

Fit for Office

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[0 : 00] Now, some of you will be aware that we looked last time, a four-night ago, at the first part of chapter 5 in 1 Timothy, which was dealing with the subject of those who were brought within the number of the widows.

That is, as we looked at, the widows who are cared for by the church. And how there almost seemed to be, in the scriptural context, an implication, if we think of the likes of Tabitha, that Peter encountered at Lydda, and so on.

How that she was one of the widows, almost, who were always preparing garments for the poor and doing good works and so on. And that those who were taken into this number almost acted like, for want of a better word, deaconesses almost, who were caring for the poor, who were full of charitable good works and so on.

But were sustained and maintained by the church to do so, because they had no one else to care for them. And it made quite clear in the first half of that chapter that those within the church family who had elderly widowed relatives, it was their responsibility, first of all, to care for those in their own family, i.e. such widows within their extended family, so that the church resources could be used to look after those who had no one else to turn to.

And then we move on, then, from those who appeared to have this almost semi-church-related caring function, to now those who ruled in the church, that is, the ruling elders.

[1 : 31] And we mentioned how this is distinct from what appears to be at verse 1 of chapter 5, which seems to be, in the context, referring to simply a brother in Christ who means of older years.

Rebuke not an elder, but in treating him as a father. The younger man is brethren, the elder one is mothers, the younger is sisters, with all purity. This seems to be referring to both sexes, but with younger and older categories.

Whereas what we're looking at in verse 17 here is those who are presbyters, those who are ruling elders, those who have a position of office, of spiritual rule, within the congregation of the Lord's people.

Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. Two things here. First of all, the double honour.

Some would maintain, of course, that this is being looked after, again, like the widows are being looked after in order to have their maintenance or whatever. We'll come to that in just a minute. The double honour is not simply about, you know, give them twice as much as the ones that don't rule well, and who's to decide who rules well and who doesn't rule well.

[2 : 40] I think how we should understand it is double honour, first of all, the honour that is due to them because of their office, because of that position which they hold, and the office is itself worthy of honour.

If we think, for example, of what Paul writes to the Romans concerning the civil magistrate, in chapter 13, For he is the minister, that is servant of God, to thee for good.

But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid. For he, bearing in mind, this is the civil magistrate, we're talking about not church rulers, he beareth not the sword in vain, for he is the minister of God, an avenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.

Wherefore, ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. In other words, not just for fear of punishment, but also because of the position which the civil magistrate holds, under God.

Verse 1, That every soul be subject to the higher powers. There's no power but of God, the powers that be are ordained of God. For this cause be tribute also, for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing.

[3 : 47] So in other words, the two reasons, the double reasons for giving double honour, are one, the office that the elder himself holds, which is a worthy office, regardless of how he may or may not discharge it, that those that fulfill it faithfully, diligently, well, they are to be honoured for that fact as well.

The office is honourable, but those who honour it, and are an ornament to it, by their faithfulness and diligence in it, ought to be worthy of double honour.

Now when it says, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine, this suggests that way back here in the apostolic church, the very early church, there is already a distinction, if not a difference, distinction rather than a difference, between those whose function is spiritual rule, and those whose function as well as spiritual rule, is labouring in the word and doctrine or teaching.

In other words, what we now regard as a teaching elder, or for a better, want of a better description, the minister. The elders and ministers are clearly of equal rank.

Elders that rule well, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine, he is an elder, just like the other elders. But in that he is giving his particular time and attention to the word, and to the doctrine or teaching, remember what the apostles said in Acts chapter 6, when they were looking at the first, what we now call deacons, said it's not reason that we should leave the word of God to discharge this function, but you choose out men, you choose out six, you know, what if you miss even, and so on, but we will give ourselves continually to the word of God, and prayer.

[5 : 32] That was their primary calling. Now, if somebody's primary calling is to be the word, and the doctrine, and prayer, and so on, it follows that he cannot give himself completely to that, and also to doing a day job, and earning his own keep.

In other words, in the context of this chapter, this would be another case for maintaining somebody, enabling them to function in this office without having to be distracted, as it were, with an ordinary day job.

Now, what might be a justification for this? Well, it says, that, you know, the labourer, that thou shalt not muzzle the ox, it treadeth out the corn, and the labourer's worthy of his reward.

