



A Study of 1st & 2nd Timothy

1st Timothy 5:17-25 Double Honor...

I am reading from 1st Timothy chapter five, verses seventeen through twenty-five. If you're using one of the pew Bibles, the passage is located on page 993...1st Timothy 5:17-25.

This is what God's Word says:

ESV 1 Timothy 5:17...Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. ¹⁸ For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer deserves his wages." ¹⁹ Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. ²⁰ As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear. ²¹ In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality. ²² Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor take part in the sins of others; keep yourself pure. ²³ (No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.) ²⁴ The sins of some people are conspicuous, going before them to judgment, but the sins of others appear later. ²⁵ So also good works are conspicuous, and even those that are not cannot remain hidden.

The letter to 1st Timothy was written by the Apostle Paul to his young protégé Timothy to encourage him to stay on at Ephesus and set right the problems that plagued the church there. There are hints throughout the letter that the church in Ephesus was being troubled by a number of false teachers. Apparently, these false teachers were trying to draw away the church from the truth of the gospel. The way they were attempting to do that was by focusing on a kind of speculative, philosophical interpretation of the Old Testament. They were more concerned with promoting novelty than they were with promoting the gospel. Of course, we don't know all the details of exactly what they were teaching, but we do know that the gist of their error centered on their misinterpretation and misuse of the Old Testament and especially of the law it contains. That is, we know they were misusing the law. We know that from some important clues contained in 1st Timothy 1:6-11.

ESV 1 Timothy 1:6...Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, ⁷ desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions. ⁸ Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, ⁹ understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, ¹⁰ the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, ¹¹ in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.

You see what I mean.

Paul doesn't really spell out in detail what their heresy was. Still, he does make it clear enough through these somewhat nebulous statements regarding both the false teachers and the law as to the general nature of their false teaching.

What Paul wants Timothy to do is to put it all to rest. That is, he wants Timothy to put an end to what these false teachers are doing.

Now I made the point a few weeks back, that Paul doesn't spell out in detail precisely what was going on in Ephesus and the fact that he doesn't actually makes his instruction more widely applicable. That is, what Paul has to say to Timothy winds up being applicable far beyond the problem at Ephesus. It winds up, in fact, being applicable to almost all heresy everywhere.

And here's the really surprising thing. Paul's solution for Timothy is rather simple.

What Paul tells Timothy to do in light of the false teachers at Ephesus is to relentlessly preach the gospel, to appoint good men to leadership in the church, and to instruct the Ephesians as to how to live their lives so that they will reflect the transformative power of the gospel.

Over the course of our study together we've covered each of those three things in turn. The last few weeks, of course, we've been focusing especially on this last part of Paul's instruction to Timothy. That is, we have been focusing on just how Paul wanted the Ephesians to treat one another.

Now I should add that initially, chapter five seems to be directed only at Timothy. That is, it sounds very much like it is focused on Timothy and Timothy alone, **"Timothy this is what I want you to do...and I want you to do it personally."**

I say that both because almost all of the verbs used in chapter five are 2nd person singular imperative verbs and because almost all of the things Paul brings up are traditionally understood to be primary pastoral responsibilities.

Let me remind you of the kind of the things Paul tells Timothy to do.

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 4:12**... Let no one despise you for your youth, but (you) set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 4:11**... (You) command and teach these things.

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 4:13**...Until I come, (you) devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 4:16**...(You) Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. (You) persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.

You see what I mean.

Still somewhere along the way the nature of the commands Paul gives Timothy somehow manages to take on a more general application. And that's true even though the commands continue to use those same 2nd person singular verbs. Let me show you what I mean.

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 5:1**...Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, ² older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity. ³ Honor widows who are truly widows.

You see what I mean. Those commands seem more general. They seem like they might apply to everyone at Ephesus. They seem more general even though Paul

continues to use a series of 2nd person singular imperative verbs. What I am saying is that his readers would have understood that this particular series of commands was not limited to Timothy alone.

