

The Epistles to Timothy

Part 3

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Note: This text is a computer generated transcript of the sermon. In some cases it may contain errors.

[00:00:00] We come again to 1 Timothy, 1 Timothy, chapter 3, verse 1, this is a true saying, if a man desires the goodness of a bishop, he desires a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality and to teach. Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy or filthy looker, but patient, not a brawler, not covetousness, not covetous, one that ruleth well with his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity. But if a man know not how to rule his own [00:01:03] house, how shall he take care of the church of God? Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must have a good report of them which are without, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. Likewise must the deacons be brave, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy or filthy looker, holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proved, then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless. Even so must their wives be brave, not slanderous, sober, faithful in all things. Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For they that have used the office of a deacon, well, purchase to themselves a good degree and great boldness [00:02:06] in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Now, chapter 1, we'll read verse 19 and 20.

Holding faith and a good conscience, which some, having put away concerning faith, have made shipwrecked, of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they learn not to blaspheme.

Now, in chapter 5, verse 19.

[00:03:03] Against an elder, receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. Them that sin, rebuke before all, that others also may fear.

I charge thee before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality. Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins. Keep thyself pure.

If we read in the Old Testament about God's dealings with his chosen people Israel, we find that he cared for them with a love and a care and concern that is very touching to [00:04:08] read. He was deeply concerned that his people might receive the best and might be attended to and might acquire every blessing that was there for them.

Now, while he could do this solemnly, yet he often used people so that they might be channels of blessing for his people. And when we come to the New Testament, we find exactly the same, that God deigns to use human vessels for the care and blessing and nurture of his beloved people. Now, I think it's very important to see this, that God cares for his people. Well, you might say that's very obvious. Well, if we really get it into our soul that God [00:05:02] does care for his people, we understand something of the heart of God and we understand something too of our value to God. Because we as humans, we care for the things that are of value, things that we really like, things that we possess, that we don't want to lose, we still a great deal of care and attention upon them. Now, God has his people. He had them in the past, he has them now, and God has expressed his care, his love towards them because they are precious to him. Now, just you think of any company of people, just forget for the moment about Christians, and think of any company of people and say now, just live the way you want to live. Now, just let everybody do what they want to do, just let everybody please themselves. Well, it wouldn't be long before there would be utter chaos. There would [00:06:02] be no cohesion, there would be no integrity, everything would just be haywire. Now, this kind of thing cannot exist in the Christian company because God is not the author of confusion. God is not the author of disorder. God wants to see order amongst his people, he wants to see them moving forward according to his mind and will, and so he provides those who are able to help in this respect. You remember Moses was caring for the people of Israel until his father Jethro gave him some very sound advice. Now he says if you carry on like this, he says, you'll never be able to attend to it, far too much for you, too many problems. He says you're judging all the difficulties of the people from morning till night and you'll wear yourself out and you won't be able to perform your great service to God. And so Moses, he chose evil men, men of truth, men who hated covetousness, men who feared [00:07:08] God. You see they had excellent qualifications. And those men he appointed over Israel that they might attend to the various duties that were necessary. And so the burden was shared and all the problems were attended to. Now I believe this is what we find in the Christian church as we find it here in 1st Timothy and as we find a history of it in the Acts of the Apostles. One of the outstanding cases is in Acts chapter 6 where we remember the Christian widows and the Hebrew widows ought to have been the objects of care without partiality. But instead of that, the Hebrew widows were being attended to and the Grecian widows were being neglected. So they came to the Apostles and the Apostles said yes, this is something that is wrong, it has to be righted. And they said to the company in Jerusalem, search for [00:08:05] seven men full of faith in the Holy Spirit, which they did. And those seven men they attended to the problem in hand and the widows were cared for and this matter of contention was healed. Now this is the kind of thing that we expect in the Christian company. Those who are addicted to the care of the people of God. And we find them mentioned in the New Testament as elders and we find them mentioned as deacons. We find other names, bishops, ministers, servants. And of course when we read the authorised version we say bishops, elders, servants, deacons. Why haven't we those people? Why haven't we bishops? Why haven't we elders? Why haven't we deacons? It's there in the Bible. Well of course we [00:09:07] have to examine what these terms mean. And with the help of the Lord we want to say a little about it tonight. Now here in chapter 3 Paul says, it's a true saying, if a man desired the office of a bishop he desired a good work. Now first of all we want to draw attention to this word office in the authorised version. If you have Mr. Diver's translation with you at the moment, you'll find that he says if any man desires the work of an elder. Now that's a bit different. He dispenses with this word office and he uses the term work, the work of an elder. Now I'm not a Greek scholar, my brother Nigel isn't here tonight, he can correct me if I'm wrong if you tell him about it. But I understand that [00:10:03] there isn't any word in the Greek language in this section that indicates an office. I think that's very important. Because amongst the saints of God today there isn't any such thing as an official. All the service and the work of God is spiritual. Now when we think of an official, we think of a man who has been appointed or is qualified

