

# OpenTheo

## April 2nd: Proverbs 31 & 1 Timothy 5

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The valorous woman. Widows and elders.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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## Transcript

Proverbs chapter 31. The words of King Lemuel, an oracle that his mother taught him. What are you doing, my son? What are you doing, son of my womb? What are you doing, son of my vows? Do not give your strength to women, your ways to those who destroy kings.

It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, or for rulers to take strong drink, lest they drink and forget what has been decreed, and pervert the rights of all the afflicted. Give strong drink to the one who is perishing, and wine to those in bitter distress. Let them drink and forget their poverty, and remember their misery no more.

Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy. An excellent wife, who can find? She is far more precious than jewels.

The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. She does him good and not harm, all the days of her life. She seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands.

She is like the ships of the merchant. She brings her food from afar. She rises while it is yet night, and provides food for her household, and portions for her maidens.

She considers a field and buys it, with the fruit of her hand she plants a vineyard. She dresses herself with strength, and makes her arms strong. She perceives that her merchandise is profitable.

Her lamp does not go out at night. She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold a spindle. She opens her hand to the poor, and reaches out her hands to the needy.

She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household are clothed in scarlet. She makes bed-coverings for herself. Her clothing is fine linen and purple.

Her husband is known in the gates, when he sits among the elders of the land. She makes linen garments and sells them. She delivers sashes to the merchant.

Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come. She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. She looks well to the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness.

Her children rise up and call her blessed. Her husband also, and he praises her. Many women have done excellently, but you surpassed them all.

Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain. But a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates.

Chapter 31 represents the final collection of the Book of Proverbs, concluding the book with the words of King Lemuel, received from his mother, concerning the noble king and the wise wife. This is not just an appendix to the Book of Proverbs, it draws together many of the themes that have been running throughout the whole. The concern to prepare the young prince for rule, and to prepare him to choose a wise woman, have been prominent throughout the whole text, and now they come to their condensed, final expression.

Proverbs began with the young man being taught by his father, and instructed not to forget the teaching of his mother. The book ends with the young man having left his father and mother, passing on the teaching that his mother once gave him, and sharing a poem of praise to the wise wife, the woman by which such a leader of his community would be elevated. Some have argued that King Lemuel is only the source of the first nine verses of this chapter, however that seems unlikely, as it would only attribute a small section to him, and would also leave the final poem of the book without attribution.

We do not know who King Lemuel was, we should probably assume that he was some God-fearing king in the ancient Near East. He passes on the words of this chapter, but he is not actually the author of them. Whether or not the words all originated with her, the words were taught to him by his mother.

Verses 2-9 concern the behaviour of a noble king. She begins by addressing him as her son, and then with the affectionate term as son of my womb, and then as son of my vows, perhaps in reference to vows that she had made to raise him up in the instruction of the Lord. As Lemuel's mother, she was very concerned about those to whom Lemuel gave his heart.

The virility and strength of a young man can often be devoted to unworthy women, and can lead him to his own destruction. Lemuel needs to be on his guard. Such women could be his destruction, as for many kings before him, and many after.

A great many kings have been led astray by their hearts and by their lusts. In the pursuit of unfaithful women, they have squandered their strengths and their riches. The most notable example of this, particularly as we read the Book of Proverbs, is Solomon himself.

We might also think here of characters like King Ahab, or of Herod, men whose wickedness was greatly compounded by their evil wives. It is good, as we see later in this chapter, for a man to give his strength to a woman, but he should give his strength to the wise wife, who will in turn strengthen him. A further danger, alongside strange women and many concubines, is that of a king who gives himself over to his appetites, particularly a king who gives himself to excesses of wine.

The resulting inebriation makes it difficult for such a king to exercise justice. He will pervert and forget the law, and he will fail to deliver justice to those to whom it is due. It is not a bad thing to drink wine.

Indeed, wisdom offers wine to her guests. The danger is that of drunkenness. Lemuel's mother sarcastically argues that if anyone has to be given excesses of wine, it should be to those who are dying or in bitter distress.

They can drown their sorrows if they must, but it is not for a king to drink wine. This statement should not be taken seriously. It is almost certainly sarcastic.