None of the Ephesians would have read Ephesians 5:1 and thought, **“Well Paul has commanded Timothy to be gentle with older men, but we don’t have to do that. We can treat them like dirt if we still want to. Nor do we have to listen to Paul as to how we ought to maintain these other relationships he brings up.”**

You see what I mean. His audience would have known better than to do that. In fact, I think it is fair to say that the rhetoric employed in 1st Timothy 4:16 more or less demands that everything that follows be applied both to Timothy and to his hearers.

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 4:16**...Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. (You) persist in this, for by so doing you will *save both yourself and your hearers*.

Do you see? It will save **“both yourself and your hearers.”** I think rhetorically that means that the commands that follow are more or less applicable to everyone at Ephesus. Really, they are even applicable to everyone in the faith.

And what were those commands starting in 1st Timothy 5.

Paul commanded Timothy and the Ephesians both, to treat older men with respect as if they are fathers; to treat older women with gentleness as though they were mothers; to treat younger men like brothers and younger women like sisters. And remember that with the younger women in the church they were commanded to

behave with absolute purity. And then, of course, Paul reminds Timothy and the Ephesians to treat widows that are truly widows with special kindness seeing that they have no one else.

Now what Paul does then at the end of chapter five and the beginning of chapter six is to address two more sets of relationships that the church at Ephesus needs to be very careful to manage. And what are those two groups?

They are two groups of slaves.

The first group of slaves is the one that includes those given over to leading and teaching in the church. They are those people who in a way are especially bondservants to the Lord Jesus to feed his sheep. The second group of slaves is one that is made up of actual slaves...slaves in the traditional sense of the word who just happen to be enslaved by Christian owners. That sounds almost like an oxymoron doesn't it.

Now what is really interesting, from my perspective, is that with regard to the first group, those elders that rule and teach in the church, Paul focuses on how the Ephesians are to deal with them fairly while with regard to the second group, those Ephesians that are actually...really and truly slaves, Paul focuses not on how their masters are to treat them but rather on how they are to obey their masters. Did you get that? Paul explains to Timothy how the elders, both ruling and teaching, are to be treated by the church, and then turns to the slaves at Ephesus focus not how they should be treated but rather on how they ought to obey.

You can see how both commands might wind up being abused. It might be possible to take these commands in such a way that we treat ruling and teaching elders like they are royalty rather than servants of Christ just as it might be possible to take the commands toward slaves in such a way that it fosters in them a kind of passive acceptance of mistreatment and abuse. I say that it is possible to take them that way. I do not, of course, believe for a moment that that is what Paul had in mind.

Alright then, let's look at how Paul commands the church at Ephesus to treat its ruling and teaching elders. You'll notice he starts right off with the issue of money.

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 5:17**...Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. ¹⁸ For the Scripture says, "**You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,**" and, "**The laborer deserves his wages.**"

Now Paul's discussion centers on the honor that elders in general and teaching elders in particular are owed by the church. You will notice how he seems to separate the elders he is talking about into two categories: those who rule in the church, and those who both rule and teach. This is, of course, one of the principal places in the New Testament where our own denomination, the Presbyterian Church in America, gets its notion of two types of elders. In case, you are new to our church or denomination that means that we have two categories or types of elders. We distinguish between the two groups by calling one group "**ruling**" elders and the other "**teaching**" elders. The combined two groups are referred to as the Session of the church. The word "**session**" means "**the seated ones.**" Together the two groups of elders are responsible before both God and the congregation to oversee the life of the church. Paul tells Timothy and the

Ephesians that both groups are worthy of honor. Ruling elders, for example, are worthy of honor because of the great ministry in which they are engaged. But he singles out one of the groups as being worthy of **“double honor.”** And that particular group includes those who toil and labor and teaching and preaching. That is, he specifically singles out those involved in the teaching ministry of the church. In modern terms, Paul is talking about teaching elders.

Now when Paul uses that phrase **“double honor”** he doesn't mean to take the respect and deference shown to a ruling elder and just double it...you know by referring to such men as **“His Eminence, the Right Reverend Doctor the Holy and Aged Pastor Browning.”** I mean just because I insist my wife call me that is no reason why the rest of you should do so. No, Paul isn't really interested in seeing just how thick a church can lay on the compliments. That doesn't mean of course that it is wrong to encourage those who publically teach in the church. It is not. Encouraging those who work hard at their teaching and preaching is a good thing and a wonderful encouragement to those who spend long hours in isolation preparing to feed God's flock. I think there is a tendency on the part of flocks everywhere to think, **“Well I would like to tell them how much their message blessed me but I don't want them to get puffed up or cocky.”** Really, that's not the flock's problem. That the preacher's problem. Still, what Paul is actually referring to when he says such men are worthy of double honor is that such men should actually get paid.