to fill a certain position, a position of authority where he directs, where his word has to be obeyed and where he is some measure of prominence. Now this word does not obtain in the New Testament as far as I understand. Now if I'm wrong, please correct me after the meeting. But it's very important I think to observe this, that any service rendered amongst the people of God is spiritual. That is, it's done in the power of the spirit and in the humility of [00:11:06] Christ. In all of the New Testament, apart from the apostles who are unique with authority and power, apart from them you'll find that the setting up of the Christian company and its functioning is that they're all together on the same platform of blessing but occupying different positions and all contributing to the spiritual well-being of the whole without anyone claiming any position of preeminence or importance. Now that's very, very important because the natural heart desires prominence, desires preeminence and loves authority so that it can direct and demand and enforce. Now this kind of thing we can say most definitely is out as far as the Christian company is concerned. And we're all to serve in the humility [00:12:03] of Christ. If we have of course the spirit of diatribes that you find in John's epistle, there we find a man who arrogates to himself a certain position of power and authority and what havoc he caused in that assembly, even casting out the apostles. What presumption. So from the very beginning we want to stress this, that the idea of a notice that someone is appointed to by vote or by appointment any other way is certainly not found in the New Testament and we hope to show this as we go along. Now we want to get to this term bishop because it's found in other portions of the scriptures. And you'll notice, or shall I tell you the passage, it's better to turn to Acts chapter 20.

[00:13:08] Turn to Acts chapter 20 and verse 17.

And from my leaders he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church. Now note that he called the elders of the church. Now further down in verse 28.

Take heed therefore unto yourselves and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost has made you overseers. Now note that word, overseers. He's addressing the Ephesian elders and then he says to them that the Holy Spirit has made them overseers. Now the importance of noticing this is that the Greek word that is translated overseers is exactly the same word that is [00:14:08] translated bishop. Now the inference is obvious. That elders, bishops, overseers all designate the same person. Now they don't in the Ecclesiastical setup in what is called hierarchy in Christendom today. Bishops, deacons, elders. I shouldn't have brought in deacons. Bishops, overseers, elders are all the same persons doing the same kind of work in the scriptures. But they convey different ideas in Christendom at the present moment. Now come again to Titus chapter 1. Because we want to confirm what we are saying from scripture.

[00:15:06] Titus chapter 1 and verse 5. For this cause left thy thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city as I had appointed thee. Now verse 7. Now he's talking about the same persons. For a bishop must be blameless.

Now there again is the scriptural proof that bishops and elders are exactly the same person doing the same kind of work as far as the New Testament record is concerned. Now one other scripture in the fifth chapter of 1 Peter. 1 Peter chapter 5. And verse 1. The [00:16:11] elders which are among you I exhort who are also an elder. That's verse 1. Now verse 2.

Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight. Now that's the verb of the noun overseer. Taking the oversight. So here again we find scriptural confirmation from what we are saying that the terms elder, bishop, overseer all denote the same person.

