

Guarding Healthy Ministry for Mission

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[0 : 00] We're going to turn now to our reading this morning, which of course is in 1 Timothy chapter 5. And we come this morning to the section beginning at verse 17.

This is a letter all about rescuing the church from the rocks, setting the church back onto its true path of being a church that truly is in the world to win the world for Jesus Christ.

And the churches in Ephesus had run into all sorts of problems, and there were very particular issues. That's why in chapter 5 we have this long bit we looked at last week about widows. The widows were part of the problem here, as were some of the leaders, the ministers, the pastors, the leaders in the churches.

And as Paul had to have some fairly stiff words to sort out issues to do with the widows, he likewise has some stiff words to sort out issues in the church leadership. And that must be done if the church is going to be able to continue and not lose its vital mission in the world.

So these are important verses, not just for first century Ephesus, but for anywhere in the church today where things have gone wrong or are drifting in the leadership.

[1 : 18] And alas, as you look around the Christian church in the West today, that is a very great problem, isn't it? So these are very pertinent words. So chapter 5, verse 17, Paul says, Let the elders, let the older men, the senior men who rule well, be considered worthy of double honor, especially, or better, namely, 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 all 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 impartiality.

Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands or take part in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure. No longer drink only water, but do use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.

[2 : 35] The sins, you see, of some men are conspicuous, going before them to judgment. But the sins of others appear later. So also good works are conspicuous.

And even those that are not cannot remain hidden. Amen. May God bless us. His word. Paul there is talking about labor for the gospel.

Well, let's turn, shall we, to 1 Timothy 5 and the verses we read from verse 17 to the end of the chapter. All about guarding healthy ministry for the church's mission.

1 Timothy 5 and the verses we read from verse 17 to the end of the chapter. First Timothy is a letter about an all too familiar problem, which is churches that have lost their gospel moorings and so are heading for the rocks.

And as, alas, it was in large part due to the corruption of the church's ministry. In Ephesus, the issue seemed to be to do with some sort of link between these dangerous rival leaders and teachers and some of the widows who were in league with them.

[3 : 53] But whatever the exact situation, things had clearly gone badly wrong. And as we said last time, the church had become diverted into a sort of indiscriminate welfare supporting these widows who were self-indulgent.

And that was both burdening the church and betraying the gospel. And Paul says to Timothy, as we saw, that must stop before the church is wrecked by that kind of diversion and by that kind of frank danger to the church.

But now he turns from the widows who needed sorting out, many of them rebuking, as we saw. He turns to the senior men, some of them leaders in the church who also need sorting out and rebuking.

And he's saying that the mission of the church had become corrupted by the ministry of the church being corrupted. It had brought reproach, disgrace upon the gospel of Christ.

And so it just had to be brought back into proper order. And Paul needs to show them that they've got to distinguish good leaders from bad leaders. That bad leaders have got to be corrected and rebuked, possibly removed.

[5 : 05] And if so, then replaced by those that the church really can trust and support to lead it properly in the true way of faith and in the real work of gospel mission.

Declaring the gospel, but also demonstrating it with clear integrity in their own life and ministry and throughout the whole church. Now that is a vital task because without such a healthy ministry to lead the church, then the church will never have a healthy mission.

It'll never win the world for salvation to Christ. All it will do is bring shame and bring derision on the name of Christ. And we know that very well, don't we? You just have to think about some of the headlines in recent times about church leaders involved in abuse scandals and so on.

And that has brought shame, hasn't it, on the whole professing Christian church. That affects all of us. And it affects the gospel. No, a healthy church with a healthy mission declaring the gospel to the world needs a healthy ministry directing the affairs of the church.

And that means, according to Paul, the church must give serious attention to three things that it seems were being neglected in Ephesus. And that have often been neglected in many churches since.

[6 : 23] As far as its ministry is concerned, the church needs to guard properly its remuneration, its reputation, and also its recruitment. That's what verses 17 to 25 are teaching us very plainly.

First of all, look at verses 17 and 18. The focus here is on proper remuneration. The church must properly provide for its full-time ministry. A healthy church that is able for real mission, that will commend the gospel to the world, will be one that cares generously for the needs of its leaders.

Verse 17. Let the elders, let the older men, or the senior men, it's the same word in verse 1 translated older men. It's not clear that we should translate it differently here. But let these men who rule well be considered worthy of double honor.

