

Paul's Epistles to Individuals

Lesson 12 – 1 Timothy 5:17-25

I. Elders Who Rule Well (vs. 17-18)

As discussed previously, the Greek word for “elder” (presbuteros) can refer to an older man (v.1) or in an official sense, to the office holder. Context must be considered in determining which is the case. Here, the word “rule” (Gr. “proistemi”) means “to stand before, to preside”. So here it is clear the reference is to the office holder, an overseer, shepherd (**Acts 20:28**), pastor, or bishop depending on translation. Here those who “rule well” are being considered.

A. Double Honor (v. 17)

The idea of honor here is not only esteem or respect but also the idea of remuneration. The word here (Gr. “time”, pronounced “tee-may”) specifically means “value”, normally used to describe money paid or valuables exchanged. In English, the word “honorarium” is used to describe payment given out of respect. Especially when contextually considered with **verse 18**, there can be no doubt there is scriptural authority for paying an elder, especially when they preach and teach.

B. Worthy of Wages (v. 18)

“You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing”, is a quote from **Deut. 25:4**. Paul also uses this quote in **1 Cor. 9:9** when he was making a case for the support of those preaching the gospel (**1 Cor 9:14** – “So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel”). The meaning of the quote in Deuteronomy is clear. A beast of burden is not to be deprived of its food when it is working. Likewise, a laborer in the gospel is not to be deprived of wages. The word “for” here indicates the reason for the previous statement follows. So, double honor is warranted because of the work that is done.

II. The Correction of Elders (vs. 19-20)

Again the office holder is discussed. Elders are human and are not sinless. However, credible evidence must be presented if an elder is to be accused. In order to protect against malicious accusations and gossip, confirmation of witnesses is required. Sin is not to be tolerated, whether it is seen in a person or in a person who falsely accuses that one (**Deut 19:15-17**) - “A single witness shall not rise up against a man on account of any iniquity or any sin which he has committed; on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed. 16 “If a malicious witness rises up against a man to accuse him of wrongdoing, 17 then both the men who have the dispute shall stand before the Lord, before the priests and the judges who will be in office in those days”).

A. Applicable to All

The requirement of witnesses so as to avoid false accusations is not just to protect elders. In matters of disputes between brethren (**Matt. 18:16**), established from the Old Law (**John 8:17**, **Heb. 10:28**) and bound by inspiration in the Law of Christ (**2 Cor 13:1**).

B. If Proven, Rebuke Before All (v.20)

Once an elder is proven guilty, it requires public rebuke. Paul illustrated this in his dealings with Peter (**Gal. 2:11-14**). This is a sin that has public impact and must be addressed publicly (**Acts 5:5,11**). Correction isn’t pleasant but necessary (**Heb. 12:5**) as seen in the letters to the Asian churches (**Rev. 2 & 3**). We should be ashamed of our sin (**2 Thes. 3:14**) and moved to Godly

sorrow (**2 Cor. 7:9-10**) so that others may fear and avoid being a partaker in evil deeds (**2 John 1:10-11**). Elders, because of their role must be ever vigilant to humbly repent without hesitation.

III. A Charge Given (vs. 21)

Here Paul emphatically charges Timothy to “observe these things” (KJV). This most certainly refers to the things previously discussed. This is akin to the instructions given in **1 Tim. 4:11-16** indicating the personal responsibilities that are to be fulfilled. This charge is made before God, Christ and the “elect angels”.

A. Elect Angels

The word translated “angel” here is from the Greek, “angelos”. Although it may refer to a potential supernatural being (**Heb. 2:7**) maybe like Gabriel (**Luke 1**) but not necessarily. This same word may also be translated “messenger”. Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” is called a “messenger” from Satan (**2 Cor. 12:7**) and Jesus also refers to John the Baptist as a “messenger” (**Luke 7:27**), both from the Greek “angelos”. Sometimes “messenger” is translated from the Greek, “apostolos” as in **Phili. 2:25**, wherein the word is used to describe Epaphroditus. Meaning, “one sent forth”, “apostolos” also describes the 12 specially chosen by Christ (**Luke 6:13**) but can also refer to others (**Acts 14:4, 14; Rom. 16:7; 2 Cor. 8:23; 1 Thes. 2:6**). So, angels here may not be supernatural but human messengers in the cause of Christ. This possibility is not injured by the use of the adjective “elect”, meaning “picked out” or “chosen”. Saints are God’s “elect” or “chosen” (**Matt. 13; 1 Pet. 1:2, 9**) unto salvation because they were called by the gospel (**2 Thes. 2:14**). Therefore, “elect angels” here may be human.

B. Without Prejudice

This statement lends support for the idea that “these things” have to do with the disciplinary principles mentioned before. To maintain these principles without bias or partiality is to insure that all individuals’ sins, even an elder’s, will be fairly addressed.

IV. Other Instructions (vs. 22-25)

This list combines several similarly important principles that all seem to have in common the ideas of restraint and moderation. The “laying hands” here (**v. 22**) likely refers to those identified to special roles (**Acts 6:1-6; 8:17-18; 13:1-3**) is a caution against being hasty in that regard, thereby avoiding being a party to others’ sins.

In regard to the instruction regarding wine, it is authorization to Timothy to use a “little” wine, mingled with water for medicinal purposes. Again, moderation and restraint. “No longer drink water” (**v. 23**), cannot be a prohibition of water altogether. A careful study shows wine (Gr. “oinos”, either fermented or unfermented) was routinely mixed with water. Not intended as a detailed study of alcoholic drink, it should be noted there is no authorization for the recreational or social drinking of alcohol here. There is none in the New Testament.

Verses 24 and 25 clarify tell us that restraint, especially in regard to elders is important. Some sins are obvious and some are not. Some sins are clearly visible and some are revealed in judgment. Likewise, good deeds are either evident now or will be in judgment. To lay hands on and identify one as an elder prematurely is potentially disastrous to the cause of Christ. Therefore, use caution and look for good works in the identification of elders.