

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

“Our Care for Those Who Lead”

1 Timothy 5:17-25

We'll be looking at 1 Timothy chapter 5 this morning, so if you will turn there, we are going to do the last part of this chapter. This deals with church matters, how to function in the church, and church leaders.

If you know Dale very well, one thing you will know is that he is an avid UCLA basketball fan, and that has caused me to have an interest in UCLA basketball. I was looking at a game recently and the color commentator was the former coach, who had been fired, and he had this comment during the game. He had gone back there to do a game and he had been warmly welcomed by so many people and he said, “they love me now, they couldn't wait to get rid of me when I was there a few years ago” and it made me think of the difficulty of not only coaching but managing in business or anything.

You know that's even true in church. Sometimes people don't always make things as successful as we would like them to and they can be criticized, sometimes justly and sometimes unjustly. So, we will look at these matters for a bit this morning and let the Scripture instruct us.

1 Timothy 5:17-25, “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. (18) For the Scripture says, 'YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING,' and 'The laborer is worthy of his wages.' (19) Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses. (20) Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also may be fearful of sinning. (21) I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of His chosen angels, to maintain these principles without bias, doing nothing in a spirit of partiality. (22) Do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily and thus share responsibility for the sins of others; keep yourself free from sin. (23) No longer drink water exclusively, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments. (24) The sins of some men are quite evident, going before them to judgment; for others, their sins follow after. (25) Likewise also, deeds that are good are quite evident, and those which are otherwise cannot be concealed.”

So this deals with our leaders and how to deal with them. The first part, the first two verses, has to do with respect for the leaders; they must be respected. We must esteem them. Let elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor. They must be thought of, appreciated, valued as respected and worthy of double honor, which isn't exactly a quantitative thing. We don't want to multiply by two, but they just are appreciated and honored for what they are doing even more than the average person. In fact, all men should be honored. The Scriptures instruct us in that in 1 Peter 2:17. 1 Timothy 5:3 says honor the widows, widows indeed, but verse 17 says elders who rule well should be considered worthy of double honor.

Now, there is a word here that has been put in the emphatic position in the Greek construction. It should be underlined and that word is “well.” It is emphasized. Let the elders who rule well. Now, certainly many of us have run into people in our lifetimes who haven't lead churches very well, either because of doctrinal reasons or moral reasons or wisdom issues, but those who do rule well are considered worthy of double honor.

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The people that rule well are not divided into two groups, which some people wrongly assume, as the ruling elders and the teaching elders. They assume that the teaching elders don't lead and the leading elders don't teach. No, there are not two groups of people. There is one group of people and that is the elders who rule well, and the subset of those people are those who laborer in teaching and preaching. They are a subset of the elders; they are committed to instruction and evangelism and seek to help others in the faith. Preaching refers to evangelism, teaching refers to what I am doing this morning. So, those people who are working hard at this are described as especially worthy of double honor, because they need to lead the church, not just in decision-making but in terms of the instruction from God's Word as well.

The church is to be lead on the foundation and the knowledge and the guidance of the Scripture and the precepts of it, the principles of it, and the wisdom of it. And all elders must teach. This is why this is inclusive of all the elders. There is this qualification. 1 Timothy 3 says this is a qualification, and Titus 1 says to refute those who contradict. So, all elders must teach, but some are giving a specific extra effort and giving more attention to this.

Notice there is a plurality of elders, leading and ruling, so it's not just one person, but even those who are working hard at preaching and teaching. A church is not served well if one person is making all the decisions. A church is not served well if one person is doing all the teaching. We are blessed to have a number of people who are able to do these things, but the laborers are always few and the harvest is always plentiful. And the more people that can be developed for this the better, but this is a plurality.

Then the next verse, verse 18, speaks of their earnings. They should be considered worthy of double honors, which is a specific reference to income in verse 18. "For the Scripture says, 'YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING.'" That's an Old Testament quote from Deuteronomy 25:4, which speaks of the low-tech process of developing grain for bread, and an ox shouldn't be muzzled. They should be able to benefit from what they are doing. Actually, if you look in Deuteronomy 25:4, that's in a section dealing with interpersonal relationships. So, just like this is used as an illustration for laborers worthy of their wages, I think the same is true even as an illustration in Deuteronomy 4.

