

1 Timothy 5:17-6:2 Representing Christ

Think right and then act right because eyes are on us – we represent Jesus and don't want to give anyone cause to talk bad about Jesus. It's OK if people think bad of me because of God, but may no one ever think bad of God because of me!

Elders represent Jesus to the church; we all, as servants, represent Him to the world.

[17](#) Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. [18](#) For the Scripture says, "*You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,*" and, "*The laborer is worthy of his wages.*"

Point #1: Elders who represent the church well should receive double honor – that is, honor and honorarium. Paul makes this point by quoting from Moses about allowing the ox who turns the wheel of the mill to eat while it works, and from Jesus saying that those who work are worthy of pay.

This instruction relates to the leaders of the church who are actively engaged in overseeing its organization and instruction. The word elder here is presbuteros and is used interchangeably to mean elder, bishop, or pastor. They are all the same idea, the same office; they just have different languages and words behind them. These men are there to minister to people, to counsel, to support, to reach out, and to teach people and pray for people and oversee the administration of the church.

And going all the way back to the Old Testament, God commanded that the people should provide for the livelihood of the priests so they could focus on serving Him and helping people. As a result, Paul says there is nothing wrong with the elders who spend their lives teaching and caring for God's people to receive double honor for this.

Now, contrary to what some may try to teach, that doesn't mean twice the paycheck. As I mentioned, it means respect and remuneration, you think well of them and pay them so that they can continue to take care of you. Much like the widows we saw in the last chapter – the elderly widows who the church should take on in full time support were those who were already active in service and prayer. Providing for them just enabled them to keep on doing what they were already doing.

It should be the same way with elders or pastors – ministry should never be looked at as a job, though it is sometimes. I knew of a guy who was a chaplain in the Air Force, he had a degree in Archeology, Ph.D. I think, and he was looking for work, so he went and talked to an Air Force recruiter and they said, well with a degree like that, you could be a chaplain. So they signed him up and he spent a few years trying to be a chaplain before he realized it wasn't a good fit.

Obviously, that's not the kind of guy you want on staff (and since then they've changed the rules in what degrees qualify) – instead, you should be looking for the guys who are trying

to find every chance they can to serve, and by bringing them on staff you just wind up taking money off the table so they can do more and more of what they really want to do in the first place.

Which brings up the issue of how much should the pastor make? The most broadly accepted answer is “average.” Whatever that means for the community. So, he’ll probably wind up making less than some and more than others, but the ideal is usually whatever is the median for the congregation and community. No one should be getting rich in the ministry, but no one should have to be worrying about making the ends meet either. You want to make sure they can focus on ministry, not money – whether that means where it’s coming from because they don’t have enough, or how to spend it because they have too much. So, give them double honor, but don’t spoil them or deprive them.

[19](#) Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses.

Point #2: Elders who represent Jesus well should be trusted on the basis of their integrity and testimony.

Now, the point here is to protect the elders from false accusations, but as we’ll see in the next couple of verses, they weren’t granted immunity if they were guilty. It’s just that in the Old Testament, you couldn’t put anyone to death without the testimony of two or three witnesses - accusations that had the potential to wreck or end someone’s life should not be brought or heard lightly.

But still, the best defense for elders and, really, for any of us, is to have such a strong reputation of integrity and righteousness that accusations are hard to believe anyway. Remember all of the qualifications for being an elder back in chapter three? Pastors should be preceded by a reputation of godliness that should protect them from casual accusations.

Charles Spurgeon was one of the most famous pastors of the 19th century – he would be the equivalent of a modern Chuck Smith, or Chuck Swindoll, or John MacArthur, a name that most people in the church would know. He wrote a great book for pastors who were attending his Preacher’s College called “Lectures to My Students” and in it he gives a great piece of advice. Whenever anyone would approach him and want to tell him about something someone else was doing wrong, he would say, “you know I have a lot of things to think about and look after, and a lot of things on my mind, so it’s hard for me to remember all the details. Would you mind writing this down for me and giving me a copy?” And that usually put a stop to things because most people don’t want to commit to their gossip. Another great tactic is to ask them to come with you and get the person in question and see if you can settle it all right then and there. Again, most people aren’t usually willing to go that route and that shows that the accusation is probably not that well founded.

