

Honoring, Protecting & Disciplining Elders

1 Timothy 5:17-25

Reggie Sanchez, Gospel Community Church, 10/15/2017

Text: 1 Timothy 5:17-25

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.

Introduction:

1. Leadership Relationship

In any group, especially a group that desires to be faithful to the Lord, one of the key components of that group is having faithful leadership, as well as a godly relationship between the leaders of the group and the members of the group. If the leadership is not godly, then the direction that the leaders seek to take the group will be contrary to the Lord's will and everyone will suffer for it. Either the group will conform to the ungodliness, or there will be a splitting off of the group from the leaders. On the other hand, if you have good leaders, but the relationship between the members of the group and the leadership is poisoned, it is extremely difficult for the group to thrive and grow and flourish in that setting as well. This is true in families, marriages, businesses, teams, and churches or any other group you can think of. God takes the relationship between the leadership of his church as well as the membership of his church very seriously. He has a desire to bless us all as we follow him in faithfulness, and he will give us great joy in him if we are obedient to him.

It is a sad but true reality that the history of the church has seen many ungodly leaders who have risen up in the ranks of leadership. At the same time the church has been greatly blessed and enriched by seeing many godly and wonderful leaders serve God's people in leadership as well. It is important for every church to know how to rightly relate to faithful leaders as well as how to deal with situations involving the sin of an elder, especially if it is of a disqualifying nature, or worse, if an elder is found to be a wolf. Not all who are not qualified to be elders are wolves. Some are brothers who simply do not meet the elder qualifications, but that doesn't mean they are false teachers or wolves, and it is important that we do not lump all disqualified men into the same category.

God in his wisdom has given us clarity in his Word about how the congregation is to relate to faithful elders and how we are, as a church to deal with elders who have sinned. It is a pretty simple truth, but the application of it is not always simple or easy. So tonight we will look at God's inspired Word on these issues and learn from the Lord as we seek to honor him in all things. Our text is 1 Timothy 5:17-25

II. Honor and Protection for Godly Elders vs. 17-19

1. Double Honor to the Faithful vs. 17

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Let's begin in verse 17, "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching." Paul is addressing those who serve in the office of elder and who meet the qualifications listed out in 3:1-7. In speaking of these elders he highlights their function in the church. When we went through chapter 3 I gave 16 sermons to the pastoral ministry and so I'm not going to be as detailed tonight as I was during those lessons. For more detail on those issues please see the previous material from chapter 3 on our website. Tonight as I deal with this topic I am going to make the assumption that you know the material we have covered previously. So back to verse 17 we see that in speaking of elders Paul highlights the two main things that they do, namely, exercising biblical rule under the authority of God's Word and the Lordship of Christ, as well as laboring in the preaching and teaching of God's Word to the congregation.

I do not believe Paul is teaching here that there are some elders who rule and some elders who teach. We know from earlier in 3:2 that all elders must be able to teach or they are not qualified to be elders. However, when there are multiple elders serving in a church, which is the biblical model and norm and what all churches should strive towards, there are inevitably going to be some elders who have greater labor in teaching and preaching than others.

For those who lead and rule and use their authority well, as well as labor long and hard in the teaching of God's Word, they are to be counted worthy of double honor. I believe there are two types of honor that faithful elders are to be shown here. First, is the honor of respect and appreciation from the congregation as they recognize the blessing that it is for them to have godly elders who rule well, and preach and teach God's Word faithfully. It is a great blessing to have faithful elders, and I know I personally have had my life dramatically impacted for the good by faithful elders in my life, and we are called to have a proper honor, respect, and appreciation for such laborers in our lives. That doesn't mean we worship them or treat them like the Pope, but we do have a great respect, appreciation of, and gratitude for their work in our lives.

The second type of honor here, and certainly the honor that gets the most attention in the text, is the honor of financial support. Just as we saw last week that the honor shown to qualifying widows was financial support in verse 3, so also we see that faithful elders are worthy of the honor of financial support. Where do I get that? The answer is in the next verse.

