



Text: 1 Timothy 5:17-25<sup>1</sup>

Series: Living the Gospel

Title: Part 12 -- Living the Gospel with Our Spiritual Leaders

Location: First Baptist Church, Olds, AB

Date: May 16, 2010

This morning I feel I should begin by issuing a kind of disclaimer declaring both pecuniary and personal interest in what you're about to hear. This morning, what we're studying in God's Word very much singles me out from the rest of congregation. God's Word for us today is talking to us about me, and about my fellow pastors.

In the passage we're about to read from Paul's First Letter to Timothy, the apostle gives his protégé some direction on how he is to relate to the spiritual leaders of the church in Ephesus. Paul uses the term "elder" to describe these church leaders. What I want to remind you of is that we examined the qualifications for these leaders back in chapter 3 where Paul calls them "overseers" but please understand that "elders" and "overseers" are one in the same group of church leaders (cf. Titus 1:5,7). In the New Testament, the terms "pastor," "elder," and "overseer" are essentially synonyms that describe the human spiritual leaders of the church of Jesus Christ. (cf. Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Peter 5:1-2) As a pastor of this church, I am an elder who has responsibility for giving oversight to the church. And as you'll see in our reading in just a moment, my area of pastoral ministry, preaching and teaching, comes into focus right away in Paul's directions to Timothy.

Why should you care about what the Bible says about how to deal with me and the other pastors and leaders of the church? The short answer is this: you need to know what God says so that you can keep us accountable for our ministries and so that you can help us accomplish them to the glory of God. We are members together of God's household (3:15) and there are important things that you can do to help us in our work for God. The principles that we're going to study this morning not only apply to dealing with spiritual leaders; they apply to dealing with all members of God's family and even with those outside the household of God.

Let's listen together to God's Word this morning. I invite you to hear it attentively and reverently as I read it for us. I'm reading from Paul's First Letter to Timothy, chapter five, verses seventeen to twenty-five. This is the Word of God. The Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy,

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission, All rights reserved.



**<sup>17</sup> Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. <sup>18</sup> For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,” and, “The laborer deserves his wages.” <sup>19</sup> Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. <sup>20</sup> As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear. <sup>21</sup> In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality.**

**<sup>22</sup> Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor take part in the sins of others; keep yourself pure. <sup>23</sup> (No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.) <sup>24</sup> The sins of some men are conspicuous, going before them to judgment, but the sins of others appear later. <sup>25</sup> So also good works are conspicuous, and even those that are not cannot remain hidden.**

There's a word that connects what we're reading here with what we examined last week and it's the word, "honor." Last week we looked how we are to show "honor" to those in the church who are alone and don't have a very high profile in the life of the church. Paul commands us to "Honor widows who are truly widows." (5:3) These dear people in God's family who might easily be overlooked because of their lack of social standing but Paul knows that God doesn't want them to be forgotten. Now Paul turns from those who have the lowest profile in the life of the church to those who have the highest profile in the church, to its leaders and he says essentially the same thing, "show them honour."

So my question this morning for us is this...

**How do we, as members of God's household, show Godly honour to our spiritual leaders?**

I use the term "Godly honour" intentionally because I think there is an appropriate, Biblical honour that is to be shown to spiritual leaders but sadly, there is also an inappropriate honour that is sometimes given and we'll touch on that as we look at Paul's instruction to us.

**First of all...**

***We show Godly honour to our spiritual leaders...  
When we thank them generously***

Paul wrote...

**<sup>17</sup> Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. <sup>18</sup> For the Scripture**



**says, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,” and, “The laborer deserves his wages.”**

What does Paul mean by “double honor”? I’m certain he doesn’t mean that we are to receive “double” the amount given to widows for their support. What I think he means is actually found in the word “honor” itself. You see, the word had a “double” meaning. It meant both “respect” and “remuneration” or, if you will, “honour” and “honorarium.” Paul means that the church should give both respect to its leaders and that they should materially support them in the work of the Gospel.

Let me tell you that I am well paid by you on both counts. I want to thank you for your generous encouragement to me in my work as a preacher and teacher of God’s Word. Regularly someone tells me that they appreciate the labour I put in to my sermons and my teaching. It has been a privilege to minister in a church that so evidently appreciates the teaching and preaching of God’s Word. When you thank me for my preaching of the Bible you are not only telling me that you appreciate my work but you’re also declaring your love for God’s Word.