Now, the first of these quotations, of course, is from Deuteronomy, chapter 25, and verse 4, where it literally just does say, I shall not muzzle the ox, and he treadeth out the corn, and the picture here, is of when they had gathered in the harvest, obviously, all the kernels, that had been threshed, sort of, and reaped, as it were, from the harvest fields, were poured into a big, sort of, circular, kind of, dish, or stone area, where an ox would be, sort of, would be attached by a, sort of, yoke, to a central wheel, and he would go round, and round, and round, in this circle, following the wheel round, and as he did, his big, heavy hooves would crush the corn, shreddeth out the corn, and so it would be ground down, as a variation of, sort of, the hand mills, that people might have had to use, in days of old, or if you didn't have a, you know, a water driven, or wind powered, or whatever mill, to actually grind your corn, people used oxen to do it, the big, heavy beasts, with their big, heavy hooves, would grind out the corn, but if the poor beast, is having to go round, and round, and round, and round, doing this, it's not unreasonable, that it might, sort of, pick up, or lick up, some of the corn, that's there, and eat it itself, and this was considered, to be no more than, you know, fair spare, if the beast, is doing the work, and it can eat a wee bit, of the corn that's there, and you know, animals of course, are not going to, glut themselves, on what they'll eat, what they want, and then they'll leave it, in much the same way, as often those, who worked in, sweetie factories, or chocolate factories, were, were allowed, to help themselves, to what was on the conveyor belt, they were allowed to eat, as many sweeties, as they wanted, off the conveyor belt, or as many chocolates, as they wanted, they weren't allowed, to take any, out of the factory, but they could eat, whatever they liked, because the owners knew, that once you've had, you know, a certain amount, of sweeties, or chocolate, you know, you can only eat so much, before you're sick of it, and after a little while, it would get sick of it, so you don't muzzle, you let it eat, but while it's dreadnetic, eventually, it's going to have had enough, and it's not going to eat, anymore, but it is maintained, it's fed, by what it's grinding out here, the second part, of what Paul quotes here, the labourer, is worthy, of his reward, it may have been, a general proverb, in use, but it is sanctified, by being quoted, by our Lord, specifically in,

St Luke chapter 10, at verse 7, where he is talking, about sending out, his disciples, to spread, the gospel, and to preach, the gospel, and the context, in which this is quoted, chapter 10, verse 7 of Luke, is in, he says, in the same house, remain, if you go into a house, let your peace rest upon it, say, peace be on this house, and if not, it shall return to you, and in the same house, remain, eating

and drinking, such things, as they give, for the labourer, is worthy of his fire, go not from house to house, now, we tend to use this phrase, the labourer, is worthy of his fire, to indicate, monetary payment, and of course, in modern terms, a stipend, is what a minister, of the gospel, has paid, but what's interesting, about a stipend, is, it's not meant, to be a salary, and it's not meant, to be a wage, it's meant, to be literally, a living, and if you look, at the original context, in which Jesus uses, you know, the labourer's worthy, was rewarded, he's not talking, about the disciples, getting rich, and being paid, in bags of gold, or getting, piles of money, or this, this is a good thing, we're on to now, we get loads of money, all the different houses, we go to, no, what are they getting, they're getting their food, they're getting sustenance, they are being enabled, by being fed, to carry on, the work that they're doing, it's, a living, and that, in the original context, of what Jesus quotes, is what it's meant to be, and so likewise, those who are called, and directed to labour, in word and sacrament, word and doctrine, as it has here, nobody's meant to get richer, nobody's meant to be, you know, a wealthy millionaire, because of it, and let's face it, nobody is, but, it's just, as nobody's meant to do it, for the money, so likewise, it's, there's got to be, sufficient, to live on, otherwise, one of two things, will happen, there'll be corruption, people seeking, to augment their income, by inappropriate means, or at the very least, he will have to go off, and do another job, to supplement, this diet, if it's insufficient, and then, the effect, of the ministry, and the preparation, and the work, and the word, and teaching, is diluted, so there's to be, sufficient, but not, overabundance, in the labourers, worthy, is fine, it's meant to be, a living, it's meant to be, enough to sustain you, to keep you going, so you don't have to, go elsewhere, but nobody's going to, get you getting rich, and they're not meant to either, against an elder, received not an accusation, but before two, or three witnesses, why might there be, an accusation, well in the first instance, we have to remember, that one of the qualities, and requirements, for a bishop, oblique elder, or leader, is a bishop, must be blameless, that has been a one, wide, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, and so on, but of course, inevitably, in the course of his duties, if part of his pastoral care, is that if he sees people, going astray, he'll seek to guide them back, into the right way, he'll seek perhaps, to admonish them, or perhaps, to encourage them, to amend, a particular thing, that may be wrong, in their life, not everyone's going to, react well to that, and if people react, badly, to being, pointed out, that maybe, they need to, adjust their behaviour, or their Christian walk, a wee bit, then, one of the ways, they might react, is to accuse, or criticise, the pastoral elder, concern, and this is one reason, why it says, against an elder, received on an accusation, but before, two or three witnesses, now, under the old law, of course, in the old testament, two or three witnesses, was what you required, in the case, of a capital incident, somebody who's going, to be put to death, at the mouth, [12:40] Deuteronomy chapter 17, verse 6, at the mouth, of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy, of death, be put to death, but at the mouth, of one witness, he shall not, be put to death, and then again, in chapter 19, and verse 15, one witness, shall not rise up, against the man, for any iniquity, or for any sin, and any sin, that he sineth, at the mouth, of two witnesses, or at the mouth, of three witnesses, shall the matter, be established, now, whilst nobody's talking, about putting, the elder in question, to death, nevertheless, one can kill, somebody's reputation, for a stone dead, with a false accusation, so it wasn't, even to be entertained, unless, there were, at least, two witnesses, in other words, unless he was, definitely guilty, of something, and it wasn't, just a reaction, to something, it wasn't just, you see, and then, that sin, and it's not just, talking here, about elders, so principally, that in the context, is the case, them that sin, rebuke before all, that others, may also, may fear, now, usually, of course, one would, one would be guided, by discretion, in these things, insofar as, a sin in private, or a secret sin, would be rebuked, in private, or admonished, in private, a sin that has been, a public scandal, would need to be, publicly rebuked, so that, not only, is, do other people fear, but also, it is seen, that those, who are the spiritual leaders, are not above, the gospel law, not above, the requirements, that apply, to all,

