

1 Timothy 5:17–25  
Elders Who Rule Well—or Don't

Thursday, February 9, 2023 • Read 1 Timothy 5:17–25

*Questions from the Scripture text: To whose treatment does v17 now turn? How must they rule, in order to be treated this way? Of what are they worthy? Especially which ones? To what does he appeal to prove this (v18)? What does he quote from Deut 25:4? What does he quote from Luke 10:7? What must not be received against an elder, except under what circumstances (v19)? When an accusation proves true, what is to be done with the elder (v20)? For what effect upon the rest of the elders and the rest of the church? How does the apostle show the seriousness and needfulness of the instruction in v21? What mustn't Timothy allow to enter into the process of receiving charges against elders or censuring elders? What is one precaution to take, in order not to end up in this situation (v22)? But what must he also not do, if an elder is sinning? What must he do with himself? What is an important part of Timothy's therapy to have a strong stomach in the context of dealing with sinful elders (v23)? What will be true of some elders' sins (v24a)? But what might investigation be required to expose (v24b)? What will eventually be the case with all good works (v25)? And what other works?*

**How are we to acknowledge the value of godly elders' ministry in the church?** 1 Timothy 5:17–25 looks forward to the second reading in morning public worship on the coming Lord's Day. In these nine verses of Holy Scripture, the Holy Spirit teaches us that **we are both to honor godly elders doubly and hold them accountable as examples unto the flock.**

Some elders in the church rule well. These are to be counted worthy of double honor. It's plain from v18 that this is referring to remuneration, like the "honor" given to the roll of praying widows in vv3–16. The implication may well be that all elders who rule well should be given a salary by the church in addition to what they earn in their "day job." Some elders, however, have "the Word and doctrine" as their life's labor, and these especially are to be counted worthy of this double honor. If they are men of the quality of 3:3, this ought not to be an issue, for they will be generous with whatever they received.

It is worth noting that v18 is quoting Luke 10:7 as Scripture. Though the concept is taught in other places, that is the only Scripture that is worded this way. The books of the New Testament were not constituted holy Scripture by human councils over hundreds of years. They were received as holy Scripture, even during the time that the New Testament was being written.

So Scripture teaches that elders are worthy of their wages for their labor. But not all elders rule well. Some sin (v20). God's standards of justice must be followed in receiving accusations against them (v19, cf. Deut 19:15, Mat 18:16), but when it is determined that they are in sin, they are to be rebuked publicly for the good of the rest of the elders, and indeed the rest of the church (v20). Otherwise, we might not fear to sin in the churches. Sadly, in the author's day, there is such an antinomian spirit that in many churches (even those that call themselves Reformed) the flock of Christ is taught not to fear sinning, because sinning is normal, and grace somehow makes sinning into not that big of a deal. But here the Spirit plainly teaches us to fear sinning.

The reality of having to deal with the sins of elders presents many dangers to Timothy. The greatest is his own sin, whether prejudice and partiality against those who are sinning (v21), or the temptation to be lax and thereby share in others' sins (v22b). One preventative for this is to ensure that 3:1–7 is being fully followed. In a situation like in Ephesus at the time, and in a great many congregations ever since, it is tempting to think that the need for Reformation calls for quick identifying and ordaining of elders and deacons. But it is precisely into such a situation that the Spirit-inspired apostle warns Timothy not to lay hands on anyone hastily (v22a).

Ultimately, Timothy is to follow the procedure outlined in v19–20 and remember that while some cases will be quite easy to adjudicate (v24a), there are other sins that follow a man that must be brought out by persisting in careful investigation (v24b). And it may be that the investigation will bring out good works rather than sin (v25). This is all difficult work, and Timothy has shown frequent infirmities (v23b). So the apostle interjects into this discussion of judging elders his counsel that Timothy take up the drinking of wine for his stomach. This may be to address physical weakness that makes him weak in handling the elders; having a "stomach" for something or having "guts" was also used with this word in a similar way to how we use it in English today, so it may even mean the moderate (cf. 3:3) use of wine to help temper the anxiety and man-fear that is a particular weakness of Timothy's. Ruling well as an elder is a calling for those stout of heart, and those whom the Lord sustains to do it well are worthy of their wages!

