the church. But Paul reminds us helpfully that we can't see the whole picture can we?

We do not know the half of what goes on in each other's lives but alone in each other's hearts. And so in the church we cannot possibly deal can we with every sin that is committed.

We cannot possibly honor every good work that is carried out. But Paul reminds us that that is not our job. Some sins and good works are obvious.

[29 : 43] For those things we do have responsibility before God to handle them rightly. But Paul is reminding us that even what we can't see, the sins that never come to light in this life, the good works that are never recognized here and now, well they will be seen on the day of judgment.

Because there is a judge who sees all and he will judge us justly, both our sin and our godliness. None of it can stay hidden forever, he says.

And so we are both to live and to lead in light of that coming day. To live knowing that our sins, even our sins that nobody else knows about will be brought to light, are known by God to serve, knowing that our father who sees in secret will reward what is done in secret on that last day.

And that's all the more true for church leaders. James writes, they will be judged all the more strictly. But we also lead knowing that not every sin is going to be sorted out in this life.

Some things will go unchecked here and now. But we rest in the promise that it won't stay that way. You as church leaders, it is not our job to cleanse or to purify the church of sin.

[31 : 09] Some people have tried, there have been sects in church history that have attempted this. Ironically, they have ended up just like the false teachers in Ephesus. Coming down hard on good and godly things in an effort to wipe out every instinct to sin.

But it doesn't work. It doesn't work because at the end of the day we are not God. And sorting out sin is God's responsibility, not ours.

We have responsibilities, but Paul reminds us there is one who is coming to judge the living and the dead. And he will do so perfectly.

And we know he will come to do that because God raised him from the dead to do it. So we live and lead in light of that day and in light of the one who is coming to put away sin once and for all.

Lead in light of eternity. And very, very finally, our third and our final point tonight, honoring from the heart. It's really hard to know whether these verses have out, slaves and masters kind of fit into this.

[32 : 23] But they do follow the same logic. Slaves were to honor, to show respect to their masters, especially those who were believers. So what's he saying? Honor godly leaders, not just at church, in the work, in the home.

So again, Paul's picking up that parallel, isn't he, between the church and the household. It's worth saying that this isn't slavery as we think of it, as we know it, okay, this is slavery in the Roman world.

It didn't necessarily be a terrible thing. They wouldn't necessarily have been treated terribly. They were not an underclass of society. Some perhaps were, certainly not all.

So to be clear, Paul's not condoning the sort of slavery that we think of when we think of slavery.

Rather, he's instructing people in the church back then to honor godly leaders, not just in the church, but in the home, in the workplace, in all of life.

And that really is the point for us as we finish, that this honoring of godly leaders is not just a tick in the box. We're not simply to ask, you know, what's the list of things that I have to do to be doing this, honoring godly leadership.

[33 : 42] though it's a posture of heart that goes with us into every area of our lives, not to honor sin, but rather to honor those that God has put in leadership in our lives, and particularly when that leadership is carried out in a God-honoring way.

That honor will look different in church, home, at work, but that honor is to be there, says Paul, for the sake of God's reputation, and for the sake of the teaching of the gospel, that we are called to honor above all for the sake of his name.

It is his name that is dragged through the mud when we honor sin and dishonor godliness. It is his gospel that is not believed for the sake of our mishandling of godliness and sin.

It is his name, his honor at stake in his family home, the clarity of our witness to his character, the credibility of the gospel, the life of this family.

And so then let us uphold that honor so that God's name and the teaching of the gospel may not be slandered, but rather go out with power from his church into this dark world.

[35 : 07] Let's pray together. God, our father, we praise you as the holy and righteous one.

We thank you that you are the just judge. We thank you, father, that you do see all to the depths of our hearts. we thank you again as we have throughout our service that seeing all our sin, you sent your son to take it away from us on the cross.

Father, we thank you for that rescue and salvation that we have in him. But father, forgive us, we pray, for the times where we take that lightly. Lord, help us never as a church to overlook sin, particularly, we pray, among our leaders.

Help us rather, we ask always, always, to put your honor before our own. Lord, your reputation before our own, your name above and beyond before our own name.

Lord, we pray that the witness of this church would always be pure and undefiled, father, we ask that you would enable the gospel to go out here from here clearly.

[36 : 34] Lord, help us to witness clearly and effectively. Lord, keep us, we pray, from sin. Lord, pray that particularly for the elders here, that you would keep us from sin, keep us in godliness.

Lord, how we need you for that. And father, for our whole church family, that you would keep us growing healthy, that you would keep us putting deep, deep roots in Christ. That you would keep us walking in him and overflowing with thankfulness.

God, as we pray in Jesus' name, amen. Amen. Thank you.