

HONORING, DISCIPLINING, & APPOINTING ELDERS

1 Timothy 5:17-25

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Note: The following are the pastor's notes used in preaching this message. This is not a complete, word-for-word transcription of what was preached. These notes serve as a companion to the complete message, which is available by listening to the audio version. Bible quotes are primarily from ESV.

INTRODUCTION

This week the Spirit will show us how to relate to leaders in God's family, by teaching us about "Honoring, Disciplining, and Appointing Elders" from 1 Timothy 5:17-25.

I. HONORING ELDERS (1 Timothy 5:17-18)

A. Honor all elders (1 Timothy 5:17a)

Honor here is the same word as in 1 Timothy 5:3 with regard to honoring widows, and thus carries the same meaning. There is to be an internal respect and reverence for the elders of the church.

Rule here means literally *to stand before*, and is translated elsewhere *lead* (cf. Romans 12:8). 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 gives another sense of the term. So *lead* or *have charge over* add further nuance to the term. Yet we need not look that far in Paul to discern the best use of the term, because it appears in 1 Timothy, in the context of elders, *manage*. This signals that elders are managing God's household; they are to be dependent on their Head (of the household)—Jesus Christ—as they manage or oversee or lead the affairs of the church. In fact, the translation *rule* is only used here in this text to translate that word, which is curious, because two chapters earlier—in the context of God's church with elders, the same term is translated *manage*.

As elders manage/lead, the church honors.

B. Doubly-honor some elders (1 Timothy 5:17b)

1. Which ones?

There are those apparently who lead, and those who lead excellently, especially (or *particularly*) those elders who labor/toil/spend a large amount of time and energy on preaching and teaching. *Labor* is the word *kopiaw*. It means to be tired, to grow weary, to struggle, to work hard, to trouble oneself. In other places, it can mean to lose heart, to become discouraged, to almost give up. It's the body-taxing, mind-consuming, emotion-draining, soul-wearying labor of ministry that commends this kind of man as worthy of double-honor. We must doubly-honor those who lead well and labor in this way.

2. How so?

Double-honor here refers to both internal respect and reverence and external, material honor as well. The elders who work hard in preaching and teaching deserve to be compensated for their work, so they can dedicate their time and effort toward the Word-work they're called to do. It's full-time compensation for full-time dedication.

3. Who says?

I'm glad you asked...

a. Moses said so (Deuteronomy 25:4)

In Deuteronomy, buried deep in various sundry laws, is a law prohibiting the Israelites from muzzling their oxen. The oxen would be led around a circular stone threshing floor, where the grain would be tossed on the floor. As the ox would walk around and over the grain stalks, it would pound out the grain. Israelite farmers were to allow their oxen to be sustained as they worked. In 1 Corinthians 9:8-10, Paul states that there is a larger principle regarding that law—that is, that the one doing ministry work should derive material benefit.

b. Jesus said so (Luke 10:7)

Now, don't miss how remarkable this little quote is. In my Bible, it's in red font, because Paul is quoting Luke 10:7. Luke would have been written just a year or two prior to Paul writing this letter of 1 Timothy, and here's Paul, quoting the newly written gospel of Luke as divine Scripture! And in quoting Jesus there, Paul is stating that his principle of paying preaching and teaching elders is in the Scripture—it's biblical.

II. DISCIPLINING ELDERS (1 Timothy 5:19-20)

A. How it begins

An accusation against an elder may definitely be brought, but with this safeguard: the elder doesn't have to answer to a charge brought against him unless there's sufficient witnesses to his sin. Most likely a breach of the elder characteristics in 1 Timothy 3:1-8. Here with elders, two or three witnesses are needed to *begin* the process of elder discipline.

B. How it progresses

If an accusation is brought forward, and he goes on sinning, then he must be disciplined. The progress of elder discipline parallels general church discipline in Matthew 18. How does the discipline process end? Well, hopefully it ends with that sinning elder being repentant—turning afresh to God and away from sin! That's the heart and goal behind church discipline no matter who it is—layperson or elder! But if he doesn't stop sinning, then it ends like this...

