

Cultivating Honour in the Church Family

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[0 : 0 0] We come now to our reading from the Bible, and perhaps you turn with me to Paul's first letter to Timothy, chapter 5. 1 Timothy, chapter 5, and you'll find that on page 992, if you have one of our large church Bibles, page 992.

I'm going to read from chapter 5, verse 1, to chapter 6, verse 2. And Paul is continuing to instruct his young friend and protege, Timothy, who's looking after the churches temporarily in Ephesus, and he's helping Timothy to know just how things should be carried out in the lives of the Christian fellowships there in that important city.

So 1 Timothy, chapter 5, verse 1. Do not rebuke an older man, but encourage him as you would a father. Treat younger men like brothers, older women like mothers, younger women like sisters, in all purity.

Honor widows who are truly widows. But if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show godliness to their own household, and to make some return to their parents, for this is pleasing in the sight of God.

She who is truly a widow, left all alone, has set her hope on God, and continues in supplications and prayers, night and day.

[1 : 3 4] But she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives. Command these things as well, so that they may be without reproach. But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever.

Let a widow be enrolled, if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband, and having a reputation for good works.

If she has brought up children, has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every good work.

But refuse to enroll younger widows. For when their passions draw them away from Christ, they desire to marry, and so incur condemnation for having abandoned their former faith.

Besides that, they learn to be idlers, going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not. So, I would have younger widows marry, bear children, manage their households, and give the adversary no occasion for slander, for some have already strayed after Satan.

[2 : 5 3] If any believing woman has relatives who are widows, let her care for them. Let the church not be burdened, so that it may care for those who are really widows.

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the scripture says, You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain, and the laborer deserves his wages.

Do not admit a charge against an elder, except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear.

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels, I charge you to keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality. Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor take part in the sins of others.

Keep yourself pure. No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments. The sins of some men are conspicuous, going before them to judgment, but the sins of others appear later.

[4 : 14] So also good works are conspicuous, and even those that are not cannot remain hidden. Let all who are under a yoke as slaves regard their own masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled.

Those who have believing masters must not be disrespectful on the ground that they are brothers. Rather, they must serve all the better, since those who benefit by their good service are believers and beloved.

Amen. This is the word of the Lord, and may the Lord make it a blessing to our understanding and our hearts tonight. Well, let's turn in our Bibles to 1 Timothy chapter 5 again.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. I want to take as a title Cultivating Honor in the Church Family.

The Bible teaches us to think about the Church in a number of different ways. So, for example, you could think of it as a flock, and that would emphasize the role of the good shepherd who looks after it.

[5 : 56] You could think of the church as a hospital because the gospel is the best medicine and over time it restores our health and vigor and sense of purpose in life.

You could think of the church as a barracks because Christians are soldiers in training to do battle with the lies of the devil. But one of the Apostle Paul's characteristic ways of looking at the church is to think of it as the Lord's family.

He often uses the terms brothers and sisters as he addresses congregations and individuals in his letters. And this is the way that he begins this fifth chapter of 1 Timothy.

Have a look with me at verses 1 and 2. Do not rebuke an older man, but encourage him as you would a father. Treat younger men like brothers, older women like mothers, younger women like sisters in all purity.

Don't you think that's affectionate family language? I'd been a Christian quite a number of years before I began to appreciate that the Lord's people really are the Lord's family.

[7 : 06] I started the Christian life as a teenager. I guess many of you did as well. I wasn't brought up in an active Christian home. So my Christian life for its first few years from about the age of 15 or 16 was all tied up with the school Christian union and then the university Christian union and with scripture union camps.

So for me in those first few years it was all young people. It was quite a narrow age band. And it wasn't until I was turning 25 and had just been ordained as a minister that I found myself for the first time in a real all-age local church.

And that was quite an eye-opener for me because there were all sorts of people in the church, not just happy, healthy 21-year-olds. For example, we had Harry and Frida, a lovely retired couple in their 70s.

He'd spent his life working in sewage. Then we had Mary and Malcolm. They were a couple of about 35 who had two young children. But there was great suffering in that house because Malcolm was wheelchair-bound.

