

The sermon

Intro

Paul's back on elders again. Makes me think elders are critical to the health of a church.

READ PASSAGE

Body

Point 1: Financially support teaching elders (5:17-18)

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. – 5:17

Elder and pastor are interchangeable. Elder is the official leadership position. Pastor is the spiritual gift, the function, the elder's task.

Elders rule

"Rule" is the same word used of managing households in chapter 3. A father oversees what's going on in the home. He makes decisions. He plans. He provides guidance. He establishes expectations. He corrects. He models godliness. In doing so, he shapes the culture of the home. This is leading.

In the church, elders oversee teaching and shepherding. Who teaches. What we teach. When we teach. Like Sunday mornings. And we oversee the souls of God's flock. How you're doing. What you need spiritually.

But we're a congregational church. How does that work? The congregation holds ultimate authority. They congregation votes in elders. The congregation has authority to remove elders. The congregation delegates authority to the elders.

Like an owner of a small business delegates authority to a supervisor. The owner has ultimate say. The owner determines the supervisor's pay and duties. The owner pulls the plug on the supervisor when they choose. But the owner gives the supervisor room to make decisions and do the job.

Hebrews 13:17 hits on the shepherding and teaching aspects:

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.

You obey and submit as you respond positively to our teaching. Assuming our instruction agrees with the Bible. We keep "watch over your souls." Making sure you're not drifting into sin or embracing doctrines of demons.

Elders oversee shepherding and teaching, but we don't control the church budget.

Double honor

Double honor involves financial provision, a salary. Not two salaries. If something other than money the second element is respect.

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

You feed an ox when they separate the grain from the chaff for you. You pay the plumber when they install a toilet or repair cracked pipes. Some get paid for preaching and teaching.

“The laborer deserves his wages” is quoted from Luke 10:7. Meaning that by the mid-60’s of the 1st century *The Gospel According to Luke* was already recognized as God’s word.

Preaching and teaching

Some elders, *“especially those who labor in preaching and teaching,”* deserve financial provision. *“especially”* indicates a subset of the elder board. Some of the men on the elder board *“labor in teaching and preaching.”* Others don’t. Every elder must be *“able to teach”* (3:2), but some of the elders *“labor in preaching and teaching.”*

This justifies the modern practice of paying a salary to a Senior Pastor who takes a bulk of the preaching load. Some of the elders have it as their exhausting, grueling labor (farming language) to preach and teach. There’s no Senior Pastor title in the New Testament, but the concept’s in 5:17-18.

Teaching is explaining the Bible. Preaching is encouraging obedient response to that teaching. Ralph preaches when he exhorts you to obey what Isaiah says.

Application

Saying elders labor *“in preaching and teaching”* indicates teaching and teaching preparation will take up a large portion of the paid pastor’s time.

Elders rule well. Watch over each and every soul. Know what’s going on. And watch over your teaching. Are you improving? Are you accurate? Helpful? Are you making progress?

Point 2: Charges against elders (5:19-21)

Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. – 5:19

Someone is making an accusation against an elder. What do we do?

1. You require a minimum of two witnesses.
2. You examine the evidence provided by the witnesses.

Is it credible?

The idea is protecting the elder against illegitimate charges. Making sure there’s evidence before jumping to conclusions. Elders will be slandered. Only substantiated sin problems should be addressed.

As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear. – 5:20

A legitimate charge has been detected. What do we do now?

3. It’s not stated, but you approach the sinning elder in private and urge them to repent.

The elder hasn’t repented. What do we do now?

4. If they persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of the whole church (“all” = the congregation).

The fact that the elder persists in sin assumes he was confronted in private. And he hasn’t budged. He didn’t repent. He’s still sinning.

Rebuke = public correction which exposes the sin to the whole church.

Why? “*so that they rest* (= the other elders) *may stand in fear.*” The other elders, and the whole congregation, will fear when they see a sinning elder rebuked in public. This is a good thing. Treating God as holy, taking sin seriously, is a good thing!

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. – 5:21

Timothy, whatever judgments you render, they’re done in the sight of God and the chosen (not fallen) angels. So eliminate every hint of bias. Be objective. Be fair. Be just.

