

## 1 Timothy 5:17-25 – “Support and Scrutiny: A Balanced Church”

The beginning of this chapter was instruction to Timothy, the leader/pastor of the church in Ephesus, on how to deal with people in the church. He was to treat them as family. He wasn't to rebuke an older man but was to exhort him as a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters. We're to see each other as family, not as enemies. And the way we talk to one another and treat one another should reflect that.

But the instruction to rebuke one another was not a prohibition on bringing correction. It was rather instruction on how to bring correction in the right way.

As we finish the chapter today, we'll see how correction and rebuke is to be done toward the church leaders when necessary. But once again, there is a right way for this to be done.

### Summary Statement:

In this passage we see the instruction for church elders/pastors to be counted worthy of financial support but they are also to be held accountable for how they live. If they are in error and sin, they must be confronted and dealt with like anyone else.

### 1. Leadership is Worthy of Support – 5:17-18

**5:17-18 - *Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. <sup>18</sup> For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,” and, “The laborer is worthy of his wages.”***

Now remember our study in 1 Timothy 3, we read there in vs. 1, *“If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work.”* And that term bishop was the Greek word *episkopos*. It was also used in Acts 20 when we see Paul meeting with the Ephesian elders.

- **Acts 20:17**, *“From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders [presbyteros] of the church.”*
- And then they were addressed as overseers [*episkopos*] who were to shepherd [*poimainō*] the church: **Acts 20:28**, *“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”*

The reason I bring this up is to clarify once again, that these terms, bishop, elder, overseer, pastor, are often used interchangeable in Scripture to speak of the same office or role in the church.

And within this office, it would seem, you could have various roles or positions. We have a team of elders here at Riverside, but we don't all fulfill the same role. I serve as an elder, equal among the other elders, but I also am called as the lead pastor to bring direction and to fulfill the main duties of teaching the Word. I do so with the help and accountability of the other elders.

- So this is why we see a bit of a clarification or distinction here in Paul's instruction: let the elders be counted worthy of double honor, **especially those who labor in the word and doctrine**. The thought here is that there were some who devoted themselves exclusively to this task that there was no time for other employment.

Now as we saw at the beginning of this chapter in vs. 3, there was a call to honor the widows. And tied to that honor was the idea of financial remuneration. And it's apparent we're dealing with that here with the elders – *especially those who labor in the word and doctrine*.

- To labor means to toil and become weary and exhausted in a work.
- Sometimes people get the idea that being a pastor is a pretty cushy job. You just get to have coffee with people, sit around and read the Bible – sounds like a vacation! I'm here to tell you it's anything but. Just the other day I was sent into some real turmoil when my tee time got bumped by a couple hours.
- But seriously, pastoring is widely recognized by occupational health researchers as one of the most stressful professions. A prominent data trend by Barna Group research shows that up to 42% of pastors have seriously considered quitting full-time ministry due to burnout and stress. [[1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#)]

It can be a labor, but it is a blessing when you do it unto the Lord and for the Lord, and when you get to serve an amazing church like Riverside! 😊

Now what does **double honor** mean? Does it mean the lead pastor gets double the rest of the staff? Does he get double the amount he expected to get? Double what he got last year?

It would seem the double honor is not about doubling their financial support, but rather it would speak of giving both financial support and also respect. They are laboring in the study and teaching of the word and it's to be listened to and lived out by the church. They are to be respected and not to be overly criticized. More on that to come.

But regarding the financial remuneration that is to be given to the elders, Paul cites a couple Biblical references to back up this principle. One comes from the Old Testament law, and the other from Jesus Himself.

- Deuteronomy 25:4 mentions the ox. When ox are being used to trample down the husks of wheat or barley to break apart the grain, it would be just mean to put a muzzle on it and not allow it to eat from the very work it was doing.
- Paul uses this picture to show that the pastor who is busy sharing the word with the church should benefit from the work he's doing. He should be supported for this labor that everyone else is benefiting from.
- Jesus also said, when He sent out the 70, to *"remain in the same house, eating and drinking such things as they give, for the laborer is worthy of his wages..."* (Luke 10:7).
- This is not something Paul is making up to try and cash out big time on the generosity of the church, this is something that has been established by God and carried out throughout history.