When someone wants to share gossip or an accusation with you, you need to ask, what good comes of sharing this information? Are they, or am I, really just smearing a person’s reputation, or am I trying to bring about some good? And if you’re really concerned about the situation, have you spent as much time praying about it as you have talking about it?

Now, that isn't to say that people are perfect, not even elders, and when they sin, especially publicly or grievously, they need to be confronted but we shouldn't be letting just any little piece of gossip or bitterness that comes along enter our minds and shape our thoughts about someone.

[20](#) Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear.

[21](#) I charge *you* before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality.

Point #3: Elders who do not represent Jesus well should be rebuked without partiality or prejudice.

Every now and then some pastor or church leader completely falls on his face, and the more visible his ministry or the more disgusting his sin, the more widely it is publicized. People get cynical or outraged when these things happen, and, to a degree, rightly so. We should expect high standards out of our religious leaders, the Bible tells us so. But what happens next?

Parties line up according to two separate attributes of God – one party wants to see His grace and His mercy demonstrated – these are the people who want to either sweep things under the rug, turn a blind eye, or write it off as a “oops, we're all human.” This side wants to see God's mercy displayed.

The other side wants to see him hung out to dry and wonders why he's getting off the hook so easily, no matter what the ultimate decision is regarding the situation. This side wants to see God's justice displayed.

Which side is right? Both. Remember, both ARE attributes of God, mercy AND justice. That's why all church discipline, and really, all discipline in general, should aim to rebuke but also to restore. You need to call a spade a spade, but also help the individual see how to change.

I've seen this done before, and it's always a shocking and unpleasant thing to be a part of, but it needs to be done – people need to know that God does have standards and expectations for those who represent Him and serve in His name.

And because of the severity of that, Paul has further instructions about how elders should be chosen:

[22](#) Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people's sins; keep yourself pure.

[23](#) No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities.

[24](#) Some men's sins are clearly evident, preceding *them* to judgment, but those of some *men* follow later. [25](#) Likewise, the good works of *some* are clearly evident, and those that are otherwise cannot be hidden.

Point #4: Elders should be chosen slowly so their testimony can be observed.

The whole idea of laying on of hands here has to do with ordaining someone to ministry. Paul says don't do it too quickly, if you jump the gun and the guy turns out to be a problem, it's going to be your problem, because you gave him a position he obviously wasn't called to by God.

Then we have this seemingly out of place admonition to Timothy to take some wine for his stomach. Throughout Rome wine was commonly accepted to have medicinal value. And some people say the same things today, it seems like you can always find a study showing a glass of red wine is good for this or that. So Paul is prescribing it here.

And I think the reason we see it here is that Timothy may have been abstaining from wine for some reason, perhaps to appear pure. And I think what Paul is telling him is not to worry about it. Because the next thing he says is that whether you sin or do rightly, it will eventually all come out. So, Timothy, if you're living a righteous life, and having some wine will help with your stomach, go for it, your good works are evident, and even if they aren't noticed right now, there's no hiding them. Walk in integrity and you don't have to worry about the footprints you leave behind.

So, that's what I think about WHY Paul said what he said, but I also want us to consider WHAT he said. If you are familiar with your Bible, Paul's instruction might strike you a little odd; not because it was wine, but because it was ANYTHING. Here's a guy God has used to do miracles, Paul has been used to heal people and even to raise people from the dead – like the guy who fell out a third story window one night while Paul was teaching at a home group. So why doesn't he just do a miracle and heal Timothy?

We don't know. It's always dangerous to ask Why questions of God, because implicit in the question is the thought that you will somehow be able to judge the reason and determine whether it was good or bad. As if you get to decide whether God made the right call there or not. Sometimes God chooses to heal, and I don't think there is anything wrong with asking, and asking, and asking, for Him to do so. Jesus said we were to ask, to seek and to knock and to keep on doing it until we get an answer. But "no" and "wait" are valid answers. Are you willing to accept them?

Paul himself was perpetually plagued by a health issue and God told him He wasn't going to heal it, that Paul was just going to have to endure it and rest in God's strength to get him through. Epaphroditus is mentioned in Philippians, he brought a gift to Paul from the church at Philippi and became deathly ill in the process, though he eventually recovered. Timothy here is said to have FREQUENT infirmities.