2. Double Honor Defined vs. 18

After saying faithful elders are worthy of double honor Paul says in the next verse that this is actually something commanded from Scripture (read vs. 18). The first reference to prove pastors should be financially supported is from Dt. 25:4 which says, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." This is obviously an Old Testament reference from Moses and the idea is that grain was placed on a threshing floor and oxen were to walk over the grain repeatedly so that the grain could be separated from the stalk and the chaff. As the oxen did this he would be providing the nourishment that comes from the grain for the people he is working for. While the oxen worked for the people, from that work, his mouth was not to be muzzled so that he also could be fed by the work that he does, rather than merely having others be fed by his work while he starves. If God has concern for even animals in this manner, how much greater is his concern for the elders who serve his church? If the elders are feeding others spiritually, they are not to be starved out in the process, but instead are to have their material needs provided for. The ox provides food for his master, and

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the master in return provides food for the oxen. Similarly, the pastor feeds the congregation spiritually, and the congregation feeds the pastor financially.

The second reference in our text is to the teachings of Jesus himself from Luke 10:7 wherein Jesus, in sending out the 72 on mission work, told them to not take food or money with them, but instead they would be provided for by those to whom they ministered. Jesus himself says in this text that, "the laborer deserves his wages." So now, not only has Paul made his point that pastors should be financially supported from the teaching of Moses, but also from the teachings of Christ himself. I'm not sure he could be appealing to two greater biblical authorities than Moses and Jesus. In the words of Jesus the idea here is that the pastor is a laborer. The work of the ministry is hard work indeed. There is so much hard work in prayer that is part of the ministry, so much hard work in study, in preparation for teaching, in seeking God about various issues in the church, in asking God for help in leading his people to his glory and presence from his Word, in seeking God for his wisdom in how to best love someone, in meeting with others and sharing with them, and in many other things, ministry is a lot of hard work. It is blessed work, it is glorious work, it is privileged work, it is joyful work, but it is nevertheless, hard work. For the one who works hard in discharging his ministry, Jesus himself says that he is worthy of wages for that work.

This doesn't mean pastors should be filthy rich like some of the vile things we see on TV with guys like Joel Osteen and others. One of the qualifications of an elder is that he not be a lover of money and I don't know how owning mansions and private jets begins to square with that. But it also doesn't mean that pastors and their families are to be forced to live in poverty, eat one meal a day, and walk everywhere they go. Their basic needs should be provided for. They gladly work hard for the congregation in ministering to their spiritual needs, and the congregation should, with joy, provide for the pastor and his family's needs. This is to be evaluated by each congregation towards each elder who rules well.

This isn't a call for pastors to seek riches, nor is it a call for the congregation to begrudge meeting a pastor's needs and force him and his family into some sort of misguided asceticism. It is to be a mutually encouraging relationship of equal love, joy, love and concern for each other. The pastor is constantly in thought, prayer, and meditation upon the souls of the church, and the church should appreciate their pastors, they should honor them, respect them, hold them in esteem, and meet their financial needs. It is really important that we not allow the vile abuses of greedy wolves to destroy our love, joy, and zeal for supporting those elders who rule, preach, and teach well and are worthy of double honor.

All of the attention in the sinning of finances goes to greedy false teachers, and there should be a lot of negative attention given to that, and it should be rebuked and called out for the vile sin that it is. At the same time, what doesn't get nearly enough attention is the fact that the congregation can be so judgmental and hypercritical of its leaders that if a pastor ever spends money on something they don't view as a need, they rip him apart and call for his head. If a pastor buys a toy for his kid, a gift for his wife, has a nice date with his wife, goes on a vacation, buys something for himself, has a fun or entertaining outing, some people lose their minds over this and begin judging him fiercely and with great bitterness. If the pastor did that to them he would be a legalist in their eyes, but if they do it to a pastor somehow, in their hypocrisy, it is justified. I heard a story in a commentary I read where someone in the congregation decided to provide the pastor with some fresh eggs and produce from his farm. This seemed like a nice gesture until the person went and demanded that the pastor's salary be decreased because he was receiving some food from the farm. This kind

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of nonsense is so destructive, is so pointless, and is so hypercritical, it dishonors God, and it is demonic. We have to love each other and reasonably engage this relationship together. Pastors are not called to pursue riches, at the same time, they are not called to starve, nor are they forbidden from ever enjoying anything that is not a “need.” With reasonableness, common sense, love and grace for each other, the pastors and the congregation are to gladly love each other, and meet each other’s needs with all joy in Christ to the glory of God.

