

Living for Christ in a Confused and Confusing World

A Study of Paul's Letters to Timothy

Sermon # 10

The Office of Pastor

1Timothy 5:17-25

Prior to my illness we were engaged in a study of the first letter to Timothy. In our last study we examined the first part of chapter five (5:1-16). This part of the text looked at the third major topic of the letter, that of church leadership. The first sixteen verses of chapter five dealt with the office of the deacon and now the remainder of the chapter (vv. 17-25) deals with the office of pastor.

Paul has previously talked about the role of the pastor in (3:1-7). You will remember that in our study of that portion of the letter that we noted that the New Testament uses several different words to describe the function of the same office we call, Pastor. Whether referred to as Pastor (*poimen*-literally meaning Shepherd), Elder (*presbuterus*- referring to maturity) or Bishop (*episkopos* – meaning overseer) they are all functions of the same office!

Paul begins this section of the letter by telling the church, "Let the elders (*presbuterus*) who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine." It is unfortunate that word "rule" is used here to describe the pastor's work. That word in our world implies that these men are the bosses, that they have to be obeyed, and that they are governors over the congregation. But actually the word (*prosestates*) means "leads" and it is the common word for leadership. So the verse would read "*Let the pastors who lead well be worthy of double honor.*"

Paul goes on to say "... especially those who labor in the word and doctrine." Although it little understood by someone who has never had the responsibility to prepare messages, it is hard work if it is done correctly. Sometime this is seen in that church members are sometimes hard pressed for the right thing to say to the pastor after the service have.

One pastor said that the following have been said to him.

- "You always manage to find something to fill up the time."
- "I don't care what they say, I like your sermons."
- "If I'd known you were going to be good today I'd have brought a neighbor."
- "Did you know there are 243 panes of glass in the windows?"

- “We shouldn’t make you preach so often.”

One of my personal favorites; was when someone told me, “*Preacher that wasn’t half bad.*”

One who’s responsibility is to break the word of God to his people should come to the pulpit prepared. I love the story that was told that, “One pastor never prepared during the week, and on Sunday morning he’d sit on the platform while the church was singing the hymns desperately praying, “Lord, give your message, Lord give me your message.” One Sunday, while desperately praying for God’s message, he heard the Lord say, “Ralph, here’s my message. You’re lazy!” [www.bible.org/illus/pastoring]

Paul has said in verse seventeen that the one who is worthy of honor is the one who “labors in word and in doctrine.” The word “labor” (*kopiaio*) means to toil or work hard.

Paul having set out the reason why pastors should be honored he now sets out to explain how this honor is to be displayed.

First, we honor them by deeming them worthy of Financial Support (vv. 17-18)

“Let the elders (*presbuterus*) who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.”

I have to admit that I am a bit uncomfortable addressing the part of the verse that says “*let pastors (elders) who rule well be counted worthy of double honor.*” A pastor who speaks to his congregation about honoring church leaders seems about as tacky as Congress voting themselves a raise.

Be that as it may, Scripture says that the church leader is to be counted worthy of double honor. But what does that mean? As a pastor it might be tempting to interpret this to mean “double pay.” But actually it means “twofold honor” or honor shown in two ways.

First, there is to be an attitude of honor, as in 1 Thess. 5:12-13 where Paul says, “And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, (13) and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake....”

But beyond this attitude of honor, secondly there is to be literally financial support for them as they work. That is those who’s calling is communicating the truth of Scripture are worthy of the church’s financial support. In fact from this Greek word we get our English word “*honorarium*,” which refers to money given someone to honor them. In support of his claim that pastoral leadership should be paid he quotes from two undeniable sources. First he appeals to the Old Testament in verse eighteen, “For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,” and, “The laborer is worthy of his wages.” Paul first quotes Moses from Deuteronomy 25:4. The principle here was that when the farmer brought his oxen onto the threshing floor to separate the wheat from the chaff they were prohibited from

muzzling the ox. Instead they were to allow the ox to eat some of the wheat as he works. Although the comparison of pastors to oxen may not be very flattering to us, he is that even the oxen has the right to benefit from his labor, so a leader called to full-time leading and teaching in the church has the right to the financial support of the church.