I am generously thanked by your kind words, and I am generously thanked by my salary cheque. Never in my wildest dreams did I ever imagine that I would be paid as well as I am for the work of studying and preaching God’s Word. Thank you. I am “doubly honoured,” and I’m sure that my fellow pastors will say the same thing. You are not like the congregation of which I read recently that blessed their pastor with fresh eggs and then deducted the value of the eggs from his salary ... a true story. You are not like that. You have been unfailingly generous to me and my family. When Trevor came to see me earlier this year to show me what the Board of Management had determined as my salary level for 2010, I got choked up. I looked at that amount and I was overwhelmed by its generosity and by my unworthiness to receive it. I determined that it should be my task for the coming year to “labor” to deserve your kindness.

Paul uses Scripture to support his directions to Timothy. First of all, he quotes from the Old Testament Book of Deuteronomy, chapter 21, verse 17...

**“You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,”**

Second, Paul quotes Jesus...

**“The laborer deserves his wages.”**

That’s a quote<sup>2</sup> from Jesus, recorded in Luke’s Gospel, chapter 10, verse 7, where Jesus commissions his disciples to go out and preach the Gospel without

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<sup>2</sup> This is either a quote from Luke’s compilation of Jesus’ teaching or a quote from an orally transmitted recollection of Jesus’ teaching.



taking any money with them because they were to be supported by those who received their ministry.

I really don't mind being compared to an ox. I certainly don't mind being compared to one of Jesus' disciples. Paul's point is that our work as pastors should feed us and that our work should be work. Paul calls it our "labor in preaching and teaching" and the word "labor" implies toil that makes us grow weary and I can honestly say that I feel that every week. Every Monday I wake up with the knowledge that I have to sow, water, cultivate and harvest a message from God's Word for you on Sunday morning. Every week, week in week out, good weather or bad weather, in season and out of season, I have to bring you the harvest of my study in God's Word. And if you don't think that is "labor," I challenge you try it some time. And I don't mean an occasional sermon when something hits you out of the blue. I mean every week, without fail.

As I thought about the pastors who've tread grain for me in the years before I became a preacher I have to say that I was deeply moved. In fact, I want to mention their names because I want to honour them. You won't know these people, but God will and I want to honour them before you and the angels of heaven...

**Ken Hall  
Herbert "Buddy" Arnold  
Norman Baird  
Harold Burchett  
Arnold McNeil  
Bill Crump  
Gerald Griffiths**

Through the miracle of the internet I was able to listen to a recent sermon by one of those men this week and the sound of his voice as he opened and applied God's Word brought tears to my eyes. I am thankful that they laboured in the Word and ground the grain for my spiritual bread. I honour them.

But the honour we're to give our spiritual leaders isn't absolute. No honour to any leader whether they are a spiritual leader, a civic leader or a family leader, no honour to any human being is ever absolute. The only absolute honour we owe is the honour we owe to God.

**Secondly...**

***We show Godly honour to our spiritual leaders...  
When we challenge them justly***

Paul wrote...



**<sup>19</sup> Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses.**

The list of pastors I read a few moments ago doesn't contain all the men who have been my pastor. There are two names intentionally absent. In both cases, they did not "rule well." (v.17) Ruth and I were in one church for less than a year, and the man who was pastor of that church was there for less time than we were. As I heard him preach, I heard heresy being taught and thankfully, the church leaders took action and removed him. In another church, serious allegations were raised against the pastor's ministry and he was removed. In both cases, in my opinion, the church acted rightly in dismissing these men. Both situations were difficult but, as I see it, neither of those men was ruling "well" nor were they labouring faithfully in the Word.

Paul lays out a standard of accountability for those in leadership and he lays out a process and some key principles for Timothy to follow. As I thought about Paul's instructions here my mind moved to the news that has been front and centre in our papers about sex abuse scandals in the Roman Catholic Church and I couldn't help but think that if Paul's instructions had been followed, the damage caused by those sexual predators who posed as pastors would have been significantly reduced.

First of all, Paul lays out a principle of evidence that ensures that a spiritual leader isn't frivolously accused of wrongdoing. The fact that Paul has to articulate this principle to Timothy tells us that smear campaigns against Christian leaders are as old as the church itself. But Paul's advice to Timothy is based upon a Word from God that is even older than the church of Jesus Christ. Smear campaigns have been around forever! They're as old as sin itself.

