

## Message #32

## I Timothy 5:17-25

As we move into this new section, widows aren't the only ones who are to be cared for properly by the church, so are the elders. The elders are to be honored and certain ones are to be supported.

There is no question that leadership is critical to the church becoming a pillar and support of the truth. In fact, no church will ever become this without Biblical leadership. In the book of Hosea, we read these simple words "And it will be, like people, like priest;..." (Hosea 4:9). The point of the statement was that people reflect their leaders and, in this context, would be punished by God.

**IF THE CHURCH IS TO BECOME A PILLAR AND SUPPORT OF THE TRUTH, IT MUST HAVE A PROPER PERSPECTIVE AND PROPER TREATMENT OF ITS ELDERS.**

John Calvin said it well when he said, "For preserving the good order of the Church, it is likewise highly necessary that elders should not be neglected but that due regard should be paid to them; for what could be more unfeeling than to have no care about those who have the care of the whole Church" (p. 137).

**POINT #1 – All elders are to be honored. 5:17**

The idea that some elders get into a "double honor" category immediately informs us that all elders are in an honored category.

The word "honor" is one that implies honoring something by recognizing its high value (G. Abbott-Smith, p. 446). People in the church should place a high value on their elders. The Bible gives us insight as to exactly how the church does this:

- 1) It should appreciate the elders (I Thess. 5:12).
- 2) It should esteem the elders (I Thess. 5:13).
- 3) It should obey the elders (Heb. 13:17).

Elders are very valuable to church life and if the church is ever to become a pillar and support of the truth, it should view them that way.

In the mind of God, the highest and holiest position a man can ever serve in this world is as an elder of one of God's churches.

H. A. Ironside said, elders "who have the responsibility of shepherding the flock of Christ should never be treated rudely or looked upon with contempt" (p. 123).

**POINT #2 – Some elders are to receive double honor. 5:18-19**

Not only should all elders be honored, but some of them should reach another level of honor. John MacArthur observed there are some elders who are worthy of a greater level of acknowledgement from the congregation. All elders are to be honored, but not all are honored at the same level. Some deserve to be honored at a greater level (p. 219). This other level includes being financially honored.

**Prerequisite #1 - The elder must be one who rules well. 5:17a**

The word “rule” is one that means to govern, to preside over, to direct and maintain (Smith, p. 381). The word “well” is one that means to do what is right and fine in accordance with God’s Word (*Ibid.*, p. 229).

The tense of the participle is critical; it is perfect tense, meaning that the elder who rules well is one who is known to do what is right in accordance with God’s Word, in ruling in church matters and he has ruled this way from some point in the past and continues to rule this way at the present.

**Prerequisite #2 - The elder must be one who works hard at preaching. 5:17b**

The word “especially” is one that means to work very exceedingly at preaching and teaching God’s Word (*Ibid.*, p. 276). The words “work hard” mean work to the point of exhaustion.

Paul’s point is that the elder who deserves double honor is one who will work to the point of exhaustion, specifically at a very exceeding level of preaching and teaching God’s Word.

The conjunction “for” explains what this double honor is – full compensation or support in wages. The elder who rules well and who works at an exceeding level at preaching and teaching God’s Word is to be fully and financially compensated.

Dr. John MacArthur writes: “Not all elders have the same burden of preaching and teaching. Some may teach or preach infrequently, some constantly. Those whose ministry demands all their attention should be freed from any need to earn a living and be cared for and even rewarded for their singular devotion” (p. 220).

- 1) Not all elders are to be financially supported by the church.
- 2) If a preaching and teaching elder is not working hard at handling the Word, he should not be financially supported.
- 3) God places a high priority on preaching and teaching His Word. Some think he should be supported if he’s a good counselor, a good caller or a good coordinator—but God demands he be a good student.

- 4) A good ruling, hard-working preacher and teacher of God's Word should always be doubly honored at the highest level possible. God will bless His church that functions this way. This is a key to a church becoming a pillar and support of the truth.

**POINT #3** – Elders are not to be falsely accused. **5:19a**

The church is to protect its elders. It should never allow an elder to be wrongly and falsely accused by someone. There are always people who love to falsely accuse a man of God. As Dr. MacArthur said, these servants of Satan may resent the elder's calling, teaching, authority, virtue, or they just may be jealous of God's blessing on his life (p. 221).

If a church is to become a pillar and support of the truth, it will stand against those who try and undermine a faithful elder's ministry. They will not even receive an accusation, which means they won't even consider it or admit to it. They won't investigate it; they will ignore it. They will turn a deaf ear (p. 339).

J. Vernon McGee observed if this principle were followed today in the church, a great deal of gossip, strife and controversy that come against a faithful man of God would be "cut down" (p. 453). It is the responsibility of the church to defend its faithful elders, not let them be demeaned.

