

January 31, 2010

“Honoring—and Disciplining—the Elders”

Let's read 1 Timothy 5:17-25 p. 1264

¹⁷ Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. ¹⁸ For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer deserves his wages." ¹⁹ Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. ²⁰ As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear. ²¹ In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality. ²² Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor take part in the sins of others; keep yourself pure.

²³ (No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.) ²⁴ The sins of some men are conspicuous, going before them to judgment, but the sins of others appear later. ²⁵ So also good works are conspicuous, and even those that are not cannot remain hidden. (ESV)

Three young boys were standing around in a school yard discussing their fathers. And one boy said to the others, "My dad is a doctor. He makes me healthy for nothing." The next boy said, "My dad is a teacher. He makes me smart for nothing." The third boy said, "My dad is a pastor. He makes me good for nothing."

That might not be so far from the truth.

I get sent journals and emails from those who are in my field of work, just like many of you do in yours. Pastoral leadership is a frequent topic, and they always include a cautionary tale. Last year I read about the founder of one of the nation's most prominent marriage ministries, Ray Mossholder. Mossholder, with his wife, founded Marriage Plus Ministries (MPM) and has written three books on marriage. He announced last January that he was divorcing his wife of 42 years because of "irreconcilable differences..." but then also announced his plan to marry a much younger woman once *she* gets her divorce. This effectively shut down the ministry overnight, and of course it caused many who had been helped over the years to be discouraged and even bitter.¹

I wish I could say that this is a rare story, but instead it's illustrative of stories you hear all the time. The apostle Paul had a lot of experience with this. The scarcity and fragility of church leadership dogged Paul throughout his ministry work. And these experiences gave Paul a basic wisdom:

he knew that *as the leadership goes, so goes the church*. This morning we want to look at

- the honoring of church leaders
- the discipline of church leaders
- the selection of church leaders

¹ Incredibly, two churches offered him a job when he announced his resignation!

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You might like to add to that the selection of a good wine, but well, we'll touch on that later!

So first, the honoring of church leaders.

I have sometimes seen this first verse thrown around a bit, and when you throw verses around, a few important words will almost always fall away. I've often heard this first verse quoted this way: "Elders are worthy of a double honor." Sounds right, doesn't it?

But actually, what the bible says is, "Let the elders *who rule well* be considered worthy of double honor." And the point is, some do, and some don't. Your leadership is supposed to run and administer the affairs of the church effectively, and to do it with godliness.

Not to brag on your elders – I shouldn't have to; you chose and elected them! – but they administer the tasks of the church very well. By God's grace – and all of this is due to the prevailing grace of God – those whom God has provided to us are doing their work very well. Your elders want to be sure that we teach the bible well, that we love you – love our people – well, that we handle the finances well, and of course that we worship well. That is, for the glory of God. And it is BECAUSE they are given and placed in authority that they are worthy of this double honor.

Now, this is one of the verses where we in Presbyterianism infer the distinction between "ruling" and "teaching elders." Sometimes you'll hear the acronyms, TE and RE. Same thing. This was the teaching of John Calvin.

Calvin inferred from this passage that it's clear that there are people with general pastoral and administrative functions – those that direct the affairs of the church – and those that have a particular calling to preaching and teaching. But Calvin and those in our tradition never saw this as so hard and fast. All elders, Paul says, have to be able to teach. All elders need to rule well. But there does seem to be a division of labor. And what you need to know, and be sure about, when it comes to your elders is that when an elder teaches, that they be an elder who doesn't put forth their own ideas, but the word of God. And that when ruling elders rule, they rule by the principles of the word of God. That is what must ratify their work and undergirds their personal authority. Because if it is not the word of God, it WILL be something else. What ever they do, rule or teach, they must do it well.

In fact, verse 17 implies that they must do it worthily. You see it doesn't say elders are "worthy of double honor, especially those who preach and teach." No it is says "especially those who *labor* in preaching and teaching." This a word for blue collar hard work, labor, and strong exertion. Paul loves this word. The point is, don't just support the elders, but support the ones who are working hard at it. Who are doing it properly. Who are doing it *well*. And this means, by implication, don't support those who are not. The remuneration is not indiscriminate. You need leaders who can rule well, and are obviously laboring in their work.

Clive James, the English novelist and poet, describes one minister he knows as "a picture of inactivity, sitting in a winged leather armchair, expending just enough energy to keep his pipe alight." Well, Paul suggests, pay that kinda guy accordingly.

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BUT, if your pastor IS working hard in his study, working at his leadership, and is laboring at his preaching, then you owe that person a double honor.

Now look – a double honor is NOT twice as much money! Paul, after all, says there should be no favoritism! No, the double honor means two-fold honor – show the honor in two ways: 1) respect AND 2) remuneration.

A moment on respect. When our elders tell you something – when they give you a "thus sayeth the Lord" – it's not that they don't love you. It's that they do! It would be easier for them and less contentious for them to ignore stuff, but they do it because they love and care for you. So when they give you correction, or insight, or simply listen to you, honor them. Respect them. Now this doesn't mean you have to agree with them. Or with every point of doctrine. That's okay. But ask yourself, as Paul suggests, are they administering the affairs of the church well?

I also want to say to the students who are here, or if you're visiting: if you have a pastor back home, and he taught you the bible and he took care of you and loved you, let him know. Respect that pastor. Send them a note to tell them how you're doing. Honor them.

Now respect AND remuneration – what should this remuneration look like? First, as a pastor, it seems unseemly to have to preach on this and I thought a couple of times this week of having one of your other elders preach on this, or an outside preacher. And you need to know this is not a sermon about my displeasure or one of the other pastors. I'm preaching on this because it's here, even though talking about paying your pastor can seem unspiritual.

After all, doesn't decent pay and expenses bring with it temptation? And the answer is, of course it can. Money can bring temptation to anyone in any kind of work. But on the other hand, if you want to keep your pastor from the love of money, you pay them.

Dick Lucas, the neo-puritan English preacher says "We need to throw out all (these platitudes) about living by faith. We live by money. We *preach* faith. But without the money to preach the faith, we won't be doing it for very long."² We'll have to do something else. We'll have to moonlight. We'll have to leave the ministry.

And that is Paul's point here when he quotes Deuteronomy 25. The way that threshing was done in the Ancient Near East is that you would collect the harvest, lay the sheaves of corn on the floor of the threshing room. Then you would tie an ox to a center pole and have him march around and around on the grain. But when you did this, you left the ox unmuzzled – nothing would cover its mouth and it was free to eat as much as it wanted as a reward for its work.

Then Paul quotes Jesus in Luke 10:7 – interesting all by itself because it suggests either that the gospel of Luke was already moving from church to church at that time, or that it was a proverbial saying that both Jesus and Paul knew: "The laborer – in this case the one who labors in teaching and preaching – deserves his wages."³

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The idea seems to be this: If Jesus is right (and He is!) that "where your treasure is, there will your heart be also," that clearly we do not respect the word of God if we don't pay those who labor over it to feed us with it. That respect and remuneration go together. You can't divorce the two. Your elders – this isn't a Wall Street or Hollywood job. We're your oxen. I'm your ox. We labor. And if we don't pay people on our ministry team properly, then it says we don't respect their work. Yes a spiritual giant might be able to overcome lousy pay and keep his head down, but he might also be tempted toward bitterness every day of his work. And then if the pastor becomes discouraged over this, HIS heart will start to drift toward other treasures, and his work will show it, and then the congregation's willingness to pay their chief laborer most assuredly will fade and drift, and the whole thing goes down in a tailspin.

So that is our first point. The leaders of the church are to be honored. It's a double honor – respect AND remuneration. But it has to be for work that is worthy.

And this moves us on to our second point

- the discipline of church leaders

Last week you'll remember that there were widows who were on the church's rolls to receive support that should not have been there. But throughout this letter we learn, tragically, that there were those in the pastorate and in eldership... *they* should not have been there, either!

You never know what will convince people of the existence of God. It was Henry Ford who once said that he based his belief on the existence of God on the fact of the church's survival. No other enterprise that is run so poorly, Ford said, could have stayed in business this long without a God.

That is not a defense for the existence of God that any of us should want to make to someone. But he has a point!

The sad implication of the statement that "elders who rule well should be considered worthy of double honor," is that others DO NOT do so well. It's a fact of Timothy's situation in Ephesus that some of the elders there are delinquent.

So Paul, again, provides some very practical advice for Timothy to follow, and it's good advice for us, too. So let's look first at verse 19, and then 20.

V. 19: Paul tells Timothy something he already knows, but is worth repeating: "Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses."

Now this could sound like special treatment. As if the pastor gets a pass unless at least two people provide evidence. But the bible ALWAYS insists that it takes two witnesses to convict someone. It's like that old saying, "If a brother comes to see you, he has a problem; if two brothers come to see you, *you* have a problem." Deuteronomy says you need two witnesses, and Jesus applied this rule to everyone in the church in Matthew 18, not just the elders.

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Now there is a difference for an elder – did you notice it? The difference is that they may not even be *accused* of a sin unless there are multiple witnesses. Two or three witnesses are required not just for a conviction, but before the accusation can even be considered at all.

And the reason for this is that "he-said; she said" conflicts are the type that are often irresolvable. Who will you believe? BUT the talking and the gossip start up anyway in these conflicts. So you have the smoke even if there is no fire. And that fog of gossip can bring down the ministry, then, of someone falsely accused by the accusation of a single person, and ultimately bring down a church.

Calvin said this so well I can't resist quoting: "None are more exposed to slanders and insults than godly teachers. This comes not only from the difficulty of their duties, which are great enough that sometimes they sink under them... or take a false step, so that wicked men find many occasions of finding fault with them; but added to that, even when they *do* perform their duties correctly and do not commit even the smallest error, they never avoid a thousand criticisms. It is indeed a trick of Satan to estrange men from their ministers so as gradually to bring their teaching into contempt. *In this way* not only is wrong done to the innocent people whose reputation is unjustly injured, but the authority of God's holy teaching is diminished."