Now, Paul began, didn't he, in verses 1 and 2, dealing with four groups of people. Older and younger men, older and younger women. He's dealt now with the older and the younger women, particularly the widows.

He'll deal with the younger men that he calls brothers in chapter 6, verses 1 and 2. But here he is insisting that Timothy will deal with some of these senior men. And he's showing him how to navigate that task with the necessary respect, but also with needful rebuke, which some of the men are going to need, as we'll see from verse 20 following.

[7 : 43] And the main point here in verses 17 and 18 is very clear, isn't it? Just as Paul says, not all widows are truly widows and therefore deserving of the church's material support.

So not all elders are truly elders and worthy and in need of the church's material support. But some are, says Paul, and they should be supported.

Indeed, he says they must be supported well. They must be given double honor if the church is to have the kind of good leadership that it needs. So who are these real elders who need the support and indeed who must have that support?

Well, Paul says it's those who are ruling well. That's the same word that we've seen in chapter 3, three times already. Chapter 3, verse 4 and verse 5 and verse 12.

It's translated there, managing well. And it's one of the earliest terms that you find in the New Testament for church leadership. So one of Paul's earliest letters, 1 Thessalonians, in chapter 5, verse 12, Paul says this.

[8 : 42] Respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord. Admonishing you. Over you is ruling you. Managing you. Leading you. And he says, esteem them highly in love because of their work.

And notice he used the same word there as he uses here in verse 17. Labor. Labor. That's another word especially used of church leadership in the New Testament. Laboring in preaching and teaching.

Literally here it's labor in the word and teaching. Don't miss that vital connection again between leadership and labor in the word and teaching.

Because that is how the church of Christ is led. Through the ministry of the word of Christ, the word of God. That's Paul's vital point here. He's not here describing different kinds of elders, although there were some who rule and some who teach.

He's saying that the church is ruled, that it's led, that it's overseen through good and proper labor in the word and in the teaching and applying of that word of God.

[9 : 46] And no other way. We've seen it already, haven't we, all through this letter, how Paul, in this letter and indeed in his other letters, how he always places teaching and the authority in the church together.

That's why in chapter 2, verse 12, it's that authoritative teaching role that he says is not to be a role for women. That's why in chapter 3 he says that to be able to teach is essential for that oversight role for a man.

God's church is led by God's word, not by anybody else's word. Leadership is by the word. Hebrews 13, verse 7. Remember, you're leaders. What did they do?

They spoke the word of God to you. That's why sometimes I think it's unhelpful. Sometimes we use this language of teaching elder and ruling elder that just makes the teaching of the word a subset of the ruling body of the church.

No, that cannot be because it is the word of God alone which is the supreme rule of faith and life in any true church. Otherwise, it's just going to be the whims of men, isn't it, that rule the church, not the authoritative word of God.

[10 : 55] And Paul will never separate the word, the teaching, and the management, the oversight, the rule, the leadership of Christ's church through senior men.

All of these men here he is talking about are called to be teachers, to labor in the word and in teaching. That's even more clear if we translate that word, which in the ESV is translated especially, if we translate it as namely, as Howard Marshall and many other fine scholars tell us we almost certainly should.

It's the same in chapter 5, verse 8. We saw last time. It's the same in chapter 4, verse 10. It makes much more sense all through this letter to translate it that way. So what Paul is simply saying is this. The senior men who rule, who manage the church well, are worthy of double honor.

Namely, I mean, of course, those who really are laboring in the word of God and teaching the true word of God. And not, of course, those who are not doing that. That was the whole point.

That's what he'll come to in verse 20 and following. The false teachers. So in our terms, in the language we use today, Paul is talking here about the full-time service, the full-time ministry of the word of God in the church.

[12 : 06] And what he's saying is that full-time ministry should be provided for properly. Double honor, he says. Good News Bible translate that as double pay. That could be very attractive for a pastor to try and argue, but I'm afraid it's not really true.

No, what he's really saying is there should be real and proper honor, which involves respect, but also, yes, remuneration. He's saying they must be adequately, indeed, they must be amply supported.

That's just a very basic principle in the New Testament. In fact, it goes all the way back to the Old Testament. Do you remember when we were studying Deuteronomy? Great care was taken, wasn't there, to provide for the material needs of the priests and the Levites, those who taught the word of God to the people then.