As Paul writes to Timothy there is an Old Testament Scripture that I'm sure fills his mind and guides his counsel. As I read it, I think you'll hear its echo in Paul's words to Timothy. From the Book of Deuteronomy, chapter nineteen, verses fifteen to twenty-one. Moses wrote...

**<sup>15</sup> "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. <sup>16</sup> If a malicious witness arises to accuse a person of wrongdoing, <sup>17</sup> then both parties to the dispute shall appear before the Lord, before the priests and the judges who are in office in those days.**

**<sup>18</sup> The judges shall inquire diligently, and if the witness is a false witness and has accused his brother falsely, <sup>19</sup> then you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother. So you shall purge the evil from your midst. <sup>20</sup> And the rest shall hear and fear, and shall never again commit any such**



**evil among you. <sup>21</sup> Your eye shall not pity. It shall be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.**

God hates a false witness! (Prov 6:16-19) Why? Because false witnesses pervert justice. The Word of God intends to create a culture of truth and justice and it does so partly by putting the fear of God into those who would bend and break the truth. And the principle of multiple witnesses isn't to be applied only to leaders; it's applied to everyone who is a member of God's household. Jesus said...

**<sup>15</sup> “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. <sup>16</sup> But 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. <sup>17</sup> If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”**

“Let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector” is New Testament language for “purge the evil from your midst.” It means that they are to be put out of the church.

Paul tells us that without proper evidence, we aren't even to “admit” the charge against a Christian leader. In other words, we aren't even to listen to it. Either the accuser produces the evidence, or “the meeting is over.” It's a clear application of the truism: “Either put up or shut up.”

But when the evidence is present, and the witnesses have been gathered, then, **thirdly...**

***We show Godly honour to our spiritual leaders...  
When we correct them publicly***

**<sup>20</sup> As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear.**

Notice that public correction is for those who “persist in sin.” In other words, just as Jesus outlined in Matthew chapter 18, these leaders have been approached one to one but they've refused to acknowledge their sin. Then they were approached with two or three witnesses but remained unrepentant. Only then was it brought to the church. Please understand that the first place that an accusation is to be brought against a fellow believer, whether a leader or not, is not to be the congregational meeting.

But when the evidence is present and when the process has been followed, we must show the courage necessary to bring the matter into the light of day. Henry Hildebrand, the founder of Briercrest Bible College, used to say...



**Private sin, private rebuke;  
Public sin, public rebuke.**

The word “rebuke” carries with it the idea of being exposed. If those predatory priests who are in the news today had been publicly exposed for their crimes against children, rather than shuffled from one parish to another, a healthy “fear” would have saved countless others from abuse. And it isn’t only the Catholic Church that needs to apply these principles. I read in the May issue of *Christianity Today* of a missionary boarding school in West Africa run by the Christian & Missionary Alliance where secrecy cloaked the most vile child abuse for many years.<sup>3</sup> But we need to understand that the purpose of public exposure isn’t only to punish wrongdoing, as just and necessary as that is; public exposure is intended to generate a healthy fear so that God’s people...

**“shall hear and fear and never again do any such wickedness as this among you.” Deuteronomy 13:11**

The process of correction is hard. It is fraught with spiritual danger. We need to guard our spirit as we enter into it. The Word of God says...

**“You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him.” Leviticus 19:17**

We need to be aware that those who lead in this process always pay a personal cost. We need to grab hold of God’s Word, we need to follow God’s guidance and stay the course of truth in obedience to God because it is so easy to pull back. It’s so easy to allow personal feelings and fear to enter into the process.

That is why Paul says to Timothy...

**<sup>21</sup> In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality.**

Remember: we’re talking about family, here. We’re talking about our brothers in Christ. These leaders who have gone off track are the people we’ve worshipped with for years. They’ve been our Sunday school teachers; our confidants; our worship leaders and counselors. They might even have led us to Christ! But regardless of our personal history with these brothers, Paul tells us, **fourthly**, that...

***We show Godly honour to our spiritual leaders...  
When we regard them impartially***

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/may/9.23.html> and  
<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/may/10.25.html>



Why is impartiality so important? Why is it so important that we not play favourites? What is it so important that we apply God's Word in the same way to everyone? Because God is impartial. Listen to these Scriptures...

