

The Elders Who Rule Well (I Timothy 5:17)

I. Introduction

A. Good morning

1. I know most of you and I think most of you know me, but I'll go ahead and introduce myself just in case
2. I'm Matt Basel and I'm one of the elders at another church in town, Gloria Deo, and have known Nate and several from your congregation for many years
3. As it turned out that Nate was going to have a significantly busy summer, he reached out to Dan and I to see if we could help fill the pulpit here at Christ the Redeemer while he was away - and, rejoicing with him in his son's impending marriages, I enthusiastically agreed

B. I've been invited to fill the pulpit at other churches a handful of times over the last few years, and I've noticed a trend whenever I share the Word with another body of believers - I have to pick a passage to preach on

1. At Gloria Deo, I never have to pick a passage to preach on, we pick a book of the Bible and spend six months or more going through it together, so any given week, I know what I'm preaching on - whatever's next in that particular book
2. When I preach in other congregations, I find I have a hard time picking a passage - choosing one thing out of the glorious wealth of Scripture is not one of my strong points, so I always have a little struggle as I come to another congregation
3. As I wrestled through what Word from God to bring to you this morning, I thought back to a sermon I had preached at another church that was not my home church to honor an elder who had contributed much to my growth in Christ - he had asked me to fill His pulpit and I could think of no better thing to do than to honor Him for the work that He had done for me in Christ
4. And, as I come to join you this morning, I can say something similar about your Pastor, Nate - I have valued His wisdom and example as a fellow elder in our community and, especially when Gloria Deo was first starting, he and Chip and Mark met with us many times to give us wisdom and guidance as we stepped out and Nate gave up much of his time and effort to mentor me as I took some seminary classes some years ago
5. So, I'd like to preach a similar sermon in honor of a man who has given his life to serve Christ and has served me well and served you well by calling you to do something that Scripture calls us to do - honor your elders

1 C. Our primary text this morning will be I Timothy 5:17 - *Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching*

1. This is the text that I am going to be preaching on this morning in order to honor Nate who labors in preaching and teaching here at this church
2. My hope is that through this sermon you will be encouraged in desire and in knowledge to honor your elders - currently Nate and Mark and Chip - and potentially in the future others who may serve this local church

D. Caveat: We aren't going to cover everything in this one verse

1. There are many things that we could focus on even just in this one verse
 - 1 i. It talks about the elders who rule well and we could ask what it means for an elder to rule well?
 - 1 ii. Again, it mentions elders who devote themselves to preaching and teaching - why and how do elders focus on preaching and teaching in the church?
 - 1 iii. But, in our short time here this morning, I just want to focus on the main command of the verse - honor your elders - *let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor*
2. But even in this command, we're not going to cover everything we could this morning
 - i. The passage mentions double honor - two types of honor we should honor our elders with this morning
 - ii. Most people who teach on this passage focus on the second, or the doubled honor, which refers to honoring them with monetary provision as they labor in the church - and that is correctly a focus of the passage as we see from the context surrounding this verse
 - iii. But sometimes because we focus on that second honor, we forget that there is a first honor - honoring them with our esteem - so, this morning I'm going to constrain my focus to that first honor, we are supposed to honor elders who rule well, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching

1 II. Three ways to honor your elders

A. The first question we need to answer this morning is how do we honor our elders?

1. Honor is a word that can have a wide variety of meanings, we could make it mean too little or too much...
2. But I think, as we look in Scripture, there is a clear pattern for how we should honor our elders
3. So, this morning, I want to show three simple ways we can honor our elders out of Scripture