Deuteronomy chapter 18 and other places. And actually, Paul quotes here, doesn't he, in verse 18 from Deuteronomy. It's a rather odd verse to quote, chapter 25, verse 4, about the ox treading out the grain.

But Paul's already quoted that verse before in 1 Corinthians 9 where he talks about these things. If you read that later, you'll see he elaborates a bit more. What he says is that, look, if God even cares for the ox when he's treading out doing his work, he gets a share of the grain.

[13 : 16] And then how much more does God want a fair deal for those who are laboring hard in his gospel harvest fields? And he says in 1 Corinthians 9, verse 11, Those who sow spiritual things, that is, who labor in the word, have a rightful claim on material support from the church.

And he's saying it again here. This is a clear scriptural principle. And indeed, the second half of verse 18, he's saying also it's a command of our God and Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The laborer deserves his wages. That's a direct quote from Jesus in Luke 10, verse 7. By the way, just notice how Paul here puts the Old Testament scriptures and words from the gospel together with equal authority.

That's important, isn't it? Those doing their proper work of laboring hard in the ministry of God's word so as to lead the church well, they must be provided for.

They must receive ample, generous care from the church. That's not a favor. That's a right, says Paul. The laborer deserves his wages. It's just like the widows, isn't it?

[14 : 28] There's got to be discrimination. It's the laborer who does do his work hard, who leads well, who should be supported. Not the slacker, not the one who doesn't do that.

These false people. But it is remarkable, isn't it? I think that in this section where the main focus will come from verse 20 onwards and is about rebuking bad leadership, it's remarkable, I think, that Paul begins by recognizing the good and providing for the good.

Because, of course, the goal is not just to get rid of bad, but to have the church healthy with good, proper leadership as it should have. But as we'll see, it's even more remarkable because when you come to chapter 6, you'll see that greed, you'll see that ungodly pursuit of material gain was a big problem among some of these leaders.

And so we might think it's strange that Paul gives so much attention right at the very start, saying, well, you must pay your church leaders properly. But you see, Paul is just a realist, isn't he? He's very down to earth.

And it might very well be that, in fact, the church's failure to provide properly in the first place had contributed to the very problem of these false teachers. Because a starving ox, a muzzled ox that can't get any food from its own field, well, it's going to take food wherever it can find food.

[15 : 44] And a starving church leader is very likely to seek food and seek material support wherever he can find it. And that might well be the very thing that leads him into corruption.

And then through that, leads the whole church into ruin. You see, there are some churches who keep their pastors in virtual penury, give them very, very inadequate stipends.

And sometimes what happens in those churches is that those pastors come to rely very greatly on handouts, on supplements, on charity from just one or two rather wealthy people in the congregation.

Well, he becomes so obliged to those people that he is virtually then in the control of those people, isn't he? Very hard to rebuke, very hard to apply things in the Bible that they don't want to hear because they've become your patron.

And that becomes something that is detrimental to the leadership of the church. In some church traditions, there's a sort of culture of quite false piety, indeed hypocrisy, that thinks it's a right thing to keep their church workers in penury, to keep them humble, to keep them spiritual.

[17 : 01] But the ministry is a sacrifice. Well, it is a sacrifice. Plenty of it is a sacrifice all by itself without anybody else feeling that they have to add their burden to make it even more sacrificial.

And that's rank hypocrisy because people who think that way, normally I wanted to keep their leaders in the kind of level of sacrifice that they have absolutely no thought of ever putting upon themselves and their own Christian lives.

One writer says this, Do Christians not in full-time ministry gladly decline salary increments in order to promote their own humility?

How many of you have ever done that? Not many, I should think. Why should you? What a lot of humbug that sort of false piety and spirituality is. It makes me very, very angry when I come across that kind of shameful sanctity.

I still do today. Hard-working, fine Christian leaders treated disgracefully because the church treasures and those churches think they're the ones who should decide what the church does with its money.

[18 : 11] And they think it's good that those who labor in the Word should be kept living in faith. And in fact, kept living in great stress and in great need. I know of a pastor who was very inadequately supplied himself was paying visiting preachers, visiting missionaries in their church out of his own meager pocket because those who were in control of the church's finances were so mean they wouldn't even pay expenses to these visitors let alone an honorarium.

No double honor, no honor at all. And that pastor was so embarrassed at the behavior of his church he was impoverishing himself even more just to do that. Friends, that is not helping anybody to live in faith.