But now let's look at v. 20: this doesn't mean that teaching and ruling elders are above the law. No, the fact that they receive some protection from slander makes the sins they commit all the more reprehensible: "As for those (elders) who *persist* in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear." A public exposure, you see, in front of the congregation.

You see, this is a stick that is sharp on both ends. I am part of a group of pastors that gets together on a near-monthly schedule. And I hear this all of the time. If any of you are psychotherapists or counselors, you know what I mean. There is a dynamic that psychologists have known for many years. They call it transference. The bible calls it idolatry. What happens is that, say, the counselee or client has spent so much time talking about their mother that, well, he or she starts to transfer their feelings about their mother to you, the counselor. Believe it or not, in psychoanalytic theory, this is thought to be a positive sign of trust, showing that the patient is making progress. But when it's bad, it's bad. It's the same with pastors. A person – whether in affection, or in emotional neediness, or in perversion, can turn on their counselor, fall in love with them, become obsessed with them, hate them, or fantasize about them, tell lies about them. Pastors are at the sharp end of the stick and they are exposed, and it's right that there should be witnesses.

BUT, there is also something called counter-transference. This is when the counselor transfers his own repressed feelings on a counselee, or a whole congregation. You see, the pastor who is supposed to be a servant... is looking to get served.

And when this happens, the whole cause of Christ – and the cause of the gospel – take an enormous hit.

That's why those who persist in this sin – we rebuke them publically.

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You may know of cases where a pastor needs to take a leave of absence. It's done quietly. There is no need for exposure if the pastor acknowledges fully and repents.

But what if he persists? It must become public. Because if things persist, and they remain quiet, there is a residue of injustice, the old fog of scandal and gossip moves in over the church, and the confusion about whether to trust leadership or to question authority will lead people away from trusting the trustworthy Christ. Some of you know this – you've survived it. And you know that the world – and certainly the Christian community – needs to know that the church takes sin seriously! Evil must be exposed. The gospel is, if nothing else, light moving into the dark places and exposing... and then redeeming. If you don't expose these things, lessons are not learned. When a scandalous minister is rebuked in front of everyone, then Paul says, the "rest" – meaning the rest of the elders – will be warned not to sin likewise.

Before we move on to our last point. One of the things that frustrates people in the doing of discipline is how long it takes. The complaint I've heard most often in my years of ministry is, "Fire him. Get it done. Get him out of here and let's move on." The undercurrent is, "You church leaders are wimps. Where I work, security would come to your office with a box, you'd fill the box, and they'd walk you out."

That's true. I've been in corporate life and I've seen it happen. But the church is not a corporation. Remember, it's a family. And in our family the goal is not profits, but repentance and redemption. We sometimes hate waiting for another witness. It can almost seem unwise. But we do it.

We wait, we are patient – and you can see this in verse 21 – because to do otherwise would be the wimpy thing to do. Look what Paul says to Timothy: "In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality." He's taking Timothy right to the very throne of God, and is saying, "if God is going to render perfect justice at the end of history, then justice should start now in the present.

You see, your leaders can be tempted to partiality. Now it could be partiality to one person over another. But I'll tell you who they are really partial to when conflict hits. Their families. To themselves. They would be tempted to fire *any* pastor who is causing them problems.

The hours an elder has to spend in ministering to the sinner – especially when it's the pastor – the EASY thing to do would be to fire them! No, doing it this way, Paul says, is the hard, but the *right* way.

Now this is dark stuff, right. Shakes me to the bone! But Paul immediately breaks in with some counsel that I think goes a long way to preventing these issues, and it's worth noting. And this is our last point:

- the selection of church leaders

Paul lays out a problem that I suspect some of you have seen over the years. It's time to nominate elders. "Great. More hands to share the load. So let's get it done." So what happens?

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People look around for the effective, able, can-do folks. How do they know who those people are? They've seen them in their place of work, or they've heard that so-in-so is a fantastic manager. "Let's nominate him!"

The problem, Paul says in v. 24, is that while "the sins of some men are conspicuous – we've just been speaking about these sorts of sexy, notorious sorts of sins – "the sins of others appear later."

I know that when we were moving toward reparticularizing (this is a bit of inside-baseball if you are new here, but if you want to know more talk to me later and I'll explain) – some people complained that the plan was to take a year to do elder training – an entire year to study God's word together, pray together, study theology together, minister together – before we elected them. But you see, this is the very advice Paul gives to Timothy! "Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands... keep yourself pure."

When you rush – it's simply a fact – people that don't pray, people that can't teach, people who are constitutionally unable to visit someone in a hospital – get ordained. And it's a mess that doesn't go away. If we rush, if we recommend people to a position, and we really have not thought it out – look at what Paul warns in v. 22 – we end up taking part in the sins of others.

There is a new book out called "The Politician" by a fellow named Andrew Young, who worked closely with John Edwards on his campaign. What is so interesting about the book is that not only does it become apparent how long you can fool so many people, but how we who are close to those people take *part* in their sins – no matter what side of the aisle you're on – Andrew Young's or Chuck Colson's many years ago.

Friends, don't nominate the merely competent. Don't nominate the merely able and efficient. Nominate the godly. Nominate the people you know. You've prayed with them. You've heard them speak from the scriptures.

Okay, we need to wrap up. But I know there are some here who are interested in only one verse.

We've looked at how the church should take care of their leaders and pastors. Then we've seen how the church must take care of its reputation by being sure to discipline – yes, even leaders. Especially leaders. And then Paul's advice on how to get it right in the first place. Be patient. Be careful. Choose well.

But you know, whether you choose well or not, whether you are able to avoid backsliding, whether you have done discipline well or not, ministry is...anxiety producing. Every and all people in the church are sinners. And we're with a bunch of people who are called to point it out when we do! And Paul knows that the elders and their wives and their homes are often heavy and burdened. They can talk to no one else about such things.

I know of one pastoral family that says they have the same thing every Sunday for lunch. "Roast Preacher."

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Now Paul is not suggesting that Timothy handle this stress by boozing it up. That's an impossible reading of the passage. No, what is more likely is that the leaders of the church – and in all of the false teaching that they were spreading – were suggesting an ascetic lifestyle. They were not just keeping themselves pure, as any Christian's should, but rather their self-denial was a work before God, or proof of their salvation. And Paul will have none of that. Paul is breaking that self-denial tension and rather than have Timothy feel even more weighed down by his instructions, Paul is saying, "Don't let this get you down. TAKE a glass of wine when this whole thing gives you indigestion. Look after your health. Use a LITTLE!!! Notice that word. God is big enough to handle this stuff.

Now you can find some old Bible dictionaries that will tell you that this really wasn't wine but was a sort of grape juice... but the age of those articles you'll note, are written between the time of the temperance movement and the 1950's. It is a lot of wishful thinking. You will not find oenologists, viticulturalists, nor serious bible scholars who will tell you that. Yes I have heard of some Seventh Day Adventist pastors and an occasional Baptist that will still teach this. But if this were the case, why all of the warnings against drunkenness and the abuse of wine in the Bible? (There are 17 warnings against drunkenness in the bible)

How did the partakers of the Lord's table at the church of Corinth get drunk on grape juice? Why would Paul say, "Be not drunk with wine?" if it had no alcohol? It makes no sense.

And what of the 20 references in the Bible to people actually *getting* drunk? The only reasonable conclusion is that when the Bible says "wine", then that is exactly what it means.

I happen to think that one of the most unfortunate things to happen in the American Church in the last 150 years – and this really is particular to America and the churches our missionaries have planted – is that wine has been pushed out of the church.

Now why do we even bother getting sidetracked by this?

For this reason: it is not wise to think that we can be more spiritual than the apostle Paul. Paul's point is, leaders are no good if they are not fit, not well, or just plain sick to their stomach. I've had congregants come up to me and tell me to lose weight and a wife that encourages me to exercise. And I take it just like this. Actually, sometimes I have the glass of wine instead of the exercise! But you know what he's saying. Get away. Get a break. Stay rested. Because ministry is labor.

Let's pray.

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Last week you'll remember that there were widows who were on the church's rolls to receive support that should not have been there. But throughout this letter we learn, tragically, that there were those in the pastorate and in eldership... *they* should not have been there, either!

You never know what will convince people of the existence of God. It was Henry Ford who once said that he based his belief on the existence of God on the fact of the church's survival. No other enterprise that is run so poorly, Ford said, could have stayed in business this long without a God.

That is not a defense for the existence of God that any of us should want to make to someone. But he has a point!

The sad implication of the statement that "elders who rule well should be considered worthy of double honor," is that others DO NOT do so well. It's a fact of Timothy's situation in Ephesus that some of the elders there are delinquent.

So Paul, again, provides some very practical advice for Timothy to follow, and it's good advice for us, too. So let's look first at verse 19, and then 20.

V. 19: Paul tells Timothy something he already knows, but is worth repeating: "Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses."

Now this could sound like special treatment. As if the pastor gets a pass unless at least two people provide evidence. But the bible ALWAYS insists that it takes two witnesses to convict someone. It's like that old saying, "If a brother comes to see you, he has a problem; if two brothers come to see you, *you* have a problem." Deuteronomy says you need two witnesses, and Jesus applied this rule to everyone in the church in Matthew 18, not just the elders.

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Now there is a difference for an elder – did you notice it? The difference is that they may not even be *accused* of a sin unless there are multiple witnesses. Two or three witnesses are required not just for a conviction, but before the accusation can even be considered at all.

