

Ecclesiastical Government (14th)

(The study for today continues looking at the officers in the congregation that the Lord Jesus Christ appointed and their particular function. This session concludes studying the word for elder and his relationship within the assembly and found in I Timothy chapter five.)

In our previous two podcasts we have been considering I Timothy 5:17 and the following verses. These verses clearly manifest that the instructions given are congregationally related and that the elders are under the authority of the assembly and not a synod or some council separate from the congregation, nor residing in some denominational headquarters. The elders are to labor in the Holy Scriptures and teach them to the people within the assembly. It is the people within the congregation who know the lives and labors of the elders that are to support them in a financial way. If there is some accusation made against an elder, it is the house of God that is to investigate and, if needful, to administer the proper discipline before the whole body of believers so that proper reverence, honor, and fear be established within the congregation to the honor and glory of the Lord. Paul further instructs Timothy to see that no partiality be shown among the elders and that all receive the same attention in all matters. The elect angels are mentioned in verse twenty-one which equally demonstrates that instructions given are within the bounds of the body of Christ, the congregation of the Lord. (For a further study of angels in attendance at the worship of the assembly, see I Corinthians 11:10; Ephesians 3:10; I Peter 1:12.)

Verse twenty-two states, "Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure." Obviously, for a body of believers to be able to follow this advice, a man would have to live among them and his life well known to avoid a sudden induction to the office of eldership. Too often a young man will have a talent for public speaking and holding the attention of an audience and he is quickly ordained into the ministry to the harm of the congregation as well as himself.

Having covered briefly the passage overall, I would like to return to verses seventeen and eighteen and comment on them somewhat. They read as follows: "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer *is* worthy of his reward." In connection with these verses, I will include I Timothy 2:2 and Titus 1:9. They read as follows: "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also." And, "Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers." There are two things that I would like to particularly discuss: (1) the honor to be given; (2) the studies of the elder or minister.

The *first* point listed is difficult in some ways due to the modern idea that the ministry is categorized as a profession like other businesses of the world. Too often, ministers are paid large salaries along with various perks, amenities, and benefits of the denomination. Also, these men are deficient in their understanding of the Holy Scriptures and appear to be a public relations man for the congregation more than an ambassador of Christ. They are often wise in administrative functions, psychological counseling (generally with worldly wisdom), and articulate in public speaking and entertaining of the audience, but they are ignorant of theology and the doctrines of the Holy Scriptures. However, the Lord instructs that the elders that are to be honored are those "who labour in word and doctrine," hold "fast the faithful word" as taught by faithful men, and that they teach "no other doctrines," I Timothy 1:3. Ministers who do not know sound doctrine and correct theology are often paid too much. But those that fulfill the conditions are to receive "double honour." What is meant by "double honour"? The Greek word for honor (τιμή) basically carries the idea of monetary value, though it is also used to indicate admiration or respect. We find it in Matthew 27:6, 9 where it is used to designate the price of blood in the fulfillment of Christ being betrayed by Judas. However, it is also used in Roman 12:10 regarding showing affection and honor

to fellow believers. Again, it is used to display the value of our redemption in I Corinthians 6:20 and 7:23 where we are told that we are “bought with a price.” It is interesting that the Lord inspired Paul to use this word four times in this epistle (I Timothy 1:17; 5:17; 6:1, and 16). There is a parallel passage regarding this subject found in I Thessalonians 5:12-13. It reads, “And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. *And* be at peace among yourselves.” The word “highly” is a most interesting word. It (περὶσσωδῶς) means “superabundantly,” and additionally, the word before it “very” is the Greek word ὑπέρ which mean over or above, etc. Putting the two words together is like saying in our modern vernacular “super duper abundantly.” In other words, the minister is to so live and conduct himself so that his life reflects one who knows the Scriptures but the people are to have a great deal of respect for them. They are to be esteemed highly and venerated greatly. No. They are not to be worshiped or exalted above measure and they should be approachable. This balance is important. However, in the society today the average minister is merely a “good old boy” who wants to get along with everyone and hardly labors in the Word of the Lord and should have little, if any honor. The true minister is to be looked upon with admiration to the honor and glory of the Lord. And for such ministers, they are to receive “double honor,” even to double pay, for their labor in the Holy Scriptures.

As previously stated, “the Lord instructs that the elders that are to be honored are those ‘who labour in word and doctrine,’ hold ‘fast the faithful word’ as taught by faithful men, and that they teach ‘no other doctrines,’ I Timothy 1:3.” This brings us to our *second* point: the studies of the elder or minister. They must not simply know the text but to be able to give the sense of the Scriptures, Nehemiah 8:4-8. Theology and doctrine are essential to the understanding of the Scriptures. A. T. Robertson, one of the most knowledgeable (if not the most notable) Greek scholar of his day said regarding Acts 2:38 that the controversies involved with the phrase “for the remission of sins” and its relationship to baptism cannot be settled by knowing the Greek. He said, “One will decide the use here according as he believes that baptism is essential to the remission of sins or not.” Doctrine is essential and the principles a person holds influences his way of life and it clearly identifies how the elder lives and what he teaches the people. It is crucial that the bishop labor in the Word of God and that he knows the doctrines that exist in it. Sadly, the modern pulpit today publishes very little, if any, doctrine to the audience. The worship services generally provide a casual atmosphere of dress, with songs set to worldly music, and a message of self-esteem and positive attitudes for success in life. There is little reverence in the assembly of the saints for God and His Son, and there is little (if any) teaching on the vital doctrines of the Scriptures such as the attributes of God, the Person of Christ, justification, adoption, reconciliation, and other God honoring subjects. Ministers who fail in this area do not deserve to be honored.

Before leaving this subject regarding the honor and respect that is to be given to the elders or bishops within the congregation, I would like briefly to direct your attention to Hebrews 13:7, 17. They are as follows: “Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of *their* conversation.” And, “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that *is* unprofitable for you.” While the elders are not a ruling body over the congregation that establishes guidelines of doctrines, practices, and discipline for the assembly, they are to function as faithful ambassadors of the Lord and deliver the truths of the Scriptures to the people so that the body of the Lord will be established in the Lord and directed as to how they are to live in this world of sin. Equally, the elders are to so live before the congregation that their faith and conversation (manner of life) is to be considered to illustrate the Christian lifestyle, verse seven. Faithful ministers watch for the souls of the people of God, especially those among whom they labor, and thereby in their prayers for them before the Lord an account is given. Dear Christian, what kind of report are the elders of your assembly giving to the Lord regarding your obedience to God and His gospel? It is a serious matter to disregard the faithful minister. His life and ministry is to be seriously considered and as

he teaches the truths of the Scriptures. By rejecting him and his ministry one is not merely rejecting the minister, he is rejecting God, See I Samuel 8:7.

This concludes our study of the eldership from I Timothy chapter five. The Lord willing we will consider the use of the word elder in the other books of the New Testament.