

## 1 Timothy 5:17-25 Bible Study Commentary And Questions

### I. Treatment of elders in the church (17-21)

#### Cross-References

Acts 14:23 – And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

Deuteronomy 19:18-19 – The judges shall inquire diligently, and if the witness is a false witness and has accused his brother falsely, then you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 – We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.

Hebrews 13:7 – Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.

Matthew 20:26 – It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant.

1 Peter 2:2 – Like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation.

Psalms 81:10 – “I, the LORD, am your God, Who brought you up from the land of Egypt; Open your mouth wide and I will fill it.

Matthew 5:6 – “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

#### Verse by Verse Commentary

1. Elders who direct the affairs of the church well – This statement gives a clear principle of what elders are doing. Elders direct the affairs of the church. It doesn't mean they boss people around. It doesn't mean they sit around and do nothing. It doesn't mean they do everything. Rather, they provide guidance and vision and direction. Sometimes this means delegating. It can also include mobilizing people in the church to work together to accomplish a common mission. While elders should listen attentively to needs (Acts 6) and be responsive, they also need to be careful not to be directed by the congregation. Cultural forces and influences can creep into churches and sometimes the masses are wrong. Elders should not make decisions in order to be popular or please people. Instead they seek God's will and then apply that in humility to the whole church.

2. Are worthy of a double honor – Paul says that elders who serve well are worthy of a double honor. The church should recognize them and appreciate them for the work that they do. Some pastors work very hard for their churches, but are treated very poorly. These men busy themselves at God's work, visiting the sick, offering counseling, organizing activities, preparing messages, teaching, preaching, and much more. Sometimes the church members they serve so faithfully, respond with complaints and accusations, taking their leaders for granted.

I believe this is why Paul is saying this. The mindset of devaluing or under-appreciating elders is toxic. If people do not appreciate their leaders, they will not listen whole heartedly or apply the lessons they are taught. The teaching and preaching will also not be appreciated.

At the same time, churches must be careful of going too far the other way. Awards, plaques, and constant recognition can also bring attention to man rather than God.

And for leaders, they should always be careful to evaluate their own motives. While God wants church members to appreciate them, they should not demand this themselves or seek it. Neither should they give up or become depressed when their work is not valued. Jesus was rejected by man. In one case, He healed ten lepers and only one even bothered to say “thanks.” Yet He did not give up or complain.

We must keep in mind that this verse is focused not to elders, but to church members. If Paul was speaking to elders, he would most likely tell them to keep faithfully serving no matter the response in order to please God rather than man.

3. Especially those whose work is teaching and preaching – It is important to note that teaching and preaching is work! Do you think pastors or teachers just stand up and give a sermon without any preparation? It takes hours and hours of hard work. One seminary professor said that one standard is it takes one hour for pastors to prepare one minute of sermon time. So a forty minute sermon may take forty hours to prepare. That is an ideal scenario that most speakers just cannot make time for. However, most of the speakers I know prepare at least ten hours for one message. Preparation requires concentration and focus. It requires sacrificing time they could use on leisure or family activities.

**Application:** Knowing that preachers take a lot of time each week to feed you a meal of God’s Word, what should you do? You should focus in order to get as much out of it as possible. You should value his time spent and apply yourself to learn from what he has to say. Here are three simple ways to do that.

A. Prepare by studying the passage ahead of time (if your church is going through a regular series). Also, prepare yourself by praying before church that God will prepare your heart and convict you of needed changes.

B. During the sermon time, pay attention! There is little more demoralization for a preacher (speaking from experience here), than seeing people in the congregation sleeping! How would you feel if you prepared a special dinner and invited guests over only to see them sleeping during the meal?

Focus on what the speaker is sharing. Take notes and meditate on the points. Write down any questions or points of confusion.

C. Afterward, consider how you can apply the lessons learned. Try to make at least one practical application each week based on what you learn from the preaching.

We see the value that God places on preaching and teaching since Paul highlights it as a reason for giving double honor. If God values it this much, should you?

4. A worker is worthy of his wages – Paul shares a principle from the Old Testament which tells us that even oxen deserve some return for their labor. Farmers were commanded to allow their oxen to eat from the very grain they were plowing.

Paul applies this to the principle of Christian workers. A believer who works faithfully in the church is worthy of his wages. Therefore it is good and right for churches to support pastors, missionaries, or anyone else who gives their time to diligently serve the cause of building God’s kingdom. This is true for workers who are officially tied to a specific local church (such as a pastor), but also those who serve in the wider universal church outside of a local church building.

Although a worker is “worthy,” this does not necessarily mean that they must always be paid. We should also remember that Paul himself often refused to accept such financial support. He refused for several reasons. These included not wanting to burden the church and to prove pure motives. There can be other reasons as well. I serve in an international fellowship in a foreign country. In our church there is no paid staff. One advantage of this is that every born again believer is encouraged to volunteer and help. In the church of about 400 regular attendees, 197 helped in some capacity. This helps to foster an environment where each person is expected to use their gift and grow. It also clearly shows that money is not a motivating factor for serving. More money is then available to give to other places such as world missions.

