

Title: Considered Worthy
Text: 1 Timothy 5.17-25
Theme: Honoring Elders
Series: I Timothy
Prop Stmtnt: How we honor the elders of the church indicates how we truly honor God.

Read Text:

I have said to you before that if we really knew what was going on when we gather together on Sundays that we would have the ushers handing out seatbelts and crash helmets instead of bulletins. Here is what I mean. Look at this text as I read it.

(Revelation 1.12-20)

What is the first thing that John sees? He sees seven golden lampstands. According to verse 20, what are the seven lampstands? They are churches. Then what does John see? John sees and experiences an overwhelming vision of the resurrected and glorified Son of God, his friend, Savior and King, Jesus Christ. Where is the King? He is in the midst of his church. Christ cares about his church. Christ knows what is going on in his church, and not just in his church in general, but according to chapters 2-3, he knows what is going on in every single church and it matters to him.

So, when we are reading and studying I Timothy, these commands about how the life of the church is to be conducted are not suggestions that we can pick or choose as we like. These are orders from the King. The stuff about polity is not for church nerds, but for every Christian. But, they are good orders. They are orders that are designed for the health of the church, the joy of the people, and the protection of and advancement of the gospel. The church is not the gospel, but she is called to protect and promote the gospel. And the instructions of I Timothy are for the health of the church so that the gospel will be protected and exalted (pillar and buttress – 3.14)

There is an emphasis in this book on what to do and on how to do it. For example, the church is to take care of her widows because this is a way for the church to show them honor. Honoring one another is a command that every single member is called to obey (Romans 12.10; 1 Peter 2.17). It is easy to overlook people who have reason to feel as if they have been marginalized (like widows). It is also easy to dishonor people in leadership, because, well, they are in leadership.

But, how we view those in leadership usually says more about us than it does about them. This passage has a number of commands in it. These are commands from the King that we are charged to follow. But there are more than commands. These commands also have some explanations so that our understanding of the heart of our King is advanced.

I. **Be generous to your elders.** (17-18)

Preaching on this text is doubly uncomfortable. For one, I hate the prosperity gospel and have shied away from saying all that much about money. Only recently have I addressed

it a bit more. And then here the text is not about money is general but addresses compensation for a pastor. So, I threatened to give this text to the intern to preach, but knew that wasn't fair. So, acknowledging all of that, let's plow through it, as we should.

Imagine that your son scored a 34 on the ACT, he is valedictorian of his class, has a free ride at any college in the country, has a propensity for science, math, engineering, law and medicine comes to you and says, "I think I want to go into the gospel ministry." How would you respond? Or, imagine that your son is 6'5", 325 lbs. of granite, has been ranked as a 5-star football recruit and has been pursued by every major college football program, and even, I might add by THE Ohio State University, and everyone says, this kid has NFL potential, and he comes to you and says, "I think I want to go into the gospel ministry and be a pastor." How do you respond? How you respond will be a reflection of what you esteem.

My son, the doctor. My son, the lawyer. My son, the professor. My son, the NFL star. My son, the pastor. This is a command to the church to be generous to the pastor/elder who rules well and who labors in preaching and teaching. This command is not out of place at all, nor uncomfortable to those who are generous with giving honor and who esteem the gospel and esteem those called to preach it. To be "considered worthy" means to be...

A. Generous in esteem

Consider the verb "consider." The verb "consider" means that this is how we are to think. In our minds, we are to rank the office of a pastor/elder as being worthy of double honor. So think about how you talk to and about the pastors and elders. Are you jaded or grateful? Do you look for ways to honor, or ways to find fault? Do you believe the best or assume the worst? It is no secret that the pastors are paid from your offerings. It is right for that to happen because we all place our treasure in what we esteem. If you do not esteem them, then your view of their compensation and your participation in that will be affected.

For example, some of you esteem the Detroit Tigers. If you esteem them a lot, you will probably make plans to go and watch them. You can purchase a ticket for \$25 - \$250. On top of that, you pay for parking and food. One ball game can be very pricey, but your willingness to expend that amount will correspond to the level of esteem that you have. Simply put, we give to what we esteem. And the church is commanded to be...

B. Generous in compensation

I have never preached this text before and have only done a cursory study of it until this week. I have thought that a good rule of thumb for the compensation of the pastors should be that we pay them enough to be generous toward others. That makes a lot of sense to me. This week, what I previously thought was a good rule of thumb has been solidified into a conviction because of this text. I realized that how we take care of our elders and shepherds is a direct reflection of what we really think of the Chief Shepherd. When I recognized that, this topic moved from the "money is slimy" category to the "this

is an important issue for the church” category. And why is this? Well the text answers this question. An elder who rules well is a tremendous gift to the church and an elder who labors in preaching and teaching is engaging the most valuable calling possible. Yes, there are those who do not rule well, and there are those who are lazy in their preaching and teaching. But when a church is blessed with pastors who rule well and who labor at preaching and teaching and feed the flock well, that flock should recognize the value of being well fed and recognize the gift of faithful leadership and compensate it accordingly.