**“For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe.”  
Deuteronomy 10:17**

**“You shall not be partial in judgment. You shall hear the small and the great alike. You shall not be intimidated by anyone, for the judgment is God's.” Deuteronomy 1:17**

**“Consider what you do, for you judge not for man but for the Lord. He is with you in giving judgment. Now then, let the fear of the Lord be upon you. Be careful what you do, for there is no injustice with the Lord our God, or partiality or taking bribes.” 2 Chronicles 19:6-7**

**“For God shows no partiality.” Romans 2:11**

Paul calls all heaven to Timothy's awareness as he challenges him to be impartial in his handling of accusations against the leaders of the church. And I think he does it because he knows that the only thing that will keep Timothy from being cowed by the fear of man is being gripped by the fear of the Lord.

Paul's word here about the fair-minded but thorough discipline of church leaders is the balance to his word about the generous thanks that we are to give our leaders. When we give honour without discipline we end up with the kind of church culture that fails to deal with wrongdoing by spiritual leaders and the testimony of the church to our faith in an impartial God is blunted. And when we discipline without honour, we end up with a church culture of demoralized leaders who are unable to courageously lead us to obey God's Word.

How do we keep from getting into this mess in the first place? I am thankful that I meet with a Deacons Board that helps to keep me on track. I'm thankful that I have fellow pastors who help to keep me track. I'm thankful for godly friends who help to keep me on track. I'm thankful for a godly wife who gives me wise counsel. Above all, I'm glad for the convicting power of the Holy Spirit (John 16:8) working on me through the Word of God (2 Tim 3:16) to teach me, rebuke me, correct me and train me in righteousness. And I'm thankful that I've only experienced the kind of correction Paul describes as an observer, not as the centre of attention. And I pray I never do.

But Paul's next word to Timothy also partially answers the question of how we keep from getting into this mess. He tells Timothy...



**<sup>22</sup> Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor take part in the sins of others; keep yourself pure.**

In other words, **fifthly...**

***We show Godly honour to our spiritual leaders...  
When we select them carefully***

I know of a pastor who planted a church from the ground up and led it in its growth to be a significant church within its denomination and in its city. Throughout his ministry, there was one man he intentionally kept out of the leadership of the church. He knew that this man did not have the character to be a trusted leader. However, when he retired from pastoral ministry, he was no longer able to stop this man from becoming part of the church's leadership team. Shortly after the founding pastor retired this man was elected into leadership by the congregation. Within just a very few years, the church had been split, reduced and rendered ineffective ... all because of that one man.

The "laying on of hands" was one of the ways in which leaders were publicly identified to the church (cf. Acts 6:6; 13:3) and it's a practice we still follow today. But before someone is publicly affirmed it is required that they be tested for their fitness to lead God's people. Earlier in this letter, Paul instructed Timothy to make sure that only proven people were appointed to spiritual leadership in the church (1 Tim 3:6-7, 10) and here he tells him one of the reasons why: "Timothy," Paul says, "if you don't show due diligence in testing someone before appointing them as a spiritual leader, you will be considered as sharing in whatever sin they commit while in office."

The word that is translated as "take part in" is the word we normally translate as "fellowship." To "fellowship" with someone is to partner with them and Paul warns Timothy that if he appoints untested men to leadership in the church, he will be a "partner" with them in whatever sins they commit as leaders. It's a joy to partner with people in ministry. You are partners with me in the preaching of the Word, with Norm in JOY Fellowship, with Paris in the Summer Ministry and with Andy in youth ministry. We are partners together with our missionary family around the globe. The way to keep our spiritual partnerships sweet is to select our partners carefully.

Paul's final word to Timothy on dealing with spiritual leaders is about the nature of the testing process that is to be applied to prospective leaders. He wrote...

**<sup>24</sup> The sins of some men are conspicuous, going before them to judgment, but the sins of others appear later. <sup>25</sup> So also good works are conspicuous, and even those that are not cannot remain hidden.**

The principle that Paul is establishing is that...

***We show Godly honour to our spiritual leaders...***



### ***When we evaluate them discerningly***

Proper evaluation of a person's spiritual character takes time. It takes different situations. It takes observing them at home; at work; in the church; at leisure. Some problems are easily seen; others take time to surface. Some strengths are quickly discerned; others take time to manifest themselves. But Paul's point to Timothy is simple: take the time you need! Seek discernment.