I hope that that is clear. There are three scriptures that we refer to and they are all saying the same thing. Now we believe that the term elder is to indicate a person of [00:17:01] spiritual maturity. We've already quoted in 1 Timothy that the person is not to be a novice. That doesn't necessarily mean he's not to be a young person. We could have a young person with maturity. We could have a young man who is married, who has a wife and family and be mature in the things of the Lord and would be perfectly entitled to do the work of an elder. But a novice suggests a newly converted person without experience without sufficient knowledge and not qualified to perform the service. So what we keep in our minds is that an elder is a mature person competent to help the saints of God. And of course when we read down these verses we find very very high qualifications are demanded of those who seek to care for the people of God. It's no light matter. A most responsible matter. And so those qualifications are of a most exacting kind so that those who have [00:18:06] them are well equipped to care for the saints of God. Now the term overseer of course explains itself. If we have an overseer at work his responsibility is to see if the work flows, that those who are doing the jobs are doing them correctly and if they're making mistakes to correct them and to make sure that everything is done according to the master's desire. Now an overseer amongst the people of God is exactly the same. It's not a person who stands with a big stick and bullies the Christians into doing what is right. That's not the idea. He's looking over the saints of God tenderly, affectionately, with care and love at his heart. While he sees faults he's not putting himself on a pedestal and talking about those [00:19:03] faults in a patronising manner and bringing home to the person the seriousness of their faults but doing nothing to correct them. That's not the idea of the overseer. He's caring with all the love and concern in his heart for the people of God and he tries to correct them and be a blessing to them. Now in I think it's the 34th chapter of Ezekiel we'll find that God has a very striking indictment against his shepherds. Now we have the term in the New Testament shepherds, leaders, sinners. People who are caring for the saints of God. Now we find that those shepherds of Israel they sadly fail in their care for the people of God. They cared for their own interests but the sheep that went astray they never sought them out. They never went after them to find them. The sheep that were wounded [00:20:01] they never bound them up. The sheep that were hungry they never fed them. They didn't care for the sheep they only cared for their own interests. Now Paul in Acts 20 you remember he said to the elders shepherd or feed the flock of God which is amongst you. Now there's the responsibility of those who care for the saints of God. There are some farmers here who know far more about feeding sheep than I do but I know that there's much more to feeding sheep than getting a few bales of hay and putting them in the field and let the sheep do away with themselves. It's much more than feeding. There's care and attention required and he's a poor shepherd that thinks he's done his work if all that he does is give them a bale of hay. Now when we transfer this to work amongst the people of God we are confronted with the same problem. Not enough for me to stand up here for instance [00:21:02] behind this table and tell you something about the Bible. Most important in its own place but that's not enough. Can I get sufficiently near to you so that I can understand and hear your problems and by the help of God try and correct them and give some feeling of love and care and concern and I think this is the true character of a shepherd. Indeed in Ephesians 4 you remember that one of the gifts that is given is the shepherd teacher, the pastor teacher. They're both combined and I believe the pastor is very akin to the elder, the shepherd, the leader. And he's not only saying what is to be done but he gets sufficiently near to the saints to wash their feet if you like and you have to be near the saints to wash their feet and to care for them and to be a blessing to them. Now notice again [00:22:02] in 1 Peter chapter 5 when Peter wrote to the saints he said to them, they were elders, and he also says I am an elder. Now Peter, the one for whom they claim the title of being the first pope and the place of preeminence and greatness says I also am an elder. He didn't say I am the elder above all the elders. He said I am an elder among the elders, not one above many but one amongst many. And that devoted servant of the Lord he took his place amongst them just as a fellow elder and

