



Our choir has just sung to us the best news in the world. God’s love takes perfect shape in the cross of Jesus Christ, where he laid down his life for the godless, absorbing all the wrath of God against their sin, and then three days later rose from the dead so that we could be forgiven, reconciled to God, and walk out of death into everlasting life.

The moment we believe in Christ, God the Father adopts us into his family. We become his children, and Jesus unashamedly calls us his brothers and sisters. And he says to us, “As I have loved you, you also are to love one another” (John 13:34).

First Timothy 5 tells us how we’re to treat one another in the context of the local church. This text and the New Testament as a whole teaches that *churches flourish when their members treat one another like family*. Last Sunday we saw in the first part of chapter 5 that we’re to *encourage one another*. This applies across all age and gender categories in the church – older men, younger men, older women, younger women. God wants us to love one another like family and to look after those who have no family.

Now, in the last part of the chapter, Paul talks about how the church is to love its leaders. Hence the title of today’s sermon:

TREAT YOUR FAITH FAMILY WELL
Part Two: Love Your Leaders

1 Timothy 5:17-25
(p. 934, pew Bible)

Please follow along as I read 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.

- 1 Timothy 5:17-25

Love your leaders. Treat them well. That's the point of this passage. The "elders" referred to here in chapter 5 are the "overseers" described in chapter 3. We know this because when Paul said farewell to these men in Acts 20, he used the terms "elder," "overseer," and "shepherd" (or, "pastor") interchangeably (Acts 20:17, 28).

If we could picture this text as a tree, with the trunk being the core principle from which all the other instructions extend as branches, the trunk would be this main precept:

***Be good to your elders
while remaining godly yourself.***

From this trunk (or, core principle) extend three boughs pertaining to the church's treatment of their elders:

1. Reward them generously (vv. 17-18)
2. Discipline them properly (vv. 19-21)
3. Appoint them carefully (vv. 22-25)

These are the three boughs from which the smaller branches, or detailed instructions, protrude. So, let's look at the tree and see how the church is to love their leaders.

1. Reward them generously (vv. 17-18).

Verse 17 says, "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching." We know from chapter 3 that the elders are biblically qualified men who oversee the church. That function is emphasized by the word "rule." The Greek term is *proistemi*, which literally means "to stand first." The elders are first in terms of leadership. That's why the New International Version says, "the elders who *direct the affairs of the church*..." The elders are the spiritual managers of God's household. They teach and command biblical doctrine, they pray for the church's members and ministries, they "chart a vision for the church's future."¹

Paul says, "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor..." (v. 17). Back in verse 3, Paul said, "Honor widows who are truly widows," and by that he meant to support them financially. The church is to do the same for elders who rule well. The Greek word for "honor" (*timé*) was often used to refer to a stipend or allowance. This meaning is indicated in the English word "honorarium," which is a gift given to a minister for teaching on a special occasion, such as a wedding, funeral, or Bible conference.

We know that Paul is referring to financial compensation in verse 17, because of the basis he gives for this command in verse 18: "For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,' and, 'The laborer deserves his wages.'" The first quote is from Deuteronomy 25:4, and the second one is from the words of Jesus in Luke 10:7 (which is good example of one New Testament writer affirming the inspiration of another NT writer).

¹ Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Timothy*. Reformed Expository Commentary, NT edited by Daniel M. Doriani, series edited by Richard D. Phillips and Philip Graham Ryken (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 222.

In the first quotation, Paul cites an Old Testament law which stipulated that oxen who threshed the grain were entitled to eat some of it. They were not to be muzzled to keep them from doing that. Paul's point is clear: *If God required that animals who labored to provide food for others were to be fed, how much more would God want faithful pastors, who labor to provide spiritual food for the flock of God, to be adequately provided for?*²

In the second quote, Paul moves up a level from an animal to a human worker, who is entitled to be paid for his labor. To refuse to support pastors who provide spiritual food is just as heartless as refusing to feed a laboring animal or a hired worker.

So, if "honor" refers to financial provision, what does Paul mean by "double honor"? He could be saying that excellent elders should be paid generously, "especially those who labor in preaching and teaching" (v. 17). The Greek word for "labor" is *kopiaō*, which refers to diligent or strenuous labor, perhaps even to the point of exhaustion.