That is the church, according to the Apostle Paul, living in rank disobedience to its Savior. It's shameful. And that will not help the church. How on earth can the laborers concentrate on his labor if he's constantly having to worry about how to pay the gas bill?

Let me tell you, Empire will not accept faith payments, will they? They want cash payments as far as I can see. And indeed, that kind of thing might be the very thing that drives a man to start to live and strive for material things because he has to.

You don't have to have lots of money, do you, to become a lover of money. Often it's those who don't. Often it's envy, it's a sense of injustice that begins to create that kind of corrupt attitude in somebody.

[19 : 44] Now the church that is going to be enabled for its mission and be led well must provide properly for its full-time ministry.

That's what Paul is saying. Now please don't think that this is your pastor this morning asking for a raise. I have no complaint. I'm very thankful that our trustees, that those who handle these things in our church, are faithful in these matters.

And I can tell you when we left the Church of Scotland because we would be no longer constrained by their pay schemes, they wanted to raise my pay. I refused because I didn't want anybody to think or to infer that anything that we were doing as a congregation was anything at all to do with personal gain for me because of what our church was doing.

I don't think it was wrong for them to want to do that, but it was wrong for me to accept that. So like Paul in 1 Corinthians 9, I waived that right. But in fact, the Church of Scotland for all of its faults has a stipend scale which is far better than many churches and really, well, if not over generous, certainly adequate at ample.

That's why we've generally kept to that as our congregation for our ministry staff. So I feel I can speak about this without any personal axe to grind, without any ulterior motive, but I must speak about it because it is such an important issue.

[21 : 07] And some of you here, especially some of you younger people in the future, you will find yourselves in churches, in positions where you have a say in this, where you're involved in this, and you have to do it properly.

We all need to understand that church ministry has to be paid for. And we need to know that if we want hard-working, good, laboring leadership in the Lord that will make the church flourish, then the church has to provide for that properly, generously, amply.

Paul's just being realistic, isn't he? If somebody's support is very, very poor, they'll become dispirited, won't they? Because they'll just feel their ministry isn't valued.

And if that's so, well, the church isn't going to get the best out of them either, is it? Of course, on the other hand, there can't be any naivety. Paul is not saying here that a slacker deserves his wages in the same way as a real grafter does.

Look at that word again, verse 17, labor. That means hard, exacting, hard work. But if our full-time church staff are doing that, then they deserve their stipend, don't they?

[22 : 17] And they are. But of course, slackers do exist in ministry just as they exist anywhere else. And that is the problem when you have a flat sort of stipend system.

It just doesn't work well. There are some pastors, some church leaders who don't do very much, who don't labor in the word of God. They don't really believe the word of God. Some of them do very little. Well, if you support that kind of ministry, you're not just corrupting the man, you're going to kill the church too.

You mustn't do that. And so Paul calls for realism just with the widows. The church must love and provide for the true laborer because he deserves it and because he needs it so he can devote himself to that task.

But of course, the laborer must do that. He must labor. He must provide what the church needs, good leadership, good management of the household of God, good ruling of the church through the word of truth.

We've got to be realistic about this. And there's got to be balance because the aim here is contentment, as we'll see in chapter 6, contentment with ample material provision.

[23 : 20] It's not an aim for corruption through excessive provision. Now that is unlikely, it has to be said, in the churches in this country.

But I recall speaking to a pastor in America whom I know and we were discussing a well-known Christian leader who had fallen from grace. And what he said to me was this, as soon as I realized what he was earning, I knew we were heading for trouble because his pay packet was over a million dollars a year.

Well, it corrupted him and damaged the church. But I have actually known those, even in this country, churches whose foolishness in overpaying a pastor corrupted them and ruined them, ruined his ministry and greatly damaged that church.

Now, there's got to be balance. There are sacrifices in serving Christ, whether you're serving him full-time or not. And sometimes those in full-time ministry and sometimes actually it's their wives feel rather hard done to when in fact they shouldn't feel hard done to.

Nobody's life is a bed of roses, is it? And people in ministry shouldn't expect a sort of more pampered lifestyle than anybody else, more cushy than anybody else. Nobody else I know who has six children will expect to get given a larger house and a larger salary so that their standard of living doesn't have to suffer in any way and only one partner has to work and everything can be wonderful.