You can tell that is his point from verse eighteen where he provides two quotes, really two analogies, to illustrate his point.

ESV 1 Timothy 5:18...For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer deserves his wages."

Now the first part of the quote is drawn from 1 Corinthians 9:9-10 which in turn quotes Deuteronomy 25:4.

ESV Deuteronomy 25:4..."You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain."

The point of the passage is that it is cruel to make a dumb animal to do endless repetitive labor and not allow it to gain some sort of sustenance, some bit of joy, from its labor. The point of the passage is certainly not that such men are dumb oxen although that may be true in my case. Rather, the point in 1st Timothy is pretty much the same as Moses originally intended it. When an ox is treading out grain, its owners ought to allow it to eat from the grain that it is treading. They ought not to clamp its mouth shut in order to prevent it from eating as it plods along. The application is obvious and this is it. A man committed to faithfully laboring and toiling in his teaching ministry is serving a greater good and faithfulness to that calling ought not to require a man to go hungry.

The second part of the quote is a quote...

ESV 1 Timothy 5:18...and, "The laborer deserves his wages."

This particular part of the verse points back to 1 Corinthians 9:9-10 which in turn seems to directly quote the Lord Jesus in Luke 10. Let me read the Luke passage.

ESV Luke 10:2...And he said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers

into his harvest. ⁵ Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house!' ⁶ And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you. ⁷ And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages. Do not go from house to house."

Paul's point in all of this is to make sure that the Ephesians understand that those men who discharge their duty to the church are worthy of honor. And his point is that those that faithfully discharge their duty as teachers in the church are actually worthy of double honor and what that means is that they ought to be able to make their living doing so. It is not an open-ended command to make such men rich. In fact, I think it is every bit as unkind to make such men rich as it is to make them paupers.

In fact, I thought this might be a good place to remind you of the vows you made before God to each of the pastors or teaching elders you have called here at Grace. This is from the Book of Church Order 21.6 and 21.10.

- 1. Do you, the people of this congregation, continue to profess your readiness to receive _____, whom you have called to be your pastor?**
- 2. Do you promise to receive the word of truth from his mouth with meekness and love, and to submit to him in the due exercise of discipline?**
- 3. Do you promise to encourage him in his labors, and to assist his endeavors for your instruction and spiritual edification?**
- 4. Do you engage to continue to him while he is your pastor that competent worldly maintenance which you have promised, and to furnish him with whatever you may see needful for the honor of religion and for his comfort among you?**

You see what I mean. The church is obligated to provide for such men's worldly maintenance.

So what exactly does that mean?

It means that the church is obligated to provide such men...especially those who work hard at their teaching and preaching...a living. I think probably a good rule of thumb for church's to follow is try to make sure that the pastor's income is something closely akin to the church's median income. In other words, I think it is a good idea for a pastor to pretty much fit into the same socio-economic world as his congregation. That way he won't be thought of as below us...you know as their slave. Nor, and this even worse will he be thought of as being above us...you know as their master. He will simply be one of us.

Now you would have thought that giving such men their proper honor both in terms of respect and pay would have been quite enough, but Paul doesn't stop there. He goes on in verses 19-21 to say that such men also deserve the protection and discipline of the church. Look at verse 19.

ESV 1 Timothy 5:19...Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. ²⁰ As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear. ²¹ In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality.

Paul admonishes Timothy and the Ephesians to not readily accept a charge against their pastors and teachers. He does not say that the church is to ignore complaints or to turn a blind eye to sin. Rather, he says that the church is not to be quick act on complaints. He says that those complaints must, in fact, be of such a nature that they are verifiable.