Lemuel is charged to speak on behalf of those who cannot speak for themselves, and to stand up for the rights of those without resources. The king is supposed to be the great advocate and defender of the poor. The Lord is the protector of the widow and the fatherless, the stranger and the alien, and the king who rules in the name of the Lord will have his throne established as he acts on behalf of these groups.

Proverbs chapter 31, and the book of Proverbs as a whole, ends with a poem concerning

the valorous wife. The Proverbs 31 woman has a reputation that precedes her. If Helen of Troy was the face that launched a thousand ships, the Proverbs 31 woman might be the biblical figure who launched a myriad of women's bible study series.

She has been set forth as a standard for women to aspire to, and as a standard by which to judge them. This can make it difficult for us to read this passage in its proper context. Proverbs chapter 31 isn't actually a text written primarily for women, but for men.

It teaches the man to recognise the wise wife, and to honour her as she is due. These are the words of King Lemuel, but they are originally the words of his mother to him. This is an internalised lesson.

It is also a lesson given by a mother concerning the woman that she desires for her son. It is one of the places in scripture where we see the voice of a woman come to the fore, and it is a woman's teaching concerning a woman. We should also attend to the form of the teaching here.

Although it is so frequently transposed into the form of command, it isn't actually given to us in that form. The rhetorical form of teaching is important. This text isn't command, it isn't even straightforwardly framed as persuasion.

It is rather a poem of praise to the figure of the wise wife, extolling her manifold virtues. It is praising that which is praiseworthy, a valorising of the valuable, thereby instructing Lemuel as to what he needs to look for in a woman. It comes at the very end of the book.

It's not just some appended thoughts at the end. Oh, here's some miscellaneous stuff that didn't fit elsewhere. No, it sums up the larger message of the book.

The book began with the young man under the teaching of his father and mother, and ends with the wise wife. A man leaves his father and mother, and is joined to his wife. This is a movement into maturity, and it frames the whole book.

Here the book's interwoven themes of the young man's quest for love and the search for wisdom arrive at a poetic resolution in a climactic statement that unites them. The figure of Lady Wisdom, by whom God created the world, is incarnated, as it were, in the virtuous wife. We can see this as we look through the statements concerning the wise wife.

The portrait reaches back to the beginning of Proverbs and the portrait of wisdom. Like Lady Wisdom, the excellent wife's value is far above Jules, as we see in chapter 3 verse 15. She is more precious than Jules, and nothing you desire can compare with her.

Or in chapter 8 verse 11, for wisdom is better than Jules, and all that you may desire cannot compare with her. Like Lady Wisdom in her invitation to the simple in chapter 9, the excellent wife offers food. The excellent wife also brings gain, as we see in verse 11

here, which is like wisdom in chapter 3 verse 14, for the gain from her is better than gain from silver, and her profit better than gold.

Wisdom begins from the fear of the Lord, which is precisely what animates the excellent wife. The poem in question is a heroic poem. It speaks of the woman as a valorous woman, a woman of courage and might.

Taking a form that may have been used more typically for male heroes, it applies it to a good wife in her running of her household. In praising the wise woman, it also adopts the language and the imagery of the heroic military champion. The woman is characterized by strength in verses 17 and 25.

She gets plunder in verse 11 and pray in verse 15 for her family. She girds herself with strength in verse 17, like a warrior heading out to battle. She rejoices and is celebrated like a hero returning from a great victory.

She's fearless and confident in the face of the future. She's the powerful wise woman who, through the prudent ruling of her household, brings prosperity and joy to her husband and family, and is honored by all who know her. Beauty and charm are deceitful and fleeting, yet this woman is marked out by enduring faithfulness and determined action.

The language of the valorous woman is also found in Ruth chapter 3 verse 11, and this poem has been connected with the character of Ruth by some. The poem is structured in 22 statements. The statements of the poem are an alphabetical acrostic, in which the entire book is summed up in the complete woman.

She covers all of the bases from aleph to tav. The placement of this passage at the end of the book is not accidental. It's not an awkward appending of excess material to the conclusion of the collection.

It brings the underlying themes of the book to full and true resolution. It's the capstone of the whole book. The quest for wisdom has been compared to the quest for a woman, and the young man's relationship with particular women has been connected to his quest for wisdom or for folly.