And the reason for this is that "he-said; she said" conflicts are the type that are often irresolvable. Who will you believe? BUT the talking and the gossip start up anyway in these conflicts. So you have the smoke even if there is no fire. And that fog of gossip can bring down the ministry, then, of someone falsely accused by the accusation of a single person, and ultimately bring down a church.

Calvin said this so well I can't resist quoting: "None are more exposed to slanders and insults than godly teachers. This comes not only from the difficulty of their duties, which are great enough that sometimes they sink under them... or take a false step, so that wicked men find many occasions of finding fault with them; but added to that, even when they *do* perform their duties correctly and do not commit even the smallest error, they never avoid a thousand criticisms. It is indeed a trick of Satan to estrange men from their ministers so as gradually to bring their teaching into contempt. *In this way* not only is wrong done to the innocent people whose reputation is unjustly injured, but the authority of God's holy teaching is diminished."

But now let's look at v. 20: this doesn't mean that teaching and ruling elders are above the law. No, the fact that they receive some protection from slander makes the sins they commit all the more reprehensible: "As for those (elders) who *persist* in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear." A public exposure, you see, in front of the congregation.

You see, this is a stick that is sharp on both ends. I am part of a group of pastors that gets together on a near-monthly schedule. And I hear this all of the time. If any of you are psychotherapists or counselors, you know what I mean. There is a dynamic that psychologists have known for many years. They call it transference. The bible calls it idolatry. What happens is that, say, the counselee or client has spent so much time talking about their mother that, well, he or she starts to transfer their feelings about their mother to you, the counselor. Believe it or not, in psychoanalytic theory, this is thought to be a positive sign of trust, showing that the patient is making progress. But when it's bad, it's bad. It's the same with pastors. A person – whether in affection, or in emotional neediness, or in perversion, can turn on their counselor, fall in love with them, become obsessed with them, hate them, or fantasize about them, tell lies about them. Pastors are at the sharp end of the stick and they are exposed, and it's right that there should be witnesses.

BUT, there is also something called counter-transference. This is when the counselor transfers his own repressed feelings on a counselee, or a whole congregation. You see, the pastor who is supposed to be a servant... is looking to get served.

And when this happens, the whole cause of Christ – and the cause of the gospel – take an enormous hit.

That's why those who persist in this sin – we rebuke them publically.

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You may know of cases where a pastor needs to take a leave of absence. It's done quietly. There is no need for exposure if the pastor acknowledges fully and repents.

But what if he persists? It must become public. Because if things persist, and they remain quiet, there is a residue of injustice, the old fog of scandal and gossip moves in over the church, and the confusion about whether to trust leadership or to question authority will lead people away from trusting the trustworthy Christ. Some of you know this – you've survived it. And you know that the world – and certainly the Christian community – needs to know that the church takes sin seriously! Evil must be exposed. The gospel is, if nothing else, light moving into the dark places and exposing... and then redeeming. If you don't expose these things, lessons are not learned. When a scandalous minister is rebuked in front of everyone, then Paul says, the "rest" – meaning the rest of the elders – will be warned not to sin likewise.

Before we move on to our last point. One of the things that frustrates people in the doing of discipline is how long it takes. The complaint I've heard most often in my years of ministry is, "Fire him. Get it done. Get him out of here and let's move on." The undercurrent is, "You church leaders are wimps. Where I work, security would come to your office with a box, you'd fill the box, and they'd walk you out."

That's true. I've been in corporate life and I've seen it happen. But the church is not a corporation. Remember, it's a family. And in our family the goal is not profits, but repentance and redemption. We sometimes hate waiting for another witness. It can almost seem unwise. But we do it.

We wait, we are patient – and you can see this in verse 21 – because to do otherwise would be the wimpy thing to do. Look what Paul says to Timothy: "In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality." He's taking Timothy right to the very throne of God, and is saying, "if God is going to render perfect justice at the end of history, then justice should start now in the present.

You see, your leaders can be tempted to partiality. Now it could be partiality to one person over another. But I'll tell you who they are really partial to when conflict hits. Their families. To themselves. They would be tempted to fire *any* pastor who is causing them problems.

The hours an elder has to spend in ministering to the sinner – especially when it's the pastor – the EASY thing to do would be to fire them! No, doing it this way, Paul says, is the hard, but the *right* way.

Now this is dark stuff, right. Shakes me to the bone! But Paul immediately breaks in with some counsel that I think goes a long way to preventing these issues, and it's worth noting. And this is our last point:

- the selection of church leaders

Paul lays out a problem that I suspect some of you have seen over the years. It's time to nominate elders. "Great. More hands to share the load. So let's get it done." So what happens?

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People look around for the effective, able, can-do folks. How do they know who those people are? They've seen them in their place of work, or they've heard that so-in-so is a fantastic manager. "Let's nominate him!"

The problem, Paul says in v. 24, is that while "the sins of some men are conspicuous – we've just been speaking about these sorts of sexy, notorious sorts of sins – "the sins of others appear later."

I know that when we were moving toward reparticularizing (this is a bit of inside-baseball if you are new here, but if you want to know more talk to me later and I'll explain) – some people complained that the plan was to take a year to do elder training – an entire year to study God's word together, pray together, study theology together, minister together – before we elected them. But you see, this is the very advice Paul gives to Timothy! "Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands... keep yourself pure."

When you rush – it's simply a fact – people that don't pray, people that can't teach, people who are constitutionally unable to visit someone in a hospital – get ordained. And it's a mess that doesn't go away. If we rush, if we recommend people to a position, and we really have not thought it out – look at what Paul warns in v. 22 – we end up taking part in the sins of others.

There is a new book out called "The Politician" by a fellow named Andrew Young, who worked closely with John Edwards on his campaign. What is so interesting about the book is that not only does it become apparent how long you can fool so many people, but how we who are close to those people take *part* in their sins – no matter what side of the aisle you're on – Andrew Young's or Chuck Colson's many years ago.

Friends, don't nominate the merely competent. Don't nominate the merely able and efficient. Nominate the godly. Nominate the people you know. You've prayed with them. You've heard them speak from the scriptures.

Okay, we need to wrap up. But I know there are some here who are interested in only one verse.

We've looked at how the church should take care of their leaders and pastors. Then we've seen how the church must take care of its reputation by being sure to discipline – yes, even leaders. Especially leaders. And then Paul's advice on how to get it right in the first place. Be patient. Be careful. Choose well.

But you know, whether you choose well or not, whether you are able to avoid backsliding, whether you have done discipline well or not, ministry is...anxiety producing. Every and all people in the church are sinners. And we're with a bunch of people who are called to point it out when we do! And Paul knows that the elders and their wives and their homes are often heavy and burdened. They can talk to no one else about such things.

I know of one pastoral family that says they have the same thing every Sunday for lunch. "Roast Preacher."

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Now Paul is not suggesting that Timothy handle this stress by boozing it up. That's an impossible reading of the passage. No, what is more likely is that the leaders of the church – and in all of the false teaching that they were spreading – were suggesting an ascetic lifestyle. They were not just keeping themselves pure, as any Christian's should, but rather their self-denial was a work before God, or proof of their salvation. And Paul will have none of that. Paul is breaking that self-denial tension and rather than have Timothy feel even more weighed down by his instructions, Paul is saying, "Don't let this get you down. TAKE a glass of wine when this whole thing gives you indigestion. Look after your health. Use a LITTLE!!! Notice that word. God is big enough to handle this stuff.

Now you can find some old Bible dictionaries that will tell you that this really wasn't wine but was a sort of grape juice... but the age of those articles you'll note, are written between the time of the temperance movement and the 1950's. It is a lot of wishful thinking. You will not find oenologists, viticulturalists, nor serious bible scholars who will tell you that. Yes I have heard of some Seventh Day Adventist pastors and an occasional Baptist that will still teach this. But if this were the case, why all of the warnings against drunkenness and the abuse of wine in the Bible? (There are 17 warnings against drunkenness in the bible)

How did the partakers of the Lord's table at the church of Corinth get drunk on grape juice? Why would Paul say, "Be not drunk with wine?" if it had no alcohol? It makes no sense.

And what of the 20 references in the Bible to people actually *getting* drunk? The only reasonable conclusion is that when the Bible says "wine", then that is exactly what it means.

I happen to think that one of the most unfortunate things to happen in the American Church in the last 150 years – and this really is particular to America and the churches our missionaries have planted – is that wine has been pushed out of the church.

Now why do we even bother getting sidetracked by this?

For this reason: it is not wise to think that we can be more spiritual than the apostle Paul. Paul's point is, leaders are no good if they are not fit, not well, or just plain sick to their stomach. I've had congregants come up to me and tell me to lose weight and a wife that encourages me to exercise. And I take it just like this. Actually, sometimes I have the glass of wine instead of the exercise! But you know what he's saying. Get away. Get a break. Stay rested. Because ministry is labor.

Let's pray.

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“Honoring—and Disciplining—the Elders”

Let's read 1 Timothy 5:17-25 p. 1264

¹⁷ Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. ¹⁸ For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer deserves his wages." ¹⁹ Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. ²⁰ As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear. ²¹ In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality. ²² Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor take part in the sins of others; keep yourself pure.

²³ (No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.) ²⁴ The sins of some men are conspicuous, going before them to judgment, but the sins of others appear later. ²⁵ So also good works are conspicuous, and even those that are not cannot remain hidden. (ESV)

Three young boys were standing around in a school yard discussing their fathers. And one boy said to the others, "My dad is a doctor. He makes me healthy for nothing." The next boy said, "My dad is a teacher. He makes me smart for nothing." The third boy said, "My dad is a pastor. He makes me good for nothing."

That might not be so far from the truth.

