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I Timothy 5:19-25 “Protect Your Pastor”

Intro. Today I conclude my brief series entitled, “How to Relate Well to Your New Pastor.” I shared with you in my second message that one of the responsibilities of a pastor is to protect His congregation, especially from false teachers and false doctrine. Here in this picture you can see a shepherd protecting his sheep from the wolf. Well in my message today, I want to share with the congregation that *you* have a responsibility to protect your pastor. Have you thought about that?

So today I am going to share several ways a congregation, and especially the lay leaders of the congregation, should protect their pastor. I especially have in mind how you should protect the pastor that will follow me. I could talk about protecting your pastor through prayer, as you see here. The day is coming when you may need to help protect your pastor from persecution. I could talk about protecting your pastor from burnout, by protecting his day off and time with his family. I could talk about taking the initiative to solve problems rather than dumping them all in his lap. Yet I am going to focus primarily on the ways addressed in my text of Scripture.

So what are some of the ways you should protect your pastor? First of all:

I. PROTECT YOUR PASTOR’S REPUTATION

In v.19 Paul says, “Do not receive an accusation against an elder [a pastor] except from two or three witnesses.” Based on the previous context, he is clearly speaking of one who holds the office of elder, or pastor. Now in all cases it is of utmost importance to safeguard the innocent from false accusation. Therefore, Old Testament law required 2 or 3 witnesses for an accusation to be established.¹ This general principle is especially true in regard to pastors. We see here that any accusation should be well substantiated *before* it is even considered and dealt with further. But lacking such support, the accusation must not even be *received* by the elders or deacons for further consideration. The reputation of the pastor must not be unnecessarily damaged, and his work must not suffer unnecessary interruption because of a disgruntled church member.

There are a number of examples of false accusations that are found in Scripture. Potiphar’s wife tried to seduce Joseph, and when he refused, she falsely accused him of rape (Gen. 39:7-20). As a result, an innocent man was sent to prison. Queen Jezebel and her co-conspirators falsely accused Naboth in order to commit judicial murder and seize his land (1 Kings 21:7-13). Jesus Himself was falsely accused of being gluttonous and a winebibber and breaking the Sabbath (Mt. 12:2-14). He was falsely accused of blasphemy (Mt. 26:65; John 10:33) and of threatening to destroy the temple (Matthew 26:59-61). He was accused of telling people not to pay their taxes to the Roman government (Luke 23:2) and of inciting insurrection against Caesar as a rival king. Jesus warned His disciples that *they* would face slander and false accusations (Mt. 5:11). Indeed, false witness against Stephen (Acts 6:7-15) resulted in his martyrdom. The apostle Paul was falsely accused on a number of occasions (Acts 16:2; 21:28; 24:5; 25:2). So this is a real problem that can happen to a pastor as well.

¹ See Deut. 17:6 19:15.

Furthermore, one of the oldest political tricks to remove someone from office is to bring false accusations against them. I'm sure some pastors have been forced out of office due to false witnesses. This sin is so serious that it was prohibited in the 10 Commandments, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" (Ex. 20:16).

One reason for this command of the apostle Paul in v.19 relates to one of the qualifications of a pastor. Look back at 1 Timothy 3:8, "Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil." Satan wants to attack and bring down every good and godly pastor. In Rev. 12:10 Satan is called, "the accuser of our brethren..." In Job 1 Satan was the one who accused Job before God. Surely you do not want to be in league with Satan and do his dirty work!

Let me tell you another reason why it is so important that you protect your pastor from false or unsubstantiated accusations. When a pastor's reputation is damaged, it closes the minds of the listeners to their preaching. They don't want to hear what he has to say. So don't gossip and publicly criticize your pastors. Paul warns against the sin of murmuring on more than one occasion (I Cor. 10:10; Phil. 2:14). That is when you share a complaint or criticism against someone with others, especially with those who are not even in position to do anything about it.

You better be careful about bringing or repeating a false accusation against the pastor or other leader of the church. Rev. 1:20 says that Christ holds His pastors (lit. messengers) in His hand and walks among the churches. Psalms 105:15, "Do not touch My anointed ones, And do My prophets no harm." Furthermore, you can do great harm to a church when you bring false accusations against the pastor resulting in his unwarranted dismissal or resignation. Zechariah 13:7 says, "Strike the Shepherd, And the sheep will be scattered..."

What should you do if you hear an accusation or complaint against a pastor from just one person? You should not repeat it or spread gossip. It is a serious offense to spread rumors and gossip about a pastor. After all, the charge may be idle gossip or may arise out of an individual's misunderstanding, or prejudice, or just because they want to get rid of the pastor. So you need to nip it in the bud. Challenge that person to follow Scripture and produce other witnesses or keep quiet! I want to encourage you to have your pastor's back when others are attacking him with criticism and accusations.