[24 : 46] That doesn't happen in the real world today, does it? So why should a minister's wife think that that should happen to them? Don't be silly. There's a balance to be struck. There's realism here, isn't there? Nevertheless, the point is clear.

Churches must provide properly for their full-time ministry if they want to be well-led, if their mission is going to be prosperous. They have to have people who can be devoted to the word and teaching.

Proper remuneration is needed for healthy church leadership. as is, secondly, verses 19-21, as is a protected reputation.

The church must protect properly its full-time ministry. A healthy church that's going to be enabled for its mission to the world will be one that cherishes jealously the integrity of its ministry office.

And that means that there will be a fair defense of the good and the innocent, but also firm discipline for the bad and for the guilty. Good ministry must be protected and bad ministry must be punished.

[25 : 51] That might seem paradoxical to say that public rebuke of misbehavior in ministry will protect the church's reputation and its ministry's reputation. But it's not, is it?

Because we all know that if there's no justice, if there's no punishment, then it becomes very difficult in life, doesn't it, to tell who are the good and who are the bad. We don't know who we can trust if there's no discipline around.

That's why when you go to buy something online from a shop for the first time, if you've got any sense, you'll go on a review site like Trustpilot, won't you? You want to know if you can trust your money to this place. If there are hundreds and hundreds of negative reviews, it tells you, don't go there.

But if all the reviews are positive, well, I can trust. We can tell the good from the bad. Well, the Christian ministry must be able to be trusted inside the church, but also by the world.

So there must be, says Paul, a self-imposed discipline, which is both fair and firm. Notice again in verse 19, Paul begins with the good.

[26 : 54] Do you see? Do not admit, another necessary negative, do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. He begins, doesn't he, with the need for fairness and he insists on several things.

First is proper process. This is just the basic principle of justice. We saw it in Deuteronomy 19 and so on. We saw it in Matthew 18 where Jesus picks up that same word.

Paul uses it also in his other letters. There must be several witnesses. And all he's saying here is that church leaders deserve no less than this basic fairness.

But he gives this command implying that, in fact, this is exactly what's been happening in Ephesus. Inadmissible charges have been made. Maybe the false teachers have been laying charges against some of the good ones.

Or maybe there was just such a backlash against all bad leadership that all kinds of unsubstantiated things were going around. No, no, no, says Paul. Proper process must prevail.

[27 : 58] And leaders are especially vulnerable, aren't they? Here's what John Calvin says. None are more exposed to slanders and insults than godly teachers.

This comes not only out of the difficulty of their duties, which are so great that they sometimes sink under them so that wicked men do find occasion to have fault with them. But also, even when they do all of their work correctly and commit not even the smallest error, they never avoid a thousand criticisms.

And the result, as Calvin says, is not only that wrong is done to innocent people whose reputation is injured, but the authority of God's holy teaching is undermined. That's true, you see, the fruitful, hard worker in the word and teaching the word will have to say many negative things, won't he?

People don't like that and so what happens? The messenger gets shot and people complain, people grumble and some will use that to cause mischief. Paul says, there must be proper process.

And there isn't always proper process. Sometimes congregations, sometimes even church groupings like presbyteries fall far short of this standard.

[29 : 13] I've known many good men, flawed men, but good men, shamefully dealt with in public where allegations were uncorroborated, but of course, once they're out in the public realm, impossible to get them back in, causing deep damage, deep distress.

That's wrong, says Paul. There must be fairness. There must be proper process and secondly, in verse 20, the first half, there must be proper proportion. Public rebuke, says Paul, is for clear, persistent sin.

For real, unrepented sin. Whether it's theological sin like the false teaching or whether it's the behavior, the consequences of that, the lies, the violence, the sexual immorality, the device of wickedness that was going on in the church there.

That's what should be rebuked. Not rebuke for those who have already repented and turned back to godliness, nor just for minor disagreements, for secondary matters of debate within the church, within Christian theology.

So important to be clear about that, isn't it? Sometimes, and I think reformed churches are especially bad at this, sometimes there's a sort of inappropriate heresy hunting that goes on.

[30 : 28] And people can be subject to discipline simply for just disagreeing with points of theology which are legitimate matters of dispute among Orthodox Christians. Those kind of disagreements are things that ought to be respected, not rebuked, not disciplined.