Wisdom and folly were juxtaposed in chapter 9 as two women providing invitations to simple young men. Here at the end of the book, the quest for wisdom and the quest for a particular woman with whom to spend his life are brought together in the figure of the wise wife, who in many ways incarnates wisdom. Wisdom is tied to love for and faithfulness to one's wife.

A crucial aspect of wisdom is guarding oneself from sexual temptation. We can all think of tragic examples of ways in which people have been led astray by their loves and their lusts, drawn to reject wisdom because they hate correction and reproof, yet love folly

and justifying their sin. This is one reason why the choice of a marriage partner is so important.

The choice of someone to commit ourselves to in love is the choice of someone to direct and shape our values and our direction in life, to determine what we treat as a matter of first importance and those things to which we give little regard. There are few things that can be more devastatingly compromising of a person than the choice of a wicked or a foolish marriage partner. This has been a recurring theme throughout the Proverbs.

If you are married, you have a position of immense influence over and responsibility for the loves, the values and the life direction of your spouse, a power that can be wielded for incredible good or evil. If you are unmarried, you should choose your partner with the utmost of care. If they are not a wise person, you may live your entire life fighting against the gravitational pull of their folly.

Wisdom is to be pursued and sought out and we must love and cleave to her. When we attend to this image, it might seem strange, at least when compared to our cultural notions of wisdom. In our culture, wisdom tends to be considered in terms of knowledge, intelligence and the sharpness of a person's mind.

Wisdom is primarily pursued by using our brains. However, the biblical understanding of the pursuit of wisdom begins in the heart. True wisdom is the guarding and mastering of one's heart and loves.

True wisdom is also not something that we create in ourselves, but something that must be sought out from and given by God. The virtuous woman described here then is another image of Lady Wisdom, but a characterisation of the actual wife that the young man must seek. The wife performs in the life of her household what the great Lady Wisdom performs in the creation at large.

In such a woman then, the young man's quest for wisdom and his quest for a wife are resolved into a unified image. The woman described here is a woman who can be trusted by her husband, trusted to be a source of prudent and righteous counsel, someone who will run her household with wisdom and strength, and to be someone who will direct his heart towards things that are worthy of his love. The woman of Proverbs chapter 31 is idealised, and though we shouldn't struggle to see traits of actual women we know in her, we should be careful about employing her as a critical measure on actual women.

However, she does reveal the part that all women are given to play in the work of Lady Wisdom. This passage also reveals the great reward enjoyed by the wise man who is crowned by such a wife. Beauty is often valued and praised in scripture, but here it is downplayed in favour of other traits.

The manner and the content of the characterisation of the woman here are instructive

for us in considering the true strength of women as it is recognised and celebrated by scripture. This is a portrait that explicitly resists the reduction of women to the passivity of beauty, as we see in verse 30. It focuses rather upon the prudence, the economy, the wisdom, the providence, the faith, the productivity, and the industry of their activity.

More striking still, as Peter Lighthouse observes, the woman's work is domestic, economic, craft work, and yet the poem celebrates it in heroic terms. A heroic poem for someone engaged in domestic labour is remarkable in the ancient world, and shows something of how God regards the work of women. The great battle of the world is between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman, not the seed of the man.

In their care for their households, wise women are on the front lines of God's holy war. Our failure to see the heroism and the strength of such a diligent and active woman is a failure to see the world as God does. The strength of such a woman is not that of the conformity to more typical male forms of strength, but rather is a reflection of the work of lady wisdom within the wife's own world of activity.

This is also praise of a wise woman given by another wise woman. If these are truly the words of King Lemuel's mother, she is training her son to see in a woman what she as a wiser, older woman perceives to be admirable in her sex. This is quite the opposite of the reduction of a woman to what she is in the eyes of men.

Rather, it is an encouragement given by a woman to a man to help him to see women differently. The woman here is not in competition with her husband. Rather, she works in unity with her husband, and by each spouse's faithful use of their strength, the other is built up and glorified.

By virtue of her diligence and providence in her household, she enables her husband to enjoy high social standing and a reputation in the society that he uses to strengthen her in her work and to build up her reputation among the people. She labours on behalf of her children, and her children rise up and praise her. This is a vision of a household where all members are working for the sake of each other, and are not just out selfishly to seek their own gain.