I get sent journals and emails from those who are in my field of work, just like many of you do in yours. Pastoral leadership is a frequent topic, and they always include a cautionary tale. Last year I read about the founder of one of the nation's most prominent marriage ministries, Ray Mossholder. Mossholder, with his wife, founded Marriage Plus Ministries (MPM) and has written three books on marriage. He announced last January that he was divorcing his wife of 42 years because of "irreconcilable differences..." but then also announced his plan to marry a much younger woman once *she* gets her divorce. This effectively shut down the ministry overnight, and of course it caused many who had been helped over the years to be discouraged and even bitter.¹

I wish I could say that this is a rare story, but instead it's illustrative of stories you hear all the time. The apostle Paul had a lot of experience with this. The scarcity and fragility of church leadership dogged Paul throughout his ministry work. And these experiences gave Paul a basic wisdom:

he knew that *as the leadership goes, so goes the church*. This morning we want to look at

- the honoring of church leaders
- the discipline of church leaders
- the selection of church leaders

¹ Incredibly, two churches offered him a job when he announced his resignation!

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You might like to add to that the selection of a good wine, but well, we'll touch on that later!

So first, the honoring of church leaders.

I have sometimes seen this first verse thrown around a bit, and when you throw verses around, a few important words will almost always fall away. I've often heard this first verse quoted this way: "Elders are worthy of a double honor." Sounds right, doesn't it?

But actually, what the bible says is, "Let the elders *who rule well* be considered worthy of double honor." And the point is, some do, and some don't. Your leadership is supposed to run and administer the affairs of the church effectively, and to do it with godliness.

Not to brag on your elders – I shouldn't have to; you chose and elected them! – but they administer the tasks of the church very well. By God's grace – and all of this is due to the prevailing grace of God – those whom God has provided to us are doing their work very well. Your elders want to be sure that we teach the bible well, that we love you – love our people – well, that we handle the finances well, and of course that we worship well. That is, for the glory of God. And it is BECAUSE they are given and placed in authority that they are worthy of this double honor.

Now, this is one of the verses where we in Presbyterianism infer the distinction between "ruling" and "teaching elders." Sometimes you'll hear the acronyms, TE and RE. Same thing. This was the teaching of John Calvin.

Calvin inferred from this passage that it's clear that there are people with general pastoral and administrative functions – those that direct the affairs of the church – and those that have a particular calling to preaching and teaching. But Calvin and those in our tradition never saw this as so hard and fast. All elders, Paul says, have to be able to teach. All elders need to rule well. But there does seem to be a division of labor. And what you need to know, and be sure about, when it comes to your elders is that when an elder teaches, that they be an elder who doesn't put forth their own ideas, but the word of God. And that when ruling elders rule, they rule by the principles of the word of God. That is what must ratify their work and undergirds their personal authority. Because if it is not the word of God, it WILL be something else. What ever they do, rule or teach, they must do it well.

In fact, verse 17 implies that they must do it worthily. You see it doesn't say elders are "worthy of double honor, especially those who preach and teach." No it is says "especially those who *labor* in preaching and teaching." This a word for blue collar hard work, labor, and strong exertion. Paul loves this word. The point is, don't just support the elders, but support the ones who are working hard at it. Who are doing it properly. Who are doing it *well*. And this means, by implication, don't support those who are not. The remuneration is not indiscriminate. You need leaders who can rule well, and are obviously laboring in their work.

Clive James, the English novelist and poet, describes one minister he knows as "a picture of inactivity, sitting in a winged leather armchair, expending just enough energy to keep his pipe alight." Well, Paul suggests, pay that kinda guy accordingly.

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BUT, if your pastor IS working hard in his study, working at his leadership, and is laboring at his preaching, then you owe that person a double honor.

Now look – a double honor is NOT twice as much money! Paul, after all, says there should be no favoritism! No, the double honor means two-fold honor – show the honor in two ways: 1) respect AND 2) remuneration.

A moment on respect. When our elders tell you something – when they give you a "thus sayeth the Lord" – it's not that they don't love you. It's that they do! It would be easier for them and less contentious for them to ignore stuff, but they do it because they love and care for you. So when they give you correction, or insight, or simply listen to you, honor them. Respect them. Now this doesn't mean you have to agree with them. Or with every point of doctrine. That's okay. But ask yourself, as Paul suggests, are they administering the affairs of the church well?

I also want to say to the students who are here, or if you're visiting: if you have a pastor back home, and he taught you the bible and he took care of you and loved you, let him know. Respect that pastor. Send them a note to tell them how you're doing. Honor them.

Now respect AND remuneration – what should this remuneration look like? First, as a pastor, it seems unseemly to have to preach on this and I thought a couple of times this week of having one of your other elders preach on this, or an outside preacher. And you need to know this is not a sermon about my displeasure or one of the other pastors. I'm preaching on this because it's here, even though talking about paying your pastor can seem unspiritual.

After all, doesn't decent pay and expenses bring with it temptation? And the answer is, of course it can. Money can bring temptation to anyone in any kind of work. But on the other hand, if you want to keep your pastor from the love of money, you pay them.

Dick Lucas, the neo-puritan English preacher says "We need to throw out all (these platitudes) about living by faith. We live by money. We *preach* faith. But without the money to preach the faith, we won't be doing it for very long."² We'll have to do something else. We'll have to moonlight. We'll have to leave the ministry.

And that is Paul's point here when he quotes Deuteronomy 25. The way that threshing was done in the Ancient Near East is that you would collect the harvest, lay the sheaves of corn on the floor of the threshing room. Then you would tie an ox to a center pole and have him march around and around on the grain. But when you did this, you left the ox unmuzzled – nothing would cover its mouth and it was free to eat as much as it wanted as a reward for its work.

Then Paul quotes Jesus in Luke 10:7 – interesting all by itself because it suggests either that the gospel of Luke was already moving from church to church at that time, or that it was a proverbial saying that both Jesus and Paul knew: "The laborer – in this case the one who labors in teaching and preaching – deserves his wages."³

² Quoted in a sermon by David Turner.

³ Luke 12:34

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The idea seems to be this: If Jesus is right (and He is!) that "where your treasure is, there will your heart be also," that clearly we do not respect the word of God if we don't pay those who labor over it to feed us with it. That respect and remuneration go together. You can't divorce the two. Your elders – this isn't a Wall Street or Hollywood job. We're your oxen. I'm your ox. We labor. And if we don't pay people on our ministry team properly, then it says we don't respect their work. Yes a spiritual giant might be able to overcome lousy pay and keep his head down, but he might also be tempted toward bitterness every day of his work. And then if the pastor becomes discouraged over this, HIS heart will start to drift toward other treasures, and his work will show it, and then the congregation's willingness to pay their chief laborer most assuredly will fade and drift, and the whole thing goes down in a tailspin.

So that is our first point. The leaders of the church are to be honored. It's a double honor – respect AND remuneration. But it has to be for work that is worthy.

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Last week you'll remember that there were widows who were on the church's rolls to receive support that should not have been there. But throughout this letter we learn, tragically, that there were those in the pastorate and in eldership... *they* should not have been there, either!

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But you know, whether you choose well or not, whether you are able to avoid backsliding, whether you have done discipline well or not, ministry is...anxiety producing. Every and all people in the church are sinners. And we're with a bunch of people who are called to point it out when we do! And Paul knows that the elders and their wives and their homes are often heavy and burdened. They can talk to no one else about such things.

I know of one pastoral family that says they have the same thing every Sunday for lunch. "Roast Preacher."

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Now Paul is not suggesting that Timothy handle this stress by boozing it up. That's an impossible reading of the passage. No, what is more likely is that the leaders of the church – and in all of the false teaching that they were spreading – were suggesting an ascetic lifestyle. They were not just keeping themselves pure, as any Christian's should, but rather their self-denial was a work before God, or proof of their salvation. And Paul will have none of that. Paul is breaking that self-denial tension and rather than have Timothy feel even more weighed down by his instructions, Paul is saying, "Don't let this get you down. TAKE a glass of wine when this whole thing gives you indigestion. Look after your health. Use a LITTLE!!! Notice that word. God is big enough to handle this stuff.

Now you can find some old Bible dictionaries that will tell you that this really wasn't wine but was a sort of grape juice... but the age of those articles you'll note, are written between the time of the temperance movement and the 1950's. It is a lot of wishful thinking. You will not find oenologists, viticulturalists, nor serious bible scholars who will tell you that. Yes I have heard of some Seventh Day Adventist pastors and an occasional Baptist that will still teach this. But if this were the case, why all of the warnings against drunkenness and the abuse of wine in the Bible? (There are 17 warnings against drunkenness in the bible)

How did the partakers of the Lord's table at the church of Corinth get drunk on grape juice? Why would Paul say, "Be not drunk with wine?" if it had no alcohol? It makes no sense.

And what of the 20 references in the Bible to people actually *getting* drunk? The only reasonable conclusion is that when the Bible says "wine", then that is exactly what it means.

I happen to think that one of the most unfortunate things to happen in the American Church in the last 150 years – and this really is particular to America and the churches our missionaries have planted – is that wine has been pushed out of the church.

Now why do we even bother getting sidetracked by this?

For this reason: it is not wise to think that we can be more spiritual than the apostle Paul. Paul's point is, leaders are no good if they are not fit, not well, or just plain sick to their stomach. I've had congregants come up to me and tell me to lose weight and a wife that encourages me to exercise. And I take it just like this. Actually, sometimes I have the glass of wine instead of the exercise! But you know what he's saying. Get away. Get a break. Stay rested. Because ministry is labor.

Let's pray.

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“Honoring—and Disciplining—the Elders”

Let's read 1 Timothy 5:17-25 p. 1264

¹⁷ Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. ¹⁸ For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer deserves his wages." ¹⁹ Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. ²⁰ As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear. ²¹ In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality. ²² Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor take part in the sins of others; keep yourself pure.