He had multiple sclerosis and he died not many years afterwards. There were all sorts and conditions of people in that church. Bills, Burt's, Herbert's, Albert's, Cuthbert's, and lots of others.

[8 : 28] There were middle-aged women with faces like hatchets. There were elderly folk, some of them gracious and godly, others whom you would have to describe rather differently.

But we were all there together. We were sitting under the word of God and learning together to love the Lord and to serve him. And the senior minister, who was a young man, he wasn't much older than myself, he often referred to the congregation as the church family.

Now, I had never heard that term before. It was a revelation to me. But it is the way that Paul speaks to the churches. And it's the way that Jesus speaks as well. Here are my mother and my brothers, he said.

Whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother. So individuals who become Christians not only come to Christ, to belong to Christ, they also discover that they come to the church family and become members of the church family.

And the divisions and separations which so often cause pain and trouble out in the world, distinctions of social background and ability and class, national and racial background and skin color, these distinctions don't cease to exist in the Lord's family, but they cease to matter.

[9 : 45] And the very diversity of the Lord's family is one of its glories. The fact that we are so different, we're just looking around here, so different in racial and social background, is a delight, because it is so much more interesting that way.

If this hall were full of people who were all exactly like me, I would be bored out of my mind. You probably would be as well. But as we learn to share our lives with a great variety of other Christian people, life becomes rich and full and full of fun.

Just think for a moment of the person sitting next to you. Don't look at them. That would be rather embarrassing. But just think of that person and say to yourself, if this person sitting next to me is a Christian, I am sitting next to a brother or sister, to whom I therefore have responsibilities to support them, to befriend them, to encourage them, to love them, to help them to be more godly, to call them to account when necessary.

The ties of brother and sister in the Lord's family, in the end, become the most important bonds in a Christian's life. Now this is what underlies Paul's instructions to Timothy in verses 1 and 2 in our chapter.

Now in this letter, just to remind ourselves of the big picture of 1 Timothy, Paul has two main aims. First of all, he's commanding Timothy to stay there in Ephesus so as to clear out of the churches there the influence of false teaching, to clear out a false understanding of God and what the gospel is and what the church is.

[11 : 21] But secondly, Paul is developing for Timothy a picture of how the church is to function when it's functioning properly. So in chapter 2, for example, Paul teaches the differing roles of men and women in the church.

In chapter 3, he profiles the kind of men whom Timothy should appoint as leaders for the local fellowships. In chapter 4, he refutes a false ascetic understanding, a false ascetic teaching, and he then gives Timothy a lovely and challenging description of what Timothy's own life should look like and how his life should function as a wholesome example of Christian living to the whole church.

Now here in chapter 5, Paul gives instructions in how to care for various categories of people in the church family. So we have quite a long section on widows in verses 3 to 16.

We then have a section on elders in verses 17 to 24. And finally, a short section on slaves, Christians, slaves who are Christians in the church in chapter 6, verses 1 and 2.

But there's an interesting thread that runs right the way through the whole section. And that thread concerns the idea of honor. Look at verse 3.

[12 : 39] Honor widows who are truly widows. Then verse 17. Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor.

And look on to chapter 6, verse 1. Let all who are under a yoke as slaves regard their own masters as worthy of all honor. So Paul is teaching Timothy to teach the church that relationships within the Lord's family are relationships in which we learn to honor our brothers and sisters.

That's a lovely word. And it speaks of the high value that we attach to each other in the Lord's family. Well, let's turn first then to verses 3 to 16 under the heading The Church is to Honor its Widows.

Widows. Now, the Bible has a lot to say about widows. And everything the Bible has to say about widows is an expression of God's care for them because the widow in the ancient world was in a vulnerable and weak position.

What the Bible demands for widows is justice and love. So, for example, in the Psalms, God is described as a father to the fatherless and a defender of widows.

[13 : 56] You often find orphans and widows put together. In Deuteronomy, Moses instructs the farmers in the community to keep a tithe of their produce for widows and orphans and to leave their gleanings in the orchards and the fields.