Christians, now, why would they seek, to be, what we might say, so determined, about this, why is it not enough, just to have a little, quiet conversation, somewhere, partly, because, the ordinary Christians, have to see, and know, that those, while in spiritual, leadership, over them, are being held, not only, to a gospel standard, but almost, we might say, to a higher, fulfillment, of that gospel standard, it's not, they're meant to be, super saints, a couple of steps up, what is required, of us under the gospel, is required, of all of us, but those, in spiritual, leadership, ought to be, shining, examples, of that, Christian, requirement, and if, one is, tarnishing that, then, it may need, to be rebuked, perhaps publicly, if the sin, is public, because remember, that just as, when we looked at,

the Ephesians, and the Lord's Day evening, Timothy, is in Ephesus, it is the Ephesian church, that is being addressed here, through Timothy, is that, part and parcel, of the, the requirements, for the Christians, is their witness, their witness, in a pagan environment, and the importance, of that purity, being maintained, and if that purity, is seen to fail, in the leadership, then, the rest of the ordinary, Christians, will think, oh well, they don't have to do it, we don't have to do it either, so if it's okay, for them to do this, it's okay for us too, you know, how can anyone say, it's wrong for us, if it's okay for them, so it was important, that any, deviancy, in that sense, become down, like a ton of bricks, then that send rebuke, before all, that others, also may fear, sometimes, when the love of the Lord, may not be quite sufficient, to keep us in line, sometimes, when, our motives, may not be as pure, as perhaps, they ought to be, good old fashioned fear, being caught, or found out, or publicly rebuked, may keep people, on the straight and narrow, and that's just human nature, however, this is it, in terms of the context, of maintaining, the order, within the church, I charge thee, before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe, these things, without preferring, one before another, doing nothing, by partiality, now of course, it would be very easy, to show partiality, especially if you're young, and impressionable, like anything it might be, because there would be, no doubt, in the church then, as in every age, some who were from, lower socio-economic, backgrounds, perhaps slaves, others who were, big contributors, powerful men, and women perhaps, of high standing, in society, and the temptation, would be if, you know, if one of the slaves, steps out of line, well yeah okay, you can rebuke them, all you like, but if one of these, big important people, in the community, if they're guilty, or something, is that a wee bit more, scary to try and rebuke them, publicly before all, or to tell them, that they're, they're stepping out of line, in terms of the, what's expected of them, as Christians, and this is one reason, Paul says, I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, if you're worried, about the fear of men, think about the fear of God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, observe these things, without preferring, one before another, doing nothing, by partiality, Dr. Ian MacDonald, in his book, about the Gallic church, in Aberdeen, he makes an instance, how just about the time, just before, and immediately, after the disruption, in Aberdeen, when the Gallic chapel there, was operating, as a congregation there, he mentions, how there was that, almost golden period, of spirituality, when those, who might be, of the, perhaps the lowest, socio-economic, position, in the city, yet, who were renowned, for godliness, and faithfulness, and because the, the position of eldership, at that time, was a purely, spiritual, and pastoral one, it didn't have the sort of, what became, more the case, it got mixed in, with subsequent, deacons courts, and responsibilities, for money, and property, and so on, it was a purely, spiritual office, that those, who were renowned, for godliness, were elected, and appointed, and everybody, submitted to them, no problem, despite whatever, they may have been, during the week, however comparatively, poor, or humble jobs, or trades, they did, those who were, a far greater, you know, money power, or position, in society, during the week, when it came to the Lord's name, when it came to the church, they submitted, you know, quite meekly, and humbly, nobody questioned, because it didn't matter, what you were in the world, what mattered were, what was, what you were, before the Lord, and in the church, in that respect, and that didn't last, as Dr. MacDonald