

Letters From My Father
Week 15
1 Timothy 5:17-25
“Regarding Pastors”

Introduction

Not many should become teachers, my brothers, because you know that we will receive a stricter judgment. For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is mature, able also to control the whole body.

James 3:1-2

There is a no more noble calling upon this earth than being entrusted by The Spirit to preach and teach The Word of God. Therefore, it is imperative that those who are endowed with the spiritual gift of teaching to live a life above reproach (**1 Timothy 3:2**). This doesn't mean that the pastor is sinlessly perfect, but it does mean that he is required to live in holiness and faith. And trust me, the spiritual warfare that is directed towards the man who stands to deliver God's truth will be both relentless and intense. So it is incumbent upon these men to be persistent in prayer in order to withstand the merciless onslaught from the enemy. Pastors are held to a very high standard indeed, for if one should fall into egregious sin, the collateral damage will often spread far and wide throughout the body.

No one knew this better than the Apostle Paul, for in his time of preaching and church planting, he had seen it all. From the Judaizers and Gnostics infiltration of the churches, such as it was in Ephesus, to the embracing of immorality and arrogant pride, as was the case in the church at Corinth. The devil is always at work in his attempts to discredit God's people and impede their great commission of making disciples. We have an enemy, and he never takes a holiday. So, we must ever be on our guard. For these struggles will not lessen as the day of Christ's return draws near.

The end of all things is near; therefore, be alert and sober-minded for prayer.

1 Peter 4:7

Paul also knew firsthand what it was like to have enemies inspired by the devil to attack his character. In cities such as Thessalonica and Berea, he was falsely accused of trying to overthrow the government. And the riots that ensued became so violent that many Believers were in fear for their lives (**Acts 17**). For this reason, Paul had a special place in his heart for the pastors in the local congregations, who would stand and deliver the word of God every Sunday, knowing that the devil himself would raise up opposition to them. And Paul wanted to make sure that every pastor who was doing his job was protected from false accusations, for there are many who despise the message of the gospel enough to lie, as a means to either suppress or silence the truth.

Paul also had to deal with “so-called prophets” who would come into a city after him and attempt to undue everything that he had taught the Believers there. His message was constantly being undermined by what he called “doctrines of demons” (**1 Timothy 4:1**), so he knew all too well the frustration of beginning a new work, rooted in God's truth, only to have someone come along and try to discredit it.

So, you see, the local pastor has his hands full. There are so many tasks that are required of him, many that no one else is even aware. But it is also an honor to be able to share God's Word with God's people. For this reason Paul instructed Timothy to see to it that those who faithfully served in this capacity were to receive what he called “double honor” (**vs. 17**).

Let us look together at The Scriptures and see what God has to say in regard to those whom He has chosen to lead his people. In this letter to Timothy, Paul charged him in regards to church elders; to honor the ones who were faithful and to discipline those who are not. For those who presume to teach will be judged more strictly. The pastors are to be *Appreciated*, held *Accountable*, and carefully *Assessed*.

Appreciated (vs 17-18)

The elders who are good leaders are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says: Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain, and, “The worker is worthy of his wages.” **1 Timothy 5:17-18**

Notice that Paul says that the elders/pastors (the words are often used interchangeably), who are “good leaders”, are worthy of double honor. There are a lot of bad preachers out there who have gone into the ministry, because they think its an easy way to make a living.

From these come envy, quarreling, slander, evil suspicions, and constant disagreement among people whose minds are depraved and deprived of the truth, who imagine that godliness is a way to material gain. **1 Timothy 6:4b-5**

I am convinced that for every preacher that God calls, the devil calls ten or more. They distort the truth and are only in the ministry to take advantage of others for their own personal gain. Men (or women) such as these are deserving of no honor, for they are despicable.

But those who are faithful are different. And you can tell by how diligently they work when it comes to the teaching and preaching of the word. Notice that Paul uses the word “*especially*” (*malista* in the Greek, meaning “*above all*”), when he describes what they do. For it is the teaching of God’s Word that is the most important thing in the church. Without the teaching of sound doctrine, the church becomes just another social club. Would you like to know why the church in the US is so anemic, having little impact on the culture? It is because they have, by and large, abandoned the teachings of Scripture in exchange for so called inclusivity and tolerance. But God does not tolerate sin. If He did, then the cross of Christ would be all for nothing. The Word needs to be taught. And those who do so are to be honored for their efforts.