How do we show the value of elders who rule well? How are elders held to a higher standard of personal, family, and congregational godliness? What is the proper way of addressing it if they don't?

*Sample prayer: Lord, we praise You for giving shepherd-teachers to us as gifts, from Your throne on high. Elders who rule well are good gifts from you and to be honored. So forgive us, when we fail to do so, especially with those who labor in the word and doctrine. And help them, O God, for they are sinners too. Grant that they would be repentant, so that as they are exposed, it would be good works that are exposed. Forgive us for being hasty to ordain on the one hand, and hasty to accuse or judge on the other hand. Grant that Your Spirit would give our elders the integrity and the courage that they and we need them to have, in Jesus Christ, AMEN!*

ARP128 "How Blessed Are All Who Fear the Lord" or TPH128B "Blest the Man That Feareth Jehovah"

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First Timothy 5 verse 17 through 25, these are God's words. But the elders who rule, well be counted worthy of double honor. Especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. For the scripture says you shall not muzzle an ox, while it treads out the grain. And the laborer is worthy of his wages.

Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all. That the rest may also fear. I charge you before god and the lord jesus christ and the elect angels. That you observe these things without prejudice.

Doing nothing with partiality. Do not lay hands on anyone. Hastily Nor share in other people's sins. Keep yourself pure. No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach sick. And your frequent infirmities. Some men's sins are clearly evident. Proceeding them to judgment. But those of some men.

Follow later. Likewise the good works of some are clearly evident. Those that are otherwise cannot be hidden. So far the reading of god's inspired and denigrant work.

So, as the apostle has put Timothy in charge of, The reformation in ephesus. And among that has been the training and ordaining new officers. As we've been considering, especially since chapter 3 There is also the Uh, treatment and conduct of the officers once they are in office. And this is a tricky thing, because Even as you follow first Timothy 3.

And, Qualifications for the office of elder, etc, office of overseer. There are still in the eldership. Men who rule? Well, As verse 17 describes. And then those who are sinning those who Or unrepentant and practicing sin. As in verse 20. And sometimes it is immediately obvious. Which is which verse 24.

Some insins are clearly evident. And verse 25. Likewise the good works of some are clearly evident. And sometimes it takes investigation. It takes carefulness and persistence in inquiring. Uh, so some medicines are clearly evident proceeding them to judgment. You already know they're wicked. Even before you start the trial, doesn't mean that you're necessarily prejudiced.

Prejudging them in the trial, but you could see it before you started. Uh, some Uh, you don't discover that they are sinful until you have. Follow the procedure, those of some men will follow later. Um, verse 24. Similarly, as you conduct investigation and inquire into things, sometimes you will find.

That there were good works. That weren't clearly evident about upon investigation, they could not be hidden. This is especially the case because just as the wicked tried to hide their evil works. So also the good are careful to be humble about. They're good works. They do it not for the eyes of man, but for the eyes of god, And yet the lord assures his servant that patience and diligence.

Will be. Rewarded. Well, the elder who rules. Well here is said to be counted worthy of double honor. This is related to verse 3, honor widows who are really widows and As we have seen going through the chapter, these are widows who Are on the payroll as those who pray night and day, they continue in supplication and prayer.

That night and day. And they are cared for by the church not merely as Those who are afflicted, but those who are the honored, the ones who Having lived the maturing seasoning portion of their life with husband to children. Keeping the house and lodging the strangers. Watching the scenes feet, relieving the afflicted etc.

Have been trained through that by the holy spirit. To treasure their fellowship with god, continuing in prayer. Night and day. And this is describing something then that is more than merely, just making sure that they have. Uh, clothing and food. Well, the honor of the widow in verse 3 is half.

Of the honor of the elder who rules well in verse 17. The implication is That even if an elder receives a salary for his To use the phrase that we were saw in. Act 18, even if he makes a salary from his tent making job. Uh, he should also be.

Uh, considered where the of receiving a salary for his labor as an elder. And the apostle marshals to scriptures one from Deuteronomy and one from the gospel of luke, He quotes luke chapter 10 verse 7 here as scripture for the scripture says you shall not muzzle an ox. While the treads out the grain.

