

Elders Part II

Introduction

We are coming to the end of our exploration of Paul's instruction to Timothy. We have been studying how God ordained His church to be structured. We have learned about the risk of false teaching. The importance of the entire church guarding the truth of the gospel. We have explored the role of men and women.....elders and deacons.... and we have learned how elders are to interact with the congregation.

Now Paul is going to focus on how the congregation should interact with the elders. Previously we have explored the criteria that God establishes for His elders, but now we will see some responsibilities that the church has towards its elders and some accountability that the elders have to the church. When all are engaged in the correct structure as defined by God, The church itself glorifies God and manifests His truth.

Let's take a look at the first verse of our passage today as Paul addresses a responsibility of the congregation.

1 Timothy 5:17–18 (ESV) 17 Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. 18 For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer deserves his wages."

Before we go too far into this passage, I know that talking about money, particularly the payment and salary of the church staff is always a challenging topic. If you are new here, let me just share with you that Remnant has never paid me, at my request, as the Lead Pastor. I am not teaching this message with the cloud of "pay me more" hanging over this sermon.

Many Christians have become jaded when it comes to sermons about money. There's a perception that the pastor is simply asking for a higher salary or that the church is being manipulated into supporting a new building project. To be fair, the church has seen its share of abuses in this area. Nevertheless, such abuses should not keep us from hearing what God has to say in our passage today. How the church cares for elders, both financially and otherwise, communicates something about its heart.

In the first part of chapter 5, we see that the church's care for widows sets it apart from the world. Similarly now, in the latter section of the chapter, Paul says that the relationship between church leaders and church members ought to look differently as well. In the church the gospel ought to be on full display. People who love God care for those who God has sent to care for them.

As you know, I am a bivocational Pastor. I work both as a physician and a pastor. I spend a lot of time in the secular workplace. I am pleased to say that in my experience those two environments are dramatically different. Remnant is an environment that honors and obeys God and my other environment is not. In secular organizations, the relationship between a company's leadership and the rest of the employees is usually strained, to say the least.

There's gossip, suspicion, favoritism, and harsh leadership, and it all makes for a cutthroat environment. It is common for lies, manipulation, and politics to dominate secular businesses....God's word tells us that His church should never be that way. In fact, the palpable difference between a secular business and God's church should be evident to all and a great witness to those who encounter both. While this may be common in the world at large, it shouldn't be the norm in the church.

The household of God ought to look different. In stark contrast to the secular business model, elders should have a genuine concern for the body of Christ, and the body ought to have a loving esteem for its elders. This dynamic is crucial because God intends for unbelievers to look at the church and see the glory of God expressed as the gospel of God impacts the people of God.

Paul was not simply saying that the congregation should care for its elders but also that the elders were responsible and accountable to the congregation. This is a two-way street.

So Paul begins this section by making a bold instructive command with one caveat. He tells Timothy that elders are "worthy of an ample honorarium, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching." Understanding the words "ample honorarium" (literally "double honor") is the key to understanding this verse and it is important to note that he says, this applies only to elders who rule well.

Scholars have different opinions about the command of double honor and what it means for the church to show this kind of honor to those who rule well in teaching and preaching. Paul never used this expression in any of his other letters, but the wider context of the passage may suggest two ways in which the body of Christ should carry out this command.

First, we need to see that double honor involves respect

Normally, when it comes to showing double honor, we think only of financial compensation, which is certainly involved in honoring elders. However, there is also an idea of respect involved here,

Perhaps this principle is best exemplified in Paul's request to the believers in Thessalonica:

1 Thessalonians 5:12–13 (ESV) 12 We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, 13 and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.

Galatians 6:6–10 (ESV) 6 Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches. ...10 So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

Elders who teach and preach the Word of God are under greater accountability and have a huge responsibility.

James 3:1 (ESV) 1 Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

For many years I was a national healthcare consultant and frequently spoke to audiences of over 3,000 people. I never had stage fright or fear until one Saturday night I had to preach to 150 people. Knowing the importance of sharing the truth and feeling completely unworthy makes it quite fearful.