Paul says, "Let them ... be *considered* worthy of double honor..." (v. 17). Don't just pay them unthinkingly, unfeelingly. Ponder their worth. Weigh the value of their ministry – of teaching and preaching God's word – and compensate them accordingly. A faithful elder or pastor will not take advantage of the church's generosity, because one of the qualifications of an overseer listed in chapter three is that he is "not a lover of money." You can trust him to steward his resources well for God's glory and the good of others.

One other possible interpretation of "double honor" is that it refers both to remuneration and respect. The Holy Spirit, speaking through the author of Hebrews, says,

Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

- Hebrews 13:17 NKJV

Be good to your elders. Contribute to the joy of their leadership. *Reward them generously*, and that will be profitable for you.

2. Discipline them properly (vv. 19-21).

This is the second bough of the tree pertaining to the church's treatment of their elders. In verses 19-20 of 1 Timothy 5, Paul says, "Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear."

Protruding from this bough of the proper discipline of elders are two equally important branches of instructions, namely, *protect elders from unsubstantiated accusations*, and *rebuke elders who persist in sin*.

a. Protect elders from unsubstantiated accusations

² John MacArthur, Jr. *1 Timothy*. The MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 220.

Some people are always looking to take potshots at church leaders – either because they despise their authority, reject their teaching, or resent God’s blessings on their life. What these false accusers fail to see is that they are the pawns of Satan, the master accuser. The apostle Paul and other biblical characters like Joseph, Moses, David, Nehemiah, Jeremiah, and especially our Lord Jesus suffered from false accusations.³ As the Puritan writer John Trapp put it, “Truth always has a scratched face.”⁴

Because false accusations against spiritual leaders are a real danger, Paul tells Timothy how to deal with allegations against elders. At the start of verse 19, Paul says literally, “Against an elder an accusation receive not...” The original word order emphasizes *who* it is that’s being accused, and that an unsubstantiated allegation is *not* to be received, or “admit[ted]” (ESV). The word “admit” is an intensified form of the Greek word for “receive”⁵ and carries the idea of “welcoming with personal interest,” entertaining the thought, mulling it over in your mind. That’s what we’re *not* to do when an unsubstantiated accusation is made.

Instead, we’re to ignore it. Turn a deaf ear to it. Refuse to listen to it. “Except on the evidence [or, basis] of two or three witnesses” (1 Tim. 5:19b). This stipulation was required in the Law of Moses (Deut. 19:15) and was reiterated by Jesus (Matt. 18:16). Multiple witnesses were required to confirm allegations. This shows that elders are to be held accountable for legit accusations but are to be protected from unsubstantiated ones.

In my own pastoral experience, I have found that false accusations tend to surface most in seasons of *church discipline* and *tough decisions*. For years I had posted next to my desk a quote from the hymn, “Courage, Brother, Do Not Stumble.” It was written by the nineteenth century Scottish minister Norman Macleod who wrote,

*Some will hate thee, some will love thee,
Some will flatter, some will slight.
Cease from man and look above thee,
Trust in God, trust in God, trust in God,
And do the right.*

That’s what we’re to do despite of what people say. But those who hear unsubstantiated accusations are to reject it and thereby defend the integrity of the pastoral leadership.

³ MacArthur, 221.

⁴ This is a slightly modernized paraphrase of the original quote, which was “Truth hath always a scratcht face.” Cited in Geoffery B. Wilson, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982), 78. According to Calvin, none are more exposed to slanders and insults than godly teachers. This comes not only from the difficulty of their duties, which are so great that sometimes they sink under them, or stagger an dhalt or take a false step, so that wicked men find many occasions of finding fault with them; but added to that, even when they do all their duties correctly and commit not even the smallest error, they never avoid a thousand criticisms. It is indeed a trick of Satan to estrange men from their ministers so as gradually to bring their teaching into contempt. In this way not only is wrong done to innocent people whose reputation is undeservedly injured, but the authority of God’s holy teaching is diminished.” (John Calvin, *The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon*, trans. T. A. Smail, Calvin’s Commentaries (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1964), 263. Cited in Ryken, 226-227.

⁵ *Paradéxomai* (from *pará*, “from close-beside,” intensifying *dexomai*, “receive”) – properly, receive *openly, welcoming* with personal *interest*. HELPS Word-studies [online]. Retrieved on 10 February 2024 from <https://biblehub.com/greek/3858.htm>.