Calvin adds this:

I reply, this is a necessary remedy against the malice of men; for none are more liable to slanders and calumnies than godly teachers. Not only does *this problem* arise from the difficulty of their office, so that *they* sometimes they either sink under it, or stagger, or halt, or blunder, *which in return causes* wicked men seize many occasions for finding fault with them; but there is this additional vexation, that, although they perform their duty correctly, so as not to commit any error whatever, they never escape a thousand criticisms.¹

Paul solution to this particular problem is to require two or three witnesses to verify the charges being made. Now there are obvious exceptions to this general rule. For example, if a pastor commits some sort of egregious sin...a sin like rape, or sexual battery, or pedophilia or something along those lines the church is obligated to protect the flock and to do quickly. Still, it is inappropriate remove a man from office on the basis of unsubstantiated rumors or even charges. To buttress his point Paul alludes back to Deuteronomy 19:15.

^{ESV} Deuteronomy 19:15...“A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established.”

Still, I don't think Paul has in mind here these great heinous sins that we sometimes see in our day from time to time. I think rather he is thinking in terms of those kinds of sins that become the fabric of a man's life...anger, or a critical spirit, or an unguarded tongue. I say that because of verse 20.

^{ESV} 1 Timothy 5:20...As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear.

You see what I mean. It sounds very much like the sin that is being referred to here is one of those long seated habits that creeps into a man's life and becomes a part of the fabric of his soul. Still it could refer to more heinous sins. But either way, if charges arise and there are a sufficient number of witnesses to support the charges being made, the church ought to confront such a teacher and they ought to do so in a manner fitting to the sin.

Calvin writes this:

Whenever any measure is taken for the protection of good men, it is immediately seized by bad men to prevent them from being condemned. Accordingly, what Paul had said about repelling unjust accusations he modifies by this statement, so that none may, on this presence, escape the punishment due to sin.²

Calvin's point is that no minister should be beyond actual justice. Still, even then if it is a private sin, the elders ought to deal with the sin privately. If it is a public sin, the church is obligated, I think, to deal with such sins publically. The engagement should fit the sin. If however such a man is unrepentant either way the church obligated to move ahead with public censure in order to encourage others in the church to have a healthy fear of the consequences of sin.

You can see just how seriously Paul takes all this business if you look down to verse 21.

ESV 1 Timothy 5:21...In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality.

Paul's point is that he is quite serious about Timothy taking this admonition as a charge before God. Paul calls both God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ to witness his charge to Timothy. And you can see his point, he wants Timothy to take such things seriously. He wants him never to minimize people's accusations. He is not to treat them frivolously. Instead, he is hear all the evidence. He is not to make up his mind up in advance. He is not to show one group or person partiality over the next.

Now if you are like me, you may be thinking, **"Well if all that's true doesn't it follow that we ought to be very careful about those whom we allow to take part in the ministry of the Word here at Grace?"**

The answer, of course, is **"Yes! Absolutely!"** We ought to be very concerned about whom we allow into the influential positions of pastor and teacher...and we are. We have been very much aware of those things here at Grace from the inception of our church. And you can see that Paul very much wants both Timothy and the Ephesians to think about those things as well. Look at verse twenty-two.

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 5:22**...Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor take part in the sins of others; keep yourself pure.

The reference to the laying on of hands refers to ordination.

It means that the church has officially set apart a man for public ministry. Paul's point is that the church ought not to do so quickly. That is, it should take the time to get know a man's heart and his character. It should make sure it knows what the man believes. The position is a holy calling and putting the wrong man in the wrong position is potentially quite dangerous. I am reminded of the fact that when

the Oneida Presbytery in upper New York ordained Charles Finney he confessed that he was not really familiar with the Westminster Confession of Faith. He said he agreed with it in so far as he understood it. Later on, he explained that he hadn't actually read it. They ordained him anyway. They did so because he seemed to be able to produce results. In other words, they ordained him for pragmatic reasons. But they lived to regret their action, and Finney went on to very nearly destroy the Presbyterian Church.