That's from Deuteronomy and The laborer is worthy of his wages. That's from the gospel of luke. You all run into people, i still run into them sometimes church officers, even may the lord have mercy on his church. Who say that? The. Who say that the contents of the new testament or the identity of The new testament scriptures was not determined until hundreds of years after Christ then.

Only by church councils and so forth. Well, Uh, that is quite obviously not the case. Since the apostle is already referring to the gospel of lucas scripture. In first, Timothy chapter 5. The the scripture was being recognized as scripture as it was written. And we can, Uh, go to what he says to the Corinthians.

About those who. I have. Uh, the spirit or consider themselves a prophet, one of the things that they do is recognize that paul is writing to them by the holy spirit. Sorry, and peter refers to paul's writings as among the scriptures. Uh, and so forth. Um, So, he appeals to the scripture to say that elders should draw salary.

And then, Those who labor in the word and doctrine. That is they don't have other work. Uh, but they're all day every day work. Is to labor in the word and doctrine, the word and teaching. So preaching and teaching. That they are to be counted. Were the of double honor.

Which perhaps indicates. That the church should not be stingy with them even up to twice. A normal salary. And if it's the sort of man that has been Described in. First Timothy 3 is not covetous. He's not greedy for gain. Doesn't love silver and so forth. Then there's no problem.

In. Then there's no problem in. Paying such a man, a very large sum. Uh, yeah, i double average salary, because this man, of course will be Uh, giving money. To the poor giving money for the work of the gospel. Everything that is his anyway, whether it's money or otherwise.

He will be pouring out as a drink offering. He's really glad to spend and be spent. For the sake of the gospel and for the sake of the church, But that's The parallel. Then between verse 3, And verse 17. Well what about those who don't rule well? What about those who Um, Who are sinning?

Well, they present a few problems, one. Great problem. Is that Timothy is in danger of sending with them. And so, the lord Uh, says Um, Do not. Do not share in other people's sins verse 22. Keep yourself pure. Which means that It is necessary that he not overlook what they are doing.

Uh, and That as he receives accusation, he would only do so in accordance with the law of god, Verse 19 do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. So you are not to be hasty and judgment. They are they are to be treated.

With the same regard for, How god says, To investigate justly. In verse 19. And yet, they are not to be. Uh, treated with favoritism either towards them. And so, The one danger was that he would share in their sins. Another danger, Is that he would be prejudiced, or Uh, that he would act with partiality.

And the apostle reminds Timothy. That it's not just in front of the elders and it's not just in front of the church. Uh, but especially it is before god. Before the lord jesus christ. Who is the god man? The judge and even Before the elect angels. The chosen are holy angels who god prevented from falling by his mercy by his power?

And that all these Are paying attention to whether or not? The minister of the gospel conducts himself justly and conduct himself purely, And so it is quite The fearful thing. And so Timothy is instructed not to be hasty. In the first place. If you take your time examining the qualifications, And accordance with the first Timothy 3.

And you don't relax the standards because you really need to have elders or because you really like this guy or because it's family has been in the church for a long time. If you're not hasty and laying on hands, that will go a long way, not to have to go through.

Uh, the verse 19 and Verse 24 process. However, if they are sending if accusations come and there's investigation and they are discovered to be sinning, Then it

is necessary that they'd be rebuked and not rebuked in a corner or rebuked behind closed doors. Doors rebuked in a session rebuked, an executive session, Of an elder's meeting there to be rebuked in the presence of all Uh, so that the rest also may fear and this is both the rest of the elders.

That they may fear sending and the rest of the congregation That they may see that even an elder. Maybe caught and sin and captured by his remaining sin and backslide and the great danger that are remaining symposes to us. And those who do not engage in church discipline and church discipline against the elders.

Are not. Protecting the congregation. From the harm that comes from their remaining sin. We see here that one of the main things, or one of the things that a church and a minister of the gospel must do is teaches congregation to continue to fear sinning. Now, sadly we actually live in an age in which the idea that we should be afraid of sinning or that we should feel guilt when we sin or that we should work hard not to sin.

All of these are treated by many people who I think themselves. Uh, experts in the gospel and great lovers of what they call grace, but is no grace at all. Um, this idea of fearing sinning, and fighting against sin and being ashamed of sin and investigating sin, punishing sin.

