

A Study on 1 Timothy

Week 10 | 5:17-6:2

Overview | Elders and Masters

This passage is the second half of this section of 1 Timothy (5:1-6:2). It begins and ends with referring to the relationships within the church using family language – “...encourage...younger men as brothers (5:1); ...those who have believing masters must not be disrespectful on the ground that they are brothers (6:2).”

Paul continues to urge the church to relate to each other out of godliness as a means of glorifying God, edifying each other, and witnessing to the community. In this passage, Paul focuses on how to deal with elders and how to deal with the master/bondservant relationship.

This section has a simple structure to it:

- Dealing with elders (5:17-25)
 - Honoring elders (5:17-18)
 - Disciplining elders (5:19-21)
 - Ordaining elders (5:22-25)
- Dealing with masters (6:1-2)
 - Serving an unbelieving master (6:1)
 - Serving a believing master (6:2)

NOTE: Paul is not endorsing the institution of slavery (see handout from ESV Expository Commentary). As we read this text, we need to keep in mind that slavery in the first century Roman world was different than American slavery in the nineteenth century. It was still full of wicked practices but we cannot import our understanding of American slavery onto this cultural context. We also need to be careful not to draw a direct line between the master/bondservant relationship and modern day employer/employee relationships.

Honoring elders | 5:17-18

Remember the context of the Ephesian church: false teachers, men who had departed from the faith, and bad leaders. As Paul instructs them on how to deal with elders he has these circumstances in mind. There is a need in the church to re-establish godly leadership and part of that process will include honoring those who are serving well, disciplining those who have proven to be immoral and wayward, and being patient in the process of raising up new elders.

“Let the elders who rule well... (5:17)” – Paul draws a distinction between the elders who are truly “eldering” and those that have been part of the problem. The term used for elder is *presbuteros* which is derived from the same word that means “older men.” It’s no coincidence that in seeking men to lead the church they should typically look to those who have life experience, wisdom that comes with age, and have proven their character and faithfulness.

“...be considered of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching (5:17).”

- “Double honor” can be translated as “two-fold honor.” Many commentators agree that this idea has to do with both the respect/reverence due to the proper elder as well as remuneration for their work.
 - When Paul uses the word “honor” it is often associated with monetary aid – “Honor widows...(5:3).”

- Are there two types of elders? There is disagreement over this.
 - Some say this should be translated as just a description of “those who rule well.”
 - Some say there are two types of elders, equal in authority but with different roles. This is the position the PCA takes.
 - *BCO 7-2. The ordinary and perpetual classes of office in the Church are elders and deacons. Within the class of elder are the two orders of teaching elders and ruling elders. The elders jointly have the government and spiritual oversight of the Church, including teaching. Only those elders who are specially gifted, called and trained by God to preach may serve as teaching elders.*

“You shall not muzzle an ox...the laborer deserves his wages (5:18).”

- Paul quotes from Deuteronomy 25:4 and Luke 10:7. As a side note, Paul is equating the words of Jesus in the gospels with scripture from the Old Testament. This is an internal acknowledgement of the canonicity of the gospels.
- With quoting these passages Paul is proving that it is good and proper to compensate the elder who is laboring in the ministry.

Disciplining elders | 5:19-21

In a church riddled with controversy they had to protect against two extremes: 1) false accusations against elders and 2) favoritism that could lead to leniency toward elders.

- Paul wants to protect the integrity of the office of elder while allowing a place for those in the wrong to be dealt with. He takes the idea from Deuteronomy 19:15-20 where if one was to bring an accusation against someone else there had to be two or more witness that could corroborate the accusation. This would protect against false accusations while at the same time providing weight to the claim if there is more than one witness.
- On the other side of things Paul wants to deal with potential favoritism and leniency with the elders. “...keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality (5:21).” It’s possible that the elders would shrug off accusations against fellow elders much like a “good old boys” club.
- Paul warns that both integrity in accusations and integrity in dealing with them must be maintained because the glory of God and witness of the church is at stake.
- And in the center of these instructions is the fruit of this integrity – the public rebuke of an elder in unrepentant sin (5:20). Again, this was for the witness of the gospel in the church.

Ordaining elders | 5:22-25

It’s possible that there was a felt urgency to ordain new elders in light of the fact that the false teachers and bad elders who had departed from the faith had left a void of leadership. Paul instructs Timothy to “...not be hasty...(5:22)” in the appointing of new elders. The “laying on of hands” is a way of describing the official ordination of elders. Paul gives two reasons to be patient:

- It takes time to know someone and over time their character is proven (5:24-25).
- The leadership will share in the blame if they are too hasty in ordaining a man who harms the witness of the church (5:22). “The list of qualifications can be learned in short order; the confirmation of such character takes time. This is why an elder must not be a ‘recent convert (3:6)’; he must have a proven track record of faithfulness. If a man is made an elder too quickly and then commits grievous sin as an elder, those who recognized him as an elder share in the

shame insofar as they overlooked character flaws they should have noticed (Duguid, Hamilton Jr., Sklar, p. 437)."

In the midst of this instruction Paul adds a unique personal note to Timothy. "No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and frequent ailments (5:23)."

- It seems that part of "keeping himself pure" has to do with staying away from the legalism and asceticism of the false teachers. It's possible they were forbidding any use of alcohol.
- Due to his health it actually may have been advisable to have a little wine in his diet. "Genuine purity is not about keeping man-made laws which have the effect of denying goodness in creation. Rather, he is to use God's gifts with thanksgiving (see 4:4) which includes the imbibing of a little wine to assist Timothy in his health (Macleay, p. 209)."

Dealing with masters | 6:1-2

The overall goal of these instructions is that the name of God might be magnified. Paul does not focus on the institution of slavery but rather he is interested in instructing Christians how they can be faithful in their current circumstances.

Those who are "under a yoke" are understood to be those in an oppressive situation under the rule of a non-believer. They are not necessarily to honor their masters because their masters are worthy of honor but rather as a witness to their true master and Lord. The conduct of a slave to a master can be a gospel witness.

- The slave is to work with integrity and obedience as a way to be a witness.
- There may come a time when the master requires the slave to act in a way that violates God's law and at this point the slave must obey God not the master.

Those who have believing masters have a similar responsibility to work and act in a way that brings glory to God.

- There might be a temptation to take for granted the relationship status since they are both Christians and, in doing so, be disrespectful in conduct and actions presuming upon the master.
- Rather, the slaves are encouraged to work even harder because those that benefit from their good work are believers and family through the bond of Christ.

So What? |

Resource List

Teaching 1 Timothy by Angus Macleay (Primary Source for class)

1 Timothy by Philip Graham Ryken

Let's Study 1 Timothy by W. John Cook

Word Biblical Commentary: Pastoral Epistles by William D. Mounce

1-2 Timothy & Titus by Philip H. Towner

ESV Expository Commentary: Ephesians-Philemon edited by Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., Jay Sklar

Commentary on 1 Timothy by John Calvin

ESV Study Bible