The reason, of course, that the church should go slow in ordaining its teachers is because it is not always immediately obvious as to the true nature of the man they ordaining. Sometimes what you see is what you get. But many times that is not true. A man may sweep a congregation of its feet only to later on reveal a sort of general malaise with regard to his labor. Another man may seem to be a plodder while in reality his waters run deep. Sometimes a man may seem godly and upright while underneath he is a boiling kettle of lusts. Sometimes a man may seem like milquetoast while underneath he is truly a lion in lambs clothing.

Notice how Paul reminds Timothy of such things in verse 24.

ESV 1 Timothy 5:24...The sins of some people are conspicuous, going before them to judgment, but the sins of others appear later. ²⁵ So also good works are conspicuous, and even those that are not cannot remain hidden.

It takes time to discern the true measure of a man.

And then finally there is the verse I skipped, verse 23, which seems to really confound the commentators. That is not because the verse is complicated. It isn't complicated. Rather, the thing that stumps the commentators is how the verse fits

into the argument that Paul has built regarding the treatment of teaching elders.
Look at verse 23.

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 5:23...** (No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.)

You see what I mean. The question is not what Paul means (that's rather obvious). The real question is why put this verse here in the midst of a discussion that has absolutely nothing to do with either wine or illness.

John Stott has about as good an explanation as anyone else:

Some think that Paul's injunction "**keep yourself pure**" reminded him to add "**keep yourself fit**" as well. He was perhaps anxious that Timothy was not looking after himself properly, and that his delicate constitution would interfere with the efficient discharge of his high office. Others guess that verse 23 is intended as a deliberate modification of verse 22: "**Keep yourself pure. But in order to do so, make sure you don't subject yourself to the ridiculous rules of the false teachers. Instead, drink a little wine.**"³

Still, even the difficulty of verse twenty-three does not alter in any material way the overall thrust of Paul's charge which directs both Timothy and the Ephesians...to honor those men who rule and who teach in the church. They are to be respected and encouraged and those that teach are to be paid. Being faithful to do these things will bear rich fruit and will guard the church against heresy and false doctrine.

One wonderful illustration of the impact that encouragement gives those who faithfully teach and preach the gospel comes from that great scene after Luther's extraordinarily brave confession at the Diet of Worms. Luther had stood toe to toe

with the Roman Catholic Church over the doctrine of justification and had not blinked. He had not turned away from Sola Fide even under the threat of being burned at the stake alive. Years later he wrote that as he left the Bishop's palace almost completely exhausted...as he made his way through the cheers and back patting of the hundreds of Germans that had come to watch him stand or fall...an elderly German noble, a man by the name of Duke Erik of Brunswick, handed him a silver tankard of Eimbeck beer. Luther hesitated for a moment to take it and so Duke Erik realizing why Luther hesitated turned it up and took a drink to himself to show Luther it wasn't poisoned and then handed it back to Luther to drink. Luther turned it up and drank the whole thing. He said he never forgot Duke Eric's kindness.

I've had the same kind of thing happen to me.

Once many years ago when I was in seminary, Beverly and I were having an anniversary and had absolutely no money to celebrate. We didn't have enough money even to drive over to MacDonald's. We were sitting at home feeling sorry for ourselves when the song leader of the church where we ministered drove up with his wife. Their names were Randy and Barb. When got out of their car, we noticed they were both dressed like Italian waiters. Barb had even penciled herself a mustache. They came storming into our little house talking to us the whole time in the worst combination of an Alabama drawl and Italian accent you ever heard. They carried a large picnic basket and came inside and set up a card table in our living room and covered it with a checkered tablecloth and candles and served us homemade lasagna. They set things up, opened a bottle of sparkling apple juice, it was as close as fundamental Baptists could get to wine, wished us a happy anniversary and left as suddenly as they had come.

It was an extraordinary encouragement to Beverly and I, and I've never forgotten it. Years later when Randy was dying of cancer over at Baylor Hospital, I reminded him of what he and his wife had done even as I thanked him again for his kindness.

In tears, he reminded me in turn of my obligation to keep working hard at my teaching and preaching. One thing leads to another he said. I think he was right.

Let's pray.

¹ John Calvin, *Commentary on 1st Timothy*, 5:19.

² John Calvin, *Commentary on 1st Timothy*, 5:20.

³ John R.W. Stott, *1 Timothy & Titus* (BST). (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 140-1.