But then the next phrase makes it completely clear, not just as an illustration, but as a direct statement. "The laborer is worthy of his wages," which is a very interesting statement, because it's a direct quotation. It's a direct quotation from Jesus in Luke 10:7 which tells us something, it gives us some information. It tells us that Paul, when he wrote, was considering the words of Jesus in Luke 10:7 as being Scripture. So, that helps us to understand that the New Testament considers other parts of the New Testament as Scripture. In other words, he considered it as the Word of God, authoritative, accurate, the whole nine yards. Paul quotes Jesus here and describes His words as Scripture. So, the laborer is worthy of his wages.

When I was very young in the faith, I don't know quite how this happened, I felt some sense of obligation to the leaders of the church, and my response to this was that I gave money specifically to the leaders of the church believing that it was a good thing to do. Well, here is how the church is set up to function best so that these Scriptures can be fulfilled.

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At Valley Bible we support our church leadership by giving to the general fund, that is, we contribute to the church budget, which is established by the elders in order to minister to the church as a whole, and it's our spending plan. So, I believe that this is the way all of us should respond to elders that are ruling well and considered of double honor. They should be contributed to through the general fund, which supports all kinds of things, not just salaries although it does support salaries. And what that does is give attention to the whole not just an individual, and it also gives accountability so that none of us are making more than what the church has determined, collectively, that we should be making, and that's a good thing, accountability.

You know, one of the reasons that churches get into problems is because leaders get into financial difficulty, so this is a good protection for us. So, that would be the way it is done here, and I encourage you to participate in that even if you are committed to the building program, which we certainly should be. We are seeking to minister to our community better with our building program, but as important as that is, we shouldn't be neglecting the general fund because there are specific Scriptures referring to how to support elders who rule well. And though I am admittedly biased, I would like to think elders rule well here.

Verses 19-21 are dealing with the rebuke of elders, because not all elders rule well and some have problems. Remember the basketball coach I mentioned to you? Well, as good or bad as he was and depending upon what type of UCLA fan you talk to, they either hate him or really hate him. I have to say he is doing much better than the guy who came before him even though the guy who came before him won a national championship. The guy who came before him cheated and that's why he lost his job. He actually went to another school, which happened to be my wife's alma mater, and he ended up cheating even worse and getting the school into probation and worse problems. It was a real write-up if you ever read the whole thing. So, I would say that the coach that didn't do very well on the winning and losing still did better than the coach cheated.

Now, what do you do when you have elders that are cheating, that are not doing things right. Well, there is a plan, a process, that the Scriptures have laid out for us, and it's a good one. We should adhere to it. Verse 19, "Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses."

First of all, there is a prohibition given to us and that is that church leaders should not be receiving accusations except on the basis of two or three witnesses, and the reason for that is plain. When you are trying to lead, direct, and guide people, you become particularly vulnerable to accusation, because some people don't want to be guided or led. When you end up in that situation, those people might go on the offensive. The best defense is a good offense, as is said, and so some people might want to accuse the leaders.

Dale, particularly because he has been here for thirty years and that people haven't always adhered to godly standards as they have in more recent times, has been falsely accused, and that is plainly wrong. By abiding by this, I think we have been guided away from having him falsely accused. I remember, some of you may, we had a person many years ago standing up in the church service making false accusations. These things just ought not to be, but some people don't look at the Scripture and don't conduct themselves properly, and the rest of us ought to respond rightly and say that an elder should not be accused except on the basis of two or three witnesses.

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What are these witnesses? These are those who are witness to the sin, to verify that this really is true. This is true of all people, fortunately, not just elders. This is a principle of Scripture that goes beyond just church leaders. Like in the passage on church discipline when we go beyond an individual confrontation with sin, there needs to be two or three witnesses, and the purpose of the witnesses is to assure that there's not false accusations, because some people may lodge false accusations.

So, this is beyond just elders, but certainly, there is a prohibition of false accusation for people that are trying to lead people, because some people are not looking to be guided and that can become difficult. But some people in leadership positions really do sin; it's unfortunate but true. So, the reason for this prohibition is to protect people from false accusations.

Sometimes the accusations aren't false, they are true, and there's a process for this in verse 20. "Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also may be fearful of sinning." This rebuke in the presence of all should be understood as the entire church. This is the pattern of church discipline. Some people understand this to be just the elders, but I would suggest that if it is good for the elders to be fearful of sinning, it's good for everyone to be fearful of sinning. Those who continue in sin should be rebuked in the presence of all, because it's a matter for the whole church. If an elder refuses to repent and continues in sin, it becomes a matter for the entire church, because he is overseeing, along with the other elders, the whole church, and so, this is a matter for everyone. So, we should adhere to that as well.

Fortunately we haven't had to do this in the lifetime of Valley Bible Church, and I trust our pattern will continue. The only time I can think of this happening with a church leadership person was with a deacon many, many years ago, but we are blessed in not having to deal with this so far, but pray that we will continue the track record and avoid sin.

