

Honouring Authority

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- [0 : 0 0] How do you treat the people in authority over you? Because the truth is we all have people in our lives who are in authority over us.
- Much as we might not like that, it's a fact of life, right? Whether it's principals and teachers at school, or bosses at work, or revenue officers in SARS.
- We all have people whose job it is to tell us what to do. And we've got to listen to them. What is your attitude to those people in your life?
- What is your attitude to the people whose job it is to tell you what to do? Because if we're honest with ourselves, we've got to admit, well, we don't really like that, do we?
- We don't like people telling us what to do. No one does. Our nature, ever since the fall, has been to push against authority. To push against anybody telling us what to do.
- [1 : 0 1] It's right from being children, that's what we naturally push against, authority in our lives. But I want to suggest this morning, that's why we need passages like this.
- The one we have in front of us in 1 Timothy. Because this passage from 1 Timothy 5.17 right to 6 verse 2, this passage here has a common theme.
- And that is how God wants us to think about authority in our lives. To think about the people who tell us what to do. What our attitude should be towards them.
- And especially those in the church. Which is Paul's main focus in his letter. But there are people in the church whose job it is to tell you what to do.
- And namely the preachers and the pastors who teach God's word. You know, when we do what we do and we take passages and we open them up and we take time on a Sunday morning to teach them.
- [2 : 0 9] These are not suggestions that you can sort of take on board if you feel like it. These are not like people treat stop signs in Plumstead.
- You know, not as commands, but just as suggestions if you want to. No. This is God's word. This is not suggestions. And those who teach it properly are relaying God's words to you and exhorting you to obey them.
- And while we might not like the idea of coming to church and being told what to do. It's very clear in this passage that the attitude God wants us to have towards the people whose job it is to do that.
- Is to honor it. That's the word that appears in this passage. And I want us to spend some time thinking about what that means. To honor those who do that.
- We're in a section of the letter, 1 Timothy. And we know Paul has written this letter to Timothy to instruct this young teacher of how the church should work. How a genuine church should work.
- [3 : 1 4] And in this section from last week from the beginning of chapter 5. We're learning how to honor various people in the church who we don't normally tend to honor naturally.

So last week if you were here you'll remember we looked at how we are to honor the vulnerable. Those who are poor. Those who are at the bottom. Those who we normally tend to ignore.

Because we don't think they can add much. And so we don't honor them by nature. And that's why we needed that passage last week to remind us. No we've got to honor them. If we call ourselves the church. But this week we face an equally difficult challenge.

And that is to honor those in authority. To honor those at the top. Who we normally don't because we normally push against. We normally don't like being told what to do by anyone.

And so that really is what this passage, what this section is calling us to do. To honor people who we don't normally tend to want to honor. And this week it's to honor those in authority.

[4 : 13] And so how do you honor those in authority over you? Do you? I mean ask yourself. Do you honor when you come to church? Do you honor those who teach the word?

Do you honor those who God has put in leadership positions in the church? Do you? If so how? What does that look like? Well that's what this passage is here to teach us.

So let's see what God's word says about this topic. And we're going to look at it in two parts. Which is how the passage is laid out. Firstly, most of the passage this morning is about honoring authority in the church.

But then we're also going to look from 6, 1 and 2 of honoring authority outside of the church. Which is also part of the responsibility of God's people. So let's look firstly at honoring authority in the church.

Look at verse 17. The elders who are good leaders are to be considered worthy of double honor. Especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.

[5 : 13] Okay, so those who lead in the church are called elders in the Bible. Also they're called presbyters. You may have heard that word. And literally the original language is they rule over the affairs of the church.

They rule. They exercise authority. But notice how they do that. They do that especially by preaching and teaching. There at the end of verse 17.

And that already tells us something about the authority of those in the church. And that's that they're not exercising their own authority. They don't have authority in and of themselves.

But only in so far as they correctly and faithfully teach God's word. They aren't exercising their own authority. They are actually mediating the authority of the one they preach about.

The Lord Jesus Christ. Who is in all authority in heaven and on earth. That's the last thing he told us before he ascended. He reminded us guys, I'm the boss.

[6 : 18] I'm in authority. That's Jesus talking. Not me, right? So those who preach his words aren't exercising their own authority. But they are mediating his.

Jesus Christ who has been revealed to be the son of God. Who died to save his people from sin and its effects and its penalty. And who rose to rule his people and is coming back to rule all people.