Paul later more fully spells out this principle in 1 Corinthians 9:7-12 where he says, Who ever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock? (8) Do I say these things as a mere man? Or does not the law say the same also? (9) For it is written in the law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain." Is it oxen God is concerned about? (10) Or does He say it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written, that he who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope. (11) If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things? (12) If others are partakers of this right over you, are we not even more? Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ."

Paul also quotes Jesus when he says, "The laborer is worthy of his wages." This is a word for word quote of Luke 10:7. Thus Paul uses both an Old Testament and a New Testament quotation to case that churches are to honor there pastors with appropriate pay. So what is appropriate pay? A general rule of thumb would be that pastor (and other full time workers) should be paid on the same scale as others in the congregation of the same age, education, level of experience and responsibilities. Obviously the size and ability of the church to pay would have to be considered.

Yet many even within the church do not understand what it is that a pastor does with his time. Someone has explained it this way; "The pastor teaches, though he must solicit his own classes. He heals, though without pills or knife. He is sometimes a lawyer, often a social worker, something of an editor, a bit of a philosopher and entertainer, a salesman, a front man for public functions, and he is supposed to be a scholar. He visits the sick, marries people, buries the dead, labors to console those who sorrow and to admonish those who sin, and tries to stay sweet when chided for not doing his duty. He plans programs, appoints committees when he can get them, spends considerable time in keeping people out of each other's hair. Between times he prepares a sermon and preaches it on Sunday's and Wednesday's to those who don't happen to have any other engagement.

Then on Monday he smiles when some jovial chap roars, "What a job – only have work on two days a week!" [www.bible.org/illus/pastoring]

Luther's Ten Qualifications for the Minister

1. He should be able to teach plainly and in order.
2. He should have a good head.

3. Good power of language.
4. A good voice.
5. A good memory.
6. He should know when to stop.
7. He should be sure of what he means to say.
8. Be ready to stake body and soul, goods and reputation on its truth.
9. He should study diligently.
10. And suffer himself to be vexed and criticized by everyone. [www.bible.org/illus/pastoring]

Secondly, we honor them by demanding that they be Treated Fairly. (vv. 19-21)

“Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. (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.”

There were those in leadership in the church in Ephesus who were worthy of double honor because they did their job with integrity. However, there were others who were failing. So Paul develops here how the offending brethren were to be disciplined.

Paul says that the church is not to “receive” an accusation, receive means to accept the accusation as true and accurate. No accusation against a church leader is to be considered as true unless it comes from at least two witnesses. In other words the leaders were to receive the same protection everyone else. “If this procedure were observed it would cut down a great deal on the gossip and misunderstanding and the strife that goes on in our churches today. Paul says that the pastor and every member of the church should refuse to let anyone whisper into his ear any gossip about the pastor or a church officer. People should be able to *prove* their accusations before witnesses. The important thing is that you should have the facts before you talk. And if you have the facts, rather than scatter the scandal abroad, you should seek to correct the problem by going to the proper authorities. Any accusation should be given before more than one witness.” [J. Vernon McGee. “*Thru The Bible Commentary*” Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (Thomas Nelson: Nashville - electronic ed. 1997)

If the facts are known that a church leader *has* sinned, he is to be rebuked. The question arises, Is this to be done publicly? It is a safe rule that private sins should be dealt with privately, and public sins publicly. It is neither right nor necessary to make what is private public, unless all other options are exhausted. However, when a leader of the church, an officer

in the church, sins, and it has hurt the church, then I think it is time to call names. Great harm can be done to a church by sin in the life of its leaders, and this is the way Paul says it should be dealt with.

Further verse twenty-one states, "... observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality." There are within this verse two opposite sides of same problem, first they are to not judge with "prejudice" against the accused and secondly they are not judge "with partiality" in favor of the accused. Judgment is to be made on an honest appraisal of the facts, eliminating prejudice either for or against the accused.