Verse 21 gives us a principle and the principle is this. "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of His chosen angels, to maintain these principles without bias, doing nothing in a spirit of partiality." The spirit of partiality, it is imperative that church leaders are not partial. When you have partiality in church leadership, you have a real cancer that will corrupt the church. Now, when we speak of partiality we have to clarify what this is. Partiality does not mean that everyone is treated the same.

God doesn't treat everyone the same. Some of us have physical limitations, disabilities that we have been created with. All of us have some of that; some of us have more severe ones. Others of us have been more blessed by the family we have been born into, or the abilities that we have, or how life's gone for us and much of this doesn't have to do with our decisions, but is God's choice in how He has made us.

So God doesn't treat everyone the same, but He does treat everyone without bias. In other words, He is seeking to love and to bring blessing to people regardless of their race or gender, so we should not be bias toward people. We should be trying to bless and help and serve everybody from the youngest to the oldest, from the people sitting in these rows to the people sitting in these rows. We have a responsibility to all, and we should be impartially seeking to minister to all.

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Now the backside of this is that some people want to be in a preferential position and may want us to do things, that if we do things for them it would be partial. So, that has to be factored in and it's challenging sometimes, but really we want to be fair and unbiased and pray that we can do that. So, that's how we deal with elders, elders that are sinning, and particularly, when we have to deal with sin, we must be impartial, we must be fair, must be unbiased.

The next and last section of this message deals with the responsibility for leaders, and there are some verses that speak of our responsibility and how to manage that. Verse 22 shows the seriousness of the responsibility. "Do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily and thus share responsibility for the sins of others; keep yourself free from sin." This is a responsibility that church leaders have, because when they allow people to have ministry, they are responsible for what they have allowed and share in that responsibility for sin.

This has caused us to be careful, perhaps slow in allowing people to have ministry in this fellowship. One, we don't want to share in the sins of others and two, we don't want people to be poorly served and harmed by people that might be looking to selfishly take advantage of others. So, we end up being slow. We are slow in adding elders. We are slow in adding deacons. We are slow in putting people in leadership positions over ministries compared to others.

But there's a challenge here. The challenge here is that you want ministry to happen, but you don't want ministry to be harmed by people that are not qualified to do it. So, you have to make a judgment. You have to make a balance here. How risky do you want to be? How conservative do you want to be? If you are too conservative, you're too reluctant to allow people to minister, then the church suffers because we don't have the laborers that we need. On the other hand, if you're too aggressive and willing to take risk, you may end up with greater difficulty because of those who you have allowed to minister.

So, this is a challenge, but in dealing with this challenge, we cannot ignore verse 22 and must recognize that allowing people leadership ministries in this church if they are sinning, if they are using people to their own advantage, is a serious thing. And we share responsibility for that, so we take that seriously. We are seeking to keep ourselves free of sin and of sin this way.

Those in leadership not only incur greater honor, they also incur greater judgment. It's a blessing to be able to serve people, lead people, to whatever degree that might be, but there is also responsibility that comes with that and even greater judgment. "Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment" (James 3:1).

It is the responsibility of church leadership to be careful, to be careful with other people, and even to be careful with ourselves, and to keep ourselves free from sin. This, hopefully, will be true for you, too. As you have the opportunity to give people ministry in this church, you should also be careful in that, because people are at risk and we want to serve people well.

Then in verse 23 we have an interesting passage. I've titled this the symptoms with the responsibility. I don't think this is just a footnote, a tangent that Paul has gone off on. I think this is related to the topic that he is writing about here, and as with dealing with responsibility and leadership. Verse 23 says, "No longer drink water exclusively, but use a little wine for the sake of

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your stomach and your frequent ailments.” As we see, Timothy had made a decision to use water exclusively, to not partake in wine. You know some people that do this. I basically do this. I'm not sure why I don't have a practice of drinking wine, but I read this and maybe I would be better served using a little wine for the sake of my stomach and frequent ailments. That might help me out a little bit.

As I look at this, I've discovered things. One thing I knew was that those in leadership may suffer physical effects and wine is a proven remedy for many ailments. Now we know more about medicine and we know that there are actually some ingredients in wine that help the body, so Paul wrote something that was true. It even helps the stomach specifically regarding indigestion or perhaps stress related things that really lead to other ailments, but wine has been shown effective in heart disease, even certain cancers because of certain ingredients found in it. So, I don't know what I'm going to do, but one thing I can say is, if I happen to have a glass of wine, there's nothing wrong with that; just as Paul can instruct Timothy as there being nothing wrong with that, because a little wine is okay.