To be the ultimate authority to whom every knee will one day bow. He's the one. We preach. And as servants of him.

Teachers and preachers preach his words. Not their own. Bad preachers preach their own words. Bad preachers. And you don't have to listen to them.

Preach their ideas. And they use the Bible as a way to preach their ideas. No. True preachers of the word preach God's words. Preach Christ's authority. And so by preaching his words, they are mediating his authority.

[7 : 22] Those people who open up and spend hard work at making sure they're preaching this accurately. They are the means. Think about this. They are the means by which Jesus calls you to submit to his authority.

And that's why you've got to listen to them. They are the means by which Jesus calls you to submit to his authority. And that is why Paul says honor them.

And so how are you to honor them? Well, there's a few main ways we see in this passage. Firstly, pay them. Pay them.

Look at verse 17 again. The elders who are good leaders are to be considered worthy of double honor. Especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. Double honor.

What does that mean? Does it mean you've got to pay them double what other people get paid? I wish. But no. That's not what it means. It means you've got to honor them in two different ways.

[8 : 24] Firstly, you've got to honor them by taking their work seriously. You know, if they are the means by which Jesus calls you to hear and submit to his authority on a regular basis, then when they do their thing, you've got to be there.

You've got to take their work seriously. Don't just treat it as a kind of thing that you may choose to take on board if you want to. You've got to treat it seriously. This is not me speaking.

This is God speaking through the preacher. And so come to church. Don't skip church if there's no good reason to. Because if you're choosing not to listen to the preacher on Sunday morning because you'd rather lie in, you're choosing not to listen to Christ's authority.

You're actually telling Christ, No, I don't really want to listen to what you have to say to me this morning. And so skipping church is not just a matter of your preference.

It's a serious affront to the authority of Christ, who is speaking every Sunday in church as people gather around his word taught and preached.

[9 : 30] And so the first obvious way you honor that is by coming here and by encouraging other people who you notice are not here to come and to sit under the authority of the one we call our king.

But also, there's a second way you honor the preaching of God's word, and that is to put your money where your mouth is. Because the truth in life is what you really value can be seen in how you spend your money.

That's really, that's the ultimate test. If I want to know what you value in your life, the best way is to look at your bank statement. That's because what we value in life is the things we're going to invest money in.

And that's why I look at verse 18, the second half of it, right at the end, it says, The worker is worthy of his wage. It's a quote from Jesus, but it simply means that what you pay, the worker reflects how much you value their work.

That's the principle. And so if you say you value the preaching of God's word, then how much you invest physically in that will show whether that's true.

[10 : 48] But also, you are to pay preachers not just because you value the work they do as Christians, but because they actually need it.

Look at the first quote that Paul quotes in verse 18. For the scripture says, Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain.

Now, I'm not sure how I feel about preachers being compared to oxen, but the principle is one that has been used throughout the Bible, and Paul quotes quite a lot.

And that is, the principle is simply, if you have an ox who's treading out the grain and working a little village industry, if you want it to do its best, you've got to make sure it's fed, right?

So don't muzzle it, but make sure it can eat. And it's the same with preachers. If you want preachers to do their job properly, and to do this properly is a full-time job.

[11 : 48] It's funny how many people come to me, and they say, Oh, you're a preacher. So what do you do during the week? Most people don't realize that.

I mean, if I wanted to preach a sermon, I could put a sermon together. I could whip one up on Saturday afternoon. But it wouldn't be right. It wouldn't be God's words. It would be my idea, my opinions.

But if I want to get this right, and I want to read it and understand it in its context, and read the Hebrew, and read the Greek, and look at the biblical theology, It takes time to do that. It's a full-time job.

And you'll remember from a few weeks ago when I spoke about ordination, and how the ordination vows include preachers vowing to put aside opportunities for worldly gain.

You remember that? In our ordination vows, we vow to put aside opportunities for worldly gain so we can put our full attention and time and effort into doing this vital job.

[12 : 46] And that is why, here, in the Bible and elsewhere, it is the responsibility of every Christian to financially support those who preach the true gospel.

Whether a little or a lot, whatever, you know, God calls you, but it's the responsibility of every Christian to be part of that, to be part of the support, not just the rich Christians.

That's why we've reinstituted, handing out the offering bags, when we remember, Dylan. Because it gives, and it's a reminder that every Christian has a responsibility to invest in the work that is done at the church.

So that is the first way we honor the work of those who God has called to preach the word. Double honor. We honor it both with our attitude, but also with our money.