Some have speculated as to Paul’s meaning in regards to the term “double honor”. Some have said that this refers to both respect and remuneration. They are to be appreciated, as well as, compensated. And some *New Testament* manuscripts have been edited to make this point. But more than likely what Paul is saying is that the teaching of God’s Word to the body is to be honored far above all other ministries of the church. This is consistent with Paul’s general attitude, when it comes to doctrine (see **1 Corinthians 14**).

After saying that those who work diligently at teaching are to receive “double honor”, Paul then speaks of their financial compensation. He uses two verses to make his point. One from Deuteronomy and another from Matthew’s Gospel.

Do not muzzle an ox while it treads out grain.

Deuteronomy 25:4

And

...the worker is worthy of His food (or wages).

Matthew 10:10b

Oxen were permitted in *The Old Testament* law to eat of the grain, while they were working so hard to thresh it. The implication here is simple. Just as the ox was allowed to eat of the grain that he was working hard to provide for his owners, the pastor who diligently toils to feed his congregation spiritually should also have his needs provided for by them. God has always insisted that those who serve Him as priests and pastors must be compensated for their work. For even the bi-vocational pastor of the smallest of churches will agree, there is no such thing as part-time ministry. To be available at all times to the people, as well as, the intensive study of The Scriptures in order to teach is an all-consuming endeavor. And the churches who appreciate the efforts of their pastors, as well as, benefit from their godly teaching, should honor those men by seeing to it that they can earn a living. The worker is worthy of his wages!

Accountable (vs. 19-21)

Don't accept an accusation against an elder unless it is supported by two or three witnesses. Publicly rebuke those who sin, so that the rest will be afraid. I solemnly charge you before God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels to observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing out of favoritism. 1 Timothy 5:19-21

Just as the faithful pastors were to receive double honor, those who experienced moral failure are to be held accountable. Paul began this topic by making sure to warn Timothy of those who would falsely accuse pastors in order to silence them. He admonished his son in the faith to not even entertain an accusation against a pastor/elder, unless it was proven to be credible. *The Old Testament* law required that anyone to be put on trial must have at least two credible witnesses to testify against them, before the case could go forward. Paul employs this doctrine of The Law as a litmus test for any who would bring accusations against a preacher in the hopes of weeding out those who would falsely accuse with malicious intent.

But for those who were proven to have fallen into grievous sin, the penalty was severe. They were to be publicly rebuked. This means that they were brought before the church and reprimanded for all to see. This was meant to serve a two-fold purpose. First to allow the congregation to see that sin was taken seriously by the church leadership. And second, to serve as a warning to any other pastors who might think their sin would not have serious consequences.

I realize that to some this punishment would seem harsh, but when the integrity of the church is at stake, then drastic measures should and must be taken. And it is also important for us to understand that when a pastor is publicly rebuked, this is done in order to give him the opportunity for public repentance to be restored to the fellowship. This does not necessarily mean that he would be automatically reinstated to ministry, for sometimes the loss of credibility is so great that things can never be fully restored to be as they were. But it does mean that even the worst sinner can receive God's grace and forgiveness. And often, after enough time has passed and the once fallen man can prove that his repentance is in fact genuine, he can reassume some leadership responsibility once again. I am reminded here of the prodigal son, whom the father restored to his original status when he returned home in repentance (**Luke 15:11-32**).

I will tell you, as for me personally, I have only been involved in the public rebuke of one fallen pastor in all my years of ministry. And let me tell you, it is not something one desires to do. To be honest, it was one of the worst experiences of my life, and I hope that I never have to do that again. But just as Paul charged Timothy, it sometimes is a duty that cannot be ignored.

In my particular case, I had to publicly rebuke a pastor, whom I loved and admired. In fact, he was almost a hero to me. And as the executive pastor of the church, I would have much rather left the task to someone else, but it was my responsibility and mine alone. Just as Timothy was instructed to perform his duty without favoritism, every pastor must do what must be done in these circumstances. It is not a pleasant task, but it is necessary for the spiritual wellbeing of everyone involved. When there are secretive things done behind closed doors within the ranks of the clergy, the people will naturally become suspicious of their leaders. So transparency within the body of Christ is vital. The church is a family, and therefore, there should be no "family secrets". Sin is to be exposed publicly and dealt with accordingly. For God, His Son, and all the host of heaven bear witness to our commitment to holiness within the body.