**1 Corinthians 9:14**, *"Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel."*

In keeping with the idea of honoring the elders, Paul says next...

## 2. Leadership is Subject to Accountability – 5:19-21

**5:19-21** - ***Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. <sup>20</sup> Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear. <sup>21</sup> 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.***

Those that are in places of leadership and responsibility in the church and for the church, become special targets of the enemy. The enemy knows if they can strike the shepherd, and bring him down, the sheep will scatter.

For this reason, there is bound to be many accusations flying in the direction of the pastor. That's why Timothy was instructed not to receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses.

- Now this is a double-edged sword today. Since the pastor is the one the enemy targets to bring down, there can be a lot of false accusations brought against him. Attempts to discredit him or accuse him of wrongdoing. Because of that, many will just dismiss every accusation as though it's a work of the enemy.
- We've seen too much of the cover up culture lately in the church to where pastors and leaders are not being held to a high standard of accountability as they should. This should not be the case in the church.
- But on the flip side, we need to be careful that we don't just rush into a sentence of guilt whenever someone brings an offense or accusation. These things need to be verified by **two or three witnesses**.
- And this isn't two or three people to back another person's accusations or pass on another person's account. They had to be witnesses of the wrongdoing or sin committed by the church leader.
- **Deuteronomy 19:15**, *"One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established."*

This was a principle put in place for any brother or sister in the church that was in error (Matthew 18:16).

The idea is to make sure the accusation has some merit.

There will be people I will upset. I will offend some people by telling too many jokes, or others will be upset that I'm being too serious. I'm not going to please everyone. There will be people tempted to lash out against me. Don't just jump on someone being offended and think that I'm in need of rebuke. It's important to give the benefit of the doubt until an accusation has been corroborated by two or three witnesses.

And if that pastor has been found to be guilty of sin and is not repentant, he is to be **rebuked in the presence of all**.

I'm going to let you in on a little secret – I'm not perfect. There will be things that I get wrong. I may blow it at times, and yes, possibly even sin. But it's not an occasion to bring every fault of mine before the church. This is about the church leader who continues in sin after being confronted with it. If he is unrepentant and

persists in sin (as the ESV translates it), he is to be rebuked in front of the church for all to hear. The purpose again is not condemnation, but correction. The goal is not to drive away a brother but to win back a brother.

Another purpose is to freak the living daylights out of everyone else in the church – ***that the rest also may fear.***

When people begin to see that the leaders of the church are going to be called on their crap, the rest of the church recognizes that their sin is open for rebuke as well. And we hope that it puts the fear of God in you to say, I don't want to be exposed. More so, our desire should be to not sin against a holy and loving God who sent us His Son to free us from the bondage and harm of sin.

It's a sad thing when the sins of church leaders are overlooked in an attempt to 'protect' the church. This only hurts the church. Sin needs to be dealt with, whoever is the offender. Timothy is charged to do these things ***without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality.***

- I'm thankful for the team of elders I get to serve with. We've known each other many years, and have served together many years. There are genuine friendships there. But that doesn't give us license to sweep things under the rug if one of us is in the wrong.
- If I find out that Randy, Rob or Jeff have been stealing funds, or have been out on the town being promiscuous, I'm going to call them on it. And if they don't repent, you better believe you're going to hear about it.
- And guess what, I know they'd do the same for me. In a heartbeat!

There shouldn't be any covering over of sins by a leader, but a certain rebuke towards the sins of any church member. No partiality here but a desire to carry out the clear instructions of His Word.

We do so with a clear charge before God, His Son Jesus Christ, and all the elect angels (this speaks of those that did not fall away in the rebellion led by Satan).

- Remember, angels are watching the church to see how they are carrying out the grace and wisdom of God (Ephesians 3:10).

**James 3:1**, *"My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment."*

So, because of the severity of what's at stake, it's important to go slow when appointing leaders...