1 B. First, we honor our elders by loving their gospel leadership

1. For this first way of honoring elders, I want to look at Hebrews 13:17 - we'll actually come back to this verse several times this morning because it has a wealth of teaching for how we should honor our elders
- 1 2. Hebrews 13:17 - *Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.*
 - 1 i. The section that I want to focus on in this point is the first phrase, obey your leaders!
 - ii. Almost all Bible translations have this phrase, but I think it has been unfortunately translated
 - iii. The Greek word here doesn't mean obey, like we usually think about obeying, instead it has a meaning closer to *Be being persuaded by or be having confidence in or be trusting in or be following your leaders*
 - iv. The author of Hebrews isn't calling us to merely obey our elders, he is calling us to watch our elders leadership and try to follow it, he is calling us to listen to our elders teaching and try to agree with it
 - v. So, we honor our elders leadership by loving their gospel leadership - when they lead, we try to follow, we don't try to lead our own ways and we don't ignore where they are going, we love their leadership over us and therefore run after them
- 1 3. Another verse that helps us understand this principle is I Thessalonians 5:12-13 - *We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.*
 - 1 i. Paul tells us in I Thessalonians that we shouldn't only be trying to follow our elders leadership, but we should esteem them very highly in love as they lead us - in other words we should think well of our elders, we should love their gospel leadership
 - ii. When we love our elders' gospel leadership we aren't only going to try to go where they are leading us, we are going to be happy about it because we think highly of our elders
4. So, as Nate and Mark and Chip labor to teach and to lead this church and struggle to grow this church up in Christ, honoring them is trying to understand what they are trying to teach, following where they are trying to lead and being joyful about it - honoring our elders is loving their gospel leadership
5. This is an important point, because growth in Christ is often a challenging thing, full of discipline and change as we try to become more like Christ and when your elders work to push you toward this it is easy to either work against your elders and not value their leadership, or allow your elders to lead but grumble about it the whole time
6. But Scripture warns us against this, it tells us that we should love our elders gospel leadership, we should follow their lead and we should be happy about it - our goal should be to catch their vision and run with it

2 C. Second, we honor our elders by listening to their gospel admonitions

1. In the last point, I encouraged you to follow your elders gladly, to love their gospel leadership, but we know that sometimes we aren't going to agree with our elders on everything, and sometimes our elders may even have to confront sin in our lives to encourage us to grow in Christ
2. This next point has to do with that, how do we respond to our elders when we disagree with them or when they confront sin in our lives - Scripture tells us how to honor them in this realm as well
- 1 3. Again, we'll start in Hebrews 13:17 - *Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.*
 - i. In the last point, I told you that the first word in Hebrews 13:17 didn't mean mere obedience
 - 1 ii. And I'm happy to say that because the next phrase in Hebrews 13:17 does mean obedience - *Obey your leaders and submit to them*
 - iii. This word does have more of the connotation of mere obedience, literally it means to surrender
 - iv. In other words, we should be trying to follow our elders lead, but even when we find ourselves in a place

where we just plain disagree with our elders we still need to submit to them - submitting to them is an act of honor, it is saying, 'God has placed you over me in Christ to encourage my growth, so I will honor your leadership even when I don't agree'

- v. Now, as a caveat, I don't mean that this submission is absolute - if your elders are consistently leading you in ways that are contrary to the gospel then you must not submit to them - fortunately, though, knowing your elders I am confident that this is not the case in this church, your elders are trying to lead and guide you in the gospel to become more like Christ
- 1 4. Another verse that points us to this is I Thessalonians 5:12-13 - *We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.*
 - i. Again, we already looked at this verse, but now I want to focus on the first half of the verse
 - 1 ii. Paul tells us that we should respect or appreciate those who labor among us and admonish us in the Lord - the word admonish means a warning about sin, a gentle rebuke or correction to point us back to the right way
 - iii. So, Paul tells us we need to respect our elders even when they are challenging us about sin in our lives
 - iv. Honoring our elders means listening to their gospel admonitions, when they come and confront sin in our lives, they aren't doing it because they like conflict or strife, they are doing it because they want to see Christ in you and you honor that by humbly and truly listening to their admonition
 - v. In fact your elders are admonishing you all of the time, when Nate preaches he is calling you to compare your life to Scripture and to change accordingly - so honoring your elders is listening carefully and considering your life in light of Nate's teaching, that is, in light of Scripture
 - vi. But sometimes admonishment is more than this, sometimes your elders must confront specific sin in specific members because the sin has become public and is unrepented of - again, honoring your elders is listening humbly and respectfully if this is you at some point, your elders aren't trying to hurt you they are trying to lead you after Christ and honoring them is listening to their gospel admonitions