Secondly, though, let's see how else we are to honor them, and that is to consider how you talk about them. Verse 19. Don't accept an accusation against an elder unless it is supported by two or three witnesses.

[14 : 03] Okay, so why did Paul feel that he had to write this? Well, because, isn't it true, that people tend to be more critical of those in leadership.

Am I right? People in leadership are more in the crosshairs of criticism. It's always been that way. I mean, you think of the tabloid newspapers, especially in the UK when I lived there.

You know, they would sell on the stations these tabloid newspapers, and front page, second page, third page, all about leaders and digging up their dirt and highlighting their smallest flaws.

You think about how the royals in England, how their smallest flaws are highlighted, like if Princess Kate has a pimple, it'll be like on the front page of these tabloids.

People love highlighting the flaws of people in authority because it makes us feel better, actually. Our natural inclination is to find fault with authority so we can kind of give ourselves excuse for not listening to it.

[15 : 09] But we need to resist that natural inclination in God's church because it undermines God's authority, who he's mediating through the preachers. But it is so, and I've seen it in church after church after church, it is so natural if you don't make a conscious effort to stop criticizing and slandering those in leadership.

It's just going to happen, and it's going to undermine God's purposes in the church. And that's why Paul has to write this. Don't accept an accusation against an elder. Don't accept it.

And he's not just talking publicly, privately as well. If someone comes to you and says, you know, the preacher, so-and-so, they've got a problem with the leader, you don't entertain it.

The first thing you do, actually, is what Jesus told you to do. You say, wait, wait, wait, wait, stop. First of all, have you spoken to them about it? Well, no, no, I'm so scared of them. No, no, no. I think, actually, they're not going to bite your head off.

They probably will really appreciate you saying this to them, so don't talk to me, talk to them first. Please get into that habit because it really helps. But secondly, don't accept an accusation against an elder unless it is supported by two or three witnesses.

[16 : 24] If there's a criticism or slander that is coming to you about someone in the church in authority and it's only coming from one source, ignore it.

Ignore it. Don't entertain it. Now, this is actually a principle that we should extend to all people, not just leaders in the church. Don't entertain slander about people. God hates slander, especially in his church.

But this is especially the case for church leaders because they are naturally subject to more of it. So honor them by not allowing that. So that's the second way that we're called here to honor those in leadership positions.

But that doesn't mean that they are now suddenly beyond all criticism and that they are above reproach. On the contrary, look at what the next verse is, verse 20.

And he's still talking about church leaders here. And he says, publicly rebuke those who sin so that the rest will be afraid. So another way we are actually to honor preachers and teachers of the word is to hold them to account, to call them to a very high standard that the Bible calls them to.

[17 : 45] Now, that doesn't mean that leaders are to be sinless and to be perfect, but it's persistence and the actual, the tense of the word sin there is those who keep on, those who continually persist in particular sin, that cannot be tolerated.

It has to be dealt with firmly because it actually indicates that those elders, those leaders, are in no position to lead others. I mean, think about, would you let someone teach you how to drive who doesn't have a driving license themselves?

You know, you wouldn't want your driving instructor to not know how to drive, and you wouldn't want those who teach and preach God's word and mediate Christ's authority to not be submitting themselves to Christ's authority, obviously.

And so they are called to a high standard and they must be held to account. And so that's why, that's why Paul goes on here. And he actually teaches why, before he continues to tell us how we should honor those in these positions of authority, he pauses in verse 21 and actually he reminds Timothy why this is so important, why all this is so important, why it's so important that we are to honor those in authority in the church, why we are to take those jobs seriously.

Look at verse 21. I solemnly charge you before God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels to observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing out of favoritism.

[19 : 31] Okay, these are serious words. This is kind of the most serious wording Paul can use to hit home to Timothy and to the rest of the church leaders who are reading this letter along with him, how serious this role actually is.

It's an official charge to make sure that this role is honored in the church. It involves the authority structures of heaven. Did you see that?

The Father, Christ Jesus, the elect angels, those who oversee the affairs of the church on earth. This is the authority structure of heaven and what Paul is trying to say to Timothy is that you, Timothy, and the preachers of God's word are an extension of that authority structure on earth.

Heaven's authority coming to bear on earth. Think about that. When the word is opened and explained and taught and we sit here and we don't argue with it, we listen.

That's why preaching is a monologue, not a dialogue. Because this is God's word. We're in no position to disagree or argue with God's word provided it is taught accurately.