3. Protecting Pastors: 2 or 3 Witnesses vs. 19

So verses 17-18 are about honoring and providing for pastors who rule and teach well and verse 19 is about protecting them from false accusations (read vs. 19). According to Titus 2:15, Christian leaders, especially elders, are called to, “Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you.” The proclamation of sound doctrine unto holy worship of Jesus is the main and primary calling of a pastor. In the discharging of this duty exhortations and rebukes are a common part of this ministry and when it happens, there will be those who try to disregard the pastor to discredit or silence the message. That is why there is so much written to Titus and Timothy in the Pastoral Epistles instructing them not to yield to this.

By nature people love sin, by nature people despise the true doctrine of the biblical God and his Gospel, by nature people do not like authority, and by nature, if the Spirit is not operative in the moment, people are going to despise anyone who corrects them. When their cherished sins, idols, and wrong theology is exposed and corrected, if they don’t repent, there are often efforts to destroy and undermine the messenger, namely, the pastor. It might be subtle suggestions here and there to others in the church to outright mutiny, but Satan has his methods to silence or discredit God’s pastors and one of his strongest weapons is false accusations.

When someone is upset at a pastor because of his faithful ministry to them that their soul is recoiling at, or because of some non-disqualifying flaw they see in him, or some other minor thing, Satan loves to stir that person up and cause them to begin sowing and spreading strife in the church to undermine that particular pastor through false accusations whether they be completely made up lies, or grand over-exaggerations of minor issues, they are the devil’s instruments, selected by him, anointed by him, and used by him to carry out his murderous schemes of destroying and undermining pastors, and by extension achieving Satan’s true goal, which is the destroying and undermining of the Word of God that is proclaimed by the pastor under attack. Slander, lies, and hyper-critical nit-picking over minor issues, is one of Satan’s greatest weapons to destroy a minister and undermine the Word. The reason why is because when you believe bad things about somebody, it taints how you look at them, and no matter what they say, even if it is faithful, loving, and true, you are resistant if not flat out hardened towards receiving it from them because you are so disaffected towards the speaker. The result is that God’s Word falls on deaf ears, hard hearts, and it is therefore ineffective. The listener is not changed, Christ is not glorified, and faithful ministers are wrongly resisted by their hearers.

God sees through all of this, he knew it was going to happen, he knew Satan would use those who profess Jesus to try to destroy his servants and hinder his Word, so he has commanded his church to operate in a given manner to protect faithful pastors and not put needless stumbling blocks in front of God’s Word that they proclaim. God’s wise protection is verse 19 that commands the church not to entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is clearly proven by 2 or 3 witnesses. We are not to prematurely conclude awful things based on hyper-critical speculations, evil suspicions, or

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irrational judgments driven by our flesh. Instead, there must be clear, irrefutable, evidence witnessed by 2 or 3 people in order for a charge to be admitted against an elder.

So much sin and destruction would be stopped if we just disciplined ourselves to obey God's Word here. The reason why this doesn't happen more is because by nature we love to hear, entertain, and believe bad things about people. It is a sad reflection of our hearts that we are so quick to do this and that we do it with such eagerness, readiness, and zeal. A genuinely mature and godly person, doesn't want bad things to be true about others, he makes sure he gathers the facts about a situation, then, when the facts are gathered, if the evidence is clear and irrefutable, he acts accordingly. We should operate this way towards all people, but we must especially do so towards elders because they, more than other Christians in the body, will be the bullseye of Satan's wrath, and Satan is the accuser of the brethren and one of the ways he accuses them and advances his wicked plots is to use professing Christians to carry out his ministry of accusation. A wise, mature, disciplined, humble, and loving church will take time to stick to this process before entertaining accusations against their elders.