Another way you should protect your pastor is this:

II. PROTECT YOUR PASTOR FROM TEMPTATION AND SIN

As Paul indicates in the last of v.22, a pastor is to keep himself pure. And yet, the old devil wants to bring your pastor down by means of temptation. So we are going to see from this text that the congregation can see to it that their pastor maintains moral purity through a process of protective guidelines and accountability. So the first thing that you should do is:

A. Encourage Protective Guidelines - 1 Cor. 10:12 says, "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." No pastor is immune to temptation. Among others, there are two areas of temptation that especially need accountability and protection: sexual and monetary temptation. You don't want your pastor falling into either of these, which could not only result in dismissal, but even prison in some cases. I hate to see a mug shot of a pastor!

As for protections from sexual temptation, I have tried to follow the Billy Graham rule in my ministry. I will not permit myself to be alone with a woman who is not my wife behind closed doors, or in a car alone with another woman. If I do counsel a woman and I need to close

the door for privacy, I only do so because the secretary is just outside the door, she can see through the window in the door, the door is unlocked, and we both know she can come in at any time.

Now my wife has served as the afternoon church secretary for about 15 years. Back when my office was in the other building in what is now the Bright Hope S.S. class, a workman was in my office bathroom working with the door closed. Meanwhile, Cheryl came into my office from next door. She wanted me to show her how to do something on the computer. She was seated at the computer and at some point I leaned over and kissed her on the cheek. Just at that moment the workman opened the door and saw me kissing her. I immediately explained that she was my wife!

I don't do this just to avoid the possibility of temptation, but also to prevent gossip and unwarranted accusations.

Another area of temptation that a pastor needs protective guidelines for has to do with money, the misappropriation of funds, and even the temptation of embezzlement. So I do not handle the offerings of the church if I can avoid it. I expect to be fully accountable for any and all spending I do. A pastor must be fully transparent with the funds and expenditures of the church. Knowing that the leadership of the church can and should hold me accountable helps to keep me from yielding to temptation. I want to be "above reproach" in such matters.

Yet what should happen when a pastor yields to temptation, and falls morally or from sound doctrine? What if accusations are brought against a pastor from at least 2-3 witnesses?

B. Follow a Biblical Process of Accountability for Sin – Pastors and other Elders who walk in sinful ways must be held accountable. In fact, their sin must be punished even more severely than that of others, as we see in our text today. The Law made the same distinction in regard to the Priests (Lev. 4:22, 27). So what should be done? First:

1. An Inquiry Should Be Made - If two or three people unite in a common testimony, a discreet inquiry should be made. Our bylaws give the process by which this is to be done. Mt. 18:15-16 should be followed as well. First, even before you bring an accusation against a pastor or elder, you should first speak to him and seek better clarity and understanding of the fault that you witnessed. If you still believe it is a sin that he is unrepentant of, then it should be taken to no more than 2-3 of the elders of the church, in our case deacons and other pastors. It should not be taken to the entire body of pastors and deacons until the situation is examined and dealt with by the smaller group. *If* it is agreed that there is unrepentant sin, or sin that is so serious that dismissal may be warranted, then it is to be taken to the entire Deacon body and the church if necessary.

As the accusations are considered, another principle we see in our text is this:

2. Appointed Leaders Should Judge without Partiality - Paul says in v.21, "I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality." Such examinations should be done without any prejudice or partiality on account of rank, wealth, or personal friendship. Just because we are friends, or just because you love me as your pastor, should not mean that you overlook what is truly a transgression that warrants rebuke. Justice should be blind and impartial. In so many cases, a good-buddy system has allowed a pastor or priest, or a professor in a seminary, or a denominational worker to go on serving in spite of serious sin.

If the charges are found to be true, and especially if there is no repentance, then Paul says there should be:

3. Rebuke Publicly – Paul says in v.20, “Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all...” Because of their public position, they should receive a public rebuke. However, some would interpret “all” to mean “all the elders,” rather than the whole church. Paul said in Eph. 5:11, “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose *them*.” Bringing sin to light has a way of purifying that sin. On the other hand, too often such things are swept under the rug, so to speak, which is contrary to the Scripture.

However, I would also point out that Paul uses the present tense here regarding “those who are sinning.” Thus, a public rebuke is mainly in order when there is unrepentant and ongoing sin, even after they have been confronted. Otherwise, the leadership could follow the principle of 1 Peter 4:8, “love will cover a multitude of sins.” Especially if the sin was not major and not publicly known, and if repented of, it can be dealt with more privately.

By the way, Paul does not say they should be fired but rebuked, though in some cases their ministry would be so impaired that they should resign or be fired. But in other cases, it is enough if they receive a rebuke before all involved and the pastor responds with a remorseful and repentant attitude.

4. Reason – In the last of v.20 Paul gives an important reason, “that the rest also may fear.” If sinning elders are rebuked publicly, or before the entire examining body, then the other elders will be filled with godly fear of wrong-doing. This will help keep others in line. Pastors are human too, and pastors need to know that they are fully accountable for their actions.

On the other hand, when pastors and others know that they can get by with sin, then sin will abound in others who will feel that they can get by with it as well. It is true that the abuse of discipline has often led to a harsh and intolerant spirit, but neglect of it has proved a danger almost as great.