Many contemporary Christians reading this passage have been preoccupied with the question of whether the woman here is going out to work in the workplace or whether she is staying at home. This is a very wrong-headed question to ask, because the home is the workplace, it is the centre of activity, it is her realm that is extending out into the world. She does all that she does as a wife and a mother and a manager of her own household, not as an individual careerist.

She is not working for a boss or another's household. The ideal here is one of unalienated labour, where the woman is doing her work to build up her own home, where she is an active participant in the economy and the wider society, but does not have to

leave the world of her household in order to participate in it. Obviously this would not be attainable for everyone in that ancient society, but in our own society it may be even less so, as the home and the economy have been substantially torn away from each other, leaving women with the choice of engaging in fungible, alienated labour in the workplace, or forming their own households in a way that is detached from the wider society.

In the figure of the wise woman here we see those two worlds brought together, perhaps in a way that functions as an indictment on us. The unveiling of the wise woman at this point should serve as something of an epiphany, a disclosure of a deep truth. The creative work of wisdom in Chapter 8, manifested in the wise wife, is not a set of rules for women, but a vision of something glorious that should inspire us.

The woman here is not just a young woman, she is a woman who has matured into glory, she isn't a set of commands or a benchmark to discourage, but a vision to inspire. The wise man praises her, and the wise woman emulates her. She reveals a sort of power of women, a power to inspire and move men towards that which is good, a power to glorify, a power to integrate things into a unified and glorious world, a power to manifest the work of wisdom herself.

The woman is the glory of the man, as Paul talks about it. Wisdom has built her house, and the wise woman builds her house also. We are supposed to see the one in the other.

The summons of wisdom herself is heard by the man, who has his eyes open to this wise wife. A question to consider, what are the different realms of activity that the wise wife is described as engaging in, in the poem concerning her here? 1 Timothy Chapter 5 Do not rebuke an older man, but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as 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, 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 to 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. 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 truly widows. Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in preaching and teaching, for the scripture says, You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain, and the labourer 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 people 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. In 1st Timothy chapter 5, Paul instructs Timothy concerning various groups within the congregation, various age groups, and then the widows and the elders. As Timothy addresses the various issues in the church in Ephesus, he needs to be mindful of the way that he interacts with different age and gender groups.

The instructions in verses 1 and 2 relate with the teaching that follows, concerning a specific group of older women, the widows, and a specific group of older men, the elders. It also develops the portrayal of the church as the household of God, as in chapter 3. The church is like an extended family, and Timothy needs to deal with the members of the church accordingly. He compares older men to fathers, younger men to brothers, older women to mothers, and younger women to sisters.

We should beware of reading this too much in terms of the modern nuclear family. Rather, we should think of the large extended family, with uncles and aunts, cousins, grandparents, nieces and nephews, and various other forms of relations. Elsewhere, Paul also speaks of different groups within the church by age and gender, in Titus 2 verses 1-6 for instance.

But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine. Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. Older women likewise are to be reverent in behaviour, not slanderers or slaves to much wine.

They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled. Likewise urge the younger men to be self-controlled. As the apostle Paul's emissary, Timothy has authority, but he needs to learn how to use it properly.

He will, for instance, have to be dealing with the elders, as we see at the end of this chapter, and Paul's instruction concerning how to approach older men at the beginning of the chapter provides Timothy with direction about how he ought to go about dealing with those elders that have failed in some regard. When dealing with older men, Timothy needs to moderate his authoritative approach with the deference that's due to father figures. Rather than rebuking such an older man, he needs to exhort and encourage him.

Such an approach operates within the honour that is due to such a figure, while still allowing for correction to be heard. Timothy will have more freedom when dealing with the younger men, men who are his peers in age and younger. As in the case of dealing with the older men, when he deals with the older women, Timothy needs to show them a proper honour, in this case treating them as he would a mother.

Timothy needs to treat the women of his age and younger as sisters, and here it is particularly emphasised that he must act with purity towards them. Given the household character of the church, Paul is concerned that Timothy perceive and operate within the structures of honour, authority and association that naturally exist in a society that's ordered by gender and age. Using the relations of the extended family as guides, Paul can give him a template within which to think about the way that he relates to different groups.

The church does not float free of the generational and gendered character of communal life more generally. This was one of the concerns of Paul in chapter 2 when dealing with men and women in the congregations. In the related passage in Titus chapter 1, we should note the gendered and generational character of the church is expressed in the orders of its teaching.

