



“HOW TO RESPECT ELDERS”

1 Timothy 5:17-25

Theme: *A Church cannot rise higher than the level of its leadership.*

Introduction: Too often, people desire leaders who reflect themselves. Throughout the history of God’s people, they turned away from God because His standards were unattainable – they desired a ruler who would be like them and whose standards would reflect their priorities. They rejected the rule of God and wanted a human king in the days of Samuel. Hosea noted that the quality of leadership determined how high the people achieved – Hosea 4:9 – “like people, like priest.” For this reason, God has established characteristics required of spiritual leadership – elders who maintain the conviction of truth, commitment to truth, and consecration to truth to lead believers in how to follow Christ more. Thus, our text informs us of how important it is for a church to value biblically qualified elders and pastors. This is crucial since ***“A church cannot rise higher than the level of its leadership.”***

I. **COMPENSATION – 5:17-18**

A. **The Worthiness of Honor – 17a**

1. The discussion as Paul is advising Timothy is on how to recover the respect for those in the church who are marginalized or dishonored by false teachers.
2. The comments on honoring widows transitions to the obligation by the church to honor the biblically qualified elders described in ***1 Timothy 3:1-7***.
3. It is assumed that if the church has carefully qualified the men to serve as elders/pastors, they will be faithful – ***“The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor ...”***
4. ***“worthy”*** [ἀξιόω] – conveys that they are considered suitable for compensation or that the church must pay sufficient attention to their needs to ensure they are without deprivation or need.
5. The term ***“rule”*** [προΐστημι] – carries ***not*** a dictatorial, tyrannical exercise of absolute authority but to “stand before” [or “to stand first”] the people having a genuine interest in helping to influence them in their devotion to Christ – the Chief Shepherd.
6. Such men who set an example of what it means to follow Christ, urging others to join them in following Christ, are to be “honored” – cp. ***1***

Thessalonians 5:12-13.

7. These men are to be honored [τιμή] – a term that means to demonstrate esteem or reverence; to set a value for someone or something and often includes financial support.
8. *“double honor”* [διπλοῦς] – conveys that a congregation ought not to seek to get a bargain – to get maximum benefit for the lowest possible cost, but to be willing to demonstrate generous support for such leaders.
9. In what ways are you being a blessing to those who are in leadership over you? – cp. *Hebrews 13:17.*
 - a) *Consider their perspectives as meaningful, significant, and influential.*
 - b) *Initiate spending quality time with elders - don't wait for them to chase you down.*
 - c) *Recognize their achievements for the Lord - acknowledge when they have helped you follow Christ more.*
 - d) *Assist them in their tasks - be available to help.*
 - e) *Seek their advice on matters through which you are working - don't make the mistake of having to recover from decisions which, had you sought advice, would have gone much differently.*
 - f) *Express appreciation for them publicly - with encouragement, gratitude, and even gifts.*
 - g) *Honor their preferences - even when you disagree.*

B. The Work to Be Honored – v. 17b

1. Although this ought to be something that a congregation does for any of its elders, those who are gifted called, and employed to teach God's Word are a particular focus of such honor – *“especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.”*
2. Notice it is not merely for those *“preaching and teaching,”* but those *“working hard.”*
3. *“work hard”* [κοπιᾶω] means to work to the point of weariness, to exert oneself physically, mentally, or spiritually.
4. Too many pastors do the opposite of what many churches do – they attempt to do the least amount of work for the most possible compensation.
5. When the church seeks a bargain or a pastor exercises a slothful ministry, God's church knows a severe disservice.
6. Pastors/elders must be all in – not marginalizing the ministry as an

interference in their more significant priorities but as an all-consuming passion for promoting the glory of Christ through shepherding, *“preaching, and teaching.”*

7. The two primary (but not exclusive) ministries of those who are “worthy” are “preaching and teaching.”
 - a) *“preaching” [λόγος] – an utterance or verbal presentation of truth, a term that can refer to a declaration or authoritative proclamation and is used in texts such as this to describe preaching.*
 - b) *“teaching” [διδασκαλία] – providing instruction.*
8. “Preaching calls for a heart response to God, while teaching is a necessary bulwark against heresy.”¹