You remember how Ruth went gleanng at Bethlehem. She was a widow and her mother-in-law also was a widow. Then often the Old Testament prophets speak out against the people of Israel and Judah because instead of providing for widows, they're exploiting them and oppressing them.

Jesus, too, had a deep compassion and concern for widows. He raised to life the dead son of the widow of Nain in Luke chapter 7. He rejoiced in the generosity of the widow who came to the temple treasury and dropped in two small copper coins, which was the total amount that she had to live on.

He told his disciples to beware of the kind of religious leaders or scribes who paraded their religiosity while at the same time devouring widows' houses.

And then Jesus' younger half-brother, the apostle James, writes in his letter that pure religion, undefiled before God, is to visit orphans and widows in their affliction.

[15 : 16] The Bible shows, then, that God looks with great compassion on women whose financial and emotional life has become vulnerable because they've lost their husbands. Now, the thrust of what Paul is saying here in verses 3 to 16 is, look after the church's widows, but be discerning, be careful.

Paul strongly encourages the church to look after Christian widows who are truly destitute, but he's saying, don't be naive because systems of support can be abused.

We get the flavor of what he's saying in both the opening and closing verses of the section. In verse 3, he writes, honor widows who are truly widows.

And in verse 16, he writes that the church should care for those who are really widows. And what he means by truly widows and really widows is widows who have no family or close relatives to support them.

Now, we need to bear in mind that first century society in the Roman Empire was not at all the same as our society here in Britain today. We are used to government-supported welfare and benefit systems, which were simply unknown in the ancient world.

[16 : 30] And while our modern benefit systems are open to abuse and do get abused fairly regularly, we're very thankful and rightly thankful that they exist. And many of the consequences of the way Bible values have greatly shaped the life of the modern West come from the fact that the Bible has taught us to be like this and has helped to promote these benefit schemes.

Many of us, I guess, already receive financial help from the government in different ways. And if we live long enough and if we become sufficiently ancient, we will perhaps receive a lot of support in our declining years.

So let's be very thankful to God that he has moved our society through the teaching of the Bible to make this kind of provision. But even if widows, as a general rule, are better supported financially today than they would have been in Paul's day, Paul still has a lot to teach the modern church.

What our society and first century society have in common is the family in the sense of the blood relation family. So while the Lord's family is the only important family in the big picture of God's purposes, Paul is also showing the blood relations family its responsibilities.

So verses 3 to 16 are about the respective responsibilities of both the church family and the blood relations family towards widows. Each of those families has its own part to play in looking after widows.

[18 : 01] So Paul says in verse 4, but if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show godliness to their own household and to make some return to their parents, for this is pleasing in the sight of God.

So he's picturing the older widow when he says this. He tells us in verse 9 that one of the qualifications to be put on the church's register or list for financial support is that a widow must be at least 60 years old.

Do you know those advertisements that you see up on billboards in places like Glasgow Central Station advertising the Scottish Widows Society? Do you know those ones? You've seen them.

They always show a very pretty young woman, don't they? She's about 24. She's wearing some sort of black thing to suggest widowhood. But you think to yourself, pull the other one.

It's got bells on it. I suppose it's a kind of tongue-in-cheek thing designed to get your attention. But Paul tells the younger widow what to do in verse 14.

[19 : 04] He says, I would have the younger widow marry and bear children and manage their own households. They mustn't be put on the church's list for financial support. You see, Paul understands human nature so well.

He tells us more about the younger widows back in verse 11. But refuse to enroll younger widows for when their passions draw them away from Christ, they desire to marry and so incur condemnation for having abandoned their former faith.

Besides that, they learn to be idlers going about from house to house. And not only idlers but also gossips and busybodies saying what they should not. No doubt, Paul has seen this kind of thing time and again.

The younger widow who is desperate to get married again, verse 11 shows that if the church is going to pay all her bills and financially support her, her desire to marry again can become such a big thing that it pushes out her love for Christ.