Um, They treat that idea as if it is somehow incompatible with the gospel. Uh, but fearing. Remaining sin and fearing backsliding. Into sin is so necessary. That the apostle here gives instruction for the manner in which a Um, An elder who has found guilty in the judicial process is to be rebuked.

Uh, in order. That the rest also may fear. Well, this all may sound very Difficult to do. And in fact, this is why verse 23 lands in the middle of this passage. It's quite obvious that versus 17 through 22 and 24. Through 25 are all the trading, the same thing.

So why is it here that the apostle tells Timothy no longer drink? Only water but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent. And, New king, James puts infirmities in the text and then illnesses in the footnote. But it misses, Uh, the most common translation of the word, perhaps, because Thomas Nelson, is a Baptist publisher or was a baptist publisher at one point.

Um, Weaknesses. No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent weaknesses. No, it's possible. That Timothy had some physical condition. Uh, that led to him being Timid. Uh, or unable to follow through. And he needs physical strength in order to lead the church.

Well, especially in light of the fact, That elders. Um, Well, it need to be held accountable and either double honored verse 17 or rebuked in the presence of all verse 20. But the word stomach can also be used and was also used the way we use it. When we say, he doesn't have the stomach for that.

Or he lacks the guts to do that. And it may even be. That a little bit of wine, notice the word little in verse 23, he still has to keep and follow the lord's instruction. That he's not being a man who has given to wine. That was one of the qualifications of an elder.

And you act a little bit of wine, maybe in order. Uh, before Uh, Uh, hearing in church court or a session meeting. Or. To help the The young pastor. Uh, not Be over anxious. As he faces that, which will you will have to do. In the ministry. So whether it's physical or Whether it's a physiological help for weakness of constitution.

He is to marshall the use of all of god's, good gifts. And you would add in verse 23, things like, you know, eat a balanced diet, and get exercise, and make sure that you are Sleeping correctly, use all of god's good gifts. And yet Timothy who, apparently knew that with respects to other things, Uh, was trying to abstain from wine altogether.

And the apostle in verse 23, says, no, Uh, the moderate appropriate. Use of wine is something that is going to be necessary for you. In leading the elders of the church, well, and holding them. Accountable and bleeding. The church in honoring. Those who do well and inferring. Uh, the rebuke.

That comes to those who don't, so make sure you use all of God's. Uh, good gifts. This, of course, corresponds to what we saw. Him saying earlier. At the beginning of chapter 4. And how there is a demonic man-made? Approach to abstaining from things that god has created good as if they were evil.

And we should make good use. Of all god's good gifts. So not organized into the, you know, 3 points or two or four points like we often do but i hope that And if you come back to this portion, Of first, Timothy 5. You'll be able to see. Uh, what the apostle is saying here.

For the church, the test, the holy spirit to bless it to us. Or ask for the holy spirit to bless us. Our father in heaven. We thank you that you have given your son to be our mediator. And that he is building the church and that the gates of hell cannot prevail against it.

And yet, o lord. Uh, you tell us to Flea temptation. And to flee. Youthful lusts. To flee, our sin so we pray that you'd help us to take our city. Seriously. And we pray that you would help the churches. To take sin, seriously. Especially among the eldership so that the congregation as a whole may be all on.

The same page, we pray that you would be giving your churches. Those elders who do rule, well, who are worthy of a double honor, who are the occasion, not of the congregation having to be reminded by rebuke to fear, Um, but rather men who are an example. Whose salary is a reminder.

Of the worth of their labor and the worth. Of their example to the flock. And so we pray. Lord for your churches and we pray for us. For ourselves for our church. We pray. Lord that you would give us only Such men as our worthy of double honor. Then we pray that our boys would grow up to be such men.

Grant to us, that we would not be hasty in things cutting corners, and ending up in situations, where we have brought much grief to ourselves and to your church. By doing something too quickly or incompletely. And grant to us that Uh, we would not put hope in self-made rules and religion.

But that we would make good use of all of your good gifts since we are so needy. And so, we And must be supported by all of your mercies. In order to serve, well, And grant then especially the help of your holy spirit. Who is your great? Good gift.

We who are evil know how to give good gifts to our children. But you are good and wise and loving heavenly father. Much more. Give the holy spirit. And we ask for him through christ. Amen.