

1 Timothy Chapter 5 (vv.17-25)

In re-visiting the subject of *leadership* in the assembly (3.1-7), Paul is emphasising its importance in view of the false teachers in Ephesus. It is possible these individuals were once part of the oversight itself (cf. Acts 20.29-30). The theme was raised in 1 Timothy 3 in relation to *order* (government) in the House of God. Here the subject of *relationships* (generations) is in view, particularly *respect* (v.17), *accountability* (v.19) and *fellowship* (v.22).

Praise of Elders [vv.17-18]

v.17: Paul has used the word 'elder' in the *singular* to designate an older brother in the assembly (v.1). Now he uses the same word in the *plural* to further define the 'bishops' (overseers) of 3.1-7. That these are different ways of describing the same men is evident from comparing Acts 20.17, 28. 'Overseer' emphasises their *work* or *duty*, whereas 'elder' depicts the *honour* and *dignity* of such work. This verse does not justify dividing 'elders' into two classes – those that 'rule' and those that 'teach'. The simple fact is that *all* elders 'lead' (shepherd) the flock *by* teaching (3.2). Elders that 'rule well' are to be 'counted worthy' or *considered deserving* of 'double honour'. The word 'rule' (*proistemi*) is used in relation to the *homes* of overseers (3.4, 5) and deacons (3.12). It simply means to 'stand before' or 'superintend' in the sense of leadership and care. This they are expected to do this 'well' (*kalos*) or 'commendably', meeting high standards of excellence. Such an elder is worthy of 'double' or *special*, two-fold 'honour', both *qualitative* (esteem) and *quantitative* (material). Typically, the word has the sense of *esteem* (respect) but can include the thought of financial value (Matthew 27.6). In light of the context of material support for widows (vv.3-16) and the quotations that follow (v.18), the 'double' (special) honour involves financial help, where required, as well as high esteem (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5.12-13). Such double honour from the assembly is 'especially' (particularly) fitting for the elder who *toils to the point of exhaustion* in the preparation and delivery of public *preaching* (gospel) and *teaching* (instruction). "*Elders who labour in the word and doctrine and therefore forfeit opportunity for material advancement may find themselves in reduced circumstances, in which case they should be helped by the assembly*" (John Riddle).

There is nothing in this verse to support the unbiblical position of a permanently salaried ministry, whether an evangelist, pastor, elder or teacher. There are some individuals, when the demands of their spiritual work preclude continuation in secular employment, that the Lord calls to 'full-time' service. Such are recognised and commended by the local assembly to which they belong (Acts 13.1-3). These individuals are not supported by any kind of salary but look to the Lord alone to meet their needs. Nevertheless, there is clear scriptural precedent for the giving of material gifts to those who have ministered spiritual blessings amongst the saints. *1 Corinthians 9.11 NET: If we sowed spiritual blessings among you, is it too much to reap material things from you?* See also Galatians 6.6. In the words of Jim Allen, "*The servant looks to his Lord, and the saints feel their responsibility before the Lord to respond to His grace and the spiritual blessing received, by responsive giving for the work of God. Thus scriptural practice issues in the spiritual enrichment of both the servant and saint and precludes any materialistic motive creeping into spiritual exercise.*"

v.18: To substantiate the teaching of v.17, Paul refers to two scriptures, one from the OT (Deuteronomy 25.4) and one from the NT (Luke 10.7). He unites the quotations under the singular title of 'scripture'. Both utterances were equally authoritative. Remarkably, Luke's gospel had only been written, and therefore in circulation, two or three years before this letter – yet it is still referred to as scripture (cf. 2 Peter 3.16). This is the second time Paul directly cites the words of the Lord Jesus, and on both occasions he quotes from his good friend Luke (cf. 1 Corinthians 11.24-25). Oxen, often in pairs, were driven across sheaves of corn laid on the threshing floor to remove the grain. The oxen were left unmuzzled and therefore free to eat grain as reward for their work. How much *more* then should faithful elders who labour to produce spiritual food be materially supported – whether money, food or shelter? Again, the 'labourer' (workman) is worthy of his 'reward' (wages). Failing to support an elder who labours in the word is as dishonouring as failing to pay the wages of a hired servant (cf. Deuteronomy 24.14-15; James 5.4).

Protection or Preservation of Elders [vv.19-20]

v.19: The public position and work of elders exposes them more readily to 'accusation' (cf. Luke 6.7). At times they must deal with faults in others which could lead to resentment and ill-feeling manifested in malicious accusation. As the apostolic representative, Timothy was not to 'receive' or even *consider in his mind* any formal complaint against an elder, except on the evidence of 'two or three witnesses' (Deuteronomy 17.6; 19.15; 2 Corinthians 13.1). Allegations from a single individual were not to be investigated but ignored. *None are more exposed to slanders and insults than godly teachers* (Calvin). Note. In the matter of *personal* offence between individuals, see Matthew 18.15-17. **v.20:** Those that are *presently* and *persistently* 'sinning' must be 'rebuked' before all. Whilst this *could* refer to the elder against whom an accusation is made and proved – which would certainly require public rebuke – it is more likely descriptive of

those persistently bringing unfounded and malicious charges, without the support or evidence of witnesses. Such are to be publicly 'rebuked' (exposed) before 'all', i.e. the entire church. This would cause 'others' of the same class, i.e. other potential accusers to be **fearful** of bringing further, unfounded accusations (cf. Deuteronomy 19.15-20, especially v.20).