And because she doesn't have to earn her living, she becomes an idler, a busybody and a gossip, spending all her day visiting friends and looking for a suitable man. That's why the church shouldn't put her on the register of widows to be supported.

[20 : 22] Let her marry, says Paul. Then her husband will put the bread on the table and she'll be so busy bringing up her family that she won't have time to be skipping around town sipping tea and tasting everybody's home baking.

Paul, you see, he's very practical and he's very shrewd. So he says, no younger widows on the list. That would bring the church into disrepute. But also, going back to verse 4, no widows who can be supported by their blood relatives.

Many widows, both then and now, will have grown-up children, sometimes grown-up grandchildren, who are earning money. And they can look after the elderly widow, either by supporting her in her own home, or even by taking her into their home and providing a granny flat or even a single room in which she can be comfortably housed.

Well, friends, this is a big challenge to families in the West today. Our family support systems, both the nuclear family and the more extended family, they've broken down in a way that they have not in many parts of Asia and Africa.

All too often, our elderly folk, when they get very elderly, are shunted off, aren't they? And sometimes, they're rarely visited by younger members of the family. I'm not saying that the care home should never be resorted to.

[21 : 45] Sometimes, it's the only option if an elderly person is unable to get out of bed. But Paul is teaching us our duty to our frail parents and our grandparents. And he presses home here five reasons why this kind of care should be given to our elderly relatives.

First, in verse 4, he says, it's part of godly living. Let the children first learn to show godliness. It's part of holy living. Secondly, still in verse 4, looking after the elderly widow is making a kind of return.

The tables are now being turned. The balance is being tipped. This old lady has spent years of effort and hard work raising her children, perhaps her grandchildren as well, and now that she's feeble and old, she needs looking after by those that she has looked after.

So Paul sees it as a kind of family compensation. Then thirdly, still in verse 4, this is pleasing in the sight of God. So God looks at this kind of caring behavior and his heart is filled with pleasure because his will is being done.

His character is being mirrored. Then fourth, in verse 16, when the blood family care for the widow, it means that the church is not being financially burdened.

[23 : 07] Paul knows very well that churches don't have bottomless pits in terms of money and the outgoings of the church need to be carefully monitored. And then fifth, and perhaps this is the strongest reason of all, that's found in verse 8.

If anyone does not provide for his relatives and especially for members of his own household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. So to refuse to look after our elderly relatives is to deny the faith.

Not even non-Christians, says Paul, behave like that. It's a very challenging standard that he's teaching us. But having said all that, the apostle also explains that there are real widows, widows who have no one at all in the world to look after them.

And that's where the church family is to step in. So how does Paul describe the real widow? Look with me at verse 5. She who is truly a widow, left all alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day.

So she is a woman who is leaning her full weight upon God. She's prayerful. She prays night and day. Her whole mental life is lived in an atmosphere of talking to the Lord.

[24 : 30] So she's not a superficial Christian. Then Paul develops his theme in verses 9 and 10. She has to be over 60. She needs to have been maritally faithful and she needs to be known in the church as a woman who has lived a genuinely godly life.

Verse 10. Having a reputation for good works. If she's brought up children, has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints, looked after the church if you like, has cared for the afflicted and has devoted herself to every good work.

Can you think of a few older Christian women who have lived their life like that? Of course you can. They're delightful. They are the mother hens of the Lord's people. In fact, Paul gives us a glimpse of one of them in Romans chapter 16 where he sends, do you know that?

It's a great chapter. He sends greetings out to various members of the Roman church and he includes this verse. Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, also his mother who has been a mother to me as well.

Isn't that a lovely greeting? Paul must have stayed there with Rufus and his mother at some point and I guess she washed his shirts and socks and served him lasagna and black bread. Now the question is how do we work out these principles in a 21st century Western church?

[25 : 56] The core of Paul's teaching is that the godly widow who has no significant financial support from her family, she is the one who the church should take care of.

Now it seems clear to me also that we must take into account government pensions and workplace pensions and other sources of income that an elderly person might have these days. Now this means, I think, that most of our elderly people will have sufficient income and will not need to have any extra help from the church.