We're a church that baptizes babies. We don't discipline people who have a different view on that. That's a disagreement. That's not sin. Don't be ridiculous. There are many other things like that.

We need to be very careful, don't we, about branding godly brothers and sisters in Christ as heretics just because they don't share our particular view on a secondary or even an even more minor matter. Sometimes Christians do that.

No, no, no. Proportion, says Paul, to respect genuine differences in lesser matters. But yes, rebuke for real persistent sin, whether it's behavioral or theological.

So the point's clear, isn't there? There must be fairness, but there must be firmness, proper process and proportion.

[31 : 35] There's a big difference between a humble, teachable, erring saint and a hardened, unteachable, erring sinner. And we must make that clear. But where there is clear evil, sin and wickedness, there must be, says Paul, proper punishment, public rebuke, because that kind of sin is public and the effects are public.

Now again, that doesn't mean, I think, excommunication. Paul does do that with some. It doesn't necessarily even mean dismissal from Christian leadership. In 2 Timothy chapter 2, Paul says clearly some can repent and come back and be restored to do good work all over again.

Nor does public rebuke mean it has to be sensational and cruel. Surely it can be handled and must be handled sensitively. But at times, Paul is clear, it may need to be severe.

He says, so that, notice, the rest may stand in fear. That is surely all the church, but especially other church leaders to realize that sin is serious and especially it's serious in leaders of the church.

I think the implication there must be that it's for other leaders like Timothy to discipline their fellow leaders. It's very hard, isn't it, for church members on their own to do that. A theologically educated leader, somebody who can speak, can often tie people in knots, can give all sorts of justifications from their air.

[32 : 59] That's harder to do with his peers who can also talk the talk. But it is hard for ministry peers to discipline others, to discipline fellows, friends, colleagues, people I've trained with, people I've known for a long time.

That's not an easy thing, is it? Imagine I had to be involved in discipline for Edward or vice versa. That would be a very hard thing, wouldn't it? Which is why I think Paul says what he says in verse 21.

This is a solemn charge. God, Christ, the angels in heaven, they're all watching you and you will be judged for the judgments you make. Don't mess around in this matter. These are deadly serious things.

They must be dealt with with due seriousness, with due reverence. not, do you notice, prejudging and not with partiality.

That's so important too, isn't it? You must be firm and fair. No prejudice, no prejudging. That's what we do with somebody we don't really like, isn't it?

[34 : 03] Somebody who's not really one of us. We'll believe the hearsay about them. We'll make judgments hastily with prejudice. We'll hang him out to dry just to get rid of the issue and solve it.

No, says Paul, no, we must judge fairly. And with no partiality. That's what we do the other way around when we like somebody, when he is one of us. So we act with partiality, don't we?

Sweep it under the carpet so nobody knows. We don't want to rock the boat. That's what I read this week of one of the Catholic archbishops saying why they turned a blind eye to sex abuse among certain people for so long.

He said, these men were ours. He was one of us. So we covered it up. No, says Paul. And I'm afraid that sort of thing isn't just confined to the Roman Catholic Church.

That very kind of thing has happened in evangelical organizations in recent times too where things have been hushed up. people have been pushed away out of the picture to another country to get rid of the problem to save the reputation of the ministry.

[35 : 05] But what happens eventually? Well, the truth comes out, doesn't it? And then the reputation of that ministry is well and truly tarnished and indeed trashed often irrecoverably sometimes.

Whereas what Paul is saying is fair, firm, public rebuke of real sin is what will actually protect the church's reputation and its ministry. And he says we must not let urgency lead to expediency either with prejudice or with partiality.

Either hurrying up the punishment to sort something out or hushing it up to sort it out. No. We mustn't ever unjustly sacrifice some or unjustifiably shore up or save others.

Proper process, proper proportion and proper punishment. Neither prejudice nor partiality. Fair defense and firm discipline.

That's how you protect the reputation of the Christian church and its ministry. That's how you cherish jealously that ministry office for the sake of the church's mission to the world.

[36 : 14] It must be done, says Paul. Proper remuneration for ministry and proper protection for its reputation. And thirdly, just as important in verses 22 to 25, is perceptive recruitment.

The church must procure properly into its senior leadership. A healthy church that is able to have a mission that will commend the gospel to the world must be one that always commissions wisely into its senior leadership.