C. The Ways to Honor – v. 18

1. Paul appeals to two Scriptural references to demonstrate the principle of financially supporting those who are given to vocational *“preaching and teaching”* – *“For the Scripture says ...”*
2. First, he references an Old Testament teaching: *“You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing”* – cp. *Deuteronomy 25:4*.
3. Second, he references a New Testament quote – demonstrating that the Scriptures were respected as Scripture as soon as they were written – *“The laborer is worthy of his wages.”* – cp. *Luke 10:7*.
4. Both indicate the responsibility of the congregation to care for the needs of those who labor hard – both providing for his needs as he serves (reimbursements) and after he serves (salary).
5. I wish to take this opportunity to express to you our most profound appreciation for the ways that you consistently seek to meet our needs and supply for us – Pat and I feel honored, even doubly honored.

II. CONFRONTATION – 5:19-21

A. Protection from False Accusations – v. 19

1. Another way elders can be honored is by protecting them from false accusations – *“Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses.”*
2. *“accusation” [κατηγορία]* – lit. a compound word from *kata* (“against”) and *agora* (“public meeting place”) - to speak against or bring charges (in

¹ John F. MacArthur Jr., *1 Timothy*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 220.

a courtroom setting).

3. The church is told that it ought not to allow a pastor or elder to be publicly accused by a disgruntled individual – *“do not receive”* [παραδέχομαι] – “to acknowledge something to be correct” or “to entertain.”
4. A man’s integrity is essential to his function as a pastor or elder – it cannot be allowed to be tainted or destroyed by unsubstantiated accusations and charges.

B. Prosecution for Factual Accusations – vv. 20-21

1. However, the church cannot shield a pastor from substantiated charges of impropriety or immorality – violating the standards outlined in *1 Timothy 3:1-7*.
2. If several can provide testimony of impropriety, the church must consider it – *“... except on the basis of two or three witnesses.”*
3. When such is the case, an elder who refuses to repent must be treated with objectivity and clarity – *“Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all ...”*
4. It is yet another way an elder can be cared for – by willingly confronting an errant elder and holding him accountable so that he might ultimately be restored.
5. *“rebuke”* [ἐλέγχω] - is the process of scrutinizing or carefully examining something to expose it or publicly pronouncing guilt – *“in the presence of all”* – meaning the entire church.
6. This is reminiscent of the instructions of the Lord in *Matthew 18:15-17*.
7. Part of the benefit is the impact of such intolerance of sin among the eldership on the other elders – *“... so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning.”*
8. The sins of leaders must be dealt with clearly, definitively, and exemplary, given the influence that leaders possess.

- a) *A person who sees an elder sin must begin confronting such an elder by examining their motive for doing so.*
 - b) *Next, a person must pray – seeking God’s guidance, wisdom, and humility.*
 - c) *Follow biblical principles such as Matthew 18.*
 - d) *Seek counsel from another biblically qualified elder.*
 - e) *Frame the confrontation with grace and truth, not harshly or condemning.*
 - f) *Maintain confidentiality – do not speak to anyone who is not part of the problem or the solution – respect privacy.*
 - g) *Be patient and trust God to work through your confrontation.*
9. Sins of elders must never be swept under the rug regardless of how gregarious, popular, entertaining, or captivating they might be in their ministries.
10. Paul emphasizes the sobriety of leaders being confronted for sin by stating: *“I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of His chosen angels, to maintain these principles without bias, doing nothing in a spirit of partiality.”*
- a) *“... in the presence of God” – Given that all of us will stand before God one day and on that day all secrets will be disclosed and faithfulness to Him will be assessed - Hebrews 12:23.*
 - b) *“... and of Christ Jesus” – Given that all judgment has been committed to the One who has paid the price for all our sin, tolerance of sin is an egregious offense - 1 John 2:28.*
 - c) *“... and of His chosen angels” – Given their example of obedience in contrast to the “angels who did not keep their own domain,” they will testify against others they witness in disobedience - cp. Ephesians 3:9-10.*
11. Hence, faithful believers understand that even as elders are to be “doubly honored” for their hard work in ministry, they should be rebuked publicly without favoritism, shelter, or preferential treatment.
12. No pastor ought to be covered for, excused, or exempted from the highest ethical, moral, and spiritual standards, and their sustained alignment is a perpetual qualification for the trust and influence they have in the hearts and minds of God’s people.
13. It must be remembered that elders are regular people who ought to receive the same benefit of the “one anothers” as any other believer – meaning that they must be confronted for sin by other believers who observe them in sin.