Faithful elders are a rich blessing to the church and should be appreciated, financially supported, honored, and protected from false accusations. As James says we must be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry. It is a tragic and sad thing for an elder to lose his ministry and for a church to lose an elder who rules well through the false accusations and exaggerated hyper-criticisms by Satan's minions in the church. We know from Matthew 16:23 that Satan spoke through Peter when Peter tried to stop the cross from happening. If Satan speaks through even faithful brothers like Peter at times, how much more through the immature, ungodly, and unconverted hypocrites that name Christ's name? We have to be aware and alert for this danger and verse 19 will protect congregations from losing good pastors and good pastors from losing their ministries if it is diligently followed. Let us not be wiser than the Scripture and instead stick to what God has revealed should be done in this situation by refusing to entertain accusations of sin against an elder unless there is clear evidence of something significant brought forward by 2 or 3 witnesses.

III. Rebuking and Removing an Elder vs. 20-21

1. Addressing Elders in Sin

Just as slander, a hyper-critical spirit, and a lying and exaggerating spirit can destroy ministries and dishonor Christ greatly, so also can enabling and retaining truly unqualified ministers. Keeping the unqualified in their ministries greatly defames the name of Jesus and does terrible spiritual harm to those under such ministry. When there is proven sin in an elder's life, whether it is moral or theological, the church must be faithful to obey God as well. Just as God in his wisdom knew he needed to protect qualified elders from slander, so also God knew that there would be, in the life of his church, the need to rebuke and or remove unqualified elders for the ministry as well. In his love and care for his church, he has not only provided protection for godly elders by giving a process to ensure their safety, but also, he has provided for the protection of the congregation by giving a process to ensure their safety in the case of dealing with sinning and or unqualified elders (read vs. 20).

In dealing with this text we have to establish what kind of sinning is being spoken of here that requires public rebuke? I would remind you as I mentioned during the sermons on the qualifications for elders in chapter 3, that all godly and qualified elders still have remaining sin in their lives. There is only one Jesus, there is only one without any flaw, blemish,

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immaturity, weakness, or remaining sin and it is not any pastor who has ever served the church. It is the Lord Jesus himself. Pastors still live off of the daily cleansing of the cross, they still live off of the mercy and grace of God, and remaining sin, depending on the type, degree, and nature of it, does not automatically disqualify a pastor. We have to realize that, allow our pastors to still be sinners, to be able to look to Jesus like everyone else, to be able to find mercy in his sin and grace in his weaknesses, otherwise we will destroy good pastors. Pastors who practically, though certainly not theologically, think they must be sinless, and congregations who also think this way, set themselves on an inevitable collision course that ends in death. Pastors still need Jesus too and the more they look to him, as with all other Christians, the holier they become.

Nevertheless, there are some types of sinning, such as adultery, that would be an instant disqualifier as a violation of 1 Timothy 3:2. There is also a sense in which sin can have such an enslaving and pervasive control of a man that it discredits his ministry to the point that he is no longer qualified and must step down. This type of sinning is very different from dealing with minor manifestations of remaining sin in his daily life. Sometimes it is not easy to discern if a man is disqualified or not. In such situations I think it is best to wait to remove someone until God makes it clear. He isn't a God of confusion, he is a God of clarity and he cares about the holiness of his pastors, the good of his church, and the honor of his name more than anybody. If a pastor is in sin and we are not sure what to do, let us seek God for he will lead. So, some sin in a pastor's life is disqualifying and some is not and for more details on that I preached 16 sermons on 1 Timothy 3 that you can reference.