Verse 22, do not be hasty in the laying on of hands and commissioning or ordaining, especially into public ministry. You can imagine the urgent desire, can't you, in Ephesus to put things right.

We've got rid of all these wrong people. We need to get good leaders in. And it's very, very easy, isn't it, in any situation for that to happen where the need drives the process. We desperately need somebody to do this.

Who can we get? Oh, he looks a good chap. Let's have him. How many times has that been done? No, says Paul. John Calvin Eckersen, it's judicious caution, he says, not undue enthusiasm that must prevail.

[37 : 24] If I had a penny for every time a pastor has told me he's lived to deeply regret a hasty leadership appointment, I'd be a very rich man, I can tell you that. No, Paul says, take time and take care in recruiting leaders.

That's why we had the whole of chapter 3. Wise discernment is needed. Because, and this is especially true when you're ordaining somebody to public word ministry, because you are conferring authority on that ministry.

And that's a huge responsibility. If it's done foolishly, if it's done rashly, Paul says very clearly, verse 22, you are taking part in the sin of others. Whether that's the sin of those who are appointing foolishly or whether it's the sin of the person being appointed.

Either way, it's a big responsibility to ordain somebody to that kind of public word ministry. That's why I think it probably is best that these decisions are taken collectively by a body of other presbyters.

As Timothy's ordination was in chapter 4, verse 14, the council of elders, literally the presbytery. It's where we get our word from. It's a huge responsibility for just one person on their own to take.

[38 : 37] If you have an episcopal situation and a single bishop or overseer who does the ordaining, it's all in his hands. Although, of course, even in that situation, if he's got any wisdom, surely, he will consult with many others.

But often in church life, you are the leader of a team in one particular ministry or whatever it is. Ultimately, it may come down to you to be the main person recommending somebody. Well, even then, you're going to be very foolish, aren't you, if you don't take others into that decision with you.

Corporate decisions tend to instill great confidence, don't they, into the whole church, into the whole leadership. And of course, it's best by far when a leadership is seen to be clearly in tune with the whole church so that everybody knows this is a good appointment, we can all be right behind it.

But whatever way it's done, Paul's point is, it's a very big responsibility because if it goes wrong, it's a disaster for the whole church. Judicious caution.

You can't just go on one interview. You can't just go on listening to somebody preach once and one interview and say, oh, that'll be fine.

[39 : 45] That is so often how it's been done in the life of the church. No, Paul says a thorough lifestyle assessment has to be made as per chapter 3. Why?

Well, look at verse 24. Because although some things about a person are obvious to everybody, there are some things that take time to emerge. The sins of some follow on afterwards and not conspicuous.

Just as by the same token, verse 25, some who don't seem to be immediately impressive to begin with actually turn out to be the ones with a real, solid and fruitful ministry full of good works that will at last be seen to have lasting fruit for the kingdom.

That's one reason why good and honest references are so important. I sometimes think today there are lies, damn lies, and then there are references. Most references are absolutely useless.

And in the secular world are they even more so. Sometimes references aren't taken up until you've actually been appointed to the job. What on earth use is that? For goodness sake, never in the church of Jesus Christ.

[40 : 49] Because we are responsible for these appointments. And if we cover up things that should be known by others, we're colluding. We're sinning, says Paul. However tempting that might be, you've got somebody on your staff, you're desperate to get rid of, at last they get a job offer from somebody else, you think, hurrah, give them a great reference, cheerio.

No, says Paul. You're complicit in sin if you do that. We can't do that. But of course, by the same token, a track record that somebody trustworthy tells you about can tell you about a truly good ministry that you would never have guessed just by interviewing somebody for half an hour.

sometimes what doesn't seem conspicuous is in fact an enduring reality. It's a real challenge, isn't it? And Paul says to Timothy, keep yourself pure, be careful, take time, take care, because you can make mistakes, big ones, if you don't.

But I think it is also a comfort, isn't it? Because sometimes he's implying things will turn out not so well, even with the best care and process. It does happen. Well then, you have to deal with it, but firmly and fairly, just as we've been saying.

You can't have a 30, 35 year probation period, can you, before you appoint somebody? Some mistakes are going to be made. I always go back to Simon Magus in Acts chapter 8 who was baptized, wasn't he, by the apostles themselves and then he turned out to be a rotter.