he exhorted them too to care for the flock of God. Notice, not their flock, the flock of God. And it's always the flock of God and that puts it in its proper place. The flock belongs to God and if it belongs to God it's [00:23:04] entitled to the best possible care and attention and those who serve are doing so in a most honoured place. Now when we read down, I'm not going to go into all the details of the qualifications of an elder but I'm going to divide them up into three classes and I think if you read the portion you'll find that what I'm saying is true. First of all there is what he is personally. His personal standing and relationship and responsibility before God. Secondly there is what he is in his home. And thirdly there is what he is in relation to the saints if you like in the assembly. Now it might be that we aspire to some form of service in the assembly but if we have failed in person, if we have failed in our [00:24:03] forms then we are disqualified from partaking in any definite spiritual service amongst the saints of God. It's absolutely necessary that we are right personally before we attempt to try and help others. And so dear friends, I would exhort you as I would exhort myself to be concerned about our own personal standing before the Lord before we embark on any service whatever it is for the interest of the Lord. And then the home circle, a very important place where Christ is honoured, where the rights of God are maintained and so if a man is right in himself and right in his home then he is ably qualified to help the people of God. And I think the inference is this, that if a man is right in himself and he is right in his home there is nobody who can come round and say to him, it's all right [00:25:03] you talking but look at yourself or look at your home. You see if he is right in himself and he is right in his home and he is trying to help the saints of God nobody can come round and say to him you are not qualified to do this kind of thing. And so I think and I find what I am saying is true that in these three areas the elder has to be right personally in his home and in the assembly. Someone said, I think it was in the Bible reading, what about the appointment of elders? Well if we come to the New Testament we find there are three things that are mentioned in an elder having this place. First of all by apostolic choice. Now the apostles were in a unique place. They were the link between the Lord [00:26:01] having gone on high and the commencement of the Christian testimony here upon earth. No man were so well qualified to present the truth of God as they were. For three and a half years they had accompanied the Lord, they had heard him ministering, they had seen the wonderful things that he did, they had seen him ascend back to glory and so they were ably qualified to represent him in all things pertaining to the church for the poderic. Now there isn't anything in the Bible to indicate that there is such a thing as apostolic succession. The Lord never spoke about it, the apostles never spoke about it and there is nothing in the New Testament to show that they handed on their authority to others and that what existed in them was to continue. We believe that apostolic authority died with the apostles and so we find that they, as they went about, they appointed elders [00:27:07] in the assemblies that were formed and by the wisdom that was given to them of the Lord they appointed persons who were qualified to help in relation to the things of God. Now there are two other things, we mention one of them in Acts 20, it says the Holy Spirit hath appointed you as overseers, that's the first thing. And the second thing is, as we find here in chapter 3, if a man desired the work of an elder. Now there we have two things, the Holy Spirit choosing and a man desiring. Now I believe that these two things still exist.

I believe that the choice of the Holy Spirit and the exercise of the individual coalesce and when you see a person with the qualities of an elder you can say there is a person [00:28:05] who has been empowered by the Spirit to care amongst the saints of God and it is connected with his own personal desire. I believe that these two things exist today. What we don't find is anywhere in the New Testament that the members of the local company came together and had a vote and certain people were elected to serve as elders. There isn't any place in the New Testament that I can find where this kind of thing happens. In the first epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians, chapter 5, Paul said to them, know those who take the lead amongst you, know them. Now isn't it inconceivable that the

Thessalonians should be directed to know them if they had already been appointed by vote. If the assembly had come together [00:29:03] and had appointed elders by vote, everybody would have known these are the persons who are our elders, we have appointed them. But, says Paul to the Thessalonians, know them, observe them, discern them. They are there to see by the qualifications that they possess. So I think, dear brethren, we would say that any company that attempts to elect elders by vote are doing something that scripture doesn't want them to do. Now we come to another question, why do we not have elders? And it's wrong to say that we haven't elders. We have people who are concerned about the well-being of the saints of God. In private praying, in public praying, and by their attitude towards the people of God, they certainly indicate that they are elders. They have cared for the saints of God. We don't say brother so-and-so is elder so-and-so. We don't give him a title [00:30:06] because we've already seen that there is no such thing as office amongst the saints of God. But we do have work, and that work, thank God, is being done.