But Paul is surely teaching the churches to be sharply on the lookout for elderly members who are suffering hardship through lack of funds. And Christian compassion surely would extend this kind of help to others who are on the edge of destitution.

Elderly widowers, for example. Elderly bachelors. Women whose financial situation has become unbearable for reasons beyond their control. That could be younger women as well.

And refugees from other lands whose income is simply not sufficient to sustain life. But however we apply this to real people in real situations, Paul is also teaching us to be compassionate and loving to elderly and frail Christians.

[27 : 14] So let me say this to those of you who are still young and fit and shapely. If you live long enough, if you continue to draw breath long enough, one day you will be old and unfit and pear-shaped.

And you will be surprised at just how quickly life passes. It's as quick as the bath water going down the plug hole. There it is.

It's gone. Just like that. You'll soon be looking into the mirror and saying, change and decay in all around I see. Help of the helpless Lord, abide with me.

So if at this moment you are fit and young and shapely, here's my suggestion. Talk lovingly to somebody at the end of the service who is not in the same sort of shape as you and is about 50 years older.

And as you talk to that person, say to yourself, this is how I shall be in a few decades' time. I am now able to give support, but one day I shall need support.

[28 : 17] Possibly financial support, but certainly the support of loving friendship and companionship. Remember verses 1 and 2. Fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters.

That's the church family. It's the best family to belong to. And one of the marks of a healthy church is what you might call multiple interactions between the older and the younger members.

In some churches, the young folks seem to hive themselves off into a corner and they become shy of the older folks. And the older folks can hive themselves off and be a bit frightened of the young folks.

And so the two groups don't talk much to each other. Now I think in this church we do quite well in that respect, but let's keep at it. Fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters. Just look at somebody near you that you don't really know but who is 40 or 50 years different from you in age.

Make a beeline for them at the end of the service. That's my little challenge. Well, let's move on now from the way that the church is to honor its widows to the way it is to honor and look after its elders.

[29 : 26] You'll see that elders is Paul's subject from verse 17 to verse 25. Now I think I said this a week or two ago, but it's not always helpful, I think, to try to line up too precisely the categories of leader that Paul describes with the categories of leader that we have in our modern churches.

We can't always quite match them clearly. We saw in chapter 3 that Paul speaks of overseers in verses 1 to 7 and of deacons in verses 8 to 13.

Here in chapter 5, verse 17, he brings in a new word and he speaks of elders. Now don't turn on, but if you were to look at Titus chapter 1, you'd find that Paul in that chapter describes the role of those he calls elders in exactly the same way that he describes the role of the overseers in 1 Timothy chapter 3.

So his own usage of these terms is rather fluid. And that suggests that we mustn't be inflexible or wooden in our use of these descriptions. We in the modern churches, we speak of elders, certainly, but we also speak of ministers, associate ministers, trainee ministers, superintendents.

If you come from my background, you'll speak of vicars, rectors, and curates. But the leaders that Paul is talking about here are clearly officially commissioned and ordained.

[30 : 44] That's what verse 22 is saying when it speaks of laying on of hands. That's an official commissioning or ordination. And some of these elders, at least, according to verse 17, are preachers and teachers.

So let's notice three things about them that Paul teaches in this passage. First, they must be paid. Now, this is about church leaders who don't have another job that produces income.

They've got to be paid, says Paul. Verse 17, let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.

Now, double honor probably means honor at two levels. First, there's the honor of being respected in the church, but secondly, the honor of being paid by the church.

And Paul backs up his point by quoting from Scripture twice. You see, in verse 18, the Scripture says, you shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain. He's quoting there from Deuteronomy.

[31 : 49] And then secondly, the laborer deserves his wages. Words of Jesus in Matthew chapter 10. Now, we might be just a little puzzled by this when we remember that Paul himself as much as possible waived the right to receive money from the churches that he'd founded.

In his later years, he certainly received some financial support from the church at Philippi. But in general, he tried to support himself by plying his trade as a leather worker and a tent maker.