points out, you know, but that was the ideal, and that's how it should be, that godliness, is that, which ought to determine, somebody's leadership, or position, or giftings, or whatever, before the church, rather than their position, society, on side, lay hands suddenly, on no man, neither be partaken, of other men's sins, keep thyself pure, now the implication here, is that you, rationally, ordain somebody, to the eldership, and you haven't really, looked into their, background, or you know, what they're like, or you know, what they may, have done in the past, or whatever, then, then you may end up, approving, or giving public, sort of, approbation, to a life, which, really shouldn't be, publicly, affirmed, and to lay hands suddenly, to, to rashly, ordain somebody, who probably, should not be, makes you, in a sense, a partaker, of what, they are guilty of, because you're approving it, apparently, you're appearing, to affirm, that, and this is the, the warning here, just hold up, wait till you, really, sort of, found out, of what a person's like, wait till you've, begun to gather, sort of, evidence, from other sources, and other people, and get the, get the full picture, of what they're like, don't suddenly, set anyone apart, in this way, now you'll be partaking, of other men's sins, another, aspect of this, in a more modern church, for example, might be, that even if somebody, who has been, perhaps set apart, to an office, in a different congregation, maybe, you wouldn't agree, with what's happened there, you didn't think, they were an appropriate person, for eldership, or deaconship, whatever the case may be, and then they come, in your own congregation, they shouldn't, automatically, be, preferred, to that office, rather,

lay hands, suddenly, or no man, neither be partaking, of other men's sins, if there is, if there is guilt, involved somewhere, don't involve yourself, in it, keep thyself, pure, now in the original, the word, thyself, is emphatic,

and it's in other words, Paul saying, whatever else, anybody may be guilty of, you keep yourself, pure Timothy, because if you're, meant to be leading, this congregation, of people, you've got to be, the ultimate example, never mind, how young you are, how old you are, you've got to be, the example, of purity, you've got to be, faithful here, and part of being, faithful, as the next verse, tells us, is looking after yourself, keeping yourself, in sufficient, fitness, and healthiness, to be able, to do the job, now when he says, drink no longer water, it doesn't mean, totally abstain from water, he says, use a little wine, for thy stomach's sake, and thy, often infirmities, often infirmities, isn't it, obviously here, that the kind of, alcohol that would be, available to them, then, would be as nothing, compared to the, the high power, drinks industry, that is nowadays, but leave that aside, the principle, is clear enough, if you're going, to look after yourself, if you're going, to take care of yourself, physically, then some, wines or spirits, may have a medicinal effect, which it's not wrong, to use, the implication, is that perhaps,

[22 : 53] Timothy might have been, leaning towards, a slightly more, ascetic lifestyle, abstaining from this, abstaining from that, abstaining from the next thing, in an effort to indeed, keep himself pure, but Paul is saying, that purity, doesn't depend on, simply avoidance, of this, that or the next thing, if God has given, a particular gift, for right, and moderate use, use it, it's interesting, to see what the, what the larger, anarchism says, about the sixth commandment, it's not short, but I'll just read it, to you briefly, it says, which is the sixth commandment, the sixth commandment is, thou shalt not kill, what are the duties, required in the sixth commandment, the duties required, in the sixth commandment, are, all careful studies, and lawful endeavours, to preserve the life, of ourselves, and others, by resisting, all thoughts, and purposes, subduing, all passions, and avoiding, all occasions, temptations, and practices, which tend to be unjust, taking away, of the life of any, by just defence, that of against violence, patient bearing, of the hand of God, quietness of mind, cheerfulness of spirit, a sober use, of meat, drink, physic, that is medicine, sleep, labour, and recreations, by charitable thoughts, love, compassion, meekness, gentleness, kindness, peaceable, mild, and courteous speeches, and behaviour, forbearance, readiness to be reconciled, patient bearing, and forgiving of injuries, and be quiet, and good for evil, comforting, and suffering the distressed, and protecting, and defending the innocent.