### 3. Leadership Requires Discernment – 5:22-23

**5:22 - *Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people's sins; keep yourself pure.***

To lay hands on someone is not to lay hold of them as in to arrest them. Paul is talking about laying hands on people and praying over them, most likely to install them to a position of leadership.

- We saw that in **1 Timothy 4:14**, "*Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership.*"

There may come a person that seems to have some real gifts or charisma and we can easily think they would be great in a position of leadership. And the scenario has played out too often where a person gets appointed before they've really proven themselves or are ready for such a position. Remember, they become big targets for the enemy, and if they're not solid, mature, and ready for these challenges, we're just going to have bring them before the church and say, they blew it, and we blew it in installing them hastily.

- Some are good at hiding their sin, but hopefully time will begin to reveal the person they truly are – whether that's leadership material or not.
- Calvary Chapels typically hold to a six month rule for anyone serving in any capacity. We want people to come and get to know us and us get to know them before we have them taking on responsibility in service.
- That time would be even longer when it comes to selecting elders.

***Nor share in other people's sins...*** Obviously it would be wise to stay away from people who had a propensity to sin. Don't follow along thinking that it's their sin and not yours.

This could also be applied in reference to covering up faults and sin in leadership. And some will refer this to mean that when you lay hands on someone hastily, you could be appointing someone that still is dealing with sin in their lives. And you bear responsibility in that to a degree. So don't share in that sin, be slow to promote people to positions of leadership. In doing so Timothy would ***keep*** himself ***pure***.

**5:23 - *No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities.***

This verse seems to jump in here out of the blue. How it connects to what we've been reading is uncertain.

Some see a connection to Paul telling Timothy to keep himself pure. He wanted Timothy to not be dragged into the ideas of the false teachers which often promoted asceticism.

- In this day the water may contain some contaminants, so you would typically mix some alcohol with it to kill off these bugs. Perhaps Timothy was trying to only have water and in so doing prove himself before these false teachers. But it wasn't helping him. He was sick and his stomach was never well.

Some wonder if this was just the stress of the job getting to Timothy. And in a day where you didn't have the local pharmacy to go pick up some Pepto-bismal or some Roloids, you'd take some wine for medicinal purposes.

- But this is not to be abused. This is not about keeping a bottle in the bottom drawer of the desk to help take the edge off when you're struggling. Between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> service is when you may need a little pick me up, so have some Jack Daniels nearby. That's not what this is about. This was purely medicinal when there wasn't a lot of options.

#### 4. Leadership Reveals True Character Over Time – 5:24-25

**5:24-25 - *Some men's sins are clearly evident, preceding them to judgment, but those of some men follow later. <sup>25</sup> Likewise, the good works of some are clearly evident, and those that are otherwise cannot be hidden.***

These seem like obscure verses, but we need to take them in continuation of verse 22. Appointing someone to positions of leadership should be done carefully, with close examination of the individual.

With some, it's very evident of their sin and error. Their fruit will make it obvious. But yet with others, they can hide it extremely well and their error will follow them to judgment. But they will not escape it. Their actions or sin will eventually be dealt with.

- Again, this is why we must give time to let people's real fruit reveal what's really going on at the root. Bad roots, bad fruits. Good roots, good fruit.

Good works will be clearly seen by those that have been living rightly and seeking to serve God from a pure heart. However, sometimes people may feel like they've been living dedicated to God and honoring Him through their lives and yet there's little acknowledgment. But those things won't be hidden either.

- **Matthew 6:3–4**, *"But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, <sup>4</sup> that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly."*

So along with vs. 22, let the character and fruit of a prospective elder become evident (to the best of your ability) before laying hands on them to appoint them to such a position.

God's design for His church is not leader worship, nor leader suspicion, but a healthy balance of honor and accountability. When we get that right, the church is protected, leaders are strengthened, and Christ is glorified.

#### Points to Ponder:

1. Am I more critical than I am prayerful for those who are leading me?
2. Do I handle accusations and conflicts with biblical wisdom – or with assumptions and emotions?
3. Am I living in a way where my life could withstand close examination over time?
4. Am I trusting God that unseen faithfulness will be rewarded one day?