And he did this because he was so keen to avoid the accusation, which his opponents might level against him, the accusation of being in the work of the gospel for the money. But remember that Paul was in a very different situation from these local church leaders at Ephesus.

Here was Paul. He was a high-profile traveling apostle, one of the best-known, most controversial Christians in the world. He was a real target for the enemy. He had to be very, very careful.

But the people that he's writing about here are low-profile, settled, local church leaders. And for them, he says, there must be proper remuneration. So the church family needs to make sure that its leaders who work hard at preaching and teaching are receiving enough income to free them from financial worry.

[33 : 13] The pastor's life, after all, will have plenty of pressures and stresses on it without the additional stress of having so little money that he can hardly heat his home in the winter or buy decent food for his family.

I remember visiting a manse in the north of England years ago where the signs of stressful poverty were all too plain. It was a big house. It was an Anglican vicarage.

But the family there were only using one room that was heated. The furniture was threadbare. The dinner we had was very nice, but the helpings were very small.

And the pastor and his wife looked prematurely haggard and elderly. So this particular ox was doing his best to tread the grain, but he was muzzled. Paul has no wish to make the pastor a rich man, but he knows that the churches will suffer if their leaders have too little and their life becomes too uncomfortable in that direction.

Looking at verse 17, let me say this as well. If you're a younger person who is contemplating the possibility of life as a preacher and teacher, just notice the verb there in verse 17.

[34 : 23] Those who labor at teaching and preaching. Stick that word in your mental pipe and smoke it thoughtfully. It is a good labor. There's a lot of joy in it, but it's labor.

Secondly, leaders must be disciplined when they sin. That's the subject of verses 19 to 21. Now, of course, everybody sins every day in various ways.

We know that. But Paul is talking here about serious sins that will bring the Lord and the church into disrepute. Verse 19 is a protection for an elder or minister against a false accusation.

Do not admit a charge, says Paul, against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. Now, false accusations will sometimes be made against godly leaders by people who hate the gospel.

Jesus himself was falsely accused of blasphemy. Paul was often accused of malpractice. So a certain amount of false accusation goes with the territory, inevitably.

[35 : 31] But if it's clear that a church leader is behaving wrongly in a persistent way and is not willing to repent, Paul tells Timothy in verses 20 and 21 that he must be disciplined.

So how should the discipline be administered? The answer is publicly. Verse 20 As for those who persist in sin, in other words, are unwilling to repent, rebuke them in the presence of all so that the rest of the church may stand in fear.

Oh, dear, dear, we might feel. Does it have to be as open and head-on as that? Couldn't it be done quietly and behind closed doors if it has to be done? Couldn't there just be a small footnote on the back page of the Tron Times that says that Mr. So-and-so has retired to West Kilbride for personal reasons or something like that?

Paul's answer is no. It has to be done in the presence of all, with all the congregation present, so that the rest may stand in fear. In other words, so that the whole church, and especially other leaders in the church, should realize how serious it is for church leaders to misbehave and be unrepentant about it.

This fear is a subsection of the fear of the Lord. Surely one of the great weaknesses of the Church of England and the Church of Scotland over the last century or so has been the failure to grasp the nettle of disciplining erring church leaders.

[37 : 03] There have been various leaders, all too many, who have persisted either in immoral behavior or in holding false doctrine, and they've been allowed to get away with it. And the consequence is shipwreck and confusion.

The consequence is that light and darkness in people's thinking become reversed. Good is exchanged for evil, even to the point where godly leaders who take a stand for the Bible find themselves being disciplined and excluded by those who have abandoned the Bible.

So the healthy church learns to be unafraid to discipline leaders who stray from the truth. Now part of the answer to the problem of erring leaders comes in Paul's third point about leaders and that is that only the right ones should be appointed in the first place.

And this is what verses 22 to 25 are about. Look at verse 22. Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands. Now laying on of hands is what happens at an ordination or commissioning service for leaders.

Many of you will have been present a few months ago when we ordained Paul Brennan at Kelvin Grove. We laid hands on him. Now the idea is that senior elders as they lay hands on the new elder are lovingly setting him apart, dedicating him to the life of teaching and preaching and leadership.