2 D. We honor our elders by living a gospel life

- 1. My first two ways of honoring our elders have focused on times that you are with your elders - you honor them by following their lead joyfully and by listening to their admonitions humbly - my last way of honoring our elders now expands honoring into all of life, how do we honor our elders even when they aren't with us?
- 1 2. Again, we'll turn to Hebrews 13 to start this point, but we'll move back a few verses, Hebrews 13:7 - *Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.*
 - i. The author of Hebrews tells us that how we live our lives is a way of honoring our elders
 - ii. When we live our lives by imitating our elders' gospel-centered lives, that is a way of honoring them
 - iii. And, conversely, when we make no effort to live gospel-centered lives we dishonor our elders
 - iv. Living a gospel-centered life in imitation of your elders is honoring to them because this is what they are working for - they are struggling to see you mature in Christ
 - v. So, more than anything else you could do, the best way to honor your elders is to listen to their teaching and watch their lives and then imitate them as they imitate Christ
 - vi. When you make much of Christ in your life and your actions demonstrate that you love Christ, this is the greatest Joy an elder could have, the apostle John said this specifically in III John 4 - *I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.*

E. So there are three simple and straightforward ways of honoring your elders

- 1. We honor our elders by loving their gospel leadership - we watch to see how they are leading and we enthusiastically follow
- 2. We honor our elders by listening to their gospel admonitions - we humble and graciously listen to our elders as they teach and admonish us and even as they confront sin for the good of the sheep
- 3. And finally we honor our elders by living a gospel life - we listen to our elders' teaching and watch our elders' lives and strive to live out the gospel in our own lives in imitation of our elders

1 III. Three reasons to honor your elders

A. In our last point, we asked the question 'how do we honor our elders?', in this point I want to ask the question, 'why do we honor our elders?'

1. I think this is an important question to ask, because honor our elders is often a hard task to do well because as sinful, fallen human beings, we like to rebel against authority
2. But Scripture doesn't just tell us that we need to submit to and honor the authorities God has placed over us, it tells us that the authority God has placed over us is good
3. So, next, I want to look at three ways that honoring your elders works out for good

1 B. First, honoring your elders is good for you

1. Our first reason is personal, when you personally honor your elders, it is good for you - God doesn't just command you to honor your elders, He commands you to do that because it works out for your best
 - i. In fact, we could say that about every one of God's commands - God always commands what is good, even what is for the best of His children, and the command to submit to your elders is no different
- 1 2. Again we'll start by looking at Hebrews 13:17 - *Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.*
 - i. We have already looked at the first phrase - *obey your leaders and submit to them*
 - 1 ii. So now I want to turn and look at the second phrase - *for they are keeping watch over your souls*
 - iii. The author of Hebrews can't get to the end of the sentence without stressing why you should honor your elders by following them and submitting to them - you should do this because it is good for you
 - iv. Your elders are leading you and your elders are confronting you because they want your soul to be counted righteous in Christ on the last day, so they are laboring to guard and watch over your souls
 - v. When you honor your elders you are cooperating with this task, you are allowing them to guard your soul in Christ well, which works for your good in Christ
 - vi. So, the author of Hebrews ends the admonition by stressing (in the negative sense) that when you honor your elders it is advantageous to you - honoring your elders is good for you!

2 C. Second, honoring your elders is good for your church

1. Our second reason is corporate, when you honor your elders, it is good for your church - your elders are working to build your church up in Christ and when you honor your elders it tends to the good of your church
2. For this point I want to turn to a slightly longer passage in Ephesians 4, listen to the flow of the passage and how shepherds and teachers - eldership roles - are part of the way God builds His church up in Christ
- 1 3. Ephesians 4:11-16 - *And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.*
 - 1 i. Shepherding and teaching are roles exercised by elders - they watch over the flock like shepherds and they devote themselves to the teaching of the Word in the church
 - ii. And Paul says that Christ has given them as a gift to the church, and He has given them to the church for a specific reason - to equip the saints, to build up the body, to encourage unity in the faith, to increase knowledge of the Son of God and to mature the saints in Christ
 - iii. And the result of the elders roles are that the church is grown in Christ - the church will no longer be childish, not having a good understanding of Christ, instead they will be growing up into Christ, who is the head of the church
 - iv. When we recognize the roles of elders as gifts of Christ to His church, we will honor the elders for what they do because we see in it Christ's gift to us - having elders placed over the church is a gift from Christ!
 - 1 v. When we honor our elders we are participating in this pathway of growth in Christ - the elders are given as gifts to the church to encourage growth, but growth only happens when each part is working

properly - *Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.*

- vi. When the elders are shepherding and teaching and the flock is following and learning and using their gifts to serve the church, then the church will grow up into Christ
- vii. So honoring your elders is good for you and it is good for your church