God has a truth that He wants shared. I am scared to death to get into the way of that. Why He chose to let fallen humans share His message is beyond me. My prayer is that my faults and weaknesses never get in the way of the delivery of God's truth.

Second, we need to see that double honor involves financial compensation

Where do we see this? If you look at the beginning of the next verse, you'll notice the word "for." Paul was giving the basis for what he had just said in verse 18 about showing honor to elders. "For the Scripture says: Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain, and, the worker is worthy of his wages." The apostle was referring to compensation for those men who give themselves either full-time or part-time to the ministry of teaching and preaching.

Now to be clear, there were occasions when Paul worked to support his ministry, and there were other occasions when he didn't. Not every context and situation is the same; however, Paul used the Old Testament to remind the church that the laborer is worthy of his wages. In short, elders should be compensated. But what did the apostle mean by double honor in terms of pay?

Paul was not being prescriptive in this passage. He wasn't attempting to give us the precise amount we should pay elders. When he referred to an "ample honorarium," I don't think he was referring to extravagant financial compensation; in fact, he is going to warn against materialism and the desire to be rich throughout the upcoming verses.

However, it does seem that the expression "double honor" indicates that God's people should give generously to their elders. When some churches talk about pastor compensation, it is not unusual to hear...."Lord, You keep him humble, and we will keep him poor," That approach dishonors God and violates His Scripture. God's design for His church is that the church honor its leaders with respect and adequate financing. Failure to do so, impedes the gospel message.

It is not uncommon for pastors and their families to be on the short end of financial compensation. Many men labor faithfully in teaching and preaching, yet they do not receive the wages they deserve. Generally, when asked how much a Pastor should make, most people think no more than their current salary whatever that is. This kind of practice violates where Paul was calling for a basic sense of fairness when it comes to compensation. I have served as a doctor and a pastor. When it comes to being available 24/7 the pastoral role is much more difficult. For most pastors, there is never true time off.

Paul is making sure that when it comes to the church at Ephesus, those who labor receive appropriate rewards. They must be able to devote the time necessary to do the Lord's work. Paul learned this from Jesus. Quoting Jesus, Paul said that if a laborer is laboring, he deserves his wages

Luke 10:7 (ESV) 7 And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages. Do not go from house to house.

Matthew 10:9–10 (ESV) 9 Acquire no gold or silver or copper for your belts, 10 no bag for your journey, or two tunics or sandals or a staff, for the laborer deserves his food.

Paul also quoted from Deuteronomy 25:4, which says, “Do not muzzle an ox while it treads out grain.” An ox is at least allowed to eat as he labors, and the same should be true for pastors. Otherwise, we are treating those who minister the Word worse than an ox.

Failing to adequately compensate a pastor may communicate, even if unintentionally, how much a body of believers values their own money and possessions. This kind of church is not only being unfair to the pastor, but they are also communicating to that congregation and to the outside world how little they think of the ministry of the Word of God.

This may seem like a trivial matter, but like all matters of money in the Bible, it really goes beyond dollars and cents—it goes straight to the heart

Matthew 6:21 (ESV) 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Unfortunately many churches use the Pastor's income to manipulate and control them. It is not uncommon for church members to not to subtly remind pastors that they can be fired. I never thought it would happen to me but it did. I was so fortunate that my salary did not depend upon my role at church.

At one point, I was asked by a church to water down the gospel and teach with less emphasis on obedience and truth. To use antidotes and stories instead of Scriptures. To make sermons more feel good and less convicting.

Had my salary come from the church, it would have been a bit harder to walk away. As a volunteer, the church had no leverage over my decision. It cost me little to walk away, but for most pastors....it is not that simple. They depend upon their congregation for the support of their families.

Most churches do not offer retirement options, health insurance, and salaries are about half of where they should be. Many churches have little alternative because studies show that most churches are supported by only 10% of the congregation and less than 5% give a true biblical tithe of 10%.