Thoughts

1. It doesn’t explicitly state the elder is removed from office, but the idea is they’re persisting in sin, so removal is involved.

If a church member is removed by the whole church for persistent, unrepentant sin (Matt 18:15-17), wouldn’t an elder be removed from office for the same thing?

Additionally, elders are held to a higher standard than church members. Elders must be “*above reproach*” (3:2) = no legitimate charges against them. Persistent, objectively verified sin after private confrontation = no longer “*above reproach*” and disqualified from office. A new convert with numerous ongoing struggles can be admitted into membership. But a man with significant flaws can’t be installed as elder.

2. It’s not stated, but some sins would require immediate dismissal while other sins would allow opportunity for repentance and restoration.

I would make the distinction that some elder sins are minor, some are serious, some are automatically disqualifying. Minor sins can be lived with. The elder cannot be required to be sinless. He, like you, has a sinful heart he daily does battle with. Some elder sins need to be overlooked or we would have zero elders.

If I’m correct that rebuke = removal, some sins are serious, but not automatically disqualifying. These sins, if repented of after private confrontation, allow the elder to remain in office. Public rebuke can be averted. Maybe the elder is showing favoritism or becoming too domineering or becoming prideful about his gifts. These sort of sins can be confronted and corrected with the elder remaining “*above reproach.*”

Disqualifying sins would require immediate removal from office. They could be restored to church membership, but elder is out of the question. These would include sins like adultery, beating his wife, stealing church money. In such cases, the elder isn’t a “*one woman man*” (3:2). He’s a “*lover of money*” (3:3). And he’s violent, not gentle (3:3). Some sins require immediate dismissal.

The balance is not too lenient, not too harsh. Some sins are shown grace. Some sins are privately pointed out. Some sins require immediate dismissal.

Application

So the elder office isn’t a “good ol’ boys” club. The elders aren’t the pastor’s favorites. The elders are biblically qualified men.

Beware of being wiser than God. Once upon a time I was looking for a new church. When people at work asked me what the sermon was about, I said I didn’t know. The pastor was telling stories about his mother. I wanted the word, not stories about his mother.

So a Christian friend led me to a church. On the first visit the pastor was explaining to the congregation why the worship leader was being publicly removed. For some sort of sexual immorality. And this was a super seeker sensitive church if

you know what I mean. Now I didn't know much about the Bible. I was saved for about 6 months. I had read 1 Timothy 5, but I had no clue what it was actually about. I didn't know what was going on then. But I do now.

Some would say doing this isn't advisable because it will drive visitors away. I say beware of being wiser than God!

Point 3: Choose elders carefully (5:22)

Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor take part in the sins of others; keep yourself pure. – 5:22

Hasty hands

“*laying on of hands*” = public endorsement, installing new elders. Don't be too quick to install elders. Take your time. Get to know them. Get a feel for their home life. Observe how they interact with people in the church. How do they handle disagreement? Critique? Immature saints? Give them opportunity to teach. Verify their ability to teach.

It's okay to be patient. We're not in a rush. Paul's counseling patience. Take your time.

Sins of others

How might Timothy take part in the sins of others?

1. If he installs a man with substandard character who models ungodliness, the congregation becomes casual about sin.
2. If he installs an abusive, domineering man who lashes out on those who don't tow in line.
3. If installs a man who can't teach and confuses people and causes division and promotes false teachings.
4. If peer pressure leads him to install unqualified men.

If Timothy puts in an unqualified man with sinful patterns, the havoc they wreak on the church is on Timothy's head! It's okay to be patient and cautious.

Personal purity

If there's pressure to install an unqualified man, be strong and courageous. Don't lose heart. Do what's right. Don't be intimidated.

On the other hand, beware of being disqualified yourself. Receive correction before it's too late. Keep close watch on your godliness and teaching (4:16).

Application

It's been said, as goes the leadership, so goes the church. This is generally true. It makes a difference whether you're following John Piper or Marilyn Manson. Elders feed the sheep. It makes a difference if you're eating fruits and vegetables or twinkies.

