

1-2 Timothy – 1 Timothy 5:17-6:2

Review

Last time, we looked at Paul's encouragement for Timothy not to be intimidated because of his being the new kid on the Ephesus block, but to remember the word of prophecy spoken over him by the elders in Jerusalem and to focus on setting an example of godliness for his flock at Ephesus. We then continued with Paul's instructions about the church's care for widows.

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Let's continue now in our study of 1 Timothy.

¹⁷Let the elders [πρεσβύτερος presbyteros] who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. ¹⁸For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," [Deuteronomy 25:4] and, "The laborer deserves his wages." [Deuteronomy 24:14-15? 1 Corinthians 9] 1 Timothy 5:17-18 (ESV)

Paul devotes an entire chapter of his first letter to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 9) to the topic of honor and pay for those who labor in Gospel ministry full time – although Paul did not ask wages for himself despite deserving them. Paul wanted it to be known beyond question that he labored for the establishment of God's kingdom and preached the Gospel to those who would hear, simply because he was called to do so, not because he hoped for earthly gain by it. Nevertheless, Paul rightly points out here that those who devote themselves fully to proclaiming the Gospel and ministering to those in need do deserve to make a living on earth by their kingdom work, just as honest laborers in any other endeavor deserve (and need) to make a living to meet their needs. In fact, Paul points out that those who devote themselves to kingdom work deserve "**double honor**" for their labor.

But with all that said, those who are entrusted with proper stewardship of God's blessings upon our fellowships must exercise great care and due diligence. There is a huge difference between making a "living" and making a "killing" from Gospel preaching and church ministry. I'm reminded of the scornful words of the Casting Crowns song – *What This World Needs...*

***What this world needs
Is not another sign waving super saint that's better than you
Another ear pleasing candy man afraid of the truth
Another prophet in an Armani suit
What this world needs is a Savior who will rescue
A Spirit who will lead
A Father who will love them in their time of need
A Savior who will rescue
The Spirit who will lead
A Father who will love
That's what this world needs***

Furthermore, our "**double honor**" must never morph into idol worship. Our world has seen many amazing servants of God like Paul, John, Augustine, Martin Luther, Charles Spurgeon, Lottie Moon, Dwight L. Moody, Corrie ten Boom, Billy Graham, Gladys Aylward, J. Vernon McGee, Irena Sendler, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Mother Teresa. These have all passed into the Glory of our LORD and received the reward due them for their faithful service. Many such faithful servants like our dear

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Pastor Brian remain and continue God's work. But it is their faith and devotion in serving God and their communities that are worthy of "**double honor**" not themselves per se, much as we might admire them personally. We must never allow our admiration – which is surely due their **work** – to ever rise to the level of worship of themselves.

The Roman Catholic church's process of beatification of specific godly servants as "saints" and promotion of worshipping and praying to these "saints" – most particularly Mary the mother of Jesus – is rank idolatry. In fact, Roman Catholic doctrine even calls Mary divine and sinless like her Son Jesus as our so-called "co-redemptrix." To be completely frank, the church's promotion of worshipping and praying to those the church has identified as "saints" (including Mary) is one of the doctrines of demons that Paul warned Timothy about. These beloved servants of God were and are mere human beings – sinners saved by the grace of God through faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They are no more deserving of honor from God or from other people than you or I. Quite the contrary. Like us, they are all deserving of eternal condemnation in their sins apart from the redemption out of death found only through faith in Jesus' Gospel.

NOTE – Last time we briefly discussed the Greek word **πρεσβύτερος presbyteros** translated as "elders" in 1 Timothy 5:17. Recall that in 1 Timothy 5:1 this word was used to refer to older men in general. Here in 1 Timothy 5:17 though, **πρεσβύτερος presbyteros** refers specifically to older men who serve as leaders in the church. This usage makes **πρεσβύτερος presbyteros** nearly synonymous with **ἐπισκοπή episkopē** found in 1 Timothy 3:1 often translated as "overseer." Here in 1 Timothy 5:17 Paul emphasizes the honor due those **πρεσβύτερος presbyteros** who labor in preaching and teaching.

19Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. 20As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear. 1 Timothy 5:19-20 (ESV)

Paul's instruction in verse 19 echoes the instruction in the Law of Moses for bringing an accusation against anyone – not just a church leader.

15"A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established. Deuteronomy 19:15 (ESV)

But notice that Paul's instruction for disciplining an elder against whom such an accusation has been properly established by witnesses is harsher than Jesus' own instructions for punishment of "rank and file" brothers and sisters not in leadership.

NOTE – Jesus' instructions here are fully conformant with the Law in Deuteronomy 19:15.

15"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. 16But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 17If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen

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even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Matthew 18:15-17 (ESV)

Perhaps it is this stricter judgment on those who dare to teach God's Word to which James referred...

¹Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. James 3:1 (ESV)

Any preacher or teacher who doesn't bear this in mind ***each and every time*** he ascends to the pulpit or sits down to teach does not have an adequate fear and respect for God and His Word.

²¹In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels [ἄγγελος angelos] I charge you to keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality. 1 Timothy 5:21 (ESV)

This is sound instruction for everyone in any leadership position, from those pastoring churches like Timothy, to front line supervisors on the job, to Supreme Court Justices. Everyone is entitled to equal treatment and fair judgment regardless of their personal relationship with the one enforcing the rules or passing judgment.

ASIDE – Before we move on, let's take a quick look at the phrase “elect angels” here in this verse. The word translated as elect simply means “chosen” – presumably by God. The word **ἄγγελος angelos** is intriguing to me here. It can mean what we normally think of by the word “angels” – eternal, non-human created beings used by God to perform specific tasks (like the slaying of 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in one night) and to bring His Word to specific people on specific occasions (like the announcement of the birth of the Messiah to the shepherds at Christmas). In fact, **ἄγγελος angelos** is translated in this sense 179 times in the KJV New Testament including right here in 1 Timothy 5:21. Obviously, **ἄγγελος angelos** is also used in reference to those who followed Lucifer in his heavenly rebellion, and subsequently fell to earth as Satan's demons.

It is the other seven times that the word **ἄγγελος angelos** appears that intrigue me. The word can also mean a messenger, an envoy, or one who is sent. In this sense the word is used to refer to John the Baptist (Matthew 11:10, Mark 1:2, Luke 7:27) The word **ἄγγελος angelos** is also used in Luke 7:24 regarding the messengers John sent from prison to ask Jesus whether He was the one the Israelites had awaited or whether they should seek another. The word was even used by Paul describing the thorn in the flesh he was given to keep him humble as “***a messenger of Satan***” (2 Corinthians 12:7)!

Every English translation I had available to me translates **ἄγγελος angelos** here in 1 Timothy 5:21 as “angels.” Since he mentions the elect **ἄγγελος angelos** right alongside Jesus and God the Father, Paul probably meant the heavenly angels here, but he might possibly have used the word referring to himself, the other apostles, and church leaders (like Timothy himself) sent forth by God as His Gospel messengers. Regardless of that though, Paul's point is clear – his admonition for Timothy (and us) to shepherd the Church impartially is important, so Paul emphasized it with a little “name dropping.”

²²Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor take part in the sins of others; keep yourself pure. 1 Timothy 5:22 (ESV)

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In honor of this instruction from Paul, many churches – including ours – have a somewhat lengthy, detailed process for ordaining church leaders and teachers. Of course, in our present debauched and treacherous society, it is extremely important to thoroughly vet candidates for church ministry positions, particularly if their duties will involve the children or anyone else unable to fend for themselves. But it isn't just protecting the flock from physical danger at the hands of an abusive leader or teacher that Paul is cautioning Timothy (and us) about here. We must also guard against the danger of false teaching, false prophecy, and spiritual abuse. Thankfully, by diligent, patient observation, we can sort out those who are trustworthy and faithful servants of the Gospel from those who come with a hidden, destructive agenda before we assign them to ministries in the church. Jesus Himself taught...

¹⁵“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. ¹⁹Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰Thus you will recognize them by their fruits. Matthew 7:15-20 (ESV)

and...