Timothy is to treat everyone in the church alike. There may be an officer in the church who is a wealthy man and who has been good to the pastor. Perhaps he has bought the pastor a suit of clothes or helped him buy a new car. A pastor will often brag that such a man is a member of his church, and he may not feel inclined to bring any charges against him even though it is evident the man is guilty. Paul says that we are *not* to show partiality in the church. James said the same thing in James 2.

Third, we honor them by expecting them to act with Integrity (vv. 22, 24-25)

"Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people's sins; keep yourself pure.... (24) Some men's sins are clearly evident, preceding them to judgment, but those of some men follow later. (25) Like-wise, the good works of some are clearly evident, and those that are otherwise cannot be hidden."

The overriding concept of these verses is that we expect a life of integrity from the leaders in the church. It may sound odd to our ears that an expectation of integrity on the part of church leaders is a means of honoring them, but if you think about it, it makes sense. To expect church leaders to act with honesty and integrity is resounding vote of confidence.

There is some difference of opinion as to what is meant by "*lay hands suddenly on no man*" (v. 22). Some commentators think Paul is referring to the process of ordination, in which case it would mean, that the best way to avoid the scandal of having to discipline a leader is to thoroughly screen candidates before they are ordained. Others believe that when Paul says "*lay hands suddenly on no man*" he is referring to refraining from rash judgment.

Sometimes God will judge a Christian's in the present, but if He doesn't judge him immediately it does not mean that He is not going to judge.

Paul wrote about this to the Corinthians where there were some who were not commemorating the Lord's Supper in the proper manner. He said, "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep" (1 Cor. 11:30). Paul said that some were already being judged by God. Some were actually sick; others had died as a judgment of God.

Paul went on in 1 Corinthians to say, “For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged” (1 Cor. 11:31). When a Christian sins, he can judge himself. That doesn’t mean he is just to feel sorry for his sin. He is to deal with it: that is, if it has hurt some-body, he’s to make it right; *and* he is to turn from that sin. If he doesn’t do these things, he has not judged himself.

First Corinthians continues: “But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world” (1 Cor. 11:32). The world commits these sins, and God judges. Neither is a Christian going to get by with them: either you will judge yourself, or God will judge you. If you judge yourself, the matter is settled. If not, He will judge. Sometimes that judgment will occur here and now. If not, it will be dealt with when you appear before the judgment seat of Christ.

The same principle applies to good works (v. 25). “Likewise, the good works of some are clearly evident, and those that are otherwise cannot be hidden.” Sometimes God blesses a believer down here for something he’s done for which God can reward him. Others are going to have to wait until they are in His presence to receive their reward, which will be the case of a great many Christians.

Fourth, we honor them by encouraging them to live a healthy lifestyle. (5:23)

“No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach’s sake and your frequent infirmities.”

What is being discussed here is not the rights and wrongs of consuming alcohol as a beverage but rather that consuming of alcohol as a medicine! It was commonly believed in the ancient world that wine had important medicinal value. Paul is telling Timothy to use a little wine for his stomach problems and frequent illnesses. Considering the wealth of medicines available to us today; it highly unlikely that any Christian would need to use wine as a medicine.

Also worthy of consideration is, “*Why is Timothy abstaining from the use of alcohol?*” There were and are a thousand reasons for abstaining from the use of alcohol, but these reasons aside Timothy was abstaining for the wrong reason.

What Paul is telling Timothy is that he needs to take care of his physical health. This is an intensely personal issue with me considering my recent health crisis. Before March 3, 2005 I had never been in the hospital other than to visit someone else. Then I was hospitalized twice in the space of seven days. I guess that on some level I knew that I had some health problems but I had no idea how serious they were. It is like walking to the edge of a cliff and suddenly recognizing how close you came to stepping over the edge. One of that came one of the most honoring things that this church has ever done for me. After my procedure the deacons called to tell that they were insisting that I take a month off to recuperate.