So, to be a pastor is to accept the fact that we are to be judged more strictly, for we have the ability to lead others astray with our sin. I will never forget the impact of that fallen pastor upon the church where I served. He never witnessed any of that, but I was left there to try to pick up the pieces after he left, and I assure you, for the longest time it was like I was presiding over a funeral. So many had been hurt by his failings. That is when I learned firsthand, that the sin of a church leader affects far more than just himself, and I diligently pray that I will never allow my own fleshly weakness to harm the people that I love. To be a pastor is to be accountable to the congregation which you lead. And it is a tremendous burden to carry, but God has promised to lead us so long as we remain faithful to His calling.

Arduous Assessment (vs. 22-25)

Don't be too quick to appoint anyone as an elder, and don't share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure. Don't continue drinking only water, but use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses. Some people's sins are obvious, preceding them to judgment, but the sins of others surface later. Likewise, good works are obvious, and those that are not obvious cannot remain hidden.

1 Timothy 5:22-25

Since those who lead are to be judged more strictly, it stands to reason that arduous scrutiny be undertaken when considering men for these positions within the church. Paul admonished Timothy not to be **"hasty in the laying on of hands"** (NIV rendering of verse 22), which was a reference to the ordination of elders. Rather than quickly appointing a person to this position, they must be carefully examined to see if they are the kind of man God requires to lead His people.

Paul warned Timothy that to appoint an unqualified man to leadership was to share in the guilt when he led the people astray (vs. 22b). Therefore, it was not only the pastors who were held to a higher standard, but also the men who chose to place them in this position. This calls for a great deal of prayer and discernment in the selection of those who would lead us. In Paul's day, it was the apostles who generally ordained men to full-time ministry. Today, the task falls to the elders of the church. Some congregations vote upon who they would choose to lead them, but in all truth, this method is *un-Biblical*. Leaders, are supposed to install other leaders.

And the spirit of the prophets are subject to the prophets, since God is not a God of disorder but of peace.

1 Corinthians 14:32

So when choosing those who would have authority over the congregation, the elders of the church should carefully pray and consider them before ordaining them. As the old saying goes, "*Marry in haste and repent in leisure.*" It is far better to take sufficient time to choose an elder, than to later wish that you had. To pastor a church is not an easy task, and it requires a genuine commitment to Christ in order to bear any lasting fruit for the kingdom (**John 15**).

After admonishing Timothy to be careful in appointing elders so as not to share in their failings, and to keep himself personally pure (*hagnos* in the Greek meaning holy), he goes on to make a statement that seems either parenthetical or even completely out of place within the context of this passage. He instructs Timothy to stop drinking the water in Ephesus and to drink wine (***in moderation***) for his stomach.

Timothy, as we have discussed in prior chapters, was rather frail of health. And the water in Ephesus was causing him to have stomach trouble. I have the same difficulty if I drink the water in Guatemala, when we go on mission trips there! You often learn the hard way to avoid the water in a foreign country at all cost. So Paul wanted Timothy to drink wine (medicinally) in order to avoid the parasites often found in unsanitary water supplies.

Unlike many *Bible* teachers, I do believe that this is *in context* with the passage, for I think that Timothy was so committed to proving his holiness by abstaining from all things alcoholic in nature, that he was doing so to the detriment of his own well being. So Paul, who loved him as a son, was assuring the young man that there was nothing wrong with taking in a *moderate* amount of wine in order to promote his own health. It was, after all, to be done for medicinal, rather than fleshly purposes. If Timothy were to be effective in Ephesus, then he couldn't very well do so from his sickbed. Paul wanted Timothy to be holy, but to also take care of himself physically. And the two things are not mutually exclusive. *The Bible* never forbids drinking wine, it simply forbids drinking to excess.

After this, Paul returns to his discussion of appointing elders by reminding Timothy that some men are very good at covering up their sins, while other men's failings are obvious. But be forewarned, sooner or later, your sin will find you out (***Numbers 32:23***). Hence, it is always prudent to take a great deal of time and effort to assess those whom we appoint as leaders within the church.

And when a life is characterized by good deeds, those deeds will serve as a testimony as to the person's character. Again, "*those who presume to teach will be judged more strictly*", so they must be carefully examined before being entrusted with ministry. The man of God, who performs his duties faithfully, and above all, the duty of teaching and preaching God's Word, should receive double honor. He should be provided for financially, as well as, protected from those who would attempt to destroy his work. But he must also be held accountable for the way that he conducts himself, for he is God's representative entrusted with the care and administration over God's flock. And these are responsibilities that should never be taken lightly.

And let those of God's household all say... TRUTH!!!