Most churches receive only about 20% of what God's Word directs and as a result, the salary of their pastors reflects that.

Jesus taught that where your money goes... so goes your heart. Those who invest in the ministry of God find their hearts invested too. Those who don't invest in the ministry of God find their hearts focused elsewhere.

So far we've seen that showing "double honor" involves both respect and financial compensation, but this kind of honor is not automatic. There is no entitlement based on position or background. Paul laid down the conditions of double honor, and these two conditions for elders are closely related. Note that he says honor goes only to those who rule well.

So when Paul talked about elders being good leaders, he was not talking about managing the church in a harsh manner, neither was he talking about ruling with efficiency. He was saying elders should shepherd and love the people under their care. This is how they imitate the good shepherd of John 10—they lay down their lives for the sheep.

The question still remains: How do we know when a minister of the gospel is being a good leader?

For some people the idea of "good" may bring up certain comparisons in their minds, as though the church needs to find the Christian version of a successful and efficient CEO. But the word "good" here is not used as a measuring stick for their successfulness; rather, it is a word that speaks of goodness or rightness, or of meeting a certain standard.

Paul is saying we ought to evaluate elders on the basis of whether they are faithful. We need to ask, "Is this man doing what he ought to be doing?" And we don't have to go any further than 1 Timothy to answer this question. Recall some of the qualifications for elders Paul gave in chapter 3: an elder must be above reproach, he must manage his household well, he must hold to sound doctrine, he must point out error, and he must be an example to the flock. This is what it takes to be a faithful minister of the gospel. This is what it means to be a good leader.

The second condition for elders to receive double honor is that they must labor diligently in the Word

This is certainly not the only responsibility of elders, as if they simply read their Bibles all 168 hours of the week. But an elder should give a large amount of time to the ministry of the Word and prayer.

The word "especially" is key to understanding verse 17. After saying that elders were worthy of double honor, Paul then said, "Especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching." That word "especially" might be better translated as "that is," so that the verse might also be translated

"The elders who are good leaders should be considered worthy of double honor, that is, those who work hard at preaching and teaching." In other words, good leaders in the church are those who labor in preaching and teaching

Next we will look at the second main instruction Paul gave in this passage

1 Timothy 5:19–20 (ESV) 19 Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses.

In light of this command, we should not be surprised when elders are accused. This may sound a little counterintuitive since elders are supposed to be above reproach. It would seem there would be fewer accusations and allegations against such people. Nevertheless, for anyone who has been close to pastoral ministry for any stretch of time, you know this is actually not the case.

The nature of pastoral work places pastors in numerous sticky and sin-filled situations that demand a firm commitment to the truth in the face of Satanic attack. Consequently, pastors are frequently the target of accusation, even more so than other members of the congregation.

The great Reformer John Calvin put it this way: “For none are more liable to slanders and calumnies [a misrepresentation intended for harm] than godly teachers.... Although they perform their duty correctly, so as not to commit any error whatever, they never escape a thousand censures”

I must admit that I was surprised by this when I was called into ministry. Satan arranges frequent assaults of your character. Usually causing people to question your motives. Often you are not challenged on what you did but rather the rumblings of why you did it.

Things happen in the church and in the lives of people that must be held confidential. They can speak of you, and often do on their way out, but you must remain silent. Most people in the congregation who are mumbling have only half truths to shape their views. Satan, if given the opportunity, will use gossip, half-truths and doubt to undermine church leaders.

So Paul instructs Timothy....make sure that there are witnesses the a charge against an elder.

Paul is simply saying that we should be cautious when elders are accused. The bottom line is that accusations are going to come. We should not be surprised when they do, but we should be cautious

Based on the requirement in verse 19 for two or three witnesses against an elder, we should dismiss charges that don't meet this standard. Of course, we shouldn't ignore serious allegations, but we must take the utmost care and consideration when elders are accused.