The two examples that follow make it clear that double honor speaks of compensation. The point is, if God commands farmers to let the oxen eat the fruit of their labor, and the one who labors deserves his wages, then how much more does the one who is serving in the most important position in the church? If you want inferior men in the ministry, pay them an inferior wage. If you want competent men in the ministry, pay them generously. Should you pay them double? I honestly do not know. What the text says is that you should consider them worthy of that. It may not be feasible to pay him that much and he may not accept it even if it was offered.

In some cases, a church simply cannot afford to pay a man what he is really worth. In situations like that, the pastor understands. If he is demanding about his salary then, that may be an issue of greed. But, if the congregation has the capacity to be generous and they choose not to be generous, then that is an issue of greed on their part. The ideal is pastors who love their people and sacrifice for them and a congregation who loves and esteems their pastors, because that is a picture of the kingdom to come. We certainly want to avoid what I saw in a church one time when a minister told the congregation that he was taking up an offering for needy children, only to then say that the needy children were his. (It was said in jest – I think).

By the way, as an aside, I do not know any pastor who went into the ministry in order to have a life of ease. The truth is, getting into the ministry is hard. The on-ramp is long; it is difficult and generally expensive. College can be upwards of \$100,000 - \$130,000 and seminary can be easily that amount again. A pastor can invest \$200,000 - \$250,000 in his education. And in those years of education, guys are going to school, working jobs to pay for school, serving in the church and trying to support a family. That is good for us to know that, because in our setting we have several pastors who have earned and/ or working on challenging degrees. One guy has a PhD., 3 guys have Master’s Divinity Degrees, 2 guys are working on a Master of Divinity and one guy has a Master of Arts. And to my knowledge every guy paid their own way through. In most cases, they have made many sacrifices in order to be able to serve you. We ought to honor that.

II. **Be careful to guard their reputation.** (19-20)

Listening to and participating in gossip or disparaging talk about an elder is so easy and tempting because of the higher shock value that comes with it. When a sentence begins with “ya know what I heard...” it generally does not end with honor and esteem. But there are times when an elder/pastor does sin. When that happens, we are told to be very careful to follow the steps that Christ gave us in Matthew 18. If someone has a grievance

against an elder, what should he do? He should go to the elder and seek to get it resolved. If it does not get resolved, then he is to take 2 or 3 others with him to function as witnesses in an effort to get the matter resolved. But, a church is not permitted to accept and act upon an accusation against an elder without following the proper steps. This guards the reputation of the elder, and it guards the reputation of the church.

A. Guard it against unfounded accusations (19)

People in leadership are more visible and the more visible you are, the more vulnerable you are to critics, to rumors, and to accusations. In addition to that, leaders make decisions. Leaders have to lead. Leaders have to make decisions that they believe is in the best interest of the people they serve. But, every decision is not going to be agreed upon by everyone. What do you do when a leader makes a decision that you do not agree with? You can pursue the matter by seeking to get more information because there may be more to the story than you know, or you can talk sinfully about the leaders and accuse them of incompetence and ulterior motives. Well, the truth is, they may have made a poor decision. They are not Jesus. But, they may have made a great decision and you do not get it yet, because you are not Jesus either. But, if you, instead of talking with them, talk to others about them, you are hurting the witness of the gospel. Be careful. And if someone tries to make an accusation against an elder without following the proper channels, the church is to refuse to let it have any weight. But, there are times when pastors and elders do sin and they try to use their position as an excuse or a cover-up.

B. Guard it against unconfessed sin. (20)

In those cases, the counsel of v.20 is clear. Elders who persist in sin are to be rebuked before the congregation so that the honor and esteem of the office is restored. To call the church to honor someone who is living dishonorably will destroy everything. When a pastor does not repent and he is rebuked before all, then every person realizes that no one is above God's law. The pastor, who preaches, stands under the same Word he declares. Having pastors who live the Word they preach is a gift to be guarded and this verse is a reminder to the pastor or elder not to assume that because he has a title or position that he is given a pass.

III. Recognize the seriousness of this charge. (21)

I confessed earlier that I do not remember ever preaching a specific sermon from this paragraph before. Not only was I surprised at how direct Paul was about this issue of compensation, but this verse also really grabbed my attention. Notice this phrase, "In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you..." Paul is in essence placing Timothy under oath. This is very serious language. Remember when Christ was on trial before the Chief Priest and Sanhedrin, he said nothing. He said nothing until the High Priest said (Matthew 26.63), "I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." Then Christ responded. It is a fascinating moment when Christ, as King of Kings, humbles himself and submits to his earthly authority, which places him under oath before God. Well, the language is similar here in

I Timothy, and quite frankly, I did not really grasp its placement here before. I have preached on 2 Timothy 4.1-2 many, many times, where Paul charges Timothy before God and Christ Jesus to preach the Word. But, he says the same thing here. In fact, he adds the “elect angels” into the formula. In essence Paul is saying to Timothy that you are under oath before these witnesses. You must lead the church to keep these commands and do not play favorites.