C. How it ends

The discipline process concludes when the elder is rebuked in the presence of all, Paul says. To whom does *all* refer? All the elders, or all the church? All the church, in parallel to Matthew 18. Notice the reason why a public rebuke is needed [1 Timothy 5:20b]. Remember Proverbs 1:7? The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, out of which all the rest of the Proverbs flow. And it's this kind of fear that is evoked in elder discipline. When elder discipline ends this way, it reminds the church to take sin seriously and thus to fear the Lord. Wow, this is serious stuff. But it's almost like Paul can sense that Timothy's and the church's resolve to doubly-honor preaching and teaching elders, and to discipline sinning elders, would weaken over time. He knew we wouldn't be inclined to follow the instruction manual on these points, so he adds a big warning sign in 1 Timothy 5:21.

III. A SACRED CHARGE TO KEEP (1 Timothy 5:21)

Paul reminds Timothy of whose presence he is standing when pressing home these house rules concerning compensation and discipline. Apparently there was some corruption going on with regard to elder pay and discipline. So Paul commands that these house rules be enacted.

A. Unbiased

To show bias is to show special treatment to certain parties, in this context, with regard to who gets compensated and how much or how someone is disciplined or not.

B. Impartial

To show partiality is to show special treatment to certain parties, in this context, with regard to who gets compensated and how much, or how someone is disciplined or not.

In the presence of God and Christ and His holy angels, we must resist all bias and partiality in the honoring and disciplining of elders.

IV. APPOINTING ELDERS (1 Timothy 5:22-25)

A. Slow down (1 Timothy 5:22)

We should understand the *laying on of hands* to mean what we have seen elsewhere in this letter; that is, the ancient apostolic commissioning (2 Timothy 1:6), affirmed by the elders (1 Timothy 4:14), and carried out in the church. It's something similar to today's concept of ordination or commissioning for gospel ministry. And Paul is saying, don't be quick to make men elders. Slow down, take your time, and watch potential men carefully.

B. Stay pure (1 Timothy 5:22-23)

The point here seems a bit more difficult to get at, but Paul seems to be telling Timothy...

1. Don't join their rush to appoint (1 Timothy 5:22b)

Ordaining (*laying on of hands*) without vetting would render Timothy at least partially responsible for the wrong that those elders might eventually commit. So Timothy is to slow down, not join the others who want to hastily fast-track elders, stay pure, and thus steer clear of any collusion or politicking.

2. Don't join their push to abstain (1 Timothy 5:23)

Timothy was abstaining from wine apparently. Abstinence popped up in a previous context (cf. 1 Timothy 4:3). Paul is perhaps telling Timothy to stop abstaining from drink as the aesthetes were practicing, who taught that godliness was equal to abstinence from certain food and drink. If that is true, maybe Timothy needed to take some wine for his stomach!

C. Sift well (1 Timothy 5:24-25)

1. Carefully examine the sins of elder candidates (1 Timothy 5:24)

There are some elder candidates whose sins are very quickly apparent. There are other men who are also not fit for the office, but what disqualifies them is not as immediately apparent. The "sins of others appear later" hopefully means that they appear before the candidate is appointed...hopefully. This should be the prayer and work of both the church who affirms the elder candidate and the elders who appoint the candidate.

2. Carefully examine the good works of elder candidates (1 Timothy 5:25)

In similar fashion to 1 Timothy 5:24, there are those whose good works are immediately apparent, and those whose good works have been done behind the scenes and which deserve to be drawn out.

CONCLUSION

So what is the Bible saying to us this morning? To honor elders on the inside and to doubly-honor those who lead well in the labor of preaching and teaching. To discipline elders when need be, according to the pattern set down here. And to appoint elders slowly, purely, and carefully. Though these instructions may only be needed on occasion, when we follow these instructions, they are absolutely vital to the life and health of the church. We need to know this manual and its instructions today, so that we can act on them to address matters of eldership in the future.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Context

- What was the main point of the passage immediately before this week's passage?
- Are there logical or thematic connections to the passage from this week's sermon?

Observation

- Are there any major sub-sections or breaks in the text?
- Are there key connecting words (for, therefore, but, because) that indicate the logical flow of the passage?
- What is the main point or points? What supporting points does the author make?
- What surprises are there in the flow of the argument?

Meaning

- How does this text relate to other parts of the book?
- How does the passage relate to Jesus?
- What does this teach you about God?

Application

- What does this teach you about you?
- How does this passage challenge (or confirm) your understanding?
- Is there some attitude you need to change?
- How does this passage call on you to change the way you live?