

Sermon Notes

WORSHIP SERVICE - 6.11.2023

PART 16 - CONCERNING ELDERS

I. INTRODUCTION

1 Timothy 5:17-25

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." 19 Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. 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. 22 Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor take part in the sins of others; keep yourself pure. 23 (No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.) 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.

II. HONORING ELDERS

- In 1 Timothy 3 we studied the qualifications of elders.
- Elders/Presbyters/Overseers/Pastors are synonymous terms.
- As we consider these qualifications we see that the character is the job description of an elder.

WORTHY ELDERS

- 17 Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.
- Paul instructs Timothy to teach the church concerning how to care for their elders.
- Paul references two conditions for what constitutes an elder who is considered worthy of double honor
- First condition is that they must be an elder who rules well.
- How do we know if an elder is doing a good job?
- The measuring stick for that has to be the same list as the one that they qualified under.
- Are they continuing to exhibit those qualities and are they maturing in those qualities?
- We must not use worldly metrics to judge what is successful leadership in the church.
- Moses appointing leaders - Ex 18:21.
- The Church appointing deacons - Acts 6:3.
- Elders who rule well are those who manage the household of God discharging their responsibilities with fidelity and godliness of character and conduct.
- The second condition is that they must labor in preaching and teaching.
- Even though it says "especially," Paul is just adding a further description of the elder who rules well. *"That is, they work hard at preaching and teaching."*
- An elder who is considered worthy of double honor must devote a large amount of time to the ministry of the word.
- The apostles stated that they must devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word (Acts 6:4).
- 2 Tim. 2:15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.
- They must preach the word in season and out of season (2 Tim. 4:2).
- In a situation with a plurality of elders, which is the biblical norm, you can play to the strengths of an elder.
- Not every elder is going to be engaged in the weekly ministry of the Word in the gathering.
- But every elder must be able to teach, that's part of the qualifications.

DOUBLE HONOR

- Paul instructs that those who rule well and work hard at preaching and teaching are considered worthy of double honor.
- What does Paul mean by double honor?
- Double means “two-fold.”
- We looked at least week in 5:3 that the church is to “honor widows who are truly widows.” We learned that honor did not just mean respect but also financial support.
- To be shown two-fold honor means that an elder should be shown: 1) respect and 2) remuneration.

- First, respect.
- Respect is not earned just by merely possessing a title.
- Hughes and Chappel, “a dependence upon professional titles for pastoral leadership is an indication of evacuated authority.”
- There is, however, an intrinsic respect in the pastoral position which is why Paul says that the person who aspires to the office of elder desires a noble task (1 Tim. 3:1).
- Elders who rule well and labor in preaching and teaching should be shown respect, as they are considered worthy of respect by virtue of who they are faithfully leading in the church.

- Second, remuneration.
- Elders should be supported through financial compensation so they can devote their time fully to the church.
- Paul appeals to two authorities to make his point—Moses and Jesus.
- He cites Moses in Deut. 25:4 “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain.”
- Then he quotes Jesus from Luke 10:7 “The laborer deserves his wages.”
- Paul makes an argument from the lesser to the greater—from what Moses said to what Jesus said.
- 1 Cor. 9:3-12, 14 This is my defense to those who would examine me. 4 Do we not have the right to eat and drink? 5 Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? 6 Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? 7 Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk? 8 Do I say these things on human authority? Does not the Law say the same? 9 For it is written in the Law of Moses, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain.” Is it for oxen that God is concerned? 10 Does he not certainly speak for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop. 11 If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? 12 If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more? 14 In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.
- Paul commends that financial support for the elders is the norm for the church.
- He is establishing the principle for the care of those in vocational ministry.

- There are tons of pastors who are grossly underpaid and taken advantage of.
- There are many pastors who are grossly overpaid and are lovers of money.
- What is an appropriate level of financial support for an elder who is considered worthy of receiving financial support from the church?
- General principles: a fair living wage considering their family situation, education, level of experience, and the responsibilities they will be taking on. It should be the same scale as others in the congregation and in the community they are serving.
- This is why an elder must not be a “lover of money” (1 Tim. 3:3).
- But the good labor of a faithful elder should be respected and they should be taken care of.

III. DISCIPLINING ELDERS

- How does a church hold elders accountable?
- Paul outlines in v19-21 a sort of process for when an accusation or a complaint is made concerning an elder.

CAUTION

- The first instruction he gives Timothy when a charge is brought against an elder is that he should exercise caution.
- Pastors are easy targets for accusations and slander.
- We should not be surprised when that happens.
- The biblical way of handling a charge brought against an elder is God's standard of multiple witnesses.
- Elders should be afforded the same protection that everyone else is to have when an accusation is made.
- 19 Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses.
- An elder should not entertain gossip about any leader, even a serious accusation against another elder, if it only comes from one person with no

other corroborating witnesses or evidence.