Principles of Appointing Elders [vv.21-22, 24-25]

v.21: The *solemn* and *serious* nature of these injunctions is evident. Timothy is '**charged**' or *solemnly urged* 'before' (in the presence of) deity. Note. Both **God** and '**Christ Jesus**' (JND) are joined together under *one* article implying *two* distinct persons that are *one* in essence. Timothy is thereby reminded that the apostle's teaching, and its practice, must be observed as being *from* God and *in the sight* of God. The '**elect angels**' are simply 'gathered out from' angels, i.e. distinguished from fallen angels who rebelled against God with Satan. Angels are highly interested spectators of every local church, delighting in the outworking of divine order and wisdom on earth (cf. 1 Corinthians 4.9; 11.10; Ephesians 3.10; 1 Peter 1.12). The mention of angels intensifies the solemnity of the charge. With such a cloud of witnesses, Timothy must carefully guard these instructions (namely vv.17-20) without *prejudice* or *favouritism*. To '**prefer** one before another' is to judge a case, positively or negatively, before hearing the evidence. To do something by '**partiality**' is to show favouritism to one side or the other. There must be a strict examination of the facts.

v.22: *Prejudice* or *favouritism* could result in the hasty recognition of an elder (or public servant) without adequate time for his character to be displayed (Jim Allen). Thus, Timothy must not '**lay hands**' (public *recognition* and *identification* of fellowship, Acts 13.3) on any man '**suddenly**' (a *brief* extent of time) without careful consideration. Even the Lord Jesus prayed all night before choosing the twelve apostles (Luke 6.12-13). Any *haste* on Timothy's part may make him 'partaker of other men's sins' by showing apparent approval of a person that later proved to be unworthy of such fellowship. He must 'keep himself **pure**' morally, but also unstained from reproach by association with the sins of others in the matter of fellowship. Jim Allen notes, "*Timothy could be held, in some degree, responsible if a man, recognised too hastily as an elder, became the subject of a scandal.*"

v.24: The last two verses of the chapter explain *how* Timothy could avoid being 'hasty' in the matter of fellowship and guard against being deceived by appearances. Don't forget the iceberg principle – *nine tenths* of a person is generally hidden from view! Negatively, there are *two types* of **sins**. Some are '**open** beforehand', i.e. quite clear and conspicuous to all, graphically depicted as 'running ahead' like heralds announcing guilt in advance. The '**judgment**' in view is likely the *assessment* by Timothy (and the assembly) of an aspiring elder's suitability to serve. But with some individuals, their sins are not immediately obvious and do not come to light for some time. **v.25:** Positively, there are *two types* of '**good works**' that may commend the character of an aspiring elder (or servant). Some are *public* and *openly evident* for all to see, but others are more *private* and *personal* (concealed). Nevertheless, they cannot remain hidden and will soon come to light (Luke 12.2). The whole matter is neatly summarised by Albert Leckie, "*Unworthy men can easily be offered the hands of fellowship. Worthy men whose good actions are not in the limelight are inclined to be overlooked. Let us not be hasty in the matter of fellowship.*"

[PARENTHESIS] Prevention of Timothy's Infirmities [v.23]

v.23: Perhaps Paul felt the necessity to qualify his call to purity (v.22), being reminded of Timothy's personal exercise not to drink wine. In first century Ephesus, water was unsanitary and carried disease. By *only* drinking **water**, Timothy was putting himself at unnecessary risk of illness. Thus, Paul condones the legitimate medicinal use of 'a little' (note the amount) 'wine'. Norman Geisler remarks, "*In the ancient world water could be made safe in one of several ways. It could be boiled, but this was tedious and costly. Or it could be filtered, but this was not a safe method. Or some wine could be put in the water to kill the germs—one-part wine with three or four parts water.*" Even though it was unsafe, Timothy clearly sought to set an example by drinking no wine at all. The alcohol content of wine today would be described as 'strong drink' by scripture and widely condemned (Leviticus 10.9; Proverbs 20.1; 31.4; Isaiah 5.11). The wine was therefore to be 'used' to serve Timothy's purpose. He was in control of the wine, rather than the wine in control of him (cf. Ephesians 5.18). Timothy does not appear to have enjoyed good health – he had 'stomach' complaints and *many* (note the plural) '**infirmities**' on a *regular* basis. Clearly the instances of special miracles (cf. Acts 19.11) and gift of healing had already fallen out of vogue – there is no suggestion Timothy could be healed of his 'often infirmities'. He is directed, rather, to use an ordinary medicinal remedy.