Now if some sin accusation is made against an elder, it is only to be investigated if it comes from two or three witnesses. According to Deut. 19:15, two or three witnesses provide confirmation. If two or three witnesses testify that an elder is in sin, then careful investigation and determination of actual facts may be undertaken.

Again, the words of Dr. John MacArthur are weighty here: "To attack someone in a position of authority is a very serious matter. . . . Psalm 105:15 warns, "Do not touch My anointed one, and do My prophets no harm." Those who set out to falsely accuse God's servants are treading on dangerous ground" (p. 222).

**POINT #4** – Elders at times must be rebuked. **5:20-21**

If an elder is found to be in a "continual sin," he is to be publically rebuked in the presence of the whole church. Most commentators observe that an elder who is in continual sin is at a whole different level than the member who is in continual sin.

The context helps us determine the application—if a sin accusation has been brought against an elder by two or three witnesses, and investigation proves the accusation to be true, namely, the elder has been involved in continual sin, then the elder is to be rebuked in the presence of the whole church.

The typical steps of private and plural confrontation are jumped over and the elder must face the congregation. This will send a strong message to the congregation, namely, it is a fearful thing to pretend to live life one way, when in fact it is a false pretension.

These things are to be carried out without bias or partiality. It doesn't matter what the man has accomplished in the past or how he has been used; he is to be publically rebuked.

Paul was dead serious about elders and how they are to be viewed and treated, and charges Timothy in the presence of God, Christ Jesus and His chosen angels. We may think it is just us who comes to worship at church, but attitudes and actions in a church are viewed by God, Jesus Christ, and His angels.

The church is monitored by God. The elders are monitored by God. Dealing with sin issues is monitored by God. When it comes time for a rebuke, God expects it in His church.

**POINT #5** – Elders must be carefully selected. **5:22-25**

Paul, in these verses, is saying to Timothy, thorough investigation must precede leadership selection.

The idea of “laying hands” on someone has already been covered in the letter. In the preceding chapter Paul referred to this as the setting of Timothy apart for ministry (I Tim. 4:14). In Timothy's case, the announcement and recognition of his gift were intimately connected in the “laying on of hands.” In this case, it is the public acknowledgement and recognition that one has been set apart to be a leader.

**Issue #1** - Do not select an elder in haste. **5:22a**

Now the charge to Timothy was that he should take his time in identifying elders. No man should be put on the board as the result of a hasty decision. Much prayer and thought must go into the selection of the elder. The word “hastily” carries with it the idea of putting someone into the office of an elder too quickly (Smith, p. 441). If one has not been proven as a faithful man of God, then it is possible to put someone into the office of an elder who is actually in sin.

The word “sin” is one that speaks of ceremonial defilement (p. 6). Paul is also commanding Timothy to keep himself pure, undefiled and holy. He must choose other leaders and he must be a pacesetter in godliness while doing this. Far too often the church throws anyone it can into the office of an elder. Never should the selection of elders be made in haste.

Now as near as I can determine, Paul's point in following his statement concerning Timothy remaining pure with a statement about drinking some wine is because drinking wine does not mean Timothy is in sin. In other words, if Timothy were to drink a little wine now and then, he is still free from sin.

**Issue #2** - Do not select an elder who is in known sin. **5:24a**

In some people, it is very evident that they are not elder material. The verb “are” is present tense meaning in some men their sin is continually evident. If a man is known for his persistence in a sin, he certainly should not ever be elevated to being a leader in God's church.

The judgment spoken of in these verses is a judgment that is church-related. Some men are such known sinners in the church that their sins have already been exposed and they should not be an elder.

**Issue #3** - Do not select an elder who is in unknown sin. **5:24b**

Now you may ask how we can know whether or not a man is in unknown sin. The answer is to watch him over a period of time. If he persists in sin, he is not fit to lead. By not being hasty in the selection of an elder, one will eventually see whether or not sin follows after the man. God over time will surface who is fit to lead and who isn't.

**Issue #4** - Do select an elder who has evidenced good deeds. **5:25a**

The term "good" is one that refers to doing things that are right and fine, specifically in accordance with the Word of God. Some men will have demonstrated that they are interested in doing what is right in accordance with the Word of God. That is elder material.

**Issue #5** - Do select an elder who eventually evidences good deeds. **5:25b**

God will eventually surface those who are doing what is right in accordance with His Word and will. When He does, this becomes elder material. It is critical that an elder not be selected in haste. This gives God time to surface what is really going on in a life.

If a church is to become a pillar and support of the truth of God, it must have elders. But not just any elders; it must have elders who have been carefully selected. Furthermore, the church must maintain a proper perspective and treatment of its elders.

### **PRACTICAL LESSONS FOR THE CHURCH:**

1. Appreciate your elders.
2. Esteem your elders.
3. Defend your elders.
4. Obey your elders.
5. Pray for your elders.