However, there are disadvantages as well. The elders and leaders face a sometimes heavy workload. Since they have many other obligations, even to support themselves, they can get tired. Also, some projects which they would like to do may not get done because of a lack of time. A paid leader has more time to dedicate to the church.

Each church can evaluate their own situation to make a decision. As we see in this verse, elders are worthy of being supported. If they do not receive support, it means they are making a sacrifice for the greater good of the church and God will not forget what they have done for Him.

**Application:** How can you encourage and support your church leaders (or missionaries?) Sometimes it can be a thankless and even lonely task. You should often pray for them and express words of appreciation. Consider also writing them a personal thank you note. Or offer to do an act of service such as babysitting to allow for a date with their spouse. Make sure your local church leaders know that you appreciate their service and time.

5. Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses – Here is a protection that Paul establishes for elders. Elders can be targets of accusations by disgruntled church members. Someone who just has an axe to grind should be given a platform or be allowed to harm the reputation or ministry of a God fearing elder. Remember that elders are to be recognized if they are living up the standards in 1 Timothy 3. Men like that have an established track record of integrity that should not be lightly cast aside.

However, this does not mean that they are untouchable. People change. Or sometimes their true colors take years to come to light. Elders aren’t perfect and sometimes fall spiritually. Therefore Paul provides a provision for this sin to be dealt with. If multiple witnesses independently corroborate an accusation against an elder then it should be taken seriously. Paul says there should be two or three witnesses. Perhaps this is a reference to the credibility of those witnesses. If two witnesses have a stellar reputation then their accusation is enough to entertain it.

Keep in mind that to entertain an accusation does mean that it is automatically received and acted on. Instead it would mean an investigation is launched to determine the facts and then take appropriate action.

6. Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly – If after investigation the accusation, it is found that the elder is guilty, then this should be dealt with publicly. Although it is painful the matter must not be swept under the rug. Sin should be brought to the light. Hopefully the elder will confess. But even if he doesn’t, this case can be a warning to others. Sin is serious and will eventually come to the light.

7. Keep these instructions without partiality – Churches are not to treat their elders in a willy-nilly manner. Honor should be given to those who do well. And sin should be dealt with appropriately. Favored and well liked elders are not to be treated better than less popular ones.

## Discussion Questions

- What is an elder?

- What does an elder do according to this verse?
- Why are elders who do well worthy of “double honor?”
- How might this honor be shown?
- What do you learn in this verse about the importance of preaching and teaching?
- What is the point of the phrase “do not muzzle the ox”?
- Should Christian workers be paid?
- What are the pros and cons of paying pastors/preachers, etc.?
- How can this verse shed light on this issue?
- Why is it important not to entertain an accusation against an elder unless there are multiple witnesses?
- What does verse 20 tell us about what to do when an elder sins? What is the purpose of this?
- How does this protect the church?
- Does your church apply the above principles? How?
- What should you do if your church doesn’t confront sin in its leaders?

## II. Personal reminders to Timothy (22-25)

### Verse by Verse Commentary

1. Do not be hasty in laying of hands – Generally elders or leaders would lay hands on someone appointed for a specific task, perhaps even appointed as an elder. It is like ordaining someone. It is important that Timothy do his due diligence first. If the wrong person is chosen, it can cause serious harm for the church. Instead it is better to be patient and careful, observing for a longer period of time and not rashly rushing into a decision.

2. Take a little wine – Timothy seems to completely abstain from drinking alcohol. Paul doesn’t think this is good for his health and suggests Timothy to drink a bit of wine. From this verse we can see clearly that it is not wrong for a believer to drink alcohol. Some believers view any type of alcohol consumption for any reason to be sin. However, this view is not based on the Bible. Jesus Himself turned water into wine. Self-control and moderation is important. It is certainly not wrong to abstain, but the one who abstains should not judge the one who drinks sometimes and in moderation.

3. Verses 24-25 – Eventually everything good and bad will come to light. A lot of actions, both good and bad, are obvious. These are evident immediately and to all. Other actions, either good or bad, are hidden. Time will reveal these. It is possible that some sins will remain hidden until the final judgment.

Why does Paul tell this to Timothy?

It is a reminder that judgment is certain. It is also a reminder to be careful and discerning. Not everyone is who they appear to be. Even in the visible church there are occasional wolves in sheep’s clothing. Leaders should be cautious about promoting people too quickly. Accountability and transparency are also important to maintain.

**Application:** We probably all know stories of people who we thought were faithful believers who were showing a facade. Churches should be careful to minimize damage done by such people by being more discerning on the front end. For example Sunday School programs can attract sexual predators. Therefore some church require background checks for Sunday School teachers. This is a wise precaution. In like manner, you should be careful as an individual in important decisions like marriage or becoming a business partner. Do not hastily jump into such alliances. Instead do your absolute best to know the real person first.

### Discussion Questions

- What does laying on of hands refer to?
- What does verse 23 teach us about believers and alcohol?
- What is the meaning of verse 24?
- Why does Paul tell Timothy that good deeds are obvious and can't be hidden?