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Three young boys were standing around in a school yard discussing their fathers. And one boy said to the others, "My dad is a doctor. He makes me healthy for nothing." The next boy said, "My dad is a teacher. He makes me smart for nothing." The third boy said, "My dad is a pastor. He makes me good for nothing."

That might not be so far from the truth.

I get sent journals and emails from those who are in my field of work, just like many of you do in yours. Pastoral leadership is a frequent topic, and they always include a cautionary tale. Last year I read about the founder of one of the nation's most prominent marriage ministries, Ray Mossholder. Mossholder, with his wife, founded Marriage Plus Ministries (MPM) and has written three books on marriage. He announced last January that he was divorcing his wife of 42 years because of "irreconcilable differences..." but then also announced his plan to marry a much younger woman once *she* gets her divorce. This effectively shut down the ministry overnight, and of course it caused many who had been helped over the years to be discouraged and even bitter.¹

I wish I could say that this is a rare story, but instead it's illustrative of stories you hear all the time. The apostle Paul had a lot of experience with this. The scarcity and fragility of church leadership dogged Paul throughout his ministry work. And these experiences gave Paul a basic wisdom:

he knew that *as the leadership goes, so goes the church*. This morning we want to look at

- the honoring of church leaders
- the discipline of church leaders
- the selection of church leaders

¹ Incredibly, two churches offered him a job when he announced his resignation!

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You might like to add to that the selection of a good wine, but well, we'll touch on that later!

So first, the honoring of church leaders.

I have sometimes seen this first verse thrown around a bit, and when you throw verses around, a few important words will almost always fall away. I've often heard this first verse quoted this way: "Elders are worthy of a double honor." Sounds right, doesn't it?

But actually, what the bible says is, "Let the elders *who rule well* be considered worthy of double honor." And the point is, some do, and some don't. Your leadership is supposed to run and administer the affairs of the church effectively, and to do it with godliness.

Not to brag on your elders – I shouldn't have to; you chose and elected them! – but they administer the tasks of the church very well. By God's grace – and all of this is due to the prevailing grace of God – those whom God has provided to us are doing their work very well. Your elders want to be sure that we teach the bible well, that we love you – love our people – well, that we handle the finances well, and of course that we worship well. That is, for the glory of God. And it is BECAUSE they are given and placed in authority that they are worthy of this double honor.

Now, this is one of the verses where we in Presbyterianism infer the distinction between "ruling" and "teaching elders." Sometimes you'll hear the acronyms, TE and RE. Same thing. This was the teaching of John Calvin.

Calvin inferred from this passage that it's clear that there are people with general pastoral and administrative functions – those that direct the affairs of the church – and those that have a particular calling to preaching and teaching. But Calvin and those in our tradition never saw this as so hard and fast. All elders, Paul says, have to be able to teach. All elders need to rule well. But there does seem to be a division of labor. And what you need to know, and be sure about, when it comes to your elders is that when an elder teaches, that they be an elder who doesn't put forth their own ideas, but the word of God. And that when ruling elders rule, they rule by the principles of the word of God. That is what must ratify their work and undergirds their personal authority. Because if it is not the word of God, it WILL be something else. What ever they do, rule or teach, they must do it well.

In fact, verse 17 implies that they must do it worthily. You see it doesn't say elders are "worthy of double honor, especially those who preach and teach." No it is says "especially those who *labor* in preaching and teaching." This a word for blue collar hard work, labor, and strong exertion. Paul loves this word. The point is, don't just support the elders, but support the ones who are working hard at it. Who are doing it properly. Who are doing it *well*. And this means, by implication, don't support those who are not. The remuneration is not indiscriminate. You need leaders who can rule well, and are obviously laboring in their work.

Clive James, the English novelist and poet, describes one minister he knows as "a picture of inactivity, sitting in a winged leather armchair, expending just enough energy to keep his pipe alight." Well, Paul suggests, pay that kinda guy accordingly.

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BUT, if your pastor IS working hard in his study, working at his leadership, and is laboring at his preaching, then you owe that person a double honor.

Now look – a double honor is NOT twice as much money! Paul, after all, says there should be no favoritism! No, the double honor means two-fold honor – show the honor in two ways: 1) respect AND 2) remuneration.

A moment on respect. When our elders tell you something – when they give you a "thus sayeth the Lord" – it's not that they don't love you. It's that they do! It would be easier for them and less contentious for them to ignore stuff, but they do it because they love and care for you. So when they give you correction, or insight, or simply listen to you, honor them. Respect them. Now this doesn't mean you have to agree with them. Or with every point of doctrine. That's okay. But ask yourself, as Paul suggests, are they administering the affairs of the church well?

I also want to say to the students who are here, or if you're visiting: if you have a pastor back home, and he taught you the bible and he took care of you and loved you, let him know. Respect that pastor. Send them a note to tell them how you're doing. Honor them.

Now respect AND remuneration – what should this remuneration look like? First, as a pastor, it seems unseemly to have to preach on this and I thought a couple of times this week of having one of your other elders preach on this, or an outside preacher. And you need to know this is not a sermon about my displeasure or one of the other pastors. I'm preaching on this because it's here, even though talking about paying your pastor can seem unspiritual.

After all, doesn't decent pay and expenses bring with it temptation? And the answer is, of course it can. Money can bring temptation to anyone in any kind of work. But on the other hand, if you want to keep your pastor from the love of money, you pay them.

Dick Lucas, the neo-puritan English preacher says "We need to throw out all (these platitudes) about living by faith. We live by money. We *preach* faith. But without the money to preach the faith, we won't be doing it for very long."² We'll have to do something else. We'll have to moonlight. We'll have to leave the ministry.

And that is Paul's point here when he quotes Deuteronomy 25. The way that threshing was done in the Ancient Near East is that you would collect the harvest, lay the sheaves of corn on the floor of the threshing room. Then you would tie an ox to a center pole and have him march around and around on the grain. But when you did this, you left the ox unmuzzled – nothing would cover its mouth and it was free to eat as much as it wanted as a reward for its work.

Then Paul quotes Jesus in Luke 10:7 – interesting all by itself because it suggests either that the gospel of Luke was already moving from church to church at that time, or that it was a proverbial saying that both Jesus and Paul knew: "The laborer – in this case the one who labors in teaching and preaching – deserves his wages."³

² Quoted in a sermon by David Turner.

³ Luke 12:34

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The idea seems to be this: If Jesus is right (and He is!) that "where your treasure is, there will your heart be also," that clearly we do not respect the word of God if we don't pay those who labor over it to feed us with it. That respect and remuneration go together. You can't divorce the two. Your elders – this isn't a Wall Street or Hollywood job. We're your oxen. I'm your ox. We labor. And if we don't pay people on our ministry team properly, then it says we don't respect their work. Yes a spiritual giant might be able to overcome lousy pay and keep his head down, but he might also be tempted toward bitterness every day of his work. And then if the pastor becomes discouraged over this, HIS heart will start to drift toward other treasures, and his work will show it, and then the congregation's willingness to pay their chief laborer most assuredly will fade and drift, and the whole thing goes down in a tailspin.

So that is our first point. The leaders of the church are to be honored. It's a double honor – respect AND remuneration. But it has to be for work that is worthy.

And this moves us on to our second point

- the discipline of church leaders

Last week you'll remember that there were widows who were on the church's rolls to receive support that should not have been there. But throughout this letter we learn, tragically, that there were those in the pastorate and in eldership... *they* should not have been there, either!

You never know what will convince people of the existence of God. It was Henry Ford who once said that he based his belief on the existence of God on the fact of the church's survival. No other enterprise that is run so poorly, Ford said, could have stayed in business this long without a God.

That is not a defense for the existence of God that any of us should want to make to someone. But he has a point!

The sad implication of the statement that "elders who rule well should be considered worthy of double honor," is that others DO NOT do so well. It's a fact of Timothy's situation in Ephesus that some of the elders there are delinquent.

So Paul, again, provides some very practical advice for Timothy to follow, and it's good advice for us, too. So let's look first at verse 19, and then 20.

V. 19: Paul tells Timothy something he already knows, but is worth repeating: "Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses."

Now this could sound like special treatment. As if the pastor gets a pass unless at least two people provide evidence. But the bible ALWAYS insists that it takes two witnesses to convict someone. It's like that old saying, "If a brother comes to see you, he has a problem; if two brothers come to see you, *you* have a problem." Deuteronomy says you need two witnesses, and Jesus applied this rule to everyone in the church in Matthew 18, not just the elders.

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Now there is a difference for an elder – did you notice it? The difference is that they may not even be *accused* of a sin unless there are multiple witnesses. Two or three witnesses are required not just for a conviction, but before the accusation can even be considered at all.

And the reason for this is that "he-said; she said" conflicts are the type that are often irresolvable. Who will you believe? BUT the talking and the gossip start up anyway in these conflicts. So you have the smoke even if there is no fire. And that fog of gossip can bring down the ministry, then, of someone falsely accused by the accusation of a single person, and ultimately bring down a church.

Calvin said this so well I can't resist quoting: "None are more exposed to slanders and insults than godly teachers. This comes not only from the difficulty of their duties, which are great enough that sometimes they sink under them... or take a false step, so that wicked men find many occasions of finding fault with them; but added to that, even when they *do* perform their duties correctly and do not commit even the smallest error, they never avoid a thousand criticisms. It is indeed a trick of Satan to estrange men from their ministers so as gradually to bring their teaching into contempt. *In this way* not only is wrong done to the innocent people whose reputation is unjustly injured, but the authority of God's holy teaching is diminished."

But now let's look at v. 20: this doesn't mean that teaching and ruling elders are above the law. No, the fact that they receive some protection from slander makes the sins they commit all the more reprehensible: "As for those (elders) who *persist* in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear." A public exposure, you see, in front of the congregation.

