

Subject: *Dealing with Pastors in the Church*

Scripture: *1 Timothy 5:17-25*

Paul's first letter to Timothy deals with many things in the church, but we come again to the subject of the pastor. It appears as if Paul is saying if you can keep the pastor right, everything else will be right, but what a job that is.

We see that Paul refers in verse 17 to the elders. He is not referring here to the older men, but to the church leaders. These are also called the bishops or the pastors. The word bishop refers to his management as overseer. The word pastor refers to his ministry as one who cares for and protects the sheep. The word elder refers to his maturity and spiritual fitness for the office. Paul refers to the elders (plural). Apparently most local churches had multiple elders or pastors to share the responsibility of ministry. *Acts 20:17* *And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church. 1 Peter 5:1* *The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed.*

THE PASTOR'S COMMENDATION (vs. 17-18)

These verses teach that the local church should support and honor the pastor who is faithful to God's work. At least three ideas stand out in these verses:

- Pastors should do things well

To rule well means to lead or guide well, as in 3:5 (one who rules his own household well). Pastors must not be sloppy or careless in their ministry. They should not settle for being mediocre or average, but should strive for excellence. The bottom line is to be faithful. Some pastors have a Ph. D, but all pastors should strive for a W. D. ("well done, good and faithful servant").

- Pastors are to be honored when they do things well

They can be honored in many ways. The church is to financially support the pastors, but that is only one way to honor them. The text says "double honor," not double pay. This could be respect, encouragement, cooperation. *3 John 1:4* *I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.*

- Pastors are to work in the Word and doctrine

Some folks think the pastor only works two days a week. The word "labor" means to toil, to put forth effort. It means the pastor is to be working in the word, always studying, teaching, and preaching. *1 Thessalonians 5:12-13* ¹² *And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; ¹³ And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves. **2 Timothy 2:15** Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*

This statement from John MacArthur has been a good reminder to me: "An expository preacher must be a diligent student of Scripture. Because the Bible is God's holy and sacred Word, it must be treated with respect, its purity protected, and its intended message never

violated or misrepresented. It is not to be handled flippantly or carelessly, but great deliberation and industry must mark all efforts to discern its truths. Since nothing is as important as the Word, no energy expended by anyone in any field should surpass the effort of an expositor seeking to ‘rightly divide the Word.’”

THE PASTOR’S EXAMINATION (vs. 19-21)

Pastors are human and are not above sin. Church discipline was important in the local church and the pastor was not immune to such discipline. A formal accusation or charge of wrongdoing against a pastor was not to be received unless there were two or three witnesses. This would eliminate gossip and false rumors. This was based on an Old Testament teaching, *Deuteronomy 19:15* *One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established.* Jesus confirmed this procedure, *Matthew 18:16* *But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.*

There was a church bulletin that contained this personal statement from a pastor who was accused of a scandal: “I have learned that a story is being circulated that on a recent occasion I would not permit my wife to attend the services of another church, and that when she refused to obey me and attended without my permission, I went to that church and dragged her out by the hair of the head, and beat her so severely that she had to be sent to the hospital. I feel it necessary to make a statement in regard to this story. In the first place, I never refused my wife permission to attend any service she wanted to attend. In the second place, I did not drag her by the hair of the head from such a service, nor did I beat her when I brought her home. In the third place, she was not hurt so badly that she had to be taken to the hospital. And in the fourth place, as some of you perhaps know, I have never been married, so I have no wife to whom any of these things could apply.”

False charges were to be rejected, but if the charges were true, the pastor was to be rebuked publicly before the church (vs. 20). This whole process had to do with the ongoing practice of sin (“them that sin”) and not just an isolated act or incident. The public rebuke involved an admission of guilt and explanation of the sin. This is the same word translated “reproof” in *2 Timothy 3:16* *All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.* The Scripture deals with what is right and what is wrong and the church must do the same. The church must realize that no one is above church discipline and being accountable and everyone in the church should have a healthy fear. Everyone would learn a lesson, especially the other pastors and leaders.

This was serious business (vs. 21). There must be no partiality. No one receives a pass or preferential treatment, even the pastor.

THE PASTOR’S ORDINATION (vs. 22-25)

It is so important to examine a man before he is selected and ordained for the ministry. Laying hands (vs. 22) refers to setting a man apart as a pastor. We do this in a pastor’s ordination service. The act of laying on hands came from the Old Testament practice of laying hands on an animal sacrifice to identify with it. The act of laying on hands signifies that a man is being set apart and authorized as God’s minister. It signifies partnership, authority, and blessing. This must be done with much thought and prayer. It should not be done suddenly. Approval of a pastor involves accountability for him and for the church.

To be sure that he is the right kind of man his life and works should be examined as evidence (vs. 24-25). Some sins and good works are easily seen, while other sins and good works can only be seen over time. The judgment here is not final judgment of the Lord, but the process of determining if a man is suitable for pastoral ministry.

This portion of Paul's letter reminds us that the pastor is an important part of God's plan for a church. The pastor is called to a high standard and has an important job to do, but remember, he is just a man. And so he must be held accountable while he serves as pastor and he must be vetted before he becomes a pastor. Here is the bottom line: pastors and churches need God's grace and guidance, and when they do what they're supposed to do, God is glorified.