

Timothy 5:17-25

Having addressed how Timothy was to regard others in the local church and to minister concerning widows, Paul now gives him some guidelines to follow concerning elders.

Verses 17-21 deal with honoring, defending and disciplining of elders.

Verses 22-25 deal with the matter of choosing and ordaining others to serve.

It should be noted that there was a plurality of pastors in the early churches with one pastor serving as overseer. Timothy was the overseer in the church at Ephesus like Titus was the overseer over the churches at Crete (Titus 1:5). This is similar to the set up in larger churches today where there is a bus pastor, a visitation pastor, a counseling pastor, and an assistant pastor and associate pastors. Note Phil 1:1.

Over time the leadership of local churches was reduced to that of one pastor who was assisted by a certain number of deacons.

V. 17 - From this verse some have concluded that a local church should have ruling elders and teaching elders. This is the set up in the Presbyterian church. But it seems rather that Paul is referring to two groups of pastors. Those who had regular employment and those who served full-time in the ministry.

According to Paul's instructions Timothy and the church were to give double honor to the pastors who served well. Honor no doubt refers to respect for their position so

double honor would mean respect as well as financial reimbursement as it does in 5:3.

Giving double honor was especially in order for those who were full-time and had no other occupations or employment.

V. 18 - Paul used an OT Scripture and a NT quotation of the Lord Jesus to prove that the pastor is worthy of being recompensed. Some have contended that pastors should not be paid but the N.T. mandates this for a local church and anyone aware of ministry demands realizes it's not an easy or little work. Note I Cor. 9:1-14.

V.19,20 - Timothy is given instruction for dealing with pastors who are accused of things and pastors who are found guilty of things.

No accusation was to be believed unless it could be substantiated by at least two witnesses. This followed the requirements according to O.T. law and also for discipline as laid out in the N.T. (Matt. 18:15-18).

It should be noted since the pastor occupies a position of spiritual responsibility this makes him a special target for the devil's assaults. If the devil can tempt and entice a pastor to sin he can do great harm to a local church.

To protect the pastors Timothy was to get the facts first before he took any action and the way to do this was to hear the witnesses.

Someone has said "where there's smoke there is fire." This may be a good slogan for a fire department but when it comes to a local church it doesn't apply. Somebody's tongue could be "set on fire of hell" as James describes (Jas. 3:6).

This means unless witnesses can corroborate an accusation a church is not to accept or act upon things concerning a pastor.

V. 20 - Paul says pastors who are found guilty are to be rebuked before all. In this procedure he should be given the opportunity to repent and if he does he should be forgiven (II Cor. 2:6-11).

It should be kept in mind that the purpose for church discipline is restoration and not revenge.

V. 21 - Paul instructs Timothy to carry out church discipline on those who sin without prejudice and without partiality.

It should be noted that church discipline is not an easy matter. The rule is - public sin requires public confession and private sin require private confession.

V. 22 - Timothy is warned about choosing individuals to serve. Oftentimes immature and inexperienced Christians are placed in positions or responsibility and this leads to big problems in a church.

Timothy was to keep himself pure also from associations with the sins of others.

Oftentimes young people hang around with those who have a bad reputation. If you're seen with those who drink or do drugs you'll have the same kind of reputation. The Bible says "abstain from all appearances..." and that "bad company corrupts good morals" (I Thess. 5:22; I Cor. 15:33).

V. 23 - Timothy is instructed to drink a little wine for medicinal purposes. It could be that Timothy had stomach problems and this was associated with problems from choosing the wrong individuals to serve.

It's a fact it can be upsetting when people in a church don't serve the Lord like they should...

Timothy may have been a victim of contaminated water that is still a problem in many parts of the world today.

This verse should not be taken as an excuse to indulge in drinking alcoholic beverages. In our culture it would be hard for a Christian to drink and present a good testimony for Christ.

V. 24 - Paul points out a certain truth that coincides with his selection of choosing others to serve. Some men's sins are up-front like the drunkard who is known by the whole community. Other men's sins are hidden for a time. This is illustrated in the life of the husband who carries on a secret love affair with another woman. People may be in the dark for awhile but eventually it will come out.

What seems to be intimated here is the need to observe individuals for a time and prove them before placing them in positions which could jeopardize the testimony of a local church.

V. 25 - Just as the sins of certain men are up-front and others are revealed later, so it is with godly servants. In some you can see their good works up-front. With others their good deeds may not be seen immediately but their character and conduct will reveal itself over time through various testings and trials.

Let me say that trials have a way of revealing the depths of our spirituality. Some folks go to pieces and explode when the least little thing comes their way. But some present such a sweet testimony in the deepest valleys.

This whole passage seems to be dealing with two essential things. Character and conduct. How we live demonstrates what we really are!

What is Your Conduct Saying About Your Character?

The conduct of some persons ...

I. REVEALS THAT THEY LACK CHRISTIAN CHARACTER BECAUSE THEY DON'T SERVE THE LORD AS THEY SHOULD.

II. REVEALS THAT THEY LACK CHRISTIAN CHARACTER BECAUSE THEY ARE IDENTIFIED WITH UNSAVED PEOPLE.

III. REVEALS THAT THEY LACK CHRISTIAN CHARACTER BECAUSE THEIR LIVES ARE FRUITLESS FOR THE LORD.