You see, this is a stick that is sharp on both ends. I am part of a group of pastors that gets together on a near-monthly schedule. And I hear this all of the time. If any of you are psychotherapists or counselors, you know what I mean. There is a dynamic that psychologists have known for many years. They call it transference. The bible calls it idolatry. What happens is that, say, the counselee or client has spent so much time talking about their mother that, well, he or she starts to transfer their feelings about their mother to you, the counselor. Believe it or not, in psychoanalytic theory, this is thought to be a positive sign of trust, showing that the patient is making progress. But when it's bad, it's bad. It's the same with pastors. A person – whether in affection, or in emotional neediness, or in perversion, can turn on their counselor, fall in love with them, become obsessed with them, hate them, or fantasize about them, tell lies about them. Pastors are at the sharp end of the stick and they are exposed, and it's right that there should be witnesses.

BUT, there is also something called counter-transference. This is when the counselor transfers his own repressed feelings on a counselee, or a whole congregation. You see, the pastor who is supposed to be a servant... is looking to get served.

And when this happens, the whole cause of Christ – and the cause of the gospel – take an enormous hit.

That's why those who persist in this sin – we rebuke them publically.

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You may know of cases where a pastor needs to take a leave of absence. It's done quietly. There is no need for exposure if the pastor acknowledges fully and repents.

But what if he persists? It must become public. Because if things persist, and they remain quiet, there is a residue of injustice, the old fog of scandal and gossip moves in over the church, and the confusion about whether to trust leadership or to question authority will lead people away from trusting the trustworthy Christ. Some of you know this – you've survived it. And you know that the world – and certainly the Christian community – needs to know that the church takes sin seriously! Evil must be exposed. The gospel is, if nothing else, light moving into the dark places and exposing... and then redeeming. If you don't expose these things, lessons are not learned. When a scandalous minister is rebuked in front of everyone, then Paul says, the "rest" – meaning the rest of the elders – will be warned not to sin likewise.

Before we move on to our last point. One of the things that frustrates people in the doing of discipline is how long it takes. The complaint I've heard most often in my years of ministry is, "Fire him. Get it done. Get him out of here and let's move on." The undercurrent is, "You church leaders are wimps. Where I work, security would come to your office with a box, you'd fill the box, and they'd walk you out."

That's true. I've been in corporate life and I've seen it happen. But the church is not a corporation. Remember, it's a family. And in our family the goal is not profits, but repentance and redemption. We sometimes hate waiting for another witness. It can almost seem unwise. But we do it.

We wait, we are patient – and you can see this in verse 21 – because to do otherwise would be the wimpy thing to do. Look what Paul says to Timothy: "In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality." He's taking Timothy right to the very throne of God, and is saying, "if God is going to render perfect justice at the end of history, then justice should start now in the present.

You see, your leaders can be tempted to partiality. Now it could be partiality to one person over another. But I'll tell you who they are really partial to when conflict hits. Their families. To themselves. They would be tempted to fire *any* pastor who is causing them problems.

The hours an elder has to spend in ministering to the sinner – especially when it's the pastor – the EASY thing to do would be to fire them! No, doing it this way, Paul says, is the hard, but the *right* way.

Now this is dark stuff, right. Shakes me to the bone! But Paul immediately breaks in with some counsel that I think goes a long way to preventing these issues, and it's worth noting. And this is our last point:

- the selection of church leaders

Paul lays out a problem that I suspect some of you have seen over the years. It's time to nominate elders. "Great. More hands to share the load. So let's get it done." So what happens?

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People look around for the effective, able, can-do folks. How do they know who those people are? They've seen them in their place of work, or they've heard that so-in-so is a fantastic manager. "Let's nominate him!"

The problem, Paul says in v. 24, is that while "the sins of some men are conspicuous – we've just been speaking about these sorts of sexy, notorious sorts of sins – "the sins of others appear later."

I know that when we were moving toward reparticularizing (this is a bit of inside-baseball if you are new here, but if you want to know more talk to me later and I'll explain) – some people complained that the plan was to take a year to do elder training – an entire year to study God's word together, pray together, study theology together, minister together – before we elected them. But you see, this is the very advice Paul gives to Timothy! "Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands... keep yourself pure."

When you rush – it's simply a fact – people that don't pray, people that can't teach, people who are constitutionally unable to visit someone in a hospital – get ordained. And it's a mess that doesn't go away. If we rush, if we recommend people to a position, and we really have not thought it out – look at what Paul warns in v. 22 – we end up taking part in the sins of others.

There is a new book out called "The Politician" by a fellow named Andrew Young, who worked closely with John Edwards on his campaign. What is so interesting about the book is that not only does it become apparent how long you can fool so many people, but how we who are close to those people take *part* in their sins – no matter what side of the aisle you're on – Andrew Young's or Chuck Colson's many years ago.

Friends, don't nominate the merely competent. Don't nominate the merely able and efficient. Nominate the godly. Nominate the people you know. You've prayed with them. You've heard them speak from the scriptures.

Okay, we need to wrap up. But I know there are some here who are interested in only one verse.

We've looked at how the church should take care of their leaders and pastors. Then we've seen how the church must take care of its reputation by being sure to discipline – yes, even leaders. Especially leaders. And then Paul's advice on how to get it right in the first place. Be patient. Be careful. Choose well.

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A moment on respect. When our elders tell you something – when they give you a "thus sayeth the Lord" – it's not that they don't love you. It's that they do! It would be easier for them and less contentious for them to ignore stuff, but they do it because they love and care for you. So when they give you correction, or insight, or simply listen to you, honor them. Respect them. Now this doesn't mean you have to agree with them. Or with every point of doctrine. That's okay. But ask yourself, as Paul suggests, are they administering the affairs of the church well?

I also want to say to the students who are here, or if you're visiting: if you have a pastor back home, and he taught you the bible and he took care of you and loved you, let him know. Respect that pastor. Send them a note to tell them how you're doing. Honor them.

Now respect AND remuneration – what should this remuneration look like? First, as a pastor, it seems unseemly to have to preach on this and I thought a couple of times this week of having one of your other elders preach on this, or an outside preacher. And you need to know this is not a sermon about my displeasure or one of the other pastors. I'm preaching on this because it's here, even though talking about paying your pastor can seem unspiritual.

After all, doesn't decent pay and expenses bring with it temptation? And the answer is, of course it can. Money can bring temptation to anyone in any kind of work. But on the other hand, if you want to keep your pastor from the love of money, you pay them.

Dick Lucas, the neo-puritan English preacher says "We need to throw out all (these platitudes) about living by faith. We live by money. We *preach* faith. But without the money to preach the faith, we won't be doing it for very long."² We'll have to do something else. We'll have to moonlight. We'll have to leave the ministry.

And that is Paul's point here when he quotes Deuteronomy 25. The way that threshing was done in the Ancient Near East is that you would collect the harvest, lay the sheaves of corn on the floor of the threshing room. Then you would tie an ox to a center pole and have him march around and around on the grain. But when you did this, you left the ox unmuzzled – nothing would cover its mouth and it was free to eat as much as it wanted as a reward for its work.

Then Paul quotes Jesus in Luke 10:7 – interesting all by itself because it suggests either that the gospel of Luke was already moving from church to church at that time, or that it was a proverbial saying that both Jesus and Paul knew: "The laborer – in this case the one who labors in teaching and preaching – deserves his wages."³

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The idea seems to be this: If Jesus is right (and He is!) that "where your treasure is, there will your heart be also," that clearly we do not respect the word of God if we don't pay those who labor over it to feed us with it. That respect and remuneration go together. You can't divorce the two. Your elders – this isn't a Wall Street or Hollywood job. We're your oxen. I'm your ox. We labor. And if we don't pay people on our ministry team properly, then it says we don't respect their work. Yes a spiritual giant might be able to overcome lousy pay and keep his head down, but he might also be tempted toward bitterness every day of his work. And then if the pastor becomes discouraged over this, HIS heart will start to drift toward other treasures, and his work will show it, and then the congregation's willingness to pay their chief laborer most assuredly will fade and drift, and the whole thing goes down in a tailspin.

So that is our first point. The leaders of the church are to be honored. It's a double honor – respect AND remuneration. But it has to be for work that is worthy.

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- the discipline of church leaders

Last week you'll remember that there were widows who were on the church's rolls to receive support that should not have been there. But throughout this letter we learn, tragically, that there were those in the pastorate and in eldership... *they* should not have been there, either!

You never know what will convince people of the existence of God. It was Henry Ford who once said that he based his belief on the existence of God on the fact of the church's survival. No other enterprise that is run so poorly, Ford said, could have stayed in business this long without a God.

That is not a defense for the existence of God that any of us should want to make to someone. But he has a point!

The sad implication of the statement that "elders who rule well should be considered worthy of double honor," is that others DO NOT do so well. It's a fact of Timothy's situation in Ephesus that some of the elders there are delinquent.

So Paul, again, provides some very practical advice for Timothy to follow, and it's good advice for us, too. So let's look first at verse 19, and then 20.

V. 19: Paul tells Timothy something he already knows, but is worth repeating: "Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses."

Now this could sound like special treatment. As if the pastor gets a pass unless at least two people provide evidence. But the bible ALWAYS insists that it takes two witnesses to convict someone. It's like that old saying, "If a brother comes to see you, he has a problem; if two brothers come to see you, *you* have a problem." Deuteronomy says you need two witnesses, and Jesus applied this rule to everyone in the church in Matthew 18, not just the elders.

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Now there is a difference for an elder – did you notice it? The difference is that they may not even be *accused* of a sin unless there are multiple witnesses. Two or three witnesses are required not just for a conviction, but before the accusation can even be considered at all.