The discipleship of the younger women is largely undertaken by older women, not by Titus himself. Titus, however, plays that role relative to the younger men. There seem to have been problems in the Ephesian congregations around the issue of widows, and it is to this matter that Paul now turns in verses 3-16.

Throughout the scripture, the Lord expresses an especial concern for the widow, the fatherless, and the stranger. Isaiah chapter 1 verse 17. Learn to do good, seek justice, correct oppression, bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.

James chapter 1 verse 27. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this, to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from

the world. As a sort of extended family, the church would take responsibility for providing for needy persons in their midst.

We see this in Acts chapter 6 where there were structures of community provision for the widows in the congregation. The church is not merely a place of teaching, it is a household, and there needs to be provision of material assistance to its members. In Acts chapter 9 we also see another instance where widows are mentioned as a group, as those who had been helped by Dorcas.

The problem in Ephesus, however, is that the church's provision for widows seems to have been abused. Some young widows of marriageable age were depending upon the church's resources when they did not need to be. Some families seemed to have been neglecting their duty of support and handing it over to the church, expecting the church to pick up their slack.

Other widows enjoying the support of the church were engaging in community disrupting behaviours. Paul addresses this situation by providing criteria by which true widows could be supported, and unworthy recipients of the church's support would be removed from the rosters. The widows who were enrolled for support by the church needed to be without family to support them.

If a widow had such family, it was not the duty of the church to look after her, but the duty of the family, and if the family was not prepared to do its duty, then any of the widow's family members shirking their responsibility should not be regarded as members of the community of faith. This was a rejection of the faith and the sort of Christian behaviour that ought to accompany it. Paul restricts the church's support to widows over the age of 60 who had a reputation and a long-standing record of godliness.

The widows to be supported by the church were expected to have been wives of one husband, faithful mothers, persons who had practised hospitality, especially to the members of the church, and marked out by commitment to charity and the works of mercy. These were women who had given much of their lives and their resources to the service of the household of faith, and the household of faith had a corresponding duty to show them great honour. The statement with which Paul begins this section, honour widows who are truly widows, singles out this group for special respect and also the material provision and support that is a necessary component of such honour.

The faithful widows are contrasted with another group, a group of younger widows, perhaps examples of the new Roman women that some have seen in the background of the book of 1 Timothy and its situation in Ephesus. A number of these women, presumably more wealthy, were given to practices that were causing trouble in the community. Rather than devoting themselves to the works of mercy and charity, they went from house to house, engaging in gossip, slander and the spread of false teaching.

Their commitment to the faith also seems to have been slight. A number of them, itching to remarry, seem to have sought new husbands from outside of the household of faith, abandoning Christ for a pagan spouse. This would greatly have unsettled the church and compromised its witness to the surrounding society.

Paul is concerned that women susceptible to such falling away are not enrolled in the company of widows that the church provides for. They can provide for themselves, many of them will have families that will be able to support them, and no small number of them will be able to remarry. While there are situations, as we see in 1 Corinthians chapter 7, where Paul can advise against remarriage, here he presents it as a prudent response to the young widow's condition.

The ideal was that such young women remarried and gave themselves to the activities of a wife and mother. We should also bear in mind the concept of managing their households would have been a very expansive activity within the first century context, far wider than what we often think about in terms of homemaking. The woman who managed her household was overseeing the children, but also the wider activity of the household as a site of production.

In many respects the household could be compared to a small business today, and much of the activity of production within a society occurred within its context. Many have wondered whether the widows described in this chapter were a particular class of appointed women within the church with special ministry roles. This, it seems to me, is unlikely.

While the women in question were being honoured for their past service, they were selected not according to their aptitude for future ministry, but according to their need. Besides, as a group limited to women over sixty, many of the widows would not be able to perform any sort of active ministry. Given the degree to which the modern church has been abstracted from the context of the household, we are more likely to think of the church as an organisation that is perhaps similar to a business, with importance in the community being defined by official roles, titles, and by positions on the payroll.

This was not the case in the early church, and I think we are misguided if we are looking for the prominence of women in the community by looking for official positions and titles. The widows that are honoured here, for instance, are women who had been serving the community for some time already prior to their being enrolled in the company of the widows. As the church functioned as a household, the church was not primarily defined by official titles and positions, rather it was the life of a community, and the ministries and works of service in the community mostly did not occur under the auspices of official titles and roles.

