

1 Timothy

I. Introduction

A. **1 Timothy 5:17-21** . . . The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. [18] For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing," and "The laborer is worthy of his wages." [19] Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses. [20] Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning. [21] I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of His chosen angels, to maintain these principles without bias, doing nothing in a spirit of partiality.

B. There are five clear instructions stated in **vs 17-21**.

1. **First**, we are to honor our church elders, and one way to honor them is to compensate them in ways that enables them to properly support themselves and their family.
2. **Second**, we are to consider elders who rule well and who work hard at preaching and teaching worthy of double honor.
3. **Third**, we are not to treat an accusation against an elder as true unless there are two or three witnesses to confirm it.
4. **Fourth**, elders who continue participating in some sin after being talked to are to be publicly rebuked, so that the rest of the believers will be fearful of sinning.
5. **Fifth**, the top leader or leaders of the church are to carry out these instructions in a totally unbiased and completely impartial way.

C. Pray

II. Unbiased honor, unbiased condemnation

A. [17] The elders who **rule well** are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who **work hard** at preaching and teaching.

1. To honor an elder is to esteem him or respect him in ways that verify the value you hold him to be in your life and the life of the church.
 - a. In our world as well as in the church there are positions that by custom are given honor, or respect, such the position of teacher or policeman or mayor of a city or president of a country or an elder in a church.

- b. However, though there are positions that are given respect, it is not always true that the people in those positions deserve respect.
 - (1) Therefore, though we are to show respect to a church elder because of his position, it does not mean we have to hold that elder to be of value to our life or the life of the church.
 - (2) The reason for this is, positional respect is bestowed. Personal respect has to be earned – earned by the integrity of one’s character, the dependability of one’s word, the maturity of one’s behavior, and the quality of one’s work.
 - c. Therefore, we are to honor and respectfully deal with elders because of their position. But if we are wise, we will use the scriptures as our basis for discerning, in an unbiased and impartial way, if an elder is worthy of sufficient respect to be followed and to give us guidance and spiritual help.
2. In relation to giving double honor to those who rule well and work hard at preaching and teaching, it is interesting to note that we are not exhorted to **give them** double honor, but rather to **consider them worthy** of double honor.
- a. In other words, **vs 17** does not command us to give double honor to those who rule well and work hard at preaching and teaching. Rather, it opens the door to giving more by exhorting us to see and think of them as worthy of double honor.
 - b. And based on **vs 18**, we can conclude that one form of double honor is compensation – compensation that enables an elder to provide for himself and his family.
3. Another interesting point is that it is only in the NT that the words preach and teach appear together. And though there are some differences in how scholars define each word, in essence,
- a. **Preaching** takes selected portions of God’s word and presents it in a way that confronts the listener with God’s truth and invites a specific response.
 - b. **Teaching** explains a selected portion of God’s word in a detailed manner with the intent of helping those listening to better understand and apply what is being taught to their daily lives.
4. With this information in mind, I want to point out several inferences in **vs 17** that come from the clear instructions stated there.
- a. There are elders whose focus is leading the church in the various ways it needs to be led, yet they do not preach or teach. And there are elders who lead, preach, and teach.

- b. There are elders who devote so much time to leading the church, preparing to preach and teach, and actually preaching and teaching that they deserve to be compensated in ways that enables them to properly support themselves and their family.
- c. Elders, regardless of their specific duties, are to be honored, treated with respect, submitted to, and followed, for as we read in **Hebrews 13:17**, “Your leaders keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account (*to God*). Let them do this with joy and not with grief (*joy because you are responding appropriately to their leadership; grief because you are resisting their leadership, resulting in leading a mediocre Christian life, and impeding the spiritual growth of the church*), for this would be unprofitable for you.
 - (1) Over the years, there have been many church leaders, but not all of them have been godly leaders, so what are we to do?
 - (2) First and foremost, we should be diligent at putting only godly leaders in positions of leadership – because when the commitment of a church is to be spiritually healthy, it creates the safest possible environment for the individuals in that church to submit to and follow their leaders.
 - (3) Therefore, the probability of bad leadership and ungodly elders is significantly minimized when those in leadership and the church as a whole strive to put into leadership **only** those who meet the Biblical qualifications for leadership.
- d. For whatever reason, some elders do a better job of leading than others. These are the ones who rule well. Some preachers and teachers do a better job of preparing and speaking than others. These are the ones who work hard at preaching and teaching.
 - (1) To discern which elders rule well and work hard at preaching and teaching, we must judge their work and the fruit that results from their work – just as we are to judge between elders who are spiritually qualified to be elders and those who aren’t (**Matthew 7:15-20, Revelation 2:2**).
 - (2) In other words, judging elders is not just appropriate, it is necessary if we are to discern which ones rule well and work hard at preaching and teaching, and therefore deserve double honor.