And the reason for this is that "he-said; she said" conflicts are the type that are often irresolvable. Who will you believe? BUT the talking and the gossip start up anyway in these conflicts. So you have the smoke even if there is no fire. And that fog of gossip can bring down the ministry, then, of someone falsely accused by the accusation of a single person, and ultimately bring down a church.

Calvin said this so well I can't resist quoting: "None are more exposed to slanders and insults than godly teachers. This comes not only from the difficulty of their duties, which are great enough that sometimes they sink under them... or take a false step, so that wicked men find many occasions of finding fault with them; but added to that, even when they *do* perform their duties correctly and do not commit even the smallest error, they never avoid a thousand criticisms. It is indeed a trick of Satan to estrange men from their ministers so as gradually to bring their teaching into contempt. *In this way* not only is wrong done to the innocent people whose reputation is unjustly injured, but the authority of God's holy teaching is diminished."

But now let's look at v. 20: this doesn't mean that teaching and ruling elders are above the law. No, the fact that they receive some protection from slander makes the sins they commit all the more reprehensible: "As for those (elders) who *persist* in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear." A public exposure, you see, in front of the congregation.

You see, this is a stick that is sharp on both ends. I am part of a group of pastors that gets together on a near-monthly schedule. And I hear this all of the time. If any of you are psychotherapists or counselors, you know what I mean. There is a dynamic that psychologists have known for many years. They call it transference. The bible calls it idolatry. What happens is that, say, the counselee or client has spent so much time talking about their mother that, well, he or she starts to transfer their feelings about their mother to you, the counselor. Believe it or not, in psychoanalytic theory, this is thought to be a positive sign of trust, showing that the patient is making progress. But when it's bad, it's bad. It's the same with pastors. A person – whether in affection, or in emotional neediness, or in perversion, can turn on their counselor, fall in love with them, become obsessed with them, hate them, or fantasize about them, tell lies about them. Pastors are at the sharp end of the stick and they are exposed, and it's right that there should be witnesses.

BUT, there is also something called counter-transference. This is when the counselor transfers his own repressed feelings on a counselee, or a whole congregation. You see, the pastor who is supposed to be a servant... is looking to get served.

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You may know of cases where a pastor needs to take a leave of absence. It's done quietly. There is no need for exposure if the pastor acknowledges fully and repents.

But what if he persists? It must become public. Because if things persist, and they remain quiet, there is a residue of injustice, the old fog of scandal and gossip moves in over the church, and the confusion about whether to trust leadership or to question authority will lead people away from trusting the trustworthy Christ. Some of you know this – you've survived it. And you know that the world – and certainly the Christian community – needs to know that the church takes sin seriously! Evil must be exposed. The gospel is, if nothing else, light moving into the dark places and exposing... and then redeeming. If you don't expose these things, lessons are not learned. When a scandalous minister is rebuked in front of everyone, then Paul says, the "rest" – meaning the rest of the elders – will be warned not to sin likewise.

Before we move on to our last point. One of the things that frustrates people in the doing of discipline is how long it takes. The complaint I've heard most often in my years of ministry is, "Fire him. Get it done. Get him out of here and let's move on." The undercurrent is, "You church leaders are wimps. Where I work, security would come to your office with a box, you'd fill the box, and they'd walk you out."

That's true. I've been in corporate life and I've seen it happen. But the church is not a corporation. Remember, it's a family. And in our family the goal is not profits, but repentance and redemption. We sometimes hate waiting for another witness. It can almost seem unwise. But we do it.

We wait, we are patient – and you can see this in verse 21 – because to do otherwise would be the wimpy thing to do. Look what Paul says to Timothy: "In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality." He's taking Timothy right to the very throne of God, and is saying, "if God is going to render perfect justice at the end of history, then justice should start now in the present.

You see, your leaders can be tempted to partiality. Now it could be partiality to one person over another. But I'll tell you who they are really partial to when conflict hits. Their families. To themselves. They would be tempted to fire *any* pastor who is causing them problems.

The hours an elder has to spend in ministering to the sinner – especially when it's the pastor – the EASY thing to do would be to fire them! No, doing it this way, Paul says, is the hard, but the *right* way.

Now this is dark stuff, right. Shakes me to the bone! But Paul immediately breaks in with some counsel that I think goes a long way to preventing these issues, and it's worth noting. And this is our last point:

- the selection of church leaders

Paul lays out a problem that I suspect some of you have seen over the years. It's time to nominate elders. "Great. More hands to share the load. So let's get it done." So what happens?

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People look around for the effective, able, can-do folks. How do they know who those people are? They've seen them in their place of work, or they've heard that so-in-so is a fantastic manager. "Let's nominate him!"

The problem, Paul says in v. 24, is that while "the sins of some men are conspicuous – we've just been speaking about these sorts of sexy, notorious sorts of sins – "the sins of others appear later."

I know that when we were moving toward reparticularizing (this is a bit of inside-baseball if you are new here, but if you want to know more talk to me later and I'll explain) – some people complained that the plan was to take a year to do elder training – an entire year to study God's word together, pray together, study theology together, minister together – before we elected them. But you see, this is the very advice Paul gives to Timothy! "Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands... keep yourself pure."

When you rush – it's simply a fact – people that don't pray, people that can't teach, people who are constitutionally unable to visit someone in a hospital – get ordained. And it's a mess that doesn't go away. If we rush, if we recommend people to a position, and we really have not thought it out – look at what Paul warns in v. 22 – we end up taking part in the sins of others.

There is a new book out called "The Politician" by a fellow named Andrew Young, who worked closely with John Edwards on his campaign. What is so interesting about the book is that not only does it become apparent how long you can fool so many people, but how we who are close to those people take *part* in their sins – no matter what side of the aisle you're on – Andrew Young's or Chuck Colson's many years ago.

Friends, don't nominate the merely competent. Don't nominate the merely able and efficient. Nominate the godly. Nominate the people you know. You've prayed with them. You've heard them speak from the scriptures.

Okay, we need to wrap up. But I know there are some here who are interested in only one verse.

We've looked at how the church should take care of their leaders and pastors. Then we've seen how the church must take care of its reputation by being sure to discipline – yes, even leaders. Especially leaders. And then Paul's advice on how to get it right in the first place. Be patient. Be careful. Choose well.

But you know, whether you choose well or not, whether you are able to avoid backsliding, whether you have done discipline well or not, ministry is...anxiety producing. Every and all people in the church are sinners. And we're with a bunch of people who are called to point it out when we do! And Paul knows that the elders and their wives and their homes are often heavy and burdened. They can talk to no one else about such things.

I know of one pastoral family that says they have the same thing every Sunday for lunch. "Roast Preacher."

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Now Paul is not suggesting that Timothy handle this stress by boozing it up. That's an impossible reading of the passage. No, what is more likely is that the leaders of the church – and in all of the false teaching that they were spreading – were suggesting an ascetic lifestyle. They were not just keeping themselves pure, as any Christian's should, but rather their self-denial was a work before God, or proof of their salvation. And Paul will have none of that. Paul is breaking that self-denial tension and rather than have Timothy feel even more weighed down by his instructions, Paul is saying, "Don't let this get you down. TAKE a glass of wine when this whole thing gives you indigestion. Look after your health. Use a LITTLE!!! Notice that word. God is big enough to handle this stuff.

Now you can find some old Bible dictionaries that will tell you that this really wasn't wine but was a sort of grape juice... but the age of those articles you'll note, are written between the time of the temperance movement and the 1950's. It is a lot of wishful thinking. You will not find oenologists, viticulturalists, nor serious bible scholars who will tell you that. Yes I have heard of some Seventh Day Adventist pastors and an occasional Baptist that will still teach this. But if this were the case, why all of the warnings against drunkenness and the abuse of wine in the Bible? (There are 17 warnings against drunkenness in the bible)

How did the partakers of the Lord's table at the church of Corinth get drunk on grape juice? Why would Paul say, "Be not drunk with wine?" if it had no alcohol? It makes no sense.

And what of the 20 references in the Bible to people actually *getting* drunk? The only reasonable conclusion is that when the Bible says "wine", then that is exactly what it means.

I happen to think that one of the most unfortunate things to happen in the American Church in the last 150 years – and this really is particular to America and the churches our missionaries have planted – is that wine has been pushed out of the church.

Now why do we even bother getting sidetracked by this?

For this reason: it is not wise to think that we can be more spiritual than the apostle Paul. Paul's point is, leaders are no good if they are not fit, not well, or just plain sick to their stomach. I've had congregants come up to me and tell me to lose weight and a wife that encourages me to exercise. And I take it just like this. Actually, sometimes I have the glass of wine instead of the exercise! But you know what he's saying. Get away. Get a break. Stay rested. Because ministry is labor.

Let's pray.

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“Honoring—and Disciplining—the Elders”

Let's read 1 Timothy 5:17-25 p. 1264

¹⁷ Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. ¹⁸ For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer deserves his wages." ¹⁹ Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. ²⁰ As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear. ²¹ In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality. ²² Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor take part in the sins of others; keep yourself pure.

²³ (No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.) ²⁴ The sins of some men are conspicuous, going before them to judgment, but the sins of others appear later. ²⁵ So also good works are conspicuous, and even those that are not cannot remain hidden. (ESV)

Three young boys were standing around in a school yard discussing their fathers. And one boy said to the others, "My dad is a doctor. He makes me healthy for nothing." The next boy said, "My dad is a teacher. He makes me smart for nothing." The third boy said, "My dad is a pastor. He makes me good for nothing."

That might not be so far from the truth.