So I call upon our pastors, deacons, and Personnel Committee to be careful to follow these biblical guidelines in dealing with accusations.

There is one more principle that needs to be followed:

C. Restoration from Serious Sin Takes Time - Paul says in v.22, “Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people’s sins...” Some commentators [Wuest & Barclay] believe this refers to restoring a pastor to office after a rebuke. The immediate context is a good argument for that interpretation. If so, Paul is cautioning against a quick restoration. Enough time should pass for the minister to demonstrate true repentance. Once the leaders feel the minister is ready for restoration, that would probably be done so with a special prayer and laying on of hands. We should strive for forgiveness and restoration if the failure is not too serious.

On the other hand, the reference to laying hands on them is used of ordination several times in Scripture (Acts 6:6; 13:3). A reference to ordination also fits the context because of the consequences of quickly ordaining someone who ends up sinning and causing harm to the church. In the case of ordination, the qualifications of the men who are being considered must be fully examined before they can be nominated for office. You need to make sure there are not ongoing or recent moral failings in a person who is to be ordained as a pastor or deacon. This is also in line with what Paul had already said in 3:6, where he says that a pastor should not be “a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil.” A church should proceed with ordination with extreme caution. But regardless of the exact meaning, Paul is saying that the laying on of hands is not to be a hasty decision, whether in cases of ordination, or restoration, or calling a pastor.

Paul gives several reasons why restoration or ordination should not be done quickly:

1. You Could Be a Partaker in Sin – Paul says in the middle of v.22 that we should be careful not to “share in other people’s sins.” Ordination without a thorough investigation would render Timothy co-responsible for the wrongs which such elders might subsequently commit. If we ordain a man to the office of the ministry who is known to be living in sin, or to cherish dangerous doctrinal error, we become partakers of the sin and of the heresy.

But while Paul meant, doubtless, that this should be applied particularly to ordination to the ministry, he has given it a general character. In no way are we to participate in the sins of other men. We are not to be engaged with them in doing wrong; we are not to patronize them in a wicked business; we are not to be known as their companions in such sins; and we are not to partake of their unlawful gains. We are not to loan money for an unlawful or immoral business that violates your Christian convictions.

2. Sometimes Their Sins Need Time to Be Revealed – Paul says in v.24, “Some men’s sins are clearly evident, preceding them to judgment, but those of some men follow later.” First impressions are not always reliable. The sins of some men are so evident that they can be refused ordination without an examination. With such men we should not be accessory to their being introduced into the office of the ministry. But with some, their sins “follow” them. No one may know about their secret sin, but nevertheless, their sin remains hot on their heels, relentlessly refusing to let them go. So in such a case, it is not until after they are ordained or take office that the church finds out what they are truly like. Or, on the surface, people may think well of this person as a dedicated Christian, but upon careful investigation and examination, their sins and lack of Christian commitment become evident.

Do you know how many times a Pastor Search Committee has recommended a man to a church, only to say later, “We called this pastor and it wasn’t until later that we realized the kind of man that he turned out to be.” Do your homework. Take whatever time is needed.

In v.25 Paul adds balance to this discussion. He says, “Likewise, the good works of some are clearly evident, and those that are otherwise cannot be hidden.” Some candidates for ordination, or to serve as a pastor, may be overlooked because their good works are not open and evident to all. Some are somewhat shy, modest, laid back and behind-the-scenes. Timothy and the other elders should not overlook them.

Finally, and very briefly, I want to give one more exhortation:

III. PROTECT YOUR PASTOR FROM AN UNFORGIVING SPIRIT

I have talked about how the elders or deacons of the church should handle accusations of moral or doctrinal failure in a pastor. But what you should do when your pastor simply makes a mistake or an error in judgment. The younger or more inexperienced a pastor is, the more likely he will make mistakes and errors in judgment. And when a pastor gets old, he may make some mental mistakes. Last Sunday at the 8:30 service I asked the deacons where the bread plate was! I momentarily forgot we had combined the elements into one tray.

Well, when a pastor makes a mistake, forgive him. Though he is God’s man, he is still a man. We all make mistakes. Extend the same grace to him that you would want extended to you. Ephesians 4:32 says, “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.” Then Heb. 12:15 says, “looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble....” Don’t let a root of bitterness keep you from receiving the ministry of your pastor.

I want you to know that I have always forgiven anyone that I *felt* has sinned against me. I do not hold grudges. I always want to set the example in this regard.

Sources: William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible Series: The Letters to Timothy, Titus, & Philemon* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975); Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes on the New Testament* (accessed through *Online Bible*); Donald Guthrie, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: 1-II Timothy, Titus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1957); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:30] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); A.T. Robertson, *New Testament Word Pictures*, Vol. IV (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931, accessed through *Online Bible*); Donald A. Ward, *Commentary on 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus* (Waco: Word Books, 1974); Kenneth S. Wuest's *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament: The Pastoral Epistles* in Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1952). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

Note: I could do a final point: IV. PROTECT YOUR PASTOR FROM UNREALISTIC DEMANDS, based on v.23 (yet the sermon is long enough as is; or substitute for III.).

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