Now I bet you never knew, there was so much involved, in keeping the sixth commander, it simply seemed to be, thou shalt not kill, but this rightly, goes to the heart, of like what Jesus teaches, on the Sermon on the Mount, it goes to the heart, what's in your heart, what's in your thoughts, if you want to avoid, the ultimate outcome, and sin, which is killing, then one of the things, you've got to do, is you've got to apply yourself, to keep relations, and forgiveness, and everything good, between yourselves, and others, as far as is humanly possible, and part of that, is looking after yourself, because you're not to, take away the lives of any, including yourself, and part of looking after yourself, as it says, a sober use of meat, drink, physic, medicine, sleep, labour, and recreation, it's fascinating, in and of itself, that the moderate use, of all these things, of rest, and of recreation, and food, and drink, and medicine, is part of our duty, under the sixth commandment, thou shalt not kill, so drink no longer water, but use a little wine, for thy stomach's sake, and thine often infirmities, is part of Timothy, being required, to look after himself, take care of his own body, because he requires to do that, as well as look after his soul, this job, this calling, to which he has been set apart, is going to take everything he's got, and he has to preserve, and keep everything, as it were, fighting fit, for the task, to which the Lord, has called them, some men's sins, are open beforehand, going before to judgment, and some, they follow after, now what we've got, translated as open beforehand, in Hebrews, it's translated as the word, evident, chapter 7, verse 14 of Hebrews, for it is evident, that our Lord, sprang out of Judah, of which tried Moses, spake nothing, concerning priesthood, evident, going beforehand, open beforehand, that's what we have, translated here, it's open to the eyes, it can be seen, some men, sins, they're public, they're obvious, they can't be hid, going before them, to judgment, in other words, like a trumpeter, going ahead, or a stand, and they say, look, this is what this guy has done, this is what he's guilty of, it's all very public, it's all very known, and some men, they follow after, they seem to be, outwardly fine, they seem to be, models of discretion, and goodness, and so on, but their sins, are tucked in behind them, and come the day, of judgment, they will follow, after that, and they will be, set out before them, likewise, also the

good works, if some are manifest, beforehand, some people, you can see, all the good that they do, and it's very obvious, how capable they are, how blessed, are the works they do, and they that are otherwise, the good that is done, in secret, privately, with the left hand, not knowing, not knowing, what the right hand, is doing, likewise, that cannot be hid, for the day, will declare it, now just as, Timothy is encouraged, to do, and be good, in all these things, so likewise, he has to deal, wisely, with sins, which may be secret, or sins, which may be more public, like, this is part, of the ordering, of the church of God, and the thing, that we have to recognize here, just as Paul writes, elsewhere, about the body, and all the different parts, and members of it, one helping the other, and one suffers, the all suffer, is you might think, my goodness, all this talk, of discipline, and rebuke, and my goodness, you would think, Ephesus must have been, in a terrible state, no it wasn't, not especially, Ephesus was made up, of fallen human beings, who were seeking, to follow Jesus, fallen human beings, with their sins, their failures, their faults, their crises of confidence, or crises of faith, those who were led, by good elders, and some perhaps, indifferent, and not so good, and some, maybe weren't the shiny, examples they should have been, but this is, fallen human nature, you see, what the church, of Jesus Christ, is in the apostolic age, just as in the present age, it is us, fallible, fallen, human beings, and these are the people, to whom this kind of word, and direction, is addressed,

Timothy is not dealing, with people who are worse than us, or better than us, he's dealing with people, who are just like us, and that is who, the word of God, is sent to, that is who the word of God, is written for, it's for sinners, it's for people, like you and me, in every age, whatever the calendar, may say, human nature, has not changed, we need, yes, to be kept, on the straight and down, we need to be, perhaps, rebuked in love, when we go astray, we need to be warned, and guided, back into the right path, we need each other, to support, and lead, and help, and uphold each other, but above all, we need the light, of the gospel, and the help, of the church, and the guidance, of the Holy Ghost, in all these things, this is, a living word, for a living church, because it is the word, of a living God, let us pray, that was a living, inside,