So, people who teach that it is wrong have wine have to deal with this passage. I think a good way to look at its basic principle is this: The Scripture approves the use of substances that aid the body. That's a good thing, and Paul encouraged wine for the sake of the stomach and other ailments as being a good thing. But it forbids the use of substances that control the mind, and that's why you find in Ephesians 5:18, “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit.” So we cannot allow substances to control our mind, but if it aids our body, that's good. So, you can take that into account with whatever substances you have consumed. Is it aiding the body? If so, good. Is it controlling the mind? If so, bad. That's what I get out of this. Church leadership is no small thing, and sometimes, frequent ailments come about. The way that I deal with this selection is that I don't take myself that seriously. So, I don't get into a whole lot of frequent ailments. Maybe I'll get more up-tight.

Verses 24-25 summarize the selection of responsibilities. We have to make decisions about whom we are going to bring on to leadership positions. Verse 24, “The sins of some men are quite evident, going before them to judgment; for others, their sins follow after.”

For some people, it is evident. We must choose leaders who don't do bad things. The sins of some men are quite evident, and we have leaders that are sinning. They are unqualified, and they must not continue. I think this verse teaches us something. It teaches us that it is possible, in advance, to eliminate some people from consideration for church leadership. We can see sinful behavior, and we can say they are not qualified. We should avoid this person, and we've done that.

But I would also say that this verse tells us something else. It tells us that it is not possible to eliminate all sinful people from church leadership. Oh, I wish it were true, and I think we are trying. I'd even say I think we are better than we use to be at this, but for others, their sins follow after. Sometimes, you can catch people before you even consider them. Sometimes, as you are considering them and you investigate, and you talk to people, you gain more information. But some people slip through the cracks, and when that happens, the church is suffering.

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Fortunately, there is a remedy for this, and that's back in verse 20. “Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also may be fearful of sinning.” But for some, their sins follow after, and then we end up having to deal with things. You can pray that we will do a good job at catching this as early as possible to protect the church.

There is something else to look at, not only the sins of some men, but “Likewise also, deeds that are good are quite evident, and those which are otherwise cannot be concealed” (verse 25). We must choose leaders who do good deeds. Not just people who don't do bad things, but we also have to have people who are doing good things that are serving people well.

The good works of some potential leaders are evident. They don't need a lot of study or research. We can see that they are doing well. They are serving their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ successfully. But for others, their deeds must be explored. So, we are looking to understand what people are doing as far as ministry and how to enhance and support their ministry and give them greater opportunities. So, we want to choose leaders who don't do bad things and who do good things. But eventually the final analysis is our deeds will be made know.

God knows those who are His. These are the words of Jesus, and I think this is very instructive for us in this passage. Matthew 7:15-20, “Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. (16) You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles, are they? (17) Even so, every good tree bears good fruit; but the bad tree bears bad fruit. (18) A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. (19) Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. (20) So then, you will know them by their fruits.”

Good fruit comes from good roots, and good roots produce good fruits. So, when you look at your life, I'd encourage you to examine your fruitfulness. If you are not seeing fruitfulness, there's a remedy for this. Look at the root, the root being your relationship with God. Strengthen your relationship with God. Move towards the Lord with the words of Christ, the words of God in the Scripture. Move towards the Lord with prayer and gain help from others who are also seeking to do this so that you can be fruitful in your life.

If you are fruitful in your life, then the Lord will guide you in how to help and serve others, and as you do that fruitfully and successfully, you will discover that you will have certain responsibilities thrust upon you, which is a good thing. As you do that well, you will be pleasing the Lord and serving your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ here at Valley Bible.

I would encourage you to pursue that, but remember the place to start is with a good root and to develop that relationship with God so that you can bless you fellow brothers and sisters in Christ around you. As you do that, you can consider taking responsibility. And when you take that responsibility, you will take that responsibility faithfully and you will carry it out with a blessing, and we can all be rejoicing in that. When we don't have a good root, we can hurt people, and then we have to deal with people who are leading that shouldn't be. We need to keep first things first and look at how a good root, a good strong relationship with Christ, and have God guide us in what responsibility we should have, and then we can bless the church to our potential.

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Let's pray together. Lord, we thank You for giving us Your instruction, for guiding us in our church in applying this. We pray that we do so with wisdom, with Your guidance, Your knowledge, and to do that faithfully. We pray for our leaders that we could be found faithful and to be pleasing You in the leadership of this church. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.