Yes people fail to grow under sound teachers. Yes sound Christians sit under sloppy preachers. But generally healthy preachers produce healthy Christians. Paul says, “*Bad company ruins good morals*” (1 Cor 15:33). So take it slow in appointing new elders.

Point 4: Health care of elders (5:23)

(No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.) – 5:23

Timothy has health problems. Is the stress of telling women what they're supposed to wear and removing unqualified elders getting to him?

In those days, drinking small amounts of wine was common medical practice.

What about wine?

1. Beware of wine.

It can control you, cause you immense pain, and kill your judgment (Prov 23:29-35).

2. Don't get drunk (Eph 5:18).
3. Wine is absolutely permissible (Rom 14:14, 21).
4. Don't let your wine drinking ruin a fellow Christian (Rom 14:21).

My drinking wine might communicate it's okay to get drunk. Encouraging a former drunkard to start drinking again might get them enslaved all over again.

5. Receive it with thanksgiving (1 Tim 4:1-5).
6. In Psalm 104:15, the Psalmist praises God for bringing forth "*wine to gladden the heart of man.*"
7. If "*You honor God with your wealth...your vats will be bursting with wine*" (Prov 3:9-10).

Giving to God will bring you plenty of wine.

That's my brief theology of wine. I haven't had alcohol since August 2000, minus communion once at a Reformed Church that served actual wine. I used to get really disturbed inside when a Christian drank alcohol in front of me. But I'm okay now. But I'm pretty sure I'm never touching alcohol again.

Application

Ministry is stressful and hazardous to your health. So take care of your body. Make use of modern medicine.

Point 5: Sometimes character is obvious, sometimes it's hidden (5:24-25)

The sins of some people are conspicuous, going before them to judgment, but the sins of others appear later. – 5:24

Paul's still talking about elders. "*conspicuous*" means obvious. When it comes to laying on hands, the sins of some men are obvious. Not too hard to detect.

In other cases, sin is well hidden. Some men may appear qualified. Only to have their sins emerge after being installed.

The judgment appears to be the final judgment. The sins of some people are so obvious they're non-Christians. Their sins get to God before judgment day. Their sins are waiting for them.

So also good works are conspicuous, and even those that are not cannot remain hidden. – 5:25

Sometimes a man's good works are obvious for all to see. They meet the qualifications. Sometimes the person meets the standard, but they go unnoticed. Their character is seen and recognized over time.

Application

We can be fooled. We can miss something. We can install unqualified men.

Christian we can hide our sin from one another, but eventually it will come out. Better to confess it now than to be discovered later. If you reveal it now, you can get help. If you reveal it now, you'll preserve some credibility. If you reveal

it now, people won't have as hard a time trusting you. If you reveal it now, you'll protect your heart from further hardness. Begin by sharing with a trusted Christian.

On the other hand, we can neglect what's staring us right in the face. We can fail to consider a qualified man.

But that doesn't mean we shouldn't do our best. Be slow to lay on hands.

Maybe we ought to ask ourselves some questions. What do people see in me? What's obvious about me? Good or bad?

Non-Christian

We've learned about organized Christian religion (elders) and personal rebellion against God (sin).

We were created to know and love and serve God. But we rejected God and rebelled against his rule. The Bible calls this sin. We chose to do life our own way.

God holds us accountable for our personal rebellion. One day rebellion against God will come to an end. Paul called this judgment.

In his great love, God sent his Son Jesus to die on the cross as a substitute.

That whoever believes in Jesus would not face judgment but rather experience forgiveness of sins and eternal life. On the cross God treated Jesus as if he lived our sinful life. If we trust in Jesus, God treats us as if we lived Jesus' perfect, sinless life.

Jesus not only died. He rose from the dead, confirming his claims.

This good news challenges us to repent and believe.

There's two ways to live. We can go on rejecting God and living our own way. Or we can humble ourselves by asking for forgiveness and trusting in Jesus' death and resurrection and joyfully submitting to God's rule.

If you turn from rebellion and believe, you're totally forgiven of every sin you've ever committed and you're born again with a new heart to fight sin.

If you haven't believed, turn to him today. Let us know if you do.