You may be thinking...hold on here. Shouldn't everyone get that kind of protection? After all, why should elders get special treatment? Is this favoritism? Actually, Paul is simply reminding the congregation that elders should get what every one else was already getting. Jewish law requires multiple witnesses. Often the standard for elders was and is below that of the members of the church.

The reason Paul said elders deserve this kind of treatment has to do with the public nature of the elder's position. Failure to dismiss false accusations would undermine the trust the congregation had in him. And if a prominent leader were destroyed and later it

was found out that the allegations were unfounded, it would be a black stain on the church in the eyes of the world.

In light of what we've seen, then, let us be zealous to do whatever we can to protect the reputation of those who preach and teach in the church, not because they are a special class of Christians but more importantly because the church is the "pillar and foundation of the truth".

We don't want the display of God's glory diminished in any way, and we don't want the gospel to be hindered in its advance as a result of people in the church or in the community who don't trust the integrity of elders. By God's grace let's be eager to eliminate unfounded accusations. Let's put an end to unhelpful and ungodly criticisms that bring down the reputation of those who labor in the ministry of the Word.

So far Paul has given us two instructions: Honor faithful elders with generous provision, and protect all elders from unfounded accusations.

But with that said, Paul doesn't let Elders off the hook....he turns his warning to them.

1 Timothy 5:19–20 (ESV) 20 As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear. 21 In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality.

When there is credible evidence on the basis of two or three witnesses and the elder persists in sin, the accusation against the elder must be brought to the congregation. No one else in the church has that kind of accountability. Why? Paul said so that everyone would be afraid of the consequence of sin.

Such a public rebuke is for the purpose of causing both the elders and the rest of the congregation to fear the consequences of sin. But which sins did Paul have in mind?

I don't think Paul had in mind here every individual sin an elder commits. We would be here a lot discussing me. Yes, all sin is infinitely serious, but not every single sin is worthy of a public rebuke. For example, if two or three witnesses see an elder jaywalking, there is no need for a public rebuke in the presence of all. There should be a certain magnitude to sin that is rebuked publicly, such that the elder can no longer serve as an example to the flock in ways consistent with passages such as 1 Timothy 3:1–7.

1 Timothy 3:1–7 (ESV) 1 The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. 2 Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, 3 not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. 4 He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, 5 for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? 6 He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. 7 Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

Since we don't have a prescription as to what deserves public rebuke, congregations should try to make such determinations by praying under the leadership of the Spirit. Those who "continue in sin" deserve public rebuke, meaning there is a pattern of unrepentant sin. Some leaders in the church refuse to repent of sin that affects their character in the eyes of the congregation.

Does this kind of action seem, well, backwards to you? Does rebuking elders publicly seem inefficient and disruptive? Why not just dismiss the elders quietly and move along? I think Paul gives us two reasons we should rebuke unrepentant elders in the presence of all.

First, we should rebuke as a witness to the truth

There were false teachers in the church at Ephesus, and Paul was calling for their public rebuke. Do you feel the magnitude of what Paul was saying here? Timothy likely had a personal relationship with these men, but he was nonetheless given a charge to rebuke them, regardless of how painful it would be. Timothy was not to show prejudice or favoritism. The same holds true as we evaluate elders today.

The church witnesses to the truth through rebuking sin because it is the "pillar and foundation of the truth" (3:15). We must align ourselves with the judgment of God, a judgment that is sure to come, either now or on the last day. Paul did not want the church to deny its identity by failing to uphold the truth of God. We must be faithful to the Word no matter how difficult or painful it might be.

Elders are not above God's reprimand. But they must be managed in a way that honors God.

The second reason we do these things publicly is that we should rebuke as a warning to others

Sometimes God motivates us by fear, and our passage is one of those cases. Paul called for public rebuke "so that the rest will also be afraid" (1 Tim 5:20). Paul wanted other people—and other elders in particular—to look on public rebuke and say, "May it never be so with me. I don't want that." It's like a boy who tries to steer clear of trouble because he has seen his older brothers disciplined for their misbehavior.