- If that standard is not met, you cannot move forward with disciplining an elder.
 - That does not mean that serious allegations aren't going to be investigated.
 - False accusations cause much damage to the church.
 - God's law demands that we shall not bear false witness against our neighbor (Ex. 20:16).
 - Deut 19:15 "A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established.
 - 2 Cor 13:1 Every charge must be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.
 - The truth matters. The mere statement of an accusation is not the establishment of a factual thing.
 - Only a corroborated charge can establish that something factually has happened.
 - Proverbs 18:17 The one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him.
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- We should all be zealous for the truth. We should all exercise caution in immediately believing the worst about someone if there is no one else to substantiate the charges.
 - Because the church is the pillar and buttress of the truth, let's NOT be eager to listen to unfounded accusations and ungodly criticism, be it of your pastor or any one else in the church.

COURAGE

- What happens if the charge that has been brought is substantiated, what if there are multiple witnesses and the evidence demonstrates the charge is true?
 - 20 As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear.
 - It is assumed by the phrase, "as for those who persist in sin...", that they have been privately admonished and called to repent, yet they remain impenitent.
 - Private sins are to be handled privately and only public sins are to be handled publicly.
 - It would have to be a grievous type of sin that is in view here; such that the elder can no longer serve as an example to the flock.
 - Wisdom is needed to administer this type of public rebuke, but it must be done.
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- Look at the reason Paul writes this should be done before the church: "...so that the rest may stand in fear."
 - This last resort type of rebuke is an effective deterrent.
 - It becomes a warning to other elders and to the rest of the church.
 - When we see someone disciplined before the church, we are motivated to holiness.
 - This is a warning to elders who may be living with hidden sin, thinking that they will not be discovered, but even that which is done in secret can have very public consequences.
 - Judgment begins in the house of the Lord (1 Peter 4:17).
 - It is right that elders be held to a higher standard.
 - As should all believers.

FAIRNESS

- 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.
 - In the strongest possible exhortation, Paul charges Timothy to keep the principles concerning the treatment of elders and to show absolutely no favoritism when dealing with the sin of church leaders, especially that of an elder.
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- Paul backs up his authority and calls forth as witnesses, "God, "Christ Jesus," and the "elect angels."
 - Timothy and all elders, are called to exercise this fair, even-handed discipline in the sight of the heavenly court, the very ones who will one day judge them.
 - Calvin wrote, "And indeed the man who is not shaken out of his carelessness and laziness by the thought that the government of the church is conducted under the eye of God and His angels must be worse than stupid."
 - Everything that takes place is under Christ's watchful gaze, and all men will have to give account for how they treated his faithful shepherds, and his shepherds will have to give account for how they led and cared for the flock of God.

IV. SELECTING ELDERS

UNHURRIED APPOINTMENT

- How can Timothy ensure that the unpleasant situation of the public admonishment of an elder doesn't happen?
- By taking great care and using wisdom on the front end in the selection and appointment of elders.
- 22 Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor take part in the sins of others; keep yourself pure.
- What Paul is commanding here is the careful screening of elder candidates and church leaders.
- This should not be done hastily.
- *"Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands..."*
- Most scholars believe that Paul is referring to the ordination of church officers.
- Twice in the pastoral letters, Paul uses the phrase, "laying on of hands," in reference to the gift Timothy received when he was commissioned to ministry (1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6).
- The best way to avoid the scandal of a wayward elder is to take time in screening a person.
- This is why an elder must not be a recent convert.

A PERSONAL ASIDE

- If Timothy rushes the process, if Timothy is tempted to take shortcuts in the screening of a potential elder, and because of that carelessness, a mistake is made, a scandal arises, that elder who was hastily set in is charged, implicated, and needs to be publicly admonished—Timothy will be sharing in the sins of others.
- So Paul exhorts him, "keep yourself pure."
- A parenthetical, personal aside is given to Timothy, 23 (No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.)
- But in context, after just having told Timothy to keep himself pure, he seems to be addressing Timothy's tendency towards fleshly asceticism.
- Remember the false teachers in 4:3-4, they were forbidding marriage and requiring the abstinence of certain foods and drink.
- Timothy was not to participate in those fleshly pursuits of purity that would do nothing to curb the desires of the flesh.
- Logically we can see why Paul would have followed the command, "keep yourself pure," with an encouragement to avoid a false asceticism.
- Legalism and asceticism can be a ditch that even the holiest of people, like Timothy, can sometimes fall into.
- It seems Timothy was abstaining from something that could be helpful to him, for the wrong reasons, and that is why Paul offers this personal note.

DISCERNMENT

- Lastly, Paul urges discernment in the selection of elders.
- 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.
- When assessing a person's character, we must remember that the true depth of a person is hidden from view.
- In some people, it's easy to spot gross sins.
- In others, their subtle unseen sins, which are hidden in the depths of their hearts, may only surface in the heat of trials, or challenges, or relational conflicts.
- John Stott writes, "Timothy must learn to discern between the seen and the unseen, the surface and the depth, the appearance and the reality."
- The point is that we need to take all the time, care, and due diligence necessary to ensure that a man is qualified biblically, to the best of our knowledge.
- That will require prayer, wisdom, discernment.
- The lengthy process is important for the protection of the elders who are doing the selection.
- We don't want to take part in the sins of others.
- And we have a responsibility to protect the church.
- We need to make sure we are doing everything we can to properly assess a man's character and life to avoid making the costly type of mistake which can negatively impact the people of God.

APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

In light of today's message....

- What did I learn about the gospel?
- How can I apply what I learned about the gospel to my life?
- With whom can I share the gospel this week?