Now let us suppose for one moment that we did come together in this hall and say, well we want to appoint elders. On what ground do we come together? Well, we say we want to come together as the assembly of God in this place most of, on the ground of the one body, and we want to appoint elders that they might function here. Now if we understand the truth of the assembly, we would be appointing elders for the assembly in Lowestock, not simply for the company here. If we understood the truth of the assembly correctly, all right, suppose we appointed twelve persons to be elders here. Would they be recognised by any [00:31:01] other Christian company in Lowestock? And of course you tell me the answer, no, they wouldn't be recognised. And if they appointed elders, would we recognise them? And the answer is no. So you see, because of the utter confusion and breakdown that exists in the assembly public today, we shouldn't attempt to appoint elders, but we should make sure that the work of an elder is being done. And I believe, dear Brethren, that while we refuse to appoint elders, and rightly so, it may be that we've sadly fallen down in attending to the work of the elders, in the care and attention being paid to the saints of God in whatever way they require. How often do Christians leave Christian companies and nobody makes any attempt to visit them, to see why they left, to enter into their problems, to get near enough to [00:32:05] them to ascertain why they left? If we find persons are sick spiritually, do we get near enough then to apply healing ministry, the love of Christ? If we see them wandering away, if we see them ill, if we see them neglected, are we concerned enough for the interest of Christ to get near to them and care for them that they might be blessed? Now this is the kind of work that is absolutely essential, should be functioning in any local company of Christians. Now we come to this other person called a deacon. There are various words used for servant in the authorised version and there are various words in the Greek which [00:33:01] are translated in various ways in the authorised. But this word deacon is one that is a very wide application. I was looking in one of Brother Elgin's Bible treasuries this morning and my eye happened to note just a little paragraph and it said, deacons attended to the money matters in the church and elders attended to the spiritual matters. Now that's an extremely elementary approach to the matter I can assure you, which I hope to show up in scripture. Now this term deacon is derived from a Greek word diakonos and as I've said already it's widely used in scripture to cover a variety of work. The common idea is that the deacon does the kind of work that's mentioned in Acts chapter 6. Widows required some attention, persons were appointed to care, hence their deacons. Now that's the common idea. I've [00:34:06] written a few things down here and if you have a pen and pencil or if you can remember them, a tape recorder will, but if you can remember them it will give you some idea of the service. Now Luke chapter 10 and verse 14 refers to household duties. You'll find the word ministering. Acts 1 and 17 is apostolic service. Acts 6 and verse 1 what we've already referred to, the care of widows. Matthew 4 and 11, when the Lord Jesus was in the wilderness the angels came and ministered unto him. Deacon service. Matthew chapter 20 and verse 28, I think I can

remember the scripture, it says the son of man came not to be ministered [00:35:02] unto but to minister and to give his life a ransom for many. Deacon service. Think of the Lord being a deacon. The Lord just doling out money as it was required. Not in that verse. He came to minister and to give his life a ransom for many. Romans 15 and 8, I think I can remember the scripture, the Lord Jesus was made a minister of the circumcision. Deacon service. Acts chapter 6 and verse 4, you remember that the apostle says it's not right that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. We'll give ourselves over to prayer and the ministry of the word. Deacon service. Ephesians 4 and 12, the gifts are given for the work of the ministry. Again, the same word, deacon service. Then 1 Timothy [00:36:04] 1 and 12, Paul was appointed to ministry. Paul was appointed to service. Was Paul appointed just to look after money matters amongst the people of God? Not at all. He was appointed to be the apostle to the Gentiles. Now here are two that may lift your eyebrows. Romans 13 and 4, a magistrate in the service that he does is doing deacon service. We think of the magistrates in the world today and no one would ever dream of saying that magistrate is a deacon, lest of course he held that post in some company of Christians. But as a deacon, as a magistrate rather, no one would ever dream of saying yes, he's a deacon. 2 Corinthians 11 and 15, Satan's agents transform themselves into ministers of life. Deacon service. Now [00:37:05] you see, this word simply means a job of work that has to be done. Now whether it's the apostle to the Gentiles or the apostles attending to their apostolic duties in the ministry of the world or the Lord Jesus Christ himself in all his glory ministering, giving his life a ransom for many, the same word underlies them all and denotes what I've said already, it's work that has to be done and it's extremely varied in character. Now this is far removed from the general idea of a deacon. Now I'm indebted to another for this when I was informed by reading that when the Greek word doulos is used, it means a bond slave and that's the bond slave's work, it is in relation to his master. But when the word diatonis is [00:38:04] used, it's a servant in relation to his work. Well, in all businesses there are servants who perform different duties. They can all be classified as servants to their master but they're all doing different varieties of work, different forms of work. They're all servants but they're doing different jobs and that's the idea behind a deacon. Note, dear brethren, thank God there is a variety of work to be found amongst the saints of God and we can't do everything. No one person can do everything. There's something for each one to do and if each one attempts to do a work as it's laid upon his and her heart, then thank God the burdens will be shared and there will be, shall we say, a community of work of a spiritual character that binds the saints together and makes sure [00:39:01] that nothing is left undone. And if we see something to be done, then thank God we can attempt to do it not in our own power but in the grace of Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Now I think I've said enough about these two things, the elders and the deacons, and I think I've said enough from scripture to show their true character in the world of God. Now I want to say a few words before we finish about the verses we read in chapter 1 about Hymenaeus and Alexander who were delivered unto Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme and then the sin that is rebuked and also our personal responsibility.

