

THE PASTORAL EPISTLES: GOD'S DIRECTIVES FOR HIS UNDERSHEPHERDS

I. 1 Timothy: Basic Local Church Ministry **M. The Biblical Treatment Of Church Elders** **(1 Timothy 5:17-25)**

I. Introduction

- A. In view of reports of great needs and problems in various churches, much of which has been produced by church leaders themselves, we view the Pastoral Epistles, handbooks on local pastoral ministry.
- B. One of the great needs in today's churches is to treat church leaders correctly, for the widespread dysfunction of father figures in today's homes has led either to an undue exaltation of father figure leaders in the church or conversely to the abuse of such men, with either mistreatment harming the spiritual welfare of local churches.
- C. 1 Timothy 5:17-25 gives us insight on the Biblical treatment of church elders, what we view for our insight:

II. The Biblical Treatment Of Church Elders, 1 Timothy 5:17-25.

- A. The elders (*presbuteroi*) in 1 Timothy 5:17a in this context are not merely older men, but official leaders in the office of elder the local church, U. B. S. Grk. N. T., 1966, p. 727; Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 744.
- B. Those officials who then direct the church's affairs well were to receive double honor, implying honor for being elders and double honor for ruling well in their oversight positions, 1 Timothy 5:17b.
- C. However, there is another category of elder, that of those who "work hard" (*kopiao*, Arndt & Gingrich, A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., 1967, p. 444) in the Word [preaching] and teaching, 1 Timothy 5:17c ESV. Indeed, Scripture at Deuteronomy 25:4 directs we should not muzzle the ox that is treading out the grain on a threshing floor, a picture of a Bible expositor who is gleaning out applicable truths from Scripture for the congregation in his preaching and teaching, and Luke 10:7 is cited by Paul where Jesus said the laborer is worthy of his hire, 1 Timothy 5:18. The congregation should thus financially support such teaching elders, what the office of pastor in today's church is supposed to be.
- D. Spiritual leaders could be falsely accused, a challenge to their character and thus to the harm of their ministries, so Paul told Timothy not accept an accusation against an elder unless it arose from two or three witnesses (1 Timothy 5:19), what mirrored the teaching of Deuteronomy 19:15 in the Mosaic Law.
- E. If an elder were proved to have sinned, he was to be rebuked in front of the entire congregation that everyone in the Church might fear and depart from sin, 1 Timothy 5:20. Paul strongly urged Timothy to perform such discipline if it was warranted, charging him to do so before Biblical parties who were involved in exercising God's judgment such as God, Christ and the elect holy angels, 1 Timothy 5:21; *Ibid*.
- F. To avoid troubling circumstances like the church discipline of a sinning elder, Paul directed Timothy to be careful and slow to lay hands of ordination on a man to make him an elder lest he share in the blame for the negative consequences on the congregation by too quickly ordaining an unqualified man, 1 Timothy 5:22.
- G. Continuing this theme in 1 Timothy 5:24-25, Paul advised Timothy that waiting to lay hands on a man to ordain him to be an elder was a sure way to avoid the likelihood of having to discipline him later and thus avoid hurting the whole congregation (as follows):
 - 1. Paul taught that some men's sins were quickly evidenced in their lives while the sins of others could only become apparent after a period of time, 1 Timothy 5:24.
 - 2. The same principle was true regarding men who were qualified for the role of elder: some men's good deeds were seen quickly where other men with other kinds of personalities could be discerned to be really godly men only after a period of time exposed their qualifications as godly men, 1 Timothy 5:25.
- H. [1 Timothy 5:23 is a parenthetical address to Timothy: his apparent effort to be a good teaching elder had likely led him to be so strict in avoiding the use of alcohol that he failed to use it even medicinally to the harm of his health. Paul thus admonished Timothy to use a little wine medicinally!]

Lesson: Church leaders are to be honored for their office, doubly honored for leading well and honored even more for toiling in the work of preaching and teaching God's Word. They are to be protected from false charges unless two or three witnesses verify the charges, and if found guilty, such leaders should be publicly rebuked for the welfare of the rest of the body. To avoid such disciplinary events that are hurtful for the church, leaders should be chosen slowly to give time for others to discern those who are truly qualified for oversight.

Application: May we honor all church leaders, doubly honor those who minister well but discipline those who sin, and go slow in putting men into leadership that we provide peace and edifying stability in the local church.