2 D. Third, honoring your elders is good for your elders

1. Our third reason is pointed outward - honoring your elders isn't only good for you and for your church, it is good for your elders as well

1 2. Once more we'll turn to Hebrews 13:17 - *Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.*

- i. We've looked at most of the first half of the verse, now I want to consider the second half of the verse
- 1** ii. The author of Hebrews tells us that elders will have to give an account for how they watch over the souls in their care - so they have to watch over your souls whether or not you cooperate because they'll have to answer to Christ for how they did this
- iii. And a good elder will struggle and strive to do this, to be faithful to their charge, as Paul says - *Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.*
- iv. Elders are called to give an account and good elders will be struggling to be faithful to their task, but the author of Hebrews doesn't only tell us that elders will be called to give an account - he encourages us therefore to not make their job harder
- 1** v. He tells us to let them do their work *with joy and not with groaning* - he is telling us that we should follow and submit to our elders so that our elders job isn't harder than it needs to be
- vi. So when you honor your elders it is good for your elders as well
- vii. Your elders, if they are good elders, are going to work with all of their effort to see you mature in Christ
- viii. But it is up to you whether they will rejoice in their work or groan in their work - will it be their joy to partner with you in pursuing Christ? Or will you be the one that they grieve over, mourning and praying for a change of heart? - let them do it with joy and not with groaning!
- ix. When you honor your elders, it makes the job that they have to perform before Christ that much easier and therefore that more joyful

E. So Scripture gives us plenty of reasons why we should honor our elders

1. When we honor our elders it is good for us, it works out for our best in Christ
2. When we honor our elders it is good for our church, we cooperate with Christ's gift to build up His church
3. When we honor our elders it is good for our elders, we allow our elders to take joy in the work Christ has appointed them to

1 IV. The Ultimate Honor

A. In our first point we asked 'how do we honor our elders?' and in the second point we asked 'why do we honor our elders?', in this point I want to turn and consider 'who are we really honoring when we honor our elders?'

1. This may seem like an odd question to ask, since we are obviously honoring our elders
2. But this is not who we are ultimately honoring when we honor our elders
3. So, I want to look to Scripture to see who we are ultimately honoring and thus why we should ultimately honor our elders

1 B. Honoring your elders is ultimately honoring Christ

1. This is the real answer to who we are honoring - honoring your elders is honoring Christ
- 1** 2. Let's look at I Peter 5:1-4 and pay attention to the comparison made in the last line - *So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.*
 - i. After giving instructions to elders as to how they are supposed to shepherd the church of God, he encourages the elders by telling them that they aren't the ultimate shepherds of the church
 - 1** ii. There is another shepherd who is the Chief Shepherd - when Peter refers to the Chief Shepherd he is referring to Christ - he is telling us that the elders shepherd the church, but they shepherd the church because they are servants of a greater Shepherd who is always shepherding His church
- 1** 3. We see this again in Revelation 7:17 - *For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.*
 - i. In the glorious pictures of Revelations, John again tells us who the ultimate Shepherd of the church is
 - ii. The ultimate shepherd is the lamb, Christ who gave Himself up as a sacrificial lamb to redeem His church
4. In fact, this was one of the core promises of a New Covenant, that there would be a new Shepherd
 - 1** i. We read this earlier this morning, but consider again the words of Jeremiah 23 - *"Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!" declares the LORD. Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who care for my people: "You have scattered my flock and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for your evil deeds, declares the LORD. Then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. I will set shepherds over them who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be missing, declares the LORD. "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'*
 - ii. God promised that a better shepherd would be raised up, a better Son of David would shepherd God's people, and under Him would be faithful shepherds to lead and guard God's people
5. So if Christ is the Chief Shepherd and elders are merely His servants imitating and pursuing His work in the church, then honoring our elders is honoring Christ
 - i. We are honoring Christ because we are honoring those whom He as the Chief Shepherd has appointed over His church
 - 1** ii. We see this in Romans 13:1 - *Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.*
 - iii. Paul isn't talking directly about elders, but He does say that all authority comes from God and this is why we honor any authority - if God has appointed authority over us, we should honor it because we honor God - and elders have been placed in the church by Christ, so honoring them is honoring Christ
 - iv. But not only are we honoring Christ in submitting to His plan, we are honoring His role in the church when we honor our elders
 - v. If Christ is the Chief Shepherd, when we submit to shepherding by our elders we are testifying that we need a shepherd, we need Christ as our shepherd and we are grateful for His shepherding work in our lives and in the church which is partially enacted through our elders
6. So honoring your elders is ultimately honoring to Christ!