In dealing with an elder's sin, not all sin has to be publicly rebuked, and in trying to discern what does need to be I think the first kind we can see in the text is that of persistent and unrepentant sin by examining the wording, which says, "As for those who persist in sin..." The literal wording in the Greek is just "Those who sin." But, the idea of the verb that is implied in the text is that it is a present and ongoing reality in the man's life. So, if an elder is in any sin that he is persisting in and that he is refusing to repent from, after being confronted by someone, including the 2 or 3 witnesses, his sin would then be brought to the congregation and he would be publicly rebuked if he had previously refused to repent. This would be a situation that follows exactly what Jesus taught about church discipline in Matthew 18:15-20. This kind of sin may not be disqualifying, but if it gets to the point that it must be brought to the public for rebuke due to unrepentance, we might be getting close to having a disqualifying situation. So a stubborn refusal to repent would be the first situation that requires public rebuke of an elder's sin.

I believe the 2nd type of sinning on an elder's part that should be publicly rebuked is public sinning, whether it is moral or theological. An example of this is found in Galatians 2:11-14 where Peter, trying to win the approval of Jewish believers, refused to associate with Gentiles at meals. This hypocrisy was actually an assault on the Gospel itself which has reconciled all believers in Christ regardless of our differences. Paul publicly rebuked Peter in the moment for this sin and he also published it in a letter to be disseminated to the churches and preserved in God's Word for all time so that there would be no confusion on this. Peter's sin was public, it no doubt impacted the public, there were certainly more than 2 or 3 witnesses to this, and therefore, the rebuke was public so that there would be no question what the truth was. Paul didn't spare Peter on this and in so doing demonstrated great courage and zeal for Christ's name.

Though his actions were wrong, this wasn't an anti-Gentile rally Peter was leading with torches and hate speech. He wasn't beating Gentiles or even calling them unbelievers. That would have been a level of sinning that was so vile that

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he likely would have been removed from ministry. Not to make light of what Peter did, but I believe he just was deceived through his desire to gain approval and fell into this sin. He no doubt repented, and though this was definitely a serious sin and he had to be rebuked publicly, I don't think he was even close to being removed from the ministry over this. This episode, in addition to the principle of Matthew 18 of winning elders to repentance when they sin, shows us that not all public rebuke of an elder's sin must result in their removal from ministry, so we shouldn't be too eager to call for heads in the sinning of elders that is publicly rebuked.

Finally, the last type of sinning by an elder that especially must be publicly rebuked, and that which is probably in mind here in 1 Timothy 5, is that which is of a disqualifying nature either theologically or morally. Again, as with other public rebukes, due diligence must be done, evidence must be firmly and irrefutably established, the elder then must be publicly rebuked for the sin, the evidence must be publicly disclosed to the congregation, and the elder must then step down and or be removed from his position of eldership. This is likely what happened with Hymenaeus and Alexander in 1 Timothy 1:18-20. Though the text doesn't explicitly say that they were elders, I don't think it is too speculative to believe that there was a strong possibility that this was the case because they were disciplined for their public and unrepentant teaching of blasphemy. Everyone knew the blasphemy, it was publicly exposed, and their lack of repentance led to being disciplined out of the church and removal from eldership, assuming they were elders.

The transparency of plainly and publicly stating the charge of sin, the evidence of sin, and the consequence of sin, in this case, removal from eldership, though extremely difficult, painful, and heartbreaking, must be done for the good of everyone. The transparency and revealing of the details is essential because it provides both protection and accountability for all involved. For the elder, he must be protected by a process that insists upon clear revelation of actual evidence. On the other hand, he must be held accountable so that when the clear evidence is publicly presented, if it is disqualifying sin, he must step down. Perhaps in time he may grow and will once again return to pastoral ministry, but in the current season his soul needs to be removed from eldership.

For the 2 or 3 witnesses they must be protected because it is a very difficult thing to speak up, be looked at with suspicion, have the other elders take in your information, and then leave you hanging out to dry by not standing clearly and firmly behind the evidence you brought forward. The witnesses need to be vindicated that their testimony and evidence is real and true for the sake of justice and the good of the witnesses, because sometimes they can wrongly come under fire when it was known that they testified against someone and their reputations must be protected when they have acted rightly. On the other hand, if it is discovered that the 2 or 3 witnesses were on a petty witch hunt, the possibility of the public revelation of the weakness and pettiness of their so-called evidence will hold them accountable to ensure they are being fair, accurate, and reasonable in their accusations.