And what I'm referring to here is the discipline that is necessary amongst the saints of God [00:40:07] to make sure that what belongs to God is maintained according to his mind and will. In the Old Testament there was no provision made for persons who sinned willfully. If persons sinned inadvertently, then God made provision for them. But willful, deliberate, premeditated sin, there was no provision made for it whatsoever. Now Paul is referring to something of this kind when he's speaking about two men, Hymenaeus and Alexander who blaspheme. Now this is an extremely serious sin. We're all subject to sin. We can go outside this hall this evening after listening to the word of God and we're in Satan's realm and we're all subject to succumb, we're all prone to succumb to some form of sin or other. [00:41:04] That's a different thing altogether from following a course of sin, our habitual conduct day by day, premeditated, willful, deliberate sin. That's a different thing

altogether. And the scriptures indicate this kind of thing and I believe these men, Alexander, Hymenaeus, were guilty of this kind of thing. They deliberately, willfully blasphemed God or the Lord Jesus Christ, something that was fundamental to the Christian faith. Now, says Paul, the discipline that belongs to the house of God demands that those persons be expelled or, if you like, excommunicated from the Christian company. Now in 1 Corinthians 5, when Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he spoke in exactly the same way about the man who was guilty of such [00:42:04] abominable behaviour in Corinth. So much so that it was publicly spoken about. It was a crying shame that a man called a Christian should behave in such a way. And Paul says you'd rather not to be ashamed of yourselves that you haven't dealt with this thing. He says you're boasting about your gift and your knowledge and your ability and you haven't mourned that this shameful behaviour is still amongst you and a dishonour to the name of the Lord Jesus. Now he says put it out from among you. Expel it. And of course it meant that the man was excommunicated from the Christian company. Now we've got to make this clear. If a person is a member of the body of Christ, it doesn't matter how much he sins, he ought not to sin, but it doesn't matter how much he sins, he cannot be put out of the body. He's there forever. The scriptures indicate to us that God sets the members in the body [00:43:07] and if God sets them there, they can never be taken out. But when it comes to the discipline of the house of God, there are privileges, there are responsibilities, and if a man or a woman does not live according to the principles of the house of God, then it is right that they should be expelled or excommunicated. They should be denied the privileges that belong to the house. Now this is the most extreme form of discipline that can be enacted amongst the saints of God. And ought not to be done until every effort has been made to bring the person to repentance and an acknowledgement of their sin. If a person acknowledges that they have sinned and are demonstrably repentant, then the forgiveness of the saints should be operated. But where there is self-will and a refusal to repent, there is no other [00:44:05] course left to the people of God but to put the person out from among them. Now we come to chapter 5, verse 20. Some sin, not to be excommunicated, but something that shouldn't have been done. Now perhaps we have an instance of this where Peter, the apostle, was dissimulating with the Jews and the Gentiles. You remember the history of this is in the epistle to the Galatians. When Peter was with the Jews, then he lived like a Jew, and he observed their customs and their ways. And when he was with the Gentiles, then he was like the Gentiles. But the main direction seemed to be pleasing the Jews when with all the knowledge that he possessed, he ought to have indicated to them the law [00:45:01] was finished forever as a means of blessing. Christianity had superseded the law and he ought to have known better. Now when Paul heard about this conduct, he went to Peter and he withstood him to the face. And he rebuked him because of this conduct. It was a form of action that was leading the saints astray. And even Barnabas, a very able man, he was being led astray by Peter's action. And I suppose that others were too. So Paul didn't speak about it, he didn't go round all the meetings and say, you know what Peter's doing? You know what Peter's saying? He didn't go about criticising Peter. He went straight to his face and in the presence of the brethren he rebuked him before all. Now that put an end to the matter. Peter was adjusted. It put an end to this dissimulating way. Now it says that the others might fear. Now if there is sufficient power amongst the saints [00:46:04] of God to publicly rebuke persons who are not walking correctly, obviously it's going to have an effect upon others and say now we need to be careful what we say and what we do. The Lord wants us to do what is right and if we are going to do what is wrong we are going to be publicly rebuked for it. Now I believe this is a form of service to the Lord that requires a great deal of spiritual power. But there it is in the word of God and it is to be followed by those who are able to do it. Now lastly, it says in verse 22, neither be partaker of other men's sins. Now this is intensely individual. I wonder how do we become partaker of other men's sins? Suppose someone tells us an obscene story [00:47:03] and we laugh. Is that not partaking of another man's sins? Instead of rebuking such talk, if we show that we have some interest and some sympathy with