Though God is motivating us here by fear, He is still, in a sense, motivating us by grace. Our natural instinct is to think we will never get caught and we will not have to give an account for our sin (Ps 10:13). However, God graciously warns elders that their day of reckoning may come sooner than they think, and this day of reckoning won't be in the privacy of their own home.

Even before the final judgment, sin sometimes has public consequences. God forbid that such steps would be necessary, but if they are, may God give us the courage to believe His Word and obey it. He has infinitely more wisdom than we do. We may think we have a better or more creative way to uphold the truth, but our way will short-circuit God's intention for the church to be a pillar and foundation of the truth.

Also note that there is a warning to Timothy and the church as well. Use no prejudice and show no partiality.

This is not the time to pile on to a leader you don't like or to leverage the situation for your own agenda. It works both directions. Don't show too much favor for your pastors and don't attack them unfairly. He is repeating here the teaching of Jesus.

Luke 6:31 (ESV) 31 And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.

John 7:24 (ESV) 24 Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment."

Matthew 7:1–2 (ESV) 1 "Judge not, that you be not judged. 2 For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.

There are times when the unrepentant sin of an elder must be brought in front of the congregation, but when that moment happens all are standing under the judgement of God. It is His character, His truth and His Glory that must be upheld.

So far we've seen that the church is to honor, protect, and rebuke elders, which brings us to Paul's fourth and final overarching instruction

1 Timothy 5:21–22 (ESV) 22 Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor take part in the sins of others; keep yourself pure.

I have been involved in a moment when the sins of a Pastor had to be brought in front of the church. It was painful and damaging to the mission of the church. It took years to recover and some churches never really recover. So Paul warns everyone....be careful who you lay hands upon.

Choosing elders is not something that is to be taken lightly. Once someone is identified as a potential elder, the elders go through a discovery and examination process that occurs in private and is quite invasive. Once the elders bring forth candidates, it is time for the church to pray and consider. Once everyone is in agreement, the church lays hands upon that person and validates God's call on their life as an elder.

Verses 22–25 make this point. Verse 22 says, "Don't be too quick to appoint anyone as an elder, and don't share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure." There seems to be a connection between the laying on of hands and sharing in the sins of others, such that being too quick to appoint someone as an elder may result in one's own guilt, a point we will return to below.

I don't know for sure but if I was Timothy at this point, I would be nauseous. I have to select elders and I have to rebuke false teachers whom I know in front of the congregation. It would be time for me to find the Prilosec and the antacids.

Perhaps that is what Paul was thinking when he wrote his next words....

1 Timothy 5:23–24 (ESV) 23 (No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.)

The most obvious thing here is that Paul is not a Doctor. His medical advice leaves a lot to be desired. But in his defense, he didn't have a chance to google it. Those who claim the Bible forbids

drinking must somehow miss this verse. Just for the record, I don't recommend adding alcohol for your stomach.

It's not exactly clear why Paul made this statement at this point in the letter. This may be a parenthetical remark following up on his command at the end of verse 22 to "keep yourself pure." This is the kind of thing we do sometimes when sending an e-mail. As we are writing about one thing, we may think of another point we want to make, so we put it in parentheses in order to remember it later. This could be what Paul was doing here

Timothy may have given himself to an ascetic lifestyle, including total abstinence from alcohol. Paul was telling Timothy that for the sake of his health he ought to consider drinking a little wine. The best thing Timothy could do in this situation is to use wine as a medicine. In light of the command for purity in verse 22, Paul may have been saying in verse 23, "Don't think the need for purity prohibits you from drinking some wine for your health."

After making this sort of bizarre tangent, Paul gets back to the careful selection of Elders.

1 Timothy 5:24–25 (ESV) 24 The sins of some people are conspicuous, going before them to judgment, but the sins of others appear later. 25 So also good works are conspicuous, and even those that are not cannot remain hidden.