I get sent journals and emails from those who are in my field of work, just like many of you do in yours. Pastoral leadership is a frequent topic, and they always include a cautionary tale. Last year I read about the founder of one of the nation's most prominent marriage ministries, Ray Mossholder. Mossholder, with his wife, founded Marriage Plus Ministries (MPM) and has written three books on marriage. He announced last January that he was divorcing his wife of 42 years because of "irreconcilable differences..." but then also announced his plan to marry a much younger woman once *she* gets her divorce. This effectively shut down the ministry overnight, and of course it caused many who had been helped over the years to be discouraged and even bitter.¹

I wish I could say that this is a rare story, but instead it's illustrative of stories you hear all the time. The apostle Paul had a lot of experience with this. The scarcity and fragility of church leadership dogged Paul throughout his ministry work. And these experiences gave Paul a basic wisdom:

he knew that *as the leadership goes, so goes the church.* This morning we want to look at

- the honoring of church leaders
- the discipline of church leaders
- the selection of church leaders

¹ Incredibly, two churches offered him a job when he announced his resignation!

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You might like to add to that the selection of a good wine, but well, we'll touch on that later!

So first, the honoring of church leaders.

I have sometimes seen this first verse thrown around a bit, and when you throw verses around, a few important words will almost always fall away. I've often heard this first verse quoted this way: "Elders are worthy of a double honor." Sounds right, doesn't it?

But actually, what the bible says is, "Let the elders *who rule well* be considered worthy of double honor." And the point is, some do, and some don't. Your leadership is supposed to run and administer the affairs of the church effectively, and to do it with godliness.

Not to brag on your elders – I shouldn't have to; you chose and elected them! – but they administer the tasks of the church very well. By God's grace – and all of this is due to the prevailing grace of God – those whom God has provided to us are doing their work very well. Your elders want to be sure that we teach the bible well, that we love you – love our people – well, that we handle the finances well, and of course that we worship well. That is, for the glory of God. And it is BECAUSE they are given and placed in authority that they are worthy of this double honor.

Now, this is one of the verses where we in Presbyterianism infer the distinction between "ruling" and "teaching elders." Sometimes you'll hear the acronyms, TE and RE. Same thing. This was the teaching of John Calvin.

Calvin inferred from this passage that it's clear that there are people with general pastoral and administrative functions – those that direct the affairs of the church – and those that have a particular calling to preaching and teaching. But Calvin and those in our tradition never saw this as so hard and fast. All elders, Paul says, have to be able to teach. All elders need to rule well. But there does seem to be a division of labor. And what you need to know, and be sure about, when it comes to your elders is that when an elder teaches, that they be an elder who doesn't put forth their own ideas, but the word of God. And that when ruling elders rule, they rule by the principles of the word of God. That is what must ratify their work and undergirds their personal authority. Because if it is not the word of God, it WILL be something else. What ever they do, rule or teach, they must do it well.

In fact, verse 17 implies that they must do it worthily. You see it doesn't say elders are "worthy of double honor, especially those who preach and teach." No it is says "especially those who *labor* in preaching and teaching." This a word for blue collar hard work, labor, and strong exertion. Paul loves this word. The point is, don't just support the elders, but support the ones who are working hard at it. Who are doing it properly. Who are doing it *well*. And this means, by implication, don't support those who are not. The remuneration is not indiscriminate. You need leaders who can rule well, and are obviously laboring in their work.

Clive James, the English novelist and poet, describes one minister he knows as "a picture of inactivity, sitting in a winged leather armchair, expending just enough energy to keep his pipe alight." Well, Paul suggests, pay that kinda guy accordingly.

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You may know of cases where a pastor needs to take a leave of absence. It's done quietly. There is no need for exposure if the pastor acknowledges fully and repents.

But what if he persists? It must become public. Because if things persist, and they remain quiet, there is a residue of injustice, the old fog of scandal and gossip moves in over the church, and the confusion about whether to trust leadership or to question authority will lead people away from trusting the trustworthy Christ. Some of you know this – you've survived it. And you know that the world – and certainly the Christian community – needs to know that the church takes sin seriously! Evil must be exposed. The gospel is, if nothing else, light moving into the dark places and exposing... and then redeeming. If you don't expose these things, lessons are not learned. When a scandalous minister is rebuked in front of everyone, then Paul says, the "rest" – meaning the rest of the elders – will be warned not to sin likewise.

Before we move on to our last point. One of the things that frustrates people in the doing of discipline is how long it takes. The complaint I've heard most often in my years of ministry is, "Fire him. Get it done. Get him out of here and let's move on." The undercurrent is, "You church leaders are wimps. Where I work, security would come to your office with a box, you'd fill the box, and they'd walk you out."

That's true. I've been in corporate life and I've seen it happen. But the church is not a corporation. Remember, it's a family. And in our family the goal is not profits, but repentance and redemption. We sometimes hate waiting for another witness. It can almost seem unwise. But we do it.

We wait, we are patient – and you can see this in verse 21 – because to do otherwise would be the wimpy thing to do. Look what Paul says to Timothy: "In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality." He's taking Timothy right to the very throne of God, and is saying, "if God is going to render perfect justice at the end of history, then justice should start now in the present.

You see, your leaders can be tempted to partiality. Now it could be partiality to one person over another. But I'll tell you who they are really partial to when conflict hits. Their families. To themselves. They would be tempted to fire *any* pastor who is causing them problems.

The hours an elder has to spend in ministering to the sinner – especially when it's the pastor – the EASY thing to do would be to fire them! No, doing it this way, Paul says, is the hard, but the *right* way.

Now this is dark stuff, right. Shakes me to the bone! But Paul immediately breaks in with some counsel that I think goes a long way to preventing these issues, and it's worth noting. And this is our last point:

- the selection of church leaders

Paul lays out a problem that I suspect some of you have seen over the years. It's time to nominate elders. "Great. More hands to share the load. So let's get it done." So what happens?

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People look around for the effective, able, can-do folks. How do they know who those people are? They've seen them in their place of work, or they've heard that so-in-so is a fantastic manager. "Let's nominate him!"

The problem, Paul says in v. 24, is that while "the sins of some men are conspicuous – we've just been speaking about these sorts of sexy, notorious sorts of sins – "the sins of others appear later."

I know that when we were moving toward reparticularizing (this is a bit of inside-baseball if you are new here, but if you want to know more talk to me later and I'll explain) – some people complained that the plan was to take a year to do elder training – an entire year to study God's word together, pray together, study theology together, minister together – before we elected them. But you see, this is the very advice Paul gives to Timothy! "Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands... keep yourself pure."

When you rush – it's simply a fact – people that don't pray, people that can't teach, people who are constitutionally unable to visit someone in a hospital – get ordained. And it's a mess that doesn't go away. If we rush, if we recommend people to a position, and we really have not thought it out – look at what Paul warns in v. 22 – we end up taking part in the sins of others.

There is a new book out called "The Politician" by a fellow named Andrew Young, who worked closely with John Edwards on his campaign. What is so interesting about the book is that not only does it become apparent how long you can fool so many people, but how we who are close to those people take *part* in their sins – no matter what side of the aisle you're on – Andrew Young's or Chuck Colson's many years ago.

Friends, don't nominate the merely competent. Don't nominate the merely able and efficient. Nominate the godly. Nominate the people you know. You've prayed with them. You've heard them speak from the scriptures.

Okay, we need to wrap up. But I know there are some here who are interested in only one verse.

We've looked at how the church should take care of their leaders and pastors. Then we've seen how the church must take care of its reputation by being sure to discipline – yes, even leaders. Especially leaders. And then Paul's advice on how to get it right in the first place. Be patient. Be careful. Choose well.

But you know, whether you choose well or not, whether you are able to avoid backsliding, whether you have done discipline well or not, ministry is...anxiety producing. Every and all people in the church are sinners. And we're with a bunch of people who are called to point it out when we do! And Paul knows that the elders and their wives and their homes are often heavy and burdened. They can talk to no one else about such things.

I know of one pastoral family that says they have the same thing every Sunday for lunch. "Roast Preacher."

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Now Paul is not suggesting that Timothy handle this stress by boozing it up. That's an impossible reading of the passage. No, what is more likely is that the leaders of the church – and in all of the false teaching that they were spreading – were suggesting an ascetic lifestyle. They were not just keeping themselves pure, as any Christian's should, but rather their self-denial was a work before God, or proof of their salvation. And Paul will have none of that. Paul is breaking that self-denial tension and rather than have Timothy feel even more weighed down by his instructions, Paul is saying, "Don't let this get you down. TAKE a glass of wine when this whole thing gives you indigestion. Look after your health. Use a LITTLE!!! Notice that word. God is big enough to handle this stuff.

Now you can find some old Bible dictionaries that will tell you that this really wasn't wine but was a sort of grape juice... but the age of those articles you'll note, are written between the time of the temperance movement and the 1950's. It is a lot of wishful thinking. You will not find oenologists, viticulturalists, nor serious bible scholars who will tell you that. Yes I have heard of some Seventh Day Adventist pastors and an occasional Baptist that will still teach this. But if this were the case, why all of the warnings against drunkenness and the abuse of wine in the Bible? (There are 17 warnings against drunkenness in the bible)

How did the partakers of the Lord's table at the church of Corinth get drunk on grape juice? Why would Paul say, "Be not drunk with wine?" if it had no alcohol? It makes no sense.

And what of the 20 references in the Bible to people actually *getting* drunk? The only reasonable conclusion is that when the Bible says "wine", then that is exactly what it means.

I happen to think that one of the most unfortunate things to happen in the American Church in the last 150 years – and this really is particular to America and the churches our missionaries have planted – is that wine has been pushed out of the church.

Now why do we even bother getting sidetracked by this?

For this reason: it is not wise to think that we can be more spiritual than the apostle Paul. Paul's point is, leaders are no good if they are not fit, not well, or just plain sick to their stomach. I've had congregants come up to me and tell me to lose weight and a wife that encourages me to exercise. And I take it just like this. Actually, sometimes I have the glass of wine instead of the exercise! But you know what he's saying. Get away. Get a break. Stay rested. Because ministry is labor.

Let's pray.