that kind of thing, if we are asked to do something that is underhand or shady and we say well I have no other choice and you partake of it perhaps reluctantly, you are still partaking of someone else's sins. They are the prime mover in it, you are involved in it and you become equally guilty. Now this matter of being guilty and yet not actually doing the thing is something that scripture teaches. No amount of argument or persuasion can help us to see why it is when we say Godspeed to a person who holds bad doctrine we become partaker of their evil [00:48:04] deeds and that is what John says in his epistle. If a man comes to your door and he doesn't bring the doctrine of Christ, he says that Christ is not the Son, he says that Christ was not God, he denies the Bible, he denies the miracles, he denies the truth of Christianity and you say well come into my house, I'll give you a cup of tea, it's cold. Or when he goes away you say well God bless you, I hope you get on alright. Now that's equivalent to saying Godspeed to him. Now the Bible says that you become partaker of his evil deeds.

Now again if we reason about it, if we argue about it, how far will we get on? The Bible says that by so doing we become partaker of his evil deeds. Now this indicates that a very high standard of self-discipline is required of each one of us, that we don't [00:49:01] allow ourselves to be involved in anything whatsoever that is a dishonour to the Lord's name. We've spoken about the assembly discipline, we've spoken about a form of discipline that doesn't go as far as excommunication, but here is a form of self-discipline that we make sure we are not in any way laying our hands upon something that's wrong before the Lord and by so doing becoming contaminated by it. Indeed we have to remember even in a collective sense that if we allow some form of evil to be there, then we're all guilty because the Bible says a little leaven leavens the whole lump. And we might say well it's that person that's wrong and yet we might refuse to judge that person because of partiality, business connections, relatives. We might say well we can't do this kind of thing, if we lose that brother we might lose half the meeting. And there are all sorts of persuasions [00:50:05] that come into the mind and we leave this matter and it's not judged and the Bible says a little leaven leavens the whole lump. In other words because that sin is there, known and unjudged, the whole company becomes guilty before God. So you can see here brethren that in connection with the holiness that becomes the house of God, a great deal is demanded of us to stand for what is right before God and make sure that the things of God are maintained in holiness and in purity. Now whatever else we may remember of the meeting tonight, there is one thing I would like to stress and that is if we are going to attempt to serve amongst the people of God, let us remember to do it in the grace of Christ. It's this that means so much. He showed us the way to serve, he watched the disciples speak, he humbled himself [00:51:03] and became obedient unto death and any service that is done must be done in this spirit if it is going to be of any worth, of any benefit, of any profit to the saints of God. We all know how much we have benefited because the Lord Jesus humbled himself and became obedient unto death and if we can serve in that same spirit, then thank God others will get the benefit. May it be so, for his name's sake.