

Armagh Baptist Church – 8th August 2010
The Life and Times of Timothy 12
1Timothy 5:17-25
More Advice about Elders

Introduction

Today's passage, the second half of 1 Timothy ch.5, is a passage that talks about good and bad elders. It is possible to have both in the life of a local church. So this passage sounds a word of caution when you're about to appoint new elders. First of all, as a Church it tells us....

1. HOW TO HONOUR GOOD ELDERS. (vs.17-18).

There are two kinds of Elders that you should honour according to v.17:-

- (i) Those who direct the affairs of the church well, and**
- (ii) Those whose work is preaching and teaching.**

This verse highlights the two main aspects of an elder's work:-

- First of all, directing, leading, guiding, overseeing, organising the church's life and ministry, and secondly,
- Preaching and Teaching God's Word, in order to feed God's People, and in order to keep them on the right tracks spiritually.

Now in practice the Pastor does most of the preaching and teaching, but if the other men who are appointed as elders are able and willing to preach, then they too should have a part to play in the preaching and teaching ministry of the church in its various services, prayer meetings and Bible studies.

But if an elder's task is to "**labour**" (to use the AV word) in the work of preaching and teaching - in other words if they work hard at it, trying to understand the text of Scripture, and preparing Biblical messages, and presenting them as clearly as possible, then they are worthy of honour.

All the Elders together have the task of '**directing the affairs of the church**'. Leading and guiding the church in what they believe to be God's Will at that time. If they work together well, and do this job well, then they are worthy of honour.

There are two ways in which a church should honour such elders:-

- (i) It says in v.17 that they are worthy of "double honour".**
- (ii) And it says in v.18 that "the worker deserves his wages."**

What does it mean that they are worthy of *double* honour?

Well the word for "honour" has already been used in this chapter before in v.3. "*Give proper recognition to*" (or *honour*) those widows who are really in need.

It was also used in ch.3:8 of deacons – “they are to be men worthy of respect” – so *honour* them.

The same word is also used in ch.6:1. Masters are “worthy of full respect” - worthy of *honour*. It’s the same word again.

Now if widows, masters and deacons are worthy of honour or respect just because of who they are, then we need to notice that Elders it says are “*worthy of double honour*” – or twice over: because of *who they are*, and because of *what they do*. That’s what it means to give them double honour.

In other words, the Office of an Elder is worthy of respect in and of itself. So as soon as elders are appointed, members should respect them, but if that particular elder serves well, and serves faithfully, and works hard at his task, then members should respect him all the more - give him double honour. Honour him *because of who he is* - your Elder, appointed by God, **and** *because of the work he does* - The Lord’s Work in this place.

That’s what it says in v.17, but what about v.18?

“The worker deserves his wages.”

Here Paul quotes from Deuteronomy 25:4.

“Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain.”

The picture is of an ox yoked to a beam across its back which is connected to millstones in the centre. And as the grain is being ground, and it walks around this circle all day, there will of course be some grain that will fall to the ground in front of him. The hard-working ox should be allowed to reach down and eat some of the grain to keep up his strength and energy. He shouldn’t be muzzled with a bag over his nose to keep him from getting any food, any rewards for his labour. That’s the picture here.

So if an animal like an ox is worthy of rewards while he is working hard, then the Christian Church should not hold back rewards from an elder or pastor who is serving well, and working hard for the Lord.

To back this up Paul quotes from the Lord Jesus himself who said in Luke 10:7, that *“the worker deserves his wages.”*

The context there is of a travelling preacher or missionary who should stay in a house when he comes to a particular town, eating and drinking whatever they set before him, because ‘a worker deserves his wages.’

We know from elsewhere in 1 Timothy that the Lord’s Work is not to be used as a means for financial gain (See 1 Tim 6:5). And in the qualifications for an elder we are told that he is not to be a lover of money (See 1 Tim 3:3).

But if an Elder or Pastor is having to give his whole time to the Lord’s Work, then the point that is being made here, very clearly, is that his church needs to make sure that he is being adequately provided for.

N.B. I have to say that Pastor's salaries today are much better than they used to be when I was growing up, but churches need to keep an eye on the cost of living generally to make sure their pastor is able to comfortably provide for his family, without major worries, in comparison to what a similar job would earn.

Generally speaking, other elders who are appointed by a church have their own outside jobs, and so they have their own means of income, so they will carry on their church-work in a voluntary capacity, or on an expenses basis, and they will have to try to balance church ministry with their paid employment and indeed with their family responsibilities too. So we need to be very understanding as far as our 'voluntary' elders are concerned.

But the point that's being made here is that one way or another, the church needs to make sure that those who work for them have enough to live on, because the Lord's servants, just like anybody else, are worthy of their wages.

N.B. it does specifically say, "*especially those whose work is preaching and teaching*" (v.17) - i.e. the pastor. So the full-time Christian ministry is Biblical, despite what some people might say. (Usually from a Brethren background!)

So we are to honour good elders here on earth, because one day God Himself will honour them and reward them in Heaven (**1 Peter 5:1-4**). (cf Matt 25:14ff).

But secondly we see from this passage...

2. HOW TO DEAL WITH BAD ELDERS. (vs.19-21).

Some people think that Church Elders and Christian Pastors are six feet above contradiction, and a law unto themselves. But that should not be the case. There is none of us, no matter how high we rise, that is not beyond the danger of falling.

"Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." (1 Cor.10:12 & 13).

There are good elders, Godly men, who seek to work hard for the Lord, and who seek to live exemplary Christian lives. But none are beyond falling. There are others who somehow get into the office, but who should never have been there at all. They are unfit for the office.

Well here Paul talks about how to discipline an Elder.

This is different from another passage in Matthew 18:15-20 which deals with how to discipline a Church Member.

First of all, because the office of an Elder is worthy of respect in and of itself:-

(i) Be very sure of your grounds before you accuse an elder at all (v.19)

An accusation against an Elder is not even to be entertained, unless it is brought by, or substantiated by, at least two or three witnesses. In other words, that means 2 or 3 independent people who have actually seen him do whatever it is he is being accused of, otherwise they are not eye-witnesses!

There will always be those who will seek to criticise or to undermine Pastors and Elders – in fact that is one of the Devil’s favourite tactics for attacking the local church. Timothy himself had been criticised in Ephesus, Paul had been turned on by the Church at Corinth, but for totally unfounded reasons. A Church must not entertain accusations against its Pastor or Elders unless they are very well founded, otherwise we’re just playing into the devil’s hands.

(ii) But if the accusation is proved to be correct; if an Elder is found to be guilty, then his punishment is to be more severe - it is to be public. (v.20)

Not as private as possible, which seems to be the idea behind the 3-step process for dealing with a church member in Matthew 18. There the concern is to keep the issue within the minimum number of people possible.

But here, as far as an elder is concerned, it says:
“Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly.” (v.20).
With all the shame that would bring.

Why is that? (v.20) *“So that the others may take warning.”*
Meaning the other elders, but also the church members too.

You see, the Lord prizes the purity of his Church. We must not treat sin lightly in the lives of any member, but especially not in the life of an Elder or Pastor. He has a position of privilege, and also of responsibility.

His character and reputation is to be protected by the church at all costs. But if he is found guilty of serious sin, then discipline must be all the more severe, because he has not only let himself down, but he has also let his church down, and let the Lord down as well.

(iii) Then comes a solemn charge in v.21 where Paul tells Timothy to carry out these instructions with total impartiality

- Not showing favouritism one way or the other. In the ideal circumstances, he should regard his fellow elders as his colleagues and as his friends, but nevertheless, painful though it might be to all concerned, for the sake of the testimony of the whole church, tough measures sometimes have to be taken.

So, in the light of all of this, because you can have very good elders, or very bad elders, Paul says thirdly in this passage:-

3. **BE CAREFUL WHEN APPOINTING NEW ELDERS. (vs.22-25).**

(i) **Don't be too hasty in the laying on of hands (v.22).**

'Laying on hands' is a phrase which refers to what happens when Elders are appointed - You lay hands on them to set them apart. But here Paul is saying that it's not something that a church should rush into. Take it slowly!

As a church we should be continually looking out for men that the Lord is raising up and gifting as elders. We should be continually on the look-out for new elders. But at the same time, we should take our time in terms of actually appointing new men to eldership positions. So although I am dealing with this matter now, because it has come up as the next passage in 1 Timothy to deal with, we will not be appointing new elders immediately. But as a church membership you will know how we do it next time around, and it gives the Lord time to equip and raise up men of his choice, and time for us to recognise their gifts and abilities before appointing them to the office of elder.

(ii) **If we appoint the wrong men, and they later fall into sin, then in a sense we who appointed them share in their sin. (v.22)**

We're to '*keep ourselves pure*' - in terms of protecting the purity of the church. But if you think keeping yourself pure simply means abstaining from everything, including alcohol, just take a look at v.23 where Paul advises Timothy that he should take 'a little wine' for his stomach problems. The poor water supply in Ephesus was obviously causing Timothy some health problems. He was frequently ill. But we're not to be such legalists, that we won't take the medicine, if it happens to involve a little alcohol. Yes it did say back in 1 Tim 3:3 that we should '*not be given to drunkenness*' - but here is proof it does not mean total abstinence. It simply means 'be wise!'

(iii) **Paul finishes the chapter (v.24,25)** by reminding us that no matter how much you investigate somebody before you appoint them to office, no matter how well you think you know them, human nature is such, that the worst about him could still be hidden from you. You can never know for sure. But then on the other hand, the best about him might be hidden as well. You may not really see what the man is like - good or bad - until he is appointed!

CONCLUSION

I think that in itself is good enough reason for the practice that some churches adopt as far as their eldership is concerned. Some churches require their elders to regularly submit their names to the church members at the AGM for re-election every 3 years, 5 years, or 7 years.

I know some churches that do that, and I think it is something that this church could consider.

I think it is a safeguard. It allows an opportunity for appreciation to be shown to good Elders, and it makes it possible to remove bad Elders.

Not with a public shaming ceremony as in v.20, but through the means of a regular submission to the vote of the members.

If an elder has lost the confidence of the membership for any reason, he will not be able to function properly anyway. But if, on the other hand, he obtains a clear backing from the membership on a regular basis in this way, then he can continue to serve with confidence for another term.

Perhaps this is something we should think about in the coming days?

But in the meantime:

Let's give honour and respect to those elders who are serving well.

Let's be sure of our grounds before bringing any accusation against an elder.

And when the time comes:

Let's be careful when appointing new elders.

Let's continually pray...

...that God's men might be found, and God's will be done in this church.

Amen.