Paul had warned Timothy in verse 22 not to lay hands on anyone—that is, appoint them as an elder—too quickly. Keep in mind that there is nothing spiritual about the physical act of the laying on of hands, in and of itself, other than the fact it symbolized the recognition of someone as a called-out minister in the church.

Some brothers should not be recognized as elders in the congregation because their sins are immediately apparent, while the sins of other believers will be less obvious, showing up only later

Yes, churches will make mistakes. The main point here is that we need to take all the time, care, and due diligence necessary to make sure a man is qualified to the best of our knowledge. It is not always immediately obvious who should be an elder.

In the matter of appointing elders, Paul presents two ways obedience to God's Word profits the body of Christ

First, careful selection is for the benefit of those choosing.

Paul's warning to Timothy not to hastily lay hands on anyone is a reminder that responsibility is attached to this high privilege. We don't want to have a part in the sins of others

Second, careful selection is for the protection of the church

This point should be fairly obvious. There's always a need for more elders to be raised up in the church; however, the last thing we need is haste in making this kind of massively important decision.

To be sure, sometimes we are going to deny brothers we shouldn't deny, and sometimes we are going to appoint brothers we shouldn't appoint. That's just part of our fallen and finite nature. But we need to make sure we are doing everything we can to minimize those mistakes. We need to obey the Word in appointing godly men for the protection of the church.

The Appointment of Elders

We need to remember that God is outlining His desire for the structure of His church. When the church is structured in the manner He defines, the entire congregation and its leadership manifest the glory of God. We see the glory of rightly ordering Christ's church.

Many believers have had negative experiences with the church, and in light of all the negative baggage, they just can't see how the church can display the glory of God. We need to be reminded that this is not the way things have to be. It's certainly not God's intention.

God's intention is not for shepherds to exploit the sheep or for sheep to abuse the shepherd. God's intention is for pastors to lay their lives down for the flock, living among them and loving them with the love of Christ. In response, the congregation—the sheep—love and follow their shepherds, giving to them generously and willingly as the Word of God is faithfully taught. This is the context in which the gospel flourishes.

We will undermine our efforts to see the advance of the gospel if we don't pay attention to God's design for the church. The end goal of this passage is not that we would have well-paid pastors or public rebukes but that the church would display the glory of God and uphold the truth.

The ultimate purpose is that the gospel would go forward from the church. This is why we need to sense the gravity of disobeying God's Word on this issue. God's glory is seen when we order the church according to what He has said.

Finally, in order not to be indifferent to these truths, we remind ourselves of the kindness of God in the gospel. How do we avoid the pitfalls of gossip and allegations and suspicions? How do we foster an environment of love and forgiveness and unity among those who are leading and those who are led? There is only one way, and that is through the gospel.

As a pastor, I need the gospel to deliver me from self-centeredness, from the desire for shameful gain, laziness, a sense of entitlement, and a host of other sins. At the same time the congregation needs the gospel in order to be delivered from criticism, a spirit of disunity, gossip, and discontentment. In short, all of us need the gospel. Only by the grace of God can elders and the church be cared for properly.

Next week we will ordain Grayson as our Family Pastor. I encourage you to attend and celebrate with us the call that God has placed on his life. He is in many ways my Timothy.

When Remnant started, we had five elders. Over the last few years several have moved away and we have not felt God had raised up candidates. About two years ago, I felt led to start a mentoring program with some men in the church. We have been meeting weekly and going through a discipleship process. The fruit of that process is evident now and we are expanding the discipleship program to include hopefully 30 men.

Currently the Elders are in the process of vetting several men to serve as elders. Once we finish the process, if we believe God has called these men, we will present them to the partners for review. Please pray for all of us as we go through this process. Our goal is to have an elder board of seven but only as God leads. Once we have our elder board supported, we will appoint deacons who will serve those who serve. It will be a training ground for future elders.

Beginning next week with the ordination of Grayson, we begin preparing God's church for the future generations. We have designed it the way He said to design it. We will do our very best to be the church that God ordained. Please continue to support financially and through prayers what God is doing at Remnant. Let's Pray.