[20 : 47] So when this is taught, when this word is opened like this on a Sunday morning, think about what's happening. Heaven's authority is coming to bear on earth.

Heaven's authority is coming through this process to bear in your life. That's why we take it seriously. And so that is why Paul goes on in the next few verses to say, therefore, you've got to be very careful who you choose to do that job.

Look at verse 22. Don't be too quick to appoint anyone as an elder. and don't share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure.

And so what he's saying to Timothy, whose job it was to appoint elders in the church in Ephesus, is be careful who you appoint. Don't just appoint them because you think they're good or they speak well or people like them.

Be very hesitant who you appoint. And don't appoint those who are still caught up in sin. Otherwise, you will be held accountable for that.

[22 : 06] I've seen so often in churches people who have been appointed into positions of leadership hastily because people just liked them, but they actually had some serious sins that they were still dealing with and how that broke the church and how it flowed over and other people got entangled in that.

And so Paul says, no, just be hesitant. Appoint people with a track record, but also don't appoint people who fake holiness because that also often happens in church circles.

And there's many people who come into church leadership because they've put forward this holy facade. They've convinced people how holy they are, but deep down they're really not, but they make it look like they're super holy and super religious.

You have it a lot. And that's exactly, in fact, what these false teachers in Ephesus were doing. If you page back to chapter 4, verse 3, Paul describes them and he says, they forbid marriage and demand abstinence from foods that God created to be received with gratitude by those who believe and know the truth.

So these false teachers were pretending to be uber holy by keeping all these rules abstaining from certain foods, things like that. But all that kind of rule keeping and that fake holiness is actually just to cover over deep unholiness.

[23 : 32] It's always the case. When people act all holy, all holier than thou, it's because they actually have some deep sin that they are struggling with and so they try to patch that over by overcompensating and being really super holy and not eating certain things.

in fact, that's why I think Paul says the next thing he says about wine in verse 23. It seems to be totally out of context but it's actually not. Look at verse 23. He says to Timothy, don't continue drinking only water but use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses.

I think what he's saying to Timothy is you don't have to pretend to be super holy, Timothy, by not ever touching wine. wine. It reminds me of how people respond when they see me buying wine in the bottle store.

It's so funny. You know, sometimes I'll be in the bottle store buying a bottle of wine or something and a congregation member from St. Mark's will come in and they'll be like and I'm like, it's okay, you know, we have freedom in the gospel.

God made wine and obviously we mustn't abuse it but we don't have to pretend to be all super holy. That's not the gospel we believe. We have freedom in the gospel, not freedom to sin and abuse good things but freedom from unnecessary rules.

[25 : 01] We know the way to true holiness as Christians through Christ and it's not about what we drink or eat, it's about following Christ and having a truly transformed character that comes from truly following Christ and submitting to his authority but that is only ever really seen over time.

You can't spot that right away by looking at someone. We want to, we want to be able to see quickly but actually true holiness is something that is only seen over time.

Look at the next few verses, 24 and 25. Some people's sins are obvious preceding them to judgment but the sins of others surface later.

Likewise, good works are obvious and those that are not obvious cannot remain hidden. So, you know, Paul's just saying there that over time a person's true character will come out whether good or bad and that is why appointing people to authority in church, whether it's Timothy appointing them or whether it's the vestry appointing them or whether it's the council employing them must be done carefully and not hastily.

And that is because authority in the church, those who take up the mantle of the great responsibility of opening up God's word and preaching and teaching it to have God's authority from heaven come to bear in our lives, it is a very serious activity and those who do it must be very carefully chosen because authority in the church is important.

[26 : 58] And so Christians must honor those in the church who do that job faithfully and do it well, those who teach the true gospel, not just because they're standing up and they have a dog collar or they're called reverend, lots of those people, for reasons we've seen, shouldn't be honored because they're not doing the job that they're called to and they must be held to account, but those who are laboring at preaching and teaching and have devoted themselves to that and are putting the right work in to teach this in its context, I'm not saying it, the Bible is saying those people must be honored by all of us, me as well, I've got to honor those that I learned from, but what's surprising before we end is as we read on, we see that Paul also calls Christians to honor those in authority outside of the church, so he's spent 517 to 25 talking about how to honor authority inside the church, but then he changes tack and says we've also got to be careful about our attitude to authority out there in the world, look at chapter 6 verse 1, this is the most common and obvious way that people had to honor authority outside and it was regarding slavery, 6 verse 1, all who are under the yoke as slaves should regard their own masters as worthy of all respect, so that