Women like those described here who were faithful in their service of the community were supposed to be treated with a special honour, for which material support and

provision was essential. Elsewhere in Paul's letters, in places like Romans 16, we see the great number of women who were active within particular communities. Churches in this context seemed to have numerous prominent women, even while the positions of official oversight of the communities were exclusive to men.

In modern Christian contexts, where most of the ministry of churches occurs through churches as official organisations and structures, it may be difficult to recover the prominence that women enjoyed within a structure of the church as an organic household and an active community, most of whose life was carried out in informal contexts. However, it seems to me that pursuing such a challenge is absolutely essential if the church is to be what it ought to be. The less that the church functions like an extended family and household, the more that there will be a breach between word and life within its existence.

From the widows, Paul turns to another group that need to be accorded special honour, the elders. Alasdair Campbell, in his book on the elders, argues that the group referred to here are the elders of the town churches rather than just the households. The elders of the house churches would not presumably have been paid for their labour in preaching and teaching.

It was only the overseers, the leaders of the town churches, that would need to give themselves completely to these tasks. As the fatherly guardians and instructors of the Christians within a given town, it was important that the office of these elders be shown a proper respect. This would involve paying them for their efforts.

To support his assertion here, Paul cites two statements, the first from Deuteronomy chapter 25 verse 4, concerning the ox threshing the grain, and then the second from Luke chapter 10 verse 7, words of our Lord, and remain in the same house eating and drinking what they provide, for the labourer deserves his wages. Elsewhere, in 1 Corinthians chapter 9 verses 7 to 14, Paul also references the case law concerning the ox threshing out the grain. Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of its milk? Do I say these things on human authority? Does not the law say the same? For it is written in the law of Moses, You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain.

Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Does he not certainly speak for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the ploughman should plough in hope, and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop. If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much that we reap material things from you? If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more? Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ. Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? In the same

way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.

There appear to have been issues with some of the elders in Ephesus. Certain elders seem to have been accused of sin, and some seem to have been clearly guilty. Part of Timothy's task in this situation is to exercise justice as Paul's representative.

To equip him in this task, Paul references a number of Old Testament principles of justice. The first concerns proper evidence. Deuteronomy 19.15 A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offence that he has committed.

Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established. Where repentance was not forthcoming, elders would have to be rebuked in the presence of everyone. When private and respectful appeal to them as fathers had failed, the company of the elders and Timothy would have to gather together and collectively enact justice in the situation.

A communally witnessed rebuke would also be a deterrent for any others. Deuteronomy 19.20 is another principle in the background here. And the rest shall hear and fear, and shall never again commit any such evil among you.

The impenitent sinning elder is rebuked in the presence of the whole company of the church, and Paul charges Timothy in the presence of the entire heavenly council, of God, of Christ Jesus, and of the elect angels. Like Old Testament judges, he is charged to exercise these rules without prejudice and without partiality. He needs to be very careful about appointing people to the office of an elder.

He must not take part in the sins of others, whether allowing people's abuses to continue without rebuke, or by appointing people who are not worthy of the positions that they are entering. As an aside at this juncture, Paul speaks to Timothy's health and his need to drink wine. Perhaps Timothy was experiencing health issues, drinking unclean water while he was abstaining from alcohol.

Drinking wine in moderation would not be giving himself to drunkenness, but it would spare him from the health issues that he might experience otherwise. Paul has given Timothy a most solemn charge. However, Timothy, like any human being, is not up to the task of discerning other people's hearts.

People's hearts cannot be fully discerned. And Paul recognises this at the end of the chapter. Certain people's sins are or can be recognised by the observant person.

Other sins, however, are secret sins and only appear later over time, perhaps through sudden scandalous exposure, or perhaps in the character that they produce in a person over many years. Others may only be revealed on the day of judgment. On the other

hand, there are people whose good works are obvious and plain to everyone around them, and others whose good deeds are not seen by others, but are largely hidden.

However, even those good deeds that are not immediately obvious will be made apparent over time. By their fruit you will know them, and people's habitual behaviours will be steadily revealed in their characters. A question to consider.

What are some of the ways in which modern churches can learn from Paul's teaching concerning the church as the household of God in the book of 1 Timothy?