The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks. Luke 6:45 (ESV)

NOTE – In both these admonitions Jesus was speaking to a crowd of His followers, not just to church leaders. After all, when Jesus said these things, the Church had not even yet been born. These cautions apply to everyone – even in day-to-day conversation. Whenever someone – even someone close with a godly reputation – comes to us saying something like, “God told me to tell you...” we must bear these warnings from Jesus in mind. We need to courteously listen, but then take what we hear from them and compare it to what God Himself reveals to us in His Word. Remember the example we have from the Jews in Berea (Acts 17:11) who listened eagerly to the Gospel preaching of Paul and Silas, but then diligently compared what they had heard to what they knew to be true by God’s written Word.

But all of this “due diligence” takes time and effort. Therefore, Paul warned Timothy not to be hasty in choosing people to serve in the church.

Paul also warned Timothy here in 1 Timothy 5:22 not to become embroiled in the sins of others. This is an easy trap to fall into – especially for a newcomer to the church who wants to make a good impression. We must all guard ourselves from compromise in our desire to fit in and not make waves. Paul recognized – no doubt from personal experience – that standing firm upon principle isn't easy. The temptation to compromise just a little is strong. We will face ridicule at best, outright hostility, and potentially even legal punishment for doing the Biblically right thing.

You may recall in 2002, then Congressman Mike Pence remarked in a press interview that he follows the so-called “Billy Graham rule” – never spending time socially alone with any woman other than his wife. The idea of this rule for personal conduct is that a man can thus avoid the temptation to adultery. Furthermore, following it precludes the possibility of false allegations against the man or

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any woman with whom he might have spent time alone. Over the next few months Pence was mocked by the “sexually liberated” faction of society as prudish and old fashioned, he was even derided by some of those who **do** believe in the Biblical mandates regarding human sexual behavior who implied he must be unable to control his sexual lusts since he set this rule for himself.

Curiously, the rule itself is denounced by the “progressive” media and politicians, liberal academia, and even by feminist activists as repressive toward women. The reasoning is that if a man of high position in some organization follows this rule, the women under him will therefore be denied the opportunity to “network” with him and make their cases for advancement in the organization. Some have even called for making it illegal for such men to practice this rule – although I can’t possibly imagine how such a law could be framed or enforced – saying that following the Billy Graham rule constitutes unlawful discrimination against women. No doubt, the homosexual and transgender community will soon (if they haven’t already) join the outcry against what is now commonly known as “The Mike Pence Rule,” denouncing it as cis-gender and heterosexual chauvinism and therefore homo/trans-phobic.

Thus, men who choose to set themselves a solid, Biblical moral standard along with a personal regimen for holding themselves to that standard are ridiculed, denigrated, and may one day even punished under the law. This makes the temptation to compromise on the standard itself almost irresistible. No doubt, since the days of Paul and Timothy the battle against Biblical morality waged by the regime of the great enemy of our souls has only gotten more heated and brazen. Nevertheless, even 2,000 years ago it was already bad enough to lead Paul to give Timothy this warning.

23(No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.) 1 Timothy 5:23 (ESV)

Nothing is known about Timothy’s physical health apart from this brief interjection into the middle of Paul’s pastoral epistle. No doubt, Paul was reminded of Timothy’s physical infirmities while contemplating the spiritual challenges Timothy was facing as the new pastor in Ephesus, and decided to put in this advice while he was thinking about it.

In the ancient world, there were very limited options for combatting infection or parasites. Of course, personal hygiene is our first line of defense, and God Himself directed many cleanliness rituals and procedures in His Law handed down to His chosen people. Timothy was certainly aware of these, and no doubt practiced them daily. But the options for disinfection and ridding the body of parasites like digestive tract worms were limited. Fermented liquids (like wine) and distilled spirits were used, as were vinegar, sulfur, salt, and various herbs. Unfortunately, clean drinking water free from bacteria and parasites was a luxury known only to the privileged few both then and today. Thus, Paul advised Timothy to take a little wine to help with whatever ailed him.

