

STUDY ON THE BOOK OF FIRST TIMOTHY

ADVICE ABOUT WIDOWS, ELDERS, AND SLAVES II

Read 1 Timothy 5:17-6:2

Introduction.

Thus far Paul has shared with Timothy the dangers of the false teaching, pointed to areas that need correction, given guidelines for leader selection, and pointed to godliness as the goal. In this section he instructs Timothy in how to relate to various types of people in the church:

- Old men, young men,
- Old women, young women,
- Older widows, younger widows,
- Sound elders, sinning elders, and
- Slaves.

Though the culture may be thousands of years removed from our own, the principles endure. In our last study, we focused on the first three on the bullet points above. Now, in this study, we will focus on the last two bullet points above.

Honour and Compensation for Elders

“Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in the word and doctrine. For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,” and, “The labourer is worthy of his wages.”” (vv7-18)

The word “elders” here is to be understood in a broad sense of those in leadership, however. The focus is on elders who rule and elders who teach (labour in the word and doctrine). While deacons were managers of various elements of church business, the elder is in charge. "Direct the affairs of the church" (NIV), "rule well" (NRSV, KJV) is “proistēmi”, "to exercise a position of leadership, rule, direct, be at the head of."

If an elder (such as a pastor) does rule well and does labour in the word and doctrine (clearly speaking of hard work), that one is worthy of double honour.

In this context, double honour means financial support. Paul already stated that certain widows were worthy of honour (1 Timothy 5:3), speaking of financial support. Now he added, let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in the word and doctrine. Some think the church should not support pastors and staff, and that the paid ministry is an abomination — they say that the church instead should be using the money to support the needy. This is an attractive way of thinking; but it isn't Biblical. If the needy (that is, the truly needy) are worthy of honour, then those who properly rule and teach in the church are worthy of double honour.

The principle that those who serve God's people should be paid (when possible, of course) is supported by the passages of Scripture quoted by Paul: Deuteronomy 25:4 and Luke 10:7. Paul explained in 1 Corinthians 9:11 that if one sows spiritual things (such as labour in the word and doctrine), it is entirely appropriate for them to reap material things among those who they do the spiritual work.

In Galatians 6:6 Paul wrote, let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches. In Philippians 4:17 Paul said that such giving abounds to the account of the giver, sharing in the reward

of the spiritual ministry supported. It is also significant that Paul quoted Luke and called it Scripture, just as much as the passage from the Hebrew Scriptures that he referenced.

Discipline of Elders

“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 also may fear.” (vv19-20)

In these verses, Paul hit the balance between believing and acting on every bit of gossip that comes along about a leader in the church and ignoring serious sin in a leader’s life. Either extreme is wrong. Those whose business it is to correct others will usually have many enemies; great caution, therefore, should be used in admitting accusations against such persons.

Any accusation against a leader should not be automatically received. The accusation should be carefully verified by two or three witnesses — not just two or three others who also heard the gossip. Timothy should not receive or promote unsubstantiated accusations about church leaders. However, if leaders are in sin, it must be addressed forthrightly — with public rebuke, to promote a fear of sin among the leadership and the entire church.

Many congregations have had great trouble because sin in the leadership was not forthrightly dealt with. It’s important that everyone understand that leadership in the church does not shield one from accountability; it makes one even more accountable.

A Solemn Charge

“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.” (v21)

Now Paul gives this in the form of an authoritative command with three holy parties as sanctions to the charge:

"I charge you,

before God

and the Lord Christ Jesus

and the elect angels

to observe these instructions without partiality and to do nothing out of partiality."

This strong statement reflects the serious nature of the job of leaders in the local congregation. They serve an eternal God and must please Him first in everything they do.

Prejudice and partiality are grave sins before God. In the New Testament, the emphasis is on partiality according to class (James 2:1-9); but partiality according to race and gender is also included (Galatians 3:26-29) and regarded as sin.

Don't Be Hasty in Ordaining Replacements

“Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people’s sins; keep yourself pure.” (v22)

This is used in the sense of ordination. Paul cautioned Timothy to let a man prove himself before he was recognized in ministry. There should not be a rush; time must season a man and his ministry. Some think the admonition do not lay hands on anyone hastily has to do with receiving repentant people back into the fellowship of the church. It seems that in some early church circles, those who had fallen into

scandalous sin had to be received back into the church with the laying on of hands and prayer by church leaders. If so, Paul meant, “Don’t go too fast. Let them demonstrate their repentance first.”