[42 : 18] Well, if the apostles themselves made mistakes and weren't infallible, friends, we're going to make mistakes, aren't we? But we must do our best. There must be judicious caution. That's why we have, for example, our ministry apprentices who serve for two years.

They're getting a classroom study which is intense and searching, but they also work in real church ministry because you learn a lot about people over two years as they're moving tables around and cleaning toilets as well as teaching the word and other things.

They learn about themselves, we learn about them, the whole church learns about them. Our ministers in training for senior pastoral ministry have another three whole years not being sent off into an ivory tower where nobody can see what on earth they're doing as they sit in a library and study their Hebrew and their Greek verbs, but actually doing real ministry in the real world and in the real church where people can see how they get on and as Timothy can see their progress, hopefully.

And so when they're ordained to the ministry of the church full time, we can be confident that they're fit for it. But no method is perfect, mistakes will be made.

And keeping yourself pure and not in sinful negligence, that's a big responsibility and perhaps actually for many it might seem an intolerable burden. I'm sure that's what verse 23 is about, don't you think?

[43 : 40] Keep yourself pure, Timothy, verse 22, but verse 23, that doesn't mean being superhuman, Timothy, super spiritual. Not about asceticism, denying yourself everything. Paul doesn't say to Timothy, keep yourself pure.

Six hours of prayer every morning before breakfast. He says, keep yourself pure, have a decent meal at night and a glass of wine, Timothy. Very different, isn't it? Some Christians and some people in full time ministry can become overburdened, over pious.

Paul's much more down to earth. What's he saying? He's saying, take care of yourself, Timothy. You need a strong stomach for ministry. Well, the answer isn't intense spiritual exercise.

It's much more mundane and down to earth. Have a decent meal and a glass of wine. Go out for a game of golf. Have a night off and go to the cinema sometimes. Get a good night's sleep. I've often quoted Psalm 127 to overzealous pastors who are burning the midnight oil, taking far, far too long to perfect their sermons.

What does the psalmist say? In vain. You rise up early and go to bed late, eating the bread of anxious toil. Why? He gives his beloved sleep. Paul's saying to Timothy, you're human.

[44 : 53] You're frail dust. God knows that. You need to know it. And we all need to know it. Let me quote you from my father's notes on these verses. It's possible, isn't it, to think of God, albeit unconsciously, as a harsh taskmaster.

He's not prepared to work in us or through us unless all the rules that we have formulated for ourselves are kept punctiliously, however tired or exhausted or broken in health we may be.

We can serve God better with a healthy stomach than with one that has been neglected and harmed more than it ought to be by constant fasting and asceticism. Maybe some of us just need to hear that.

It's not super spiritual to have an occasional day off or a holiday or to relax with friends and watch sport or go out for a decent meal. Sometimes people in ministry fear that.

You know, what they really fear is that other people might spot them having a bit of time off and think they're being rather unspiritual and should be laboring harder in the Word. Don't be silly. I love the story of Charles Spurgeon where, there are so many stories about Spurgeon, but he was on a train going off to speak at a meeting somewhere and there he was sitting in the first class carriage reading his notes as he was on his way.

[46 : 11] And another Christian walked past in the corridor and spotted him there and recognized who he was. He opened the door and said, Good day, Mr. Spurgeon. Are you on the way to speak at a meeting? Yes, I am, he said.

And when she pulled out his third class ticket from his pocket, held it up and said, Well, Mr. Spurgeon, I'd like you to know I am looking after the Lord's money. Whereupon Spurgeon pulled out his first class ticket and said, And sir, I am looking after the Lord's servant.

Good day. Well, you see, what Paul is saying here is the Lord cares for his servants. And what he's telling us as the church is that we must do the same for their sake but also for all of our sakes.

We must protect their remuneration and their reputation and their recruitment. Or we will never have the kind of leadership that the church needs if it is going to be a church that wins the world for Christ.

But if we do, then we will have healthy ministry for fruitful mission. Well, let's pray.

[47 : 21] Heavenly Father, we thank you that your word is so down to earth, so realistic, so honest, and so balanced that you teach us with great clarity the way that we are to live so as to honor you and the way that we are to act as the church so that all might see in us a clear demonstration of wholesome, decent, human life.

Not something that is corrupt, far less something that is false and hypocritical. Help us, we pray, to show the world truth for life and to demonstrate all that we seek to proclaim for the glory of our great Savior and for the blessing of many who will come to believe through our message.

And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.