I remember when we made the difficult decision to close Webster Christian School – a decision that was confirmed by a congregational vote. Of course, everyone was saddened by the decision, and some disagreed with it, which was certainly their prerogative. But at one meeting called by some parents in the school, false accusations were being raised. One man even called our decision “demonic.” I did not feel the need to defend myself, being mindful of David’s words in Psalm 7:10: “My shield is with God, who saves the upright in heart.” Yet at one point one of our church members stood up and said to the accuser, “Watch it. That’s my pastor you’re talking about.” I’m thankful for a church that is true to God and his word and refuses to give ear to false accusations against leaders.

b. Rebuke elders who persist in sin

This instruction, given in verse 20, shows that “elders are to be protected from false accusations but are not to receive immunity from true ones.”⁶ Any elder who persists in any sin, thus violating the qualifications for an overseer (3:2-7) is to be “rebuked in the presence of all” – not just all the elders but the whole church. The word “rebuke” (*elenchó*) means “to expose; to prove wrong; to show to be guilty; to convince with solid, compelling evidence.”⁷ John MacArthur put it, “A sinning elder has nowhere to hide.”⁸

This is never easy to do, but it is the right thing to do. For this reason Paul tells Timothy, “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” (v. 21). No one is to receive preferential treatment. The process of discipline is to be handled with integrity. Paul reminds us that God the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the angelic host are watching. They are the ones we should fear, not people’s reactions.

The purpose of the public rebuke is “so that the rest may stand in fear” (v. 20). The rest of the elders and the whole congregation. Proverbs 19:10 says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” When discipline is done properly, believers wise up and worship God with a renewed sense of awe. They become more conscious of sin in their own lives and are persuaded to purify themselves and pursue holiness in the fear of God (2 Cor. 7:1).

Elders who have been rebuked and are repentant should be forgiven and fully accepted by the congregation. In some cases, such men can be restored to leadership once they have regained the church’s trust by reestablishing a consistent pattern of godly living.

This takes us to the third “bough” of the tree pertaining to the church’s treatment of their elders. The first bough is “reward them generously.” The second bough is “discipline them properly.” The third bow is “appoint them carefully.”

3. Appoint them carefully (vv. 22-25)

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

⁶ MacArthur, 222.

⁷ HELPS Word-studies. Retrieved on 10 February 2024 from <https://biblehub.com/greek/1651.htm>.

⁸ Ibid.

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.

1 Timothy 5:22-25

One of the ways to avoid a public rebuke of an elder is to be careful who you appoint to the office in the first place. Don't appoint someone too hastily, otherwise you may be an unwitting accomplice. "Keep yourself pure."

Right after Paul says that, he includes a parenthetical statement to Timothy in verse 23, encouraging him to drink wine on account of his frequent ailments. Perhaps the turmoil in the church at Ephesus due to the false teaching and other things that Timothy had to deal with was causing him a lot of stress and stomach issues. Some of us can relate to such an experience. Apparently, Timothy had committed himself to total abstinence, which Scripture does not require, although it does forbid drunkenness (Eph. 5:18). So, Paul told him to drink a little wine for medicinal purposes.

Then Paul goes on to list four kinds of men: Obviously unqualified, not-so-obviously unqualified, obviously qualified, and not-so-obviously qualified.

- **Obviously unqualified:** Some are so obviously unqualified to serve as elders that they can be ruled out immediately. Their reputation precedes them.
- **Not-so-obviously unqualified:** Some men's sins are not seen right away but are discovered later and must be dealt with.
- **Obviously qualified:** Their good deeds are obvious. Their godly character shines for all to see. They're clearly qualified, and everyone knows it.
- **Not-so-obviously qualified:** Some qualified men are less conspicuous. They may not be a great public speaker, but they know God's word and counsel people well in private. They're good at mentoring one-on-one or in small groups. They serve behind the scenes. A little investigation shows that such a man is well-qualified to serve because his good works can't be concealed.

As we consider these four categories, "the obvious practical question" that pertains to all of us "is this: What kind of person are you? What will people find out about you in days to come? Will your sins catch up with you? Or will people discover that you are much godlier than they ever expected?"⁹ Remember the key takeaway from today's text:

***Be good to your elders
while remaining godly yourself.***

As we wrap up our study of 1 Timothy 5, one thing is clear: We need the Lord to help us love one another like family. Christ is both our example and our enabler, our pattern and our power. So, as we transition from the sermon to the Lord's Supper, let us confess our need for him and lay hold of him by faith.

⁹ Ryken, 233.