For the other elders who are leading the way in dismissing an elder, presenting the charge and the clear evidence of the charge protects them because it shows they are not some sort of secret good old boy's club who just happened to get sideways with a fellow worker and are looking to remove him without cause. It shows the people that things have been handled properly by their elders. On the other hand, if this is a witch hunt on behalf of the elders, then the need to publicly present the charge and the evidence holds them accountable to all and deters them from sinning in this way.

The entire congregation is blessed as well in that they do not have to speculate about what happened. They will not be put in the bad situation of having no knowledge and yet are trying to decide if they should side with the leadership or

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the one being disciplined. Sufficiently detailed transparency, while difficult and painful in the short term, is for the long term good of the church. I mean what is the purpose of 2 or 3 witnesses if the evidence remains behind closed doors? Sparing the short term pain of this is very likely going to give birth to long term problems.

2. Good Fruit

Though this process is miserable, there will be good fruit if done properly. The elder will be hopefully brought to repentance, and depending on the nature of the sin, may be kept from being disqualified. Another good fruit is that a disqualified elder no longer remains in ministry. That does no good for the elder or the church. The name of Jesus is honored, the church is made pure, and finally, the specific good fruit in publicly rebuking an elder who has sinned that is listed by Paul in verse 20 is, "...so that the rest may stand in fear." Who are the rest? Is Paul addressing the rest of the elders or the rest of the church? I think the rest of the elders are probably primarily in view here though it would also include the rest of the church since the congregation would be present at the public rebuke. Everyone will tremble, everyone will see that God is not playing with sin and his standards, everyone should examine his own life, and everyone should have a healthy fear of ending up in the same place. If Peter and David can fall, so can anyone. If God didn't spare Peter a public rebuke, or a fallen elder, he will not spare us either.

In Acts 5:1-14 we read about the account of Ananias and Sapphira who lied about their giving to the church. In response to this lying God killed both of them and verse 5 and verse 11 tell us that great fear came upon the church in this judgment. Open to Acts 5:12-14, which I will read to you and I want you to see the good fruit that came from this fear of the Lord (read). The people had great fear and respect for what was going on and the result is that more people were getting converted than ever! In the short term God's discipline was jarring and painful, but in the long term it was fruitful and glorious. If we will refuse to play God by circumventing his sometimes unpleasant processes because with good intentions we are leaning on our own understanding, then I believe that we too will see this kind of work from the Lord. We have to trust God's Word when faced with difficult situations. It isn't always easy, but in the long term it is blessed and faithful.

3. Accountability before God vs. 21

Because Paul knows how difficult this is, all of the temptations to shrink back from doing it, all of the temptations to do it wrongly, he gives a strong plea to Timothy in verse 21 (read). No matter where you are in this, whether you are the one bearing a faithful witness or are tempted to be a false witness, whether you are the accused, or a leader who is having to lead and navigate this process in relation to a peer being accused, everyone must keep in mind that this is happening before God the Father, before Jesus the Son, and the elect angels. All of our words and actions are witnessed to by heaven and that should bring tremendous accountability to what you say and do.

Knowing that and reminding Timothy of the truth that heaven is watching, Paul pleads with him to engage this process without prejudging. The emphasis in the part of the exhortation is not to make a decision on something prematurely and without all of the evidence. We must be patient and wait until there is evidence lest we condemn the innocent by prejudging their guilt.

The other side of erring in this process is addressed by Paul as well when he says to do nothing from "partiality." Here the idea is that you see clear evidence that action needs to be taken against an elder, however, for some reason you are

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being impartial and will not hold him accountable and follow through with what needs to be done because you are showing him favoritism. God sees this and he knows if this is what you are doing. So Paul tells Timothy to avoid this error as well. The idea here is that if Timothy is pure before God, he will follow God's process without coming to premature conclusions and when he has sufficient evidence, he isn't going to refuse to apply the tough truths to people, even if they are close to him or difficult to deal with.