24The sins of some people are conspicuous, going before them to judgment, but the sins of others appear later. 25So also good works are conspicuous, and even those that are not cannot remain hidden. 1 Timothy 5:24-25 (ESV)

As I read the final paragraphs of this letter, I sense that Paul was in a hurry. Here near the end of chapter 5 he had begun writing somewhat disjointedly, trying to get all the things he wanted to say

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written down quickly before sending the letter on its way. Perhaps a ship that would carry the person who was to deliver the letter to Ephesus was about to depart.

These two verses go hand-in-hand with Paul's admonition for Timothy not to hurriedly lay his hands upon potential servants in the church and with Jesus' own instruction that we may discern true servants of God from the wolves in sheep's clothing by observing their fruits. Paul reminds Timothy here that the lives of some people are an open book with both their sins and their righteousness being readily apparent to all. Other, craftier people will try to hide their sins and may be able to keep them secret for a while – perhaps a very long while. Some in deep humility will quietly and anonymously perform their righteous service to the Gospel and their communities year after year with no fanfare or even acknowledgement. But in the end, both the hidden sins and the hidden good works will be revealed. As Jesus also proclaimed...

²Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. ³Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops. Luke 12:2-3 (ESV)

¹Let all who are under a yoke as bondservants [δοῦλος *doulos*] regard their own masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled. ²Those who have believing masters must not be disrespectful on the ground that they are brothers; rather they must serve all the better since those who benefit by their good service are believers and beloved. Teach and urge these things. 1 Timothy 6:1-2 (ESV)

Paul finishes his specific instructions for behavior in the Church with this brief admonition to those bound in servitude. The Greek word **δοῦλος *doulos*** translated by the ESV here in 1 Timothy 6:1 as “bondservant” may also be translated as “slave.” The ESV translators chose whether to translate **δοῦλος *doulos*** as “bondservant” or “slave” based on consideration of the specific passage's context. Like so many in this letter, this brief, 2-verse passage has garnered considerable controversy because of the word **δοῦλος *doulos***. To the modern mind, the very idea of slavery is abhorrent – largely due to the horrendous abuses of the West African and Native American slave trade beginning with the European “discovery” of the New World at the end of the 15th century.

Slavery has been common in almost every human society throughout history. Most often, slaves were prisoners of war who were never repatriated to their native societies. In ancient Jewish society, Israelites also commonly sold themselves into servitude to other Jews under whom they served for a specified period. These “bondservants” were then free to return to their homes and tribes on the seventh (sabbatical) year unless they chose to remain in bond service out of love for their masters (Deuteronomy 15:12-18). A similar form of bond service was practiced among European colonists in the Americas. Many so-called “indentured servants” obtained their passage from Europe to the New World by contracting to serve as bondservants for a certain period, after which they were released.

Slavery in various forms was common throughout the Mediterranean Basin in Paul's day. This passage in 1 Timothy has often been condemned as condoning and perpetuating such slavery. Later, it was one of the scriptures used to rationalize the human abuses in the Americas by European

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conquerors as being the manifestation of God’s revealed will – the concept of so-called “Manifest Destiny.” But we should carefully consider this passage in the light of Paul’s motivations for writing it.

Practically speaking, there was almost nothing Paul or the nascent Christian Church could do to combat the slavery in the societies around them even if they wanted to. Jesus Himself on the day He ascended back to His Father gave His Church the more important job of proclaiming the Gospel throughout their society – slave and free (Matthew 28:18-20). Paul considered this Great Commission from Jesus a higher priority than combatting the social ills of the society in which he lived. As we have mentioned previously, Paul strongly encouraged unity and stridently opposed dissent among the brethren in his writings. Paul recognized that if Christians divide up into “camps” the work of God’s Kingdom will be hindered. Thus, Paul wrote to the Galatians...

28There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Galatians 3:28 (ESV)

Paul considered it extremely important for Christians to demonstrate our love for Jesus through our love for one another, just as Jesus commanded His disciples on the night He was betrayed...

34A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. 35By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. John 13:34 (ESV)

This commandment surely extends to the love Christian slaves and bondservants were to show their masters and vice versa, just as Paul instructed here in 1 Timothy 6:1-2.

Looking Ahead

With 1 Timothy 6:1-2, Paul finishes his specific pastoral instructions for Timothy and his flock. The remainder of the letter is devoted to general instruction in godliness, which God willing we will take up next time.