14. They should not be “spared” confrontation, and their sin must be punished even more severely than others – cp. [*James 3:1*](#).

III. CONSECRATION – **5:22-25**

A. **The Opportunity to Be Proven** – vv. 22-23

1. For this reason, the greatest care must be exercised when considering a man for the office of elder or pastor – *“Do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily ...”*
2. *“lay hands upon”* [ἐπιτίθημι] – came from the practice of laying hands on a sacrifice the solidarity with the animal, sanctifying it as dedicated to the Lord on behalf of the one whose hands are placed upon it – cp. [*1 Timothy 4:14*](#); [*2 Timothy 1:6*](#).
3. It refers to symbolically transferring honor or authority to someone, identifying them as sanctified to the Lord, to set them apart for ministry.
4. It is essentially what we consider the culmination of “ordination.”
5. To do this *“hastily”* [ταχέως] – means to elevate someone to the position of an elder before the church has had an opportunity to test them; this is forbidden:
 - a) *Thus, they cannot be a “new convert”* – cp. [*1 Timothy 3:6*](#).
 - b) *The church must have the opportunity to observe their confession of faith – to ensure their doctrine is orthodox.*
 - c) *Also, the church must observe their lives – whether they align with the characteristics Paul gave in 1 Timothy 3.*
6. To identify a man as an elder too quickly, before the opportunity to evaluate is provided, causes the persons who ordain him to share in the introduction of sin into the congregation – for as goes the leader, so go the people – *“... and thereby share responsibility for the sins of others ...”*
7. Whether it is a sin of deviation from a commitment to the truth of the Gospel or of moral laxity, lack of love and care for those in need, to promote a man to influence the people into error becomes an offense for which the entirety of the church becomes responsible.
8. Paul’s admonition is that the way to avoid becoming accountable for such sin in the church is to evaluate correctly and disqualify those who fail to represent Christ properly – *“keep yourself free from sin.”*
9. Paul then provides Timothy with a balancing comment – clearly, Timothy abstained from wine (intoxicants) out of a desire to remain above reproach, but Paul instructs him to treat his stomach ailment with wine –

“No longer drink water exclusively, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.”

10. Timothy was not to let his commitment to being above reproach injure his health.

B. The Objectivity in Being Proven – vv. 24-25

1. Things that Discredit Consecration – v. 24

- a) *The lack of spiritual qualities in some men is obvious or conspicuous, and this keeps them from ever being considered – “The sins of some men are quite evident [πρόδηλος] going before them to judgment” – known to all with their evaluation or “judgment” [κρίσις] – to assess for innocence or guilt – cp. [John 7:24](#).*
- b) *Some sins are not obvious but will only be observed when the congregation begins to look at their lives with evaluation - “... for others, their sins follow after” [ἐπακολουθέω] – “to trail behind.”*

2. Things that Demonstrate Consecration – v. 25

- a) *Still, others’ lives and qualifications are obvious or conspicuous, causing them to be considered for leadership roles – “Likewise also, deeds that are good are quite evident.”*
- b) *Yet, others’ qualities must be uncovered through the evaluation – “and those which are otherwise (than evident) cannot be concealed.”*

3. The essential principle here is that without proper evaluation, a congregation is culpable for placing a man into leadership – likely a reproof for how false teachers had been elevated to influence in Ephesus.

So What?

- 1. How can I actively honor an elder whose ministries directly impact my life?**
- 2. Are there ways that I notice an elder is failing to live or teach consistently with what the Scriptures teach?**
- 3. Have I given attention to gossip, innuendos, or slander against an elder when I should have refused?**
- 4. Am I praising God for the spiritual leadership God has provided me – by seeking to ensure they are successful in what God has called them to do?**

A church cannot rise higher than the level of its leadership.