IV. Warning about Future Elders

1. Don't be hasty vs. 22

Because removing an elder is such a traumatic and difficult experience for everyone involved, Paul uses that to warn Timothy about the future. But the warning isn't a warning that exhorts him to stop rebuking elders if it needs to happen, rather, it is the warning that he needs to be slow-moving when it comes to ordaining future elders (read vs. 22). The laying on of hands is something done by leaders in the church, in our present day it is elders, whereby they bear witness that the man whom they are laying hands on meets the qualifications for the ministry he is being appointed to, they are identifying with this man, they are yoking themselves to him, and they are conferring authority upon him to fulfill his ministry. The Apostles did this to the 7 who waited tables in Acts 6:6, the elders laid hands on Paul and Barnabas for their missionary work in Acts 13:1-4, and the elders laid hands on Timothy for his work in the ministry in 1 Tim 4:14 and 2 Tim 1:6. This is a serious moment that the elders themselves are to do. The congregation gives input about the qualifications of elder candidates, but it is ultimately the elders, and not the congregation, who lays hands on them, and this is an essential component of biblical ordination that every man who aspires to ministry should seek. It is sort of like an elder's graduation ceremony whereby he is no longer aspiring to eldership, but rather, will now begin serving that way in the power of the Spirit.

So Paul tells Timothy to be slow to do this. God uses time to reveal who people are. Sometimes it isn't obvious and we must proceed slowly, do our due diligence, and ensure that the candidate truly does hold to sound doctrine, truly is gifted to teach and shepherd, and truly meets the character qualifications, and we have to take as much time as necessary to determine that. Because if we refuse to do that, if we short circuit that, or ignore the qualifications, move too quickly, ordain a man who actually doesn't meet the qualifications, then we sin against the 2nd half of verse 22 (read).

By appointing an unqualified man to ministry too hastily, there is a sense that the ordaining elders share in his sins because the public sinning he committed as an elder wouldn't have even been possible without their ordination of him. So Timothy is commanded by Paul to, "keep yourself pure," not only in his own walk and doctrine, but also in relation to whom he appoints to the ministry.

2. Random Note about Wine vs. 23

In the middle of this blood earnest appeal about a very serious topic, Paul inserts verse 23 (read). Uh...Ok. Paul is instructing Timothy to drink a little wine for his stomach problems. Wine actually is effective in helping with stomach problems, and Paul wants Timothy to use a little of it to help his health. Notice he says "a little," he is by no way intending for Timothy to become a drunk which would violate the qualifications of 3:3. Using some wine to help with his valid medical issue is a permissible thing.

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Why say this here? Perhaps it is just a parenthetic drifting from the topic at hand. That is a view some hold to. But in considering why he would mention this in a context of defending and honoring qualified elders and rebuking sinning elders, I think that if you consider the fact that he has already stated that drunkards are disqualified in 3:3 and if we also remember from 4:1-5 that there were false teachers who insisted on abstaining from certain foods, which very likely could have included wine, there was a real possibility that someone might wrongfully accuse Timothy of being disqualified because he didn't completely abstain from wine. Knowing this, Paul explicitly lays out what is valid in Timothy's situation to protect him. Paul doesn't intend for Timothy to become a drunk, nor does he intend for Timothy to publicly flaunt his conscience to weaker believers who might be led into a lifestyle of drunkenness if Timothy shares wine with them and thus violates Romans 14:20-22. Instead, Paul intends for Timothy to treat his stomach ailment with minimal wine, in a responsible way, that doesn't lead others into temptation, and in doing this, Timothy is in no way disqualified.