I take that to mean that you are to treat each pastor fairly. If the guy is super likeable and has had a great ministry and wonderful reputation, and disqualifies himself, do not cover it up as you would be tempted to do. Do not look the other way and pretend that it did happen out of fear of how this will hurt the church. You have to do what is right.

If your pastor is on the radio and your church enjoys some notoriety as a result, or if he has written some books and speaks at conferences, it makes your church look good. In fact, some of the residual effect might be the source of additional members, ministries, staff positions and income. If he steps down, there is seemingly a lot of good that will not happen, right? A lot of people will be hurt; thus the charge before God and Christ and the angels. The audience is more important than what you can see with your physical eyes. And because of that...

IV. **Therefore, be careful in selecting elders.** (22-25)

The wisdom and anecdotal comment in these closing verses is now apparent.

A. **Not too fast** (22)

Take your time in selecting elders. First impressions are not always accurate. And if you are like me, I tend to believe people. Many years ago I had a friend who had a side business of picking up the bodies of people who had died and delivering them to local funeral homes. He owned a hearse and needed a driver. He was looking for some help. I had recently met a guy who was attending the church who had just lost his job because he reported to management that some of the co-workers were doing drugs on the job. And instead of dealing with the problem, they fired him. I felt so bad for the guy, so I recommended him to my friend. Upon my recommendation my friend hired him and everything worked out great, for about two weeks.

Then I got a phone call from my friend asking me if I knew anything about the guy. He had disappeared the day before, along with the hearse. They found the hearse and the guy at a crack house. Then I found out that he was not fired because he had turned the other guys in, he was fired because he was the one doing the drugs on the job. Thankfully, the hearse was recovered. But my friend, who remained my friend, never asked me for a recommendation again.

If a church places someone into leadership too soon, and that person uses that position as a cover for sinful practices, then the church is, in that sense, taking part in the sins of others because they have put that person into a position of influence. The office of pastor

and elder is a serious position and the church must take its time to make sure that the person is qualified and that takes time. But then comes this interesting little statement in v.23.

B. Not too strict (23)

In studying this book, we definitely get the sense that Timothy is very conscientious. Paul has the utmost confidence in him. Back in Philippians 2, Paul speaks of Timothy with great esteem. Timothy, it seems is, as I said, very conscientious. So, when Paul says (at the end v.22) “keep yourself pure” he figures that Timothy will go the extra mile. Instead of making sure that he does not have one too many, Timothy is the kind to not have any wine at all. Which is fine. However, Timothy’s practice may be preventing him from getting some of the medicinal benefit that he needs. So, Paul is telling Timothy that while he may want to avoid wine as a beverage, that he ought to take some for the sake of his stomach so that he is more useful to the church. Timothy was staying away from wine in order to be useful to the church, and Paul was saying that the point is not “no wine” but what is going to be useful to the church. He then resumes his previous point.

C. Time will tell (24-25)

For some people, their sins are obvious. There is no denying them. For others, they may appear to be sheep and even shepherds, but they are actually wolves. You may not see it right away, but eventually it will come out. Be mindful, you may have been wrong. But it is also true in another way. There are some people that you may initially be suspicious of, but over time you keep finding out how faithful, loving, serving, and trusting they really are. Again, be mindful, you may have been wrong. To Timothy and to us, this is a call for discernment.

Conclusion:

There are several commands in this paragraph. As a member of this congregation I need to examine my own heart as to how generous I am with honor for the elders. As an elder I need to feel the weight of this esteem and be humbled by it and treat it with great care.

As a member of this congregation I should never listen to an accusation against another elder, but insist that the steps of Matthew 18 be followed. As an elder I need to watch my life and doctrine to never give anyone reason for an accusation and if they do, humbly listen and pray for a heart of repentance if I am in the wrong.

As a member of this congregation I need to attend Members Meetings because that is where these issues are handled. As an elder, I need to do all I can to ensure that any rebuke of an elder is done fairly and compassionately.

As a member of this congregation I need to inform myself about the process of men becoming elders and pay attention to those who are being nominated. If someone is out of order, I need to say something. As an elder I need to be careful not to let personal

friendship cloud biblical directives. This is not my church to own, but Christ's for which I will give an account.

Do you honor the elders, or do you hold them at arms length with a spirit of suspicion?

Do you resent compensating the pastors or want them to experience generosity?

Are you willing to participate in the unpleasant aspects of church life? (Hey, I'll show up for dinner, but won't do any chores

Do you have a tendency to prejudge the elders because of past experiences? If so, what do you need to do to address that in your own life and repent of that?