2 C. Therefore honoring your elders is a response to the gospel

1. When we think about Christ as the Chief Shepherd, this takes us right back to the core of the gospel
- 1** 2. We saw Peter call Christ the Chief Shepherd in I Peter 5, so now I want to turn back a few chapters to the first time Peter calls Christ the Shepherd of the church, I Peter 2:24-25 - *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*
3. Christ, as our Chief Shepherd is the shepherd who was willing to leave the comfort and safety of heaven to

seek out lost sheep - even to seek them out at the cost of His own life

- 1 4. Jesus Himself said that this was the mark of the good shepherd - *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*
5. Christ's shepherding role is the gospel, so honoring your elders, which is ultimately honoring Christ, is a response to the gospel
6. The beginning of my message may have seemed very man-centered, but this is why it is not - honoring your elders isn't about your elders, honoring your elders is about Christ and the gospel
7. Honoring your elders is rooted in the fact that Christ bore our sins in His body on the tree so that we might die to sins and live to righteousness
8. And I need to pause here and say, if you don't understand what that means - if you don't understand what it means that Christ took our sins, that He died in our place, that He provided our righteousness - if you have never come and sought refuge in this gospel, ignore the rest of my message this morning for right now
9. The gospel is the most important and honoring men without understanding the gospel will do you no good
10. So, if you don't understand this gospel, please don't leave this morning without asking someone to tell you more about this good news - I know that the elders here or really anyone here would count it a joy to sit and explain what it means that Christ took our sins in our place
11. But, once we understand that glorious truth and have grasped it for ourselves, then our response to the selfless shepherd is to submit to His shepherding - the gospel calls us to bow our knees to our shepherd and one practical and powerful outworking of that is to joyfully submit to the shepherds that Christ has appointed over us - submitting to your elders is a glorious testament of submission to the gospel

2 D. So honoring your elders is ultimately honoring Christ and this gives us the ultimate reason why we can honor our elders

1. One of the reasons it is hard to honor our elders is that your elders are sinful men, sometimes they will make mistakes and sometimes they will offend you, sometimes they may even wrong you - your elders aren't going to be perfect, they should be striving to follow after Christ, but they won't be perfect
2. But if we're not ultimately honoring our elders, we're ultimately honoring Christ, this gives us great freedom to honor our elders well even when they make mistakes every once in a while
- 1 3. We looked at I Peter 5:1-4 a few minutes ago, lets continue with I Peter 5:5-7 - *Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.*
 - i. After giving instructions to the elders in verses 1-3 and encouraging the elders to imitate the chief shepherd in verse 4, Peter turns to the rest and encourages them to submit to their elders
 - ii. Immediately after telling them to be in submission to their elders, though, he turns to the topic of humility - by why does he do this?
 - iii. As I've said many times this morning, honoring our elders can be hard for a variety of reasons and requires great humility, humility before our elders, but ultimately humility before Christ
 - iv. Christ has appointed elders over His church and we need to humble ourselves and submit to Christ leadership of His church
 - v. But Christ is not only in charge of His church, He is the loving Chief Shepherd of His church, so He cares deeply about His church - so we can humble ourselves and cast all of our cares on our Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ, because we know He is going to care for us
 - vi. So, when it is hard to honor our elders, when it is hard to follow their lead or listen to their admonitions, even when we disagree with something our elders say, instead of choosing not to honor our elders, we can cast our cares on Christ knowing that He is going to care for us and for His church
 - vii. So, Christ being the Chief Shepherd gives us the best reason to honor our elders - we can honor our elders because we know Christ cares for His church - this gives us great freedom to honor our elders well even though they are still sinful men and are wrong at times - Christ is always going to lovingly and perfectly shepherd His church

E. So honoring your elders isn't a man-centered, worldly task, honoring your elders is submitting to Christ and loving His gospel, honoring your elders is a practical and joyful way of living out our faith in the Chief Shepherd!