That is my view as to why this verse appears here, it is Paul's way of applying verse 19 himself on behalf of Timothy by defending him from potential false accusations of being disqualified, based on the unbiblical standards of asceticism promoted by the misguided. When it comes to church leadership, people can have very legalistic and unbiblical standards that they think leaders are to accommodate, even if those standards are wrong and are pure legalism. This is so destructive and we have to be on guard for this. Should such a situation arise in Ephesus and Timothy's validity as a minister be questioned because he uses wine to help his stomach, Timothy has this letter from the Apostle Paul himself to defend him against unjust criticisms, which he is already receiving by those who despise him for his youth. So again, we have to make sure our issues with elders are really issues of sin and not our own personal preferences. I recently heard of a man whose family members in his church sought to have him removed from eldership because they think he cheers too loud at Bronco games! This is the kind of stuff that destroys churches and congregations should not tolerate it and call to repentance those who live in such a way.

3. God will expose the sinner vs. 24

In conclusion, Paul shares the role of time in helping Timothy not be too quick to ordain elders (read vs. 24). Some people's sins are obvious and plainly seen by everybody, which is what it means for them to be conspicuous. In such a situation it is clear that they are disqualified. On the other hand, the sins of others appear later, meaning, it takes time for the sin in some to become obvious, and in context I believe he is referring to sin that disqualifies a man from ministry. So time is Timothy's friend. God uses time to reveal those who are not qualified and Timothy must be patient and trust this truth in determining whether or not he will lay hands on someone. I also believe this same exact truth is to be used when an elder is under investigation for disqualifying sin. Take your time, make sure the truth is clear, make sure the evidence is clear, you don't have to play God, we can trust him to manifest the presence of disqualifying sin, or the lack of evidence of it and thus the clear direction of how to proceed with an elder.

4. God will expose the righteous vs. 25

If God uses time to reveal some are not suited for the ministry, the opposite is also true, (read vs. 25). When you spend sufficient time with someone who is called by God, you can just see the good works in their life. It just becomes very obvious that they are called and suited to ministry, and even if it isn't at first, in due time those good works will be brought forth and he will be confirmed by the elders and the congregation. Time is the pathway to both discovering a

Honoring, Protecting & Disciplining Elders

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man is called and qualified and discovering he is disqualified. We don't have to put pressure on ourselves to play God and jump to premature conclusions. We just have to wait on him and ask God to show us how to proceed. This is true with those aspiring to the eldership as well as those who are under fire and are having their calling questioned. In due time the obvious step will be made clear as we seek God. God loves his church more than we do, he loves his elders more than we do, he loves his name more than we do, and he will give us what we need to make faithful decisions.

V. Conclusion

1. Summary

So in conclusion we must have a heart that is for each other and is for our elders as well. We are to honor them with respect, esteem, and financial support. We must protect them, their ministry, and their reputations from false accusations. When there is clear sin, we must be courageous and bold to be straightforward about it, we must labor for the elder's repentance, and if necessary, we must remove them from office. All of this is to be done with patience, with a deep sense of accountability knowing this is all unfolding before a heavenly witness, and with great transparency on all sides to ensure everyone involved is both protected and accountable. The burden is on God to bring the good and the bad to light. The burden upon us is to wait on him, to believe the best for each other, to stick to God's process, and to act in faithfulness based on facts. This is how we are to act towards existing and aspiring elders. Time is our friend, God is our shepherd, and he will lead us and guide us through it all.

So let us commit ourselves and our hope to the pastor who will never need to be removed. Let us look to the one whom time has proved out over and over again. Let us look to the one with no sin, no immaturity, no weakness, and no flaw. Let us look to the savior and giver of life, the Great Shepherd Jesus Christ. He is the hope of all qualified pastors, of all who have been disqualified, he is the hope of all faithful witnesses, he is the savior of false witnesses, he is the savior of wolves, and in him all can be forgiven and find hope and life. Through the highs and lows of being blessed and disappointed by elders, let us never lose hope in our savior Jesus Christ. For even though faithful elders are a great blessing to the body, nobody can ever be Jesus for someone. And even if we have been hurt by wolves, Jesus can minister to anything and restore us. Look to him and have great encouragement and hope for his people! He loves us all and is the Good Shepherd who gave his life for his sheep.