Since ordination simply recognizes God’s calling, it is even more reason to not be in a hurry — time should be given to allow those gifts and callings to demonstrate themselves. It isn’t uncommon for a young man in the ministry to be a bit impatient; he wants to do great things for the Lord and is anxious for pastors and elders to lay hands on them in recognition of God’s work in them. Yet, there is danger if anyone waits to give themselves fully to serving the Lord until they are recognized with a title or the laying on of hands. This means they are more concerned with image (how it appears to others) than with substance (what they can really be doing for the Lord right now).

Keep Yourself Pure

This connects to an important idea. If Timothy was called to observe and assess the lives of others, it was important that he pay even more attention to his own life. He should not share in other people’s sins. We all have enough sin of our own; we do not need to add to it by partaking in the sins of others. There are many ways we can do this.

- We can share in the sins of others by setting a bad example before them.
- We can share in the sins of others by approving of them or ignoring them.
- We can share in the sins of others by joining a church that spreads dangerous teachings.

Use a Little Wine

“No longer drink only water but use a little wine for your stomach’s sake and your frequent infirmities.”
(v23)

In conjunction with his injunction to "keep yourself pure" in verse 22, Paul didn't want Timothy to be caught up with the false teachers' idea of abstaining from certain foods to keep pure.

He is encouraging a medicinal use of wine, widespread among both Jews and Greeks. Unfortunately, alcoholics in our day can quote this verse at the drop of a hat to defend their excessive drinking. That is certainly not what Paul meant! The emphasis is on "a little," Greek oligos, "relatively small on a scale of extent, little, small, short.

Your frequent infirmities

Timothy was the victim of frequent infirmities; yet Paul did not simply command a healing on apostolic authority, or even send him a handkerchief with healing power (Acts 19:11-12). This demonstrates that Paul did not have miraculous powers at his own command, but only at the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Apparently, there was no such prompting in Timothy’s case.

If it is God’s will for all to be healed right now, then Paul (and the Holy Spirit who inspired him) here led Timothy into sin — calling him to look to a natural remedy instead of a divine healing. God uses natural remedies and the work of doctors in healing, as well as the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit — they don’t contradict one another.

Man’s sin and his good works.

“Some men’s sins are clearly evident, preceding them to judgment, but those of some men follow later. Likewise, the good works of some are clearly evident, and those that are otherwise cannot be hidden.”
(vv24-25)

It is easy to see the struggles and sins some have; but with some others, the sins are hidden.

We all have areas of our lives God is dealing with; and sometimes the area is something clearly evident to others. But sometimes the sinful area is not evident; some people are regarded as holy just because they are good at hiding their sin.

Good works are always eventually revealed; but sins are sometimes hidden and will be evident only at the judgment. These words are meant to be a caution to Timothy in his appointing of leaders. Sometimes what one sees on the outside isn't really an accurate picture, so we need to take it slow, so we can wait on God for discernment.

Slavery

“Let as many bondservants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, so that the name of God and His doctrine may not be blasphemed. And those who have believing masters, let them not despise them because they are brethren, but rather serve them because those who are benefited are believers and beloved. Teach and exhort these things.” (vv6:1-2)

Paul concludes this section with a paragraph on slaves. He has advised Timothy on how to relate to old men and young men, old women and young women, older widows and younger widows, sound elders and sinning elders, and now slaves. Reading from other translations perhaps, makes the point her clear:

“Whoever is a slave must make the best of it, giving respect to his master so that outsiders don't blame God and our teaching for his behaviour. Slaves with Christian masters all the more so—their masters are really their beloved brothers!” (MSG)

“All slaves should show full respect for their masters so they will not bring shame on the name of God and his teaching. If the masters are believers, that is no excuse for being disrespectful. Those slaves should work all the harder because their efforts are helping other believers who are well loved.” (NLT)

But just as women needed to maintain their roles in society for the sake of the church, so did slaves, "so that the name of God and His doctrine may not be blasphemed" (6:1). It was difficult enough to proclaim the Gospel in terms this culture could understand -- Christians were called "atheists" during the cruel reign of Domitian because they refused to worship the Greek and Roman gods. If they also became known as the sect that encourages slaves to be rebellious, even more reason to speak against and persecute the Christians.

Christian slaves are told to show respect toward their non-Christian masters, "so that the name of God and His doctrine may not be blasphemed" (6:1) -- that is, for the sake of the church. Christian masters were to be respected also, with the additional reason that they are brothers. You see a similar instruction in other epistles (Ephesians 6:5-8; Titus 2:9; 1 Peter 2:17-20). Elsewhere, however, Paul encourages slaves to get their freedom, if that option becomes available (1 Corinthians 7:20-23) and encourages Philemon to free his now-Christian slave Onesimus (Philemon 10-16).