God's name and his teaching will not be blasphemed, now there's something odd about Christians, well obviously there's a lot of stuff odd about Christians, but one of the odd things about Christians, about genuine Christians, is that they respect authority of people that they disagree with, they still respect them, they honor their authority, they honor their office, they honor their position, even if they're not Christians, even if they're pagans and they disagree with them, Christians still submit to authority structures, and it's a strange thing, you don't find it in other religions that vehemently oppose and fight those who don't agree with them, we, we, lots of people don't agree with the gospel, but we still submit and we respect their authority, that is actually a teaching that comes up over and over again in the Bible, so I just want to read to you for example 1

Peter 2 12-14, Peter writes, conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, the pagans, so that when they slander you as evildoers, they will observe your good works and will glorify God on the day he visits, submit to every human authority because of the Lord, whether to the emperor as the supreme authority or to governors, so this is Peter saying to people who were still living in a pre-Christian world under pagan emperors who just did ridiculously sinful things, Peter's writing and saying you've still got to submit to the authority, they're still being placed in positions of authority and you've got to honor that as Christians so that you can be a witness, so that God's name and God's message is not maligned and it's the same thing that Paul is saying about even slaves to their non-Christian masters, even if they're not right, even if they're unjust and this attitude to honor authority even when it's being abused is actually exemplified by Jesus himself, right?

When he was led like a lamb to the slaughter keeping his mouth shut, not arguing against Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, but submitting to his authority even though it was an unjust trial and Jesus was being wrongly treated, he still honored the authority of Pontius Pilate.

Paul did the same, we read in Acts, when he came before the governor Festus and the king Agrippa and you read how he spoke to them, he was very respectful, very honoring, even though these were pagans and they were contrary to the gospel, Paul was still honoring them because he wanted them to hear and understand his message and he wanted them to see that Christians were different, Christians still uphold authority, but why do they?

[31 : 42] Especially when it's wrong or it's being abused, why do Christians still uphold and respect authority structures in the world?

Why are we called to do that? Well the reason is because we know who's really in charge, don't we? And we're confident of the authority of Christ.

Listen to what Jesus himself said when he was on earth as a human under authority and he was standing before Pilate, right?

Let me just read to you from John 19 quickly. Pilate said to him, do you refuse to speak to me? Don't you know that I have the authority to release you and the authority to crucify you?

And this is when Jesus spoke up and listen to what he said, you would have no authority over me at all if it hadn't been given to you from above.

[32 : 42] God's love. And that is why we submit to earthly authority because we know all earthly authority is actually derived from the one who is truly an authority, who is now Jesus Christ.

And so any authority, even evil authority, exists by God's permission. religion. And so we don't have to push against it all the time like people want to do.

But the best way to serve the gospel is actually to submit to authority even better than non-Christians do. Safe in the knowledge of who is really calling the shots.

And if that is true for slaves with their masters, how much is it true for you and your boss, even if you don't like him or her? How much more is it true for the tax man and the government?

Yes, the government is failing dismally in South Africa, but those are people who God has allowed for this time to be in charge and we've still got to honor that because we know who's really in charge.

[33 : 56] Because to sum up what this passage is teaching us, honoring those with earthly authority is actually the best way to honor heavenly authority.

Because we are people under authority, always. We can't avoid that, but as Christians we are people under the right authority, under true heavenly authority. And the best way we recognize that and we proclaim that to others is by respecting and honoring earthly authority.

Both inside the church as we support those who preach and labor at teaching the true gospel, and outside the church, church as a way of witnessing daily our conviction of who's really in charge of our lives and our world as we eagerly await his return at which everyone one day will bow and recognize.

But we, we are the ones who are to proclaim to the world who the true authority really is, and we show that in the way we live under authority. So let's go out and put this into practice in the coming week.

Let's pray. Oh Lord, we do confess that you are our authority and we confess how often we still subconsciously try to rule over our lives and ignore your authority and ignore your word and ignore those who you have placed to exercise and mediate your authority through the preaching of the word.

[35 : 28] Help us, Lord, to take that seriously in our lives and to listen properly and help us to realize that when the word is opened and taught, you are exercising authority and would you help us to align our lives and to plan our giving and our finances in such a way that truly honors that?

And out in the world, will you help us to have an attitude towards authority that witnesses to the people around us who we know is really in charge so that they might come to know Christ and submit to him before he returns.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.