[38 : 31] Now Paul the Apostle is saying in verse 22 don't rush to put someone in the position of a church leader. And part of his reason for saying this comes in chapter 3 verse 6.

Just look back to 3.6. He must not be a recent convert or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. So somebody who's only been a Christian for a year or two is not ready for senior leadership.

However able he may be, however steady in character, he's not ready because there's so much that has to be learned about the way that churches operate as well as learning the Bible.

And also the young man has so much to learn about himself, about the frailties of his own temperament. Look at verse 24 in our chapter 5. The sins of some men are conspicuous, going before them to judgment, but the sins of others, you don't spot them initially but they appear later.

In other words, a man may look like the real thing initially. He may appear to be smart and eager and vigorous. But Paul is saying at the end of verse 24 that sinful things can appear after time passes.

[39 : 49] I think it's a very good thing in our church, in our particular setup here, that young men in training for ministry are not ordained quickly. They have to serve a probationary period of several years.

And that gives the church plenty of opportunity to observe them and test them out. So the church asks, is this man steady and godly? Is he faithful in marriage?

Is he self-controlled when it comes to alcohol and money? Is his temper well controlled? Does he love people? Can he teach the Bible? Now you can't answer those questions about an individual in five minutes.

But after about five years, the church knows the answers to those questions and therefore can go forward with confidence. So widows, elders.

Thirdly, just a brief word on slaves who are Christians in chapter 6, verses 1 and 2. Slavery was a gigantic institution in the Roman Empire. In Paul's day, there were thought to be something like 50 million slaves throughout the empire.

[40 : 57] And as far as the city of Rome was concerned, about one-third of the population were slaves. And slaves were not simply used in menial service. They also had, often had responsible positions as teachers, clerks, skilled craftsmen, business managers, and so on.

But a slave was still a slave, even if he had a responsible job. Now Paul's instruction to slaves here in chapter 6 are all to do with the reputation of God and the gospel and the church.

So he says in verse 1, let all who are under a yoke as slaves regard their own masters as worthy of all honor so that the name of God and the teaching, that's the gospel, may not be reviled.

So if slaves who were known to be Christians were often speaking disrespectfully and rudely about their non-Christian masters, people would take a dim view of Christianity and of the God of the Christians.

But if Christian slaves were seen to consistently honor their masters, to be obedient and respectful, and to speak well of them behind their backs, then people would sit up and take notice.

[42 : 07] They would see then that the gospel has a refining and sweetening influence on those who believe it. So the message of verse 1 is, Christian slaves, honor your master if he's not a Christian.

And verse 2, honor your master if he is a Christian. You might be tempted to take advantage of the fact that he's your brother in Christ and you come to church with him every week on a Sunday.

But don't take advantage like that. Serve him all the better because he is your beloved brother. And this is going to have a lot to say to us in our workplace situations.

So here in chapter 5, we see the shrewd, loving apostle opening up some of the nooks and crannies of the shared life of the church family. Almost every aspect of godliness, holy living, is relational.

It's to do with the way we relate to other people. It's to do with honoring other people, supporting them, loving them, not being hoodwinked by them, learning discipline, how to receive it, and where necessary, how to administer it.

[43 : 16] Fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters. It's the Lord's family. So friends, let's enjoy the Lord's family. Let's enjoy it very much.

Let's learn to enjoy it more and more. Because if we belong to the Lord's family, we shall be enjoying it for a very long time. Let's bow our heads and we'll pray.

We do thank you, our dear Heavenly Father, for the spirit-given wisdom of the Apostle Paul. We thank you for sending him, for raising him up to teach the churches, and especially the churches of the Gentiles.

we do pray that you'll help us to take his words seriously, to learn to love those who belong to the church family with us, and to care for those who are weak.

We do pray for elders and leaders, that you will bless them, that you'll raise up many more godly ones who will be able to teach the Bible and to love people, and to work out all the implications of the gospel.

[44 : 26] So dear Father, have mercy upon us, we pray, and we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.