In another church in which I served there was a man who seemed to be very helpful to those in need. He and his wife often gave practical assistance to people in our church. One day, however, a woman who attended our church came to tell me that this man had sexually assaulted her in his home. As the church leadership tried to sort out the situation we met with both the woman and with the accused separately. She gave us her account of the event; he gave us his. We didn't know which way to go; the evidence was not clear. As we talked with the accused man I quietly asked the Lord for discernment. Within seconds the man made a statement that was clearly inconsistent with his earlier story and that inconsistency opened up the floodgate of truth. Much later I learned that this man had been accused of several similar acts in another church. God gives discernment when we pray and we need to pray for it as we seek leaders for his church.

You might have noticed that I skipped over a verse. Well, yes and no. I've left it for the last on purpose. In verse 23 Paul shifts his focus from Timothy's relationship with the spiritual leaders in the church to Timothy himself as a spiritual leader among God's people.

Paul wrote...

**<sup>23</sup> (No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.)**

Why does Paul shift his focus here? Well, let me ask another question. Why had Timothy decided to drink "only water"? I think Paul's shift in focus is connected to the word, "pure" at the end of verse 22. It's not because the water Timothy was drinking was pure. In fact, it probably wasn't and there's a good chance that impure water was the cause of Timothy's recurring stomach problem.

I think the word "pure" points us in the direction of the false teachers with whom Timothy was dealing in the church. Paul told us earlier in his letter to Timothy that these false teachers...

**"forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving..." 1 Timothy 4:3**



These false teachers practiced a form of extreme self-denial that is called asceticism and it is probable that one of the foods from which they required abstinence was wine. Timothy, under pressure from these false teachers, had abandoned a sensible, medicinal use of “a little wine” – and please notice, it’s “a little wine” for medicinal purposes -- because he didn’t want to appear unspiritual in the eyes of these spiritual extremists.

In order to “require abstinence,” these ascetics would have to set aside Scriptures such as Psalm 104, where the writer is clearly giving thanks to God when he wrote...

**“You cause the grass to grow for the livestock and plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food from the earth and wine to gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine and bread to strengthen man’s heart.” Psalm 104:14-15**

As Kent Hughes wrote...

*There are a thousand reasons to abstain: 1) the rampant alcoholism that devours whole families; 2) alcohol’s hazard to health as declared billions of times by the Surgeon General’s warning ... 3) the social evils that occur from the lessening of inhibitions—sexual crimes, felonies, traffic deaths; ... But these reasons aside, Timothy was abstaining for the wrong reason—asceticism, which could ensnare his soul.<sup>4</sup>*

Timothy was caving in to social pressure from a group of people who were out of step with God’s Word. He was caving in to the fear of man and the fear of man is a deadly snare to anyone who longs to live in the fear of God alone. Paul, dealing as he is with mature spiritual leadership in Timothy’s church, says to Timothy...

**Be a spiritual leader; live sincerely!**

In other words: Live according to your Biblical convictions; not the convictions of others. Don’t cave in to pressure. Don’t be a hypocrite. Stand strong in the fear of the Lord.

Does this connect with how we are to show honour to our spiritual leaders? Well, let me suggest that...

***We show Godly honour to our spiritual leaders...  
When we respect their integrity***

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<sup>4</sup>R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus : To Guard the Deposit.*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2000), 135.



You don't want a leader who caves in to the fear of man. You want a leader who has sincere, Biblically founded convictions, even if those convictions differ with yours on non-essential issues. You want a leader who tells you what he believes to be the truth according to God's Word and who lives those convictions with integrity. You want a leader whose only fear is the fear of not living according to the fear of the Lord.

***We show Godly honour to our spiritual leaders...***

- ***When we thank them generously***
- ***When we challenge them justly***
- ***When we correct them publicly***
- ***When we regard them impartially***
- ***When we select them carefully***
- ***When we evaluate them discerningly***
- ***When we respect their integrity***

Let's choose to be a church that honours God by honouring its leaders according to God's Word. Let's determine that in this church His will will be done, not ours; that His courage will be shown, not our fear; that His fairness will prevail, not our partiality.

And to God be all the glory! Amen.

- **Invitation to prayer ministry**
- **Final Song: "Today, I Choose"**
- **Benediction**