B. [18] For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing," and "The laborer is worthy of his wages."

1. Paul supports his instructions about supporting elders with two direct quotations, one from the **Deuteronomy 25**, and one from Jesus – though it is possible Jesus was adapting **Deuteronomy 24:14-15** to the situation at hand.
 - a. **Deuteronomy 25:4**, “You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing.”
 - b. In sending out His disciples to do missionary type work, Jesus said, “Do not acquire gold, or silver, or copper for your money belts, [10] or a bag for your journey, or even two coats, or sandals, or a staff; for **the worker is worthy of his support**” (**Matthew 10:9-10**).
 2. Paul makes three other statements about honoring and supporting those who serve the church. These are found in –
 - a. **1 Thessalonians 5:12–13**, “But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, [13] and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work.”
 - b. **Galatians 6:6**, “The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches him.”
 - c. **1 Corinthians 9:13–14**, “Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the food of the temple, and those who attend regularly to the altar have their share from the altar? [14] So also the Lord [Jesus] directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.”
 3. **An aside:** Some interesting information about OT quotes in the NT
 - a. The NT contains a number of quotes and references to specific passages in the OT. The OT books quoted most are Psalms, Isaiah, Exodus and Deuteronomy.
 - b. To the best of our knowledge, Paul either directly quotes, loosely quotes, adapts, or references the OT 93 times. Of those 93 times, the majority come from the Pentateuch (*the first five books of the OT*) – 33 times, Isaiah – 25 times, and the Psalms – 19 times.
- C. [19] Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses.
1. Church leaders in Paul’s day were just as human as they are in our day – which means none of them were perfect, and some of them were so imperfect that they needed to be confronted and publicly rebuked about some sin they were continuing to practice – even after

- having been encouraged to change their ways. The important lesson here is not the perfection of the elders, but the commitment of the church to promote and maintain godly leadership.
2. However, whether it is a first-time sin or the continuation of a particular sin – church leaders and the church as a whole are not to treat as true an accusation against an elder unless there are two or three witnesses to confirm it.
 3. This is according to God’s law as given through Moses to Israel.
 - a. **Deuteronomy 17:6**, “On the evidence of two witnesses or three witnesses, he who is to die (*for knowingly breaking a law that was to be punished by being put to death*) shall be put to death; he shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness.”
 - b. **Deuteronomy 19:15**, “A single witness shall not rise up against a man on account of **any iniquity or any sin** which he has committed; on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed.”
 4. It is my opinion that this requirement shows God to be more concerned about protecting the innocent against false accusations than about condemning the guilty in this life.
 - a. And as we know from God’s word, we may get away with certain sins in this life, but we will not get away with them forever, for we will face God’s judgment in the next.
 - b. And finally, needing two or three witnesses to confirm a person’s guilt does not mean the matter cannot be investigated further if there is only one witness. Yet bear in mind that there is a significant difference between **investigating** to discern the truth and **condemning** as if the truth has been confirmed.
- D. [20] Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning.
1. This idea of communicating to the church that God is serious about sin, and using fear to motivate God’s people to do what is right, did not start with Paul. This began with God’s dealings with Israel.
 - a. For example, **Deuteronomy 13:10-11**, “So you shall stone him to death because he has sought to seduce you from the LORD your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. [11] Then all Israel will hear and be afraid, and will never again do such a wicked thing among you.”
 - b. An actual example comes from the beginning of Israel entering the Promised Land. At that time, God acted in a fear-inducing

way in His dealings with Achan – who took for himself booty from Jericho that was to be given to God for God’s use.

- c. Another example comes from the beginning of the church, when God acted in a fear-inducing way in His dealings with Ananias and Sapphira – who lied about giving all the proceeds from the sale of their property to God, when in fact they kept back part of it for themselves.
2. In my experience, it is the rare Christian whose sole motivation for doing what is right and good is love for God and the good of others – which is why we need the additional motivation of fear when the motivation of love is not enough, or even absent.
 - a. I suspect that in at least one or two specific areas, most of us need the fear of getting caught and of being exposed to motivate us to do what is right.
 - b. In adult believers, this need for fear-induced motivation is a weakness in our love for God and commitment to godliness.
 - c. And yet, this need is a reality that has existed from Adam and Eve onward. Therefore, there is wisdom in using church discipline and the shame it brings upon the one disciplined to put fear into others who need fear-based motivation to do or continue doing what is right.
 3. Finally, if the church sees that even elders are subject to such public exposure and shame, the fear of getting caught will likely seep into everyone’s consciousness and have its intended effect on the rest of the church.

III. Conclusion

- A. [21] I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of His chosen angels, to maintain these principles (vs 17-20) without bias, doing nothing in a spirit of partiality.
 1. Of this list of five requirements (vs 17-21) there is no requirement more important than this one.
 2. Without question, it is important as a church that we honor our church elders and compensate those elders who need it.
 3. It is equally important that we consider elders who rule well and who work hard at preaching and teaching to be worthy of double honor.
 4. It is equally important that we do not treat an accusation against an elder as true unless there are two or three witnesses to confirm it.

5. It is equally important that elders who continue participating in some sin after being talked to are publicly rebuked so that the rest of the church will be fearful of sinning.
 6. And it is equally important that we do all four without bias or partiality.
- B. The reality is, how we judge and how we deal with the people around us, including those in our church, is of great importance. It is for this reason that **vs 21** strongly exhorts us to maintain (*practice and carry out*) the first four instructions without bias and without partiality.
1. **Without bias:** No judging before hearing both sides of the story and assessing all the facts. And never treat presuppositions or assumptions as facts.
 2. **Without partiality:** No prejudices or favoritism in dealing with a person or situation.
 - a. The glory of God, the truth of God's word, the spiritual health of the church, and the good of the individual is to be the standard for discerning who should be given double honor, who and how we compensate elders, how we handle accusations against an elder, and who and how we publicly reprimanded a continuously sinning elder or church member.
 3. No bias and no partiality is not only a mark of God's character and dealings with us, it is the mark of godliness. Therefore, it is to be the way we live and fellowship and judge and deal with each other.