We need to have the right ideas about serving God. He doesn't promise to suddenly turn your life into a magazine article where everything is picture perfect and glamorous. But He does promise to be with you, day in and day out, through the hard times and the pain.

And sometimes, for reasons we don't get an answer to, He wants us to take some meds instead of receive a miracle. So, in our family, when something hurts, whether slightly or severely, we ask God for healing, and we also thank Him for the meds. And I don't think that in any way lessens our faith. We praise God for giving men and women wisdom to know how to develop medications – whether pharmaceutical or herbal, and treatments. And when Mady is at work we pray that God would use her to be a blessing to her patients and their families and that He would give her the wisdom she needs to treat them and help them go home quickly.

If God wants you to take some meds for your illness, take the meds. But notice too that he says, take a little – don't going getting addicted to something and becoming more dependent on it than you are on God.

Now we transition to the last group of people Paul wants to address, servants.

1 Let as many bondservants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and *His* doctrine may not be blasphemed. 2 And those who have believing masters, let them not despise *them* because they are brethren, but rather serve *them* because those who are benefited are believers and beloved. Teach and exhort these things.

Point #5: Servants who represent Christ well prevent others from blaspheming God's name and Christian doctrine and are a blessing to those they serve.

Slavery was wide spread at this time during the Roman Empire. There were an estimated 50-60 million slaves in the population, and something like 1/3 to 1/2 of the city of Rome were slaves.

Now, it's not my intent to address the wrongs of slavery today, or how it is treated in the whole of the Bible, but I will point out that the slavery of this time was based more in economics and politics than in race. It could be intentionally entered into and by this time in the Empire, great reforms had been enacted that enabled many slaves to earn their freedom by age 30. Slaves could be tradesmen, merchants, CEOs, or the more common agricultural or domestic help among others. Slaves could even own their own slaves. It wasn't the perfect situation or even an admirable situation, but it was different in some important ways from the horrors of racially based slavery that was seen in this country.

Paul is giving directions to slaves who could come and go to and from church, some of whom even had Christian masters. You know that created some interesting dynamics, in fact, that is what he is touching on here.

Now the typical application for us today is to think of this in your role in the workplace. And that's true, but really, if you think about it, our entire life is described in terms of servitude and it's all based on the example of Jesus.

Mark 10:42 “...You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. [43](#) Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. [44](#) And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. [45](#) For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

We are all called to be servants. Husbands are called to serve their wives, wives are called to serve their husbands. Parents are to serve their children, not in the sense of waiting on them hand and foot, but in the terms of providing for them, teaching them, and giving yourself away to them instead of spending your life on your self. And then, yes, we are called to be servants in the work place, servants at church, and servants at all times, in all places, of God.

Many of you spend more time with your co-workers than you do with your family or roommates – if your life is going to be changed by the gospel, and if Jesus is going to make a difference in who you really are, it ought to be visible there. And actually, the same thing is true with those of you who are full time moms or who work from home. Are you living your life in such a way that the people who surround you day in and day out can see the light of God in you, or are you living in such a way that gives them ammunition to be critical of what you say you believe?

Again, that applies to those of you who work outside the home as much as those of us whose work is the home or who work from home. Do you walk, by grace, in such a way as to be blessing to those you serve and serve with? Or, is your work place a place where your faith doesn't really penetrate? Church and God are for Sunday and my quiet time, and my reflective moments, and my crisis moments, but they don't characterize my daily, real world life?

We have the privilege of being able to represent our Lord to those who surround us – whether in the church or outside of the church, whether we are in full time ministry or full time service, whether we have a title or not. We all get to bear the name of Christ, and as a result, there are certain expectations He and the people around us have of us.

Now, don't walk out of here feeling stressed out and burdened unless God is speaking to you specifically about something that needs to change, if so, respond to that NOW. But for most of you, the big take away is just this – think soberly about your life and your witness. Are there any changes that need to be made? If so, submit to God, ask Him to have His way in you, and then, and here's the great part, re-present yourself to Him as a tool to be used, in ministry or in the workplace, to glorify Him and bless those that surround you.

Whether we are called into full time ministry or not, every one of us has the privilege of bearing His name and being used to impact others. So take it seriously and see what He wants to do with you. May it never be said of any of us, that God was willing to do a work, but He couldn't find a willing or a worthy servant.