

Honor Elders

The nice thing about preaching through books of the Bible or expository preaching is you always know where you are going. The hard thing is you have to deal with everything the Lord has inspired to be written. This morning is one of the more difficult subjects for an elder to teach about. How a church body it to honor elders. How one lives in obedience to God's Word, handles money and gives honor are basic to our Christian beliefs and yet difficult to be consistent in. The relationship between Christ and His Church, both leadership and congregation is critically important. This morning we voyage into known waters where many have gone before and seek the calmness that comes from obedience to Christ and sail away from the storms of the world.

Honor as Worship

Last week we saw in Romans chapter 12 that everything in our lives is meant to be an act of worship; prayer, study of God's Word, marriage, how we perform our jobs, how we relate to other people, the sharing the gospel of Jesus and how we interact in our church community are all to be acts of worship that bring honor to Christ. As we return to 1st Timothy chapter 5, Paul instructed the proper attitude towards widows was to show them honor and encouraging older men was also important; caring for and showing proper respect and honoring others is to be spiritual worship before God. An important part of honoring widows is providing for their needs. The church is to provide for the needs of "true widows." Paul qualifies who true widows are and then his teaching concerning widows ends with, "Let the church not be burdened, so that it may care for those who are truly widows." (1 Timothy 5:16) In other words, the church is not to be burdened by

taking care of those who are not true widows; those who are able to be cared for by family. Thus, freeing the church to give its resources to take care of true widows.

It is only natural for Paul to move from honoring and caring for widows to honoring and caring for elders. Paul has already given the qualification for true elders in chapter 3. It is the church's responsibility to know whom true elders are by the standards given in the Bible. In context the proper respect of true elders is an act of worship meant to bring honor and by honoring elders a church honors Christ. Honoring elders as the leaders of Christ's church means providing for both their spiritual and material needs. This is the proper order within Christ's Church. Canyon Bible Church belongs to Christ and is made up of His people.

Christ is the only Head of the Church and elders serve under Christ to lead and serve the only thing Christ created while He was on this earth, His Church. The Church is the only institution that Jesus blessed and promised would exist throughout history, **"I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."** (Matthew 16:18) The Church was God the Father's plan before creation and the Church was birthed and redeemed by the work of the Son of God on the cross. The Church is empowered by the God Holy Spirit. The Church is the conduit through which God's truth and the saving gospel of Jesus Christ flows out into the sinful world.

The church is to live holy in order to bring honor to Christ and to allow the Holy Spirit to empower it to penetrate the kingdom of darkness. As we saw last week Paul instructed, **"For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; ⁴ that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, ⁵ not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God."** (1 Thessalonians 4:3–5) The Church cannot penetrate the darkness of sin if it is not holy. The church is not to live like the Gentiles. It is by living holy that

the Church, meaning Christians, draws people to the light of Christ. The Church is the visible form of Christ in this world. The Apostle Peter wrote of the Church, “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” (1 Peter 2:9) The ability of Christ’s Church to fulfill its calling to represent Christ to the world is dependent on its willingness to live the Scripture of God. A key factor in the Church’s understanding of its mandate and having vision to fulfill its calling is found in its leadership. Just as those now running for President are a reflection of our sin riddled society, the church is to be the opposite, Church leadership is to be the reflection of Christ. The problem in some churches is the leadership reflects the people and the world instead of the standards of the Bible. The Church’s ability to fulfill its call to glorify Christ is, to a large extent, dependent on the quality of its leadership.

The prophet Hosea wrote, “like people, like priest.” (Hosea 4:9) Rarely do churches rise higher than the level of their leadership. Leadership comes from within the people to be raised up as priests. The people have responsibility to raise up leaders that meet the qualifications of the Bible. God called Israel, as His chosen people, to be a shining example of holiness lived before the nations of the Middle East. Today Christ calls the Church to take the holy light of God out into the dark world, so that the world may know their desperate need for Christ. Therefore, the leadership of Christ’s Church is critical to each church fulfilling its command and commission given by Christ. Sadly the history of Israel, to a large extent, is one of failure of leadership. Israel’s leaders often were disobedient to the commands of God and slid into apostasy and this led the people away from God. Beginning early in the history of the Church the very same problems that plagued Israel and its leadership crept into the Church. Instruction to the church of proper order and worship was Paul’s purpose in writing this letter to Timothy.

Honor and Respect

Knowing the importance of leadership and its need to stay true to the Word of God, Paul writes Timothy, “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.”¹⁸ For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,’ and, ‘The laborer deserves his wages.’” (1 Timothy 5:17-18) Paul begins by continuing his thoughts laid out for widows - right biblical worship involves giving proper honor to elders who serve faithfully in the church. This was not unique to the Ephesian churches, for Paul wrote to the churches in Thessalonica, “We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you,¹³ and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work.” (1 Thessalonians 5:12–13) To respect, esteem and love elders that labor for the church is what God calls each member of the church to do. God’s will is for the church to care for their elders. Pastoring, which means to guide people in God’s truth, to steer them from harm, discipling people in God’s Word, counseling those who are struggling and preaching the Word is hard work and requires study, meditation and prayer. Paul says, he and the church must “Remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Thessalonians 1:3) My earthly father taught me to work hard and enjoy work. This laid the foundation for my heavenly Father’s calling me into ministry and to enjoy the hard work of being an elder and pastor. Fathers do you children a great blessing by teaching them to work hard and enjoy working. Christians are called to a life of hard work and further to enjoy their work as spiritual worship to the Lord. Your children and your children’s children are the future until Christ returns.

As we have seen both Paul and Peter were concerned with leadership and, so too, was the writer of the book of Hebrews, “Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate

their faith. ...¹⁷ Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.” (Hebrews 13:7 & 17) Elders are to work hard at preaching the “word of God” and the congregation it to “Obey your leaders and submit to them.” Paul says elders have the great responsibility of “keeping watch over your souls.”

Just as Paul clarified who are true widows Paul also clarifies which elders are worthy of honor. Paul wrote, “Let the elders who rule well.” To do one’s job well means to meet or exceed the standards for the job. If one fails to do their job well in the secular world it results in pay not being increased with experience. It can mean being dismissed and losing one’s job. The same is true with the job of an elder. In the secular if you perform your job well and the company does not recognize your good job this may lead to one finding a job with a company that does appreciate their hard work and is willing to compensate accordingly. We find satisfaction in a job well done and to be honest we desire that others would see our efforts and our results and appreciate them.

Honor Doubled

Paul says, “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.” (1 Timothy 5:17) So, elders are to be appreciated for their hard work. Those who labor in the preaching and teaching are “worthy of double honor.” What does this mean, “worthy of double honor?”

Honor is not just the respect one shows towards another, for in the Greek it also implies financial support. Could it mean that if an elder who works fulltime in ministry receives \$40,000 a year salary that the elder who spends his time in preparing and preaching and teaching the Word of God should be paid \$80,000?

Frankly, it could mean this. Or, is Paul referring to the Jewish practice of the eldest son receiving a double portion from his father's estate? The father "shall acknowledge the firstborn ... by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he is the firstfruits of his strength. The right of the firstborn is his." (Deuteronomy 21:17) This is possible, also. It could also simply mean showing greater honor and providing greater pay to the elder who works hard at preaching and teaching. The use of the word "honor" in this passage is similar to our English word "honorarium" which refers to the money given to someone to show honor for their service. As with almost everything in the scriptures the real issue is the condition of the heart. Some elders at the time of Paul as today served part-time and some full-time. Their honor or honorarium would naturally be different. Paul makes the point that those who labor in the preaching and teaching of God's Word are worthy of compensation for the time and energy in caring for, and teaching and shepherding a community. How an elder is compensated and cared for reveals the heart condition of those within the church.

Also, as was the custom at the time of Paul, money is not referred to directly, but indirectly in terms of honor, the right to eat and drink by ones work and you shall not muzzle the ox. Paul writes in this custom of not referring to money directly. Paul looks at the heart attitude that results in the way a church cares and pays their elders.

Some might argue that Paul was self-supporting and not paid by the church; this was true at times in his ministry, but it is also true that he gladly received support at other times, for example, as in Philippians chapter 4 beginning in verse 10. Canyon Bible has been a combination - my partly supporting myself, and the church partly supporting me. There is no hard and fast rule. Paul asks the question, is the laborer is worth his wages? Certainly no one argues against this in the secular job arena, so too, it should be true in the church. In fact, I would argue that it is the church that is

to set the standard for the secular world for what is true, and right. What message does the Church send to the world if their pastor lives in a way that makes it difficult to care for their family? Those who give their hard work to preach God's Word should be paid for it is their vocation. Paul dealt with this in some detail when he wrote the brethren in Corinth "Are not you my workmanship in the Lord? ... ⁴ Do we not have the right to eat and drink? ⁵ Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife ... ⁷ Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk?"

⁸ "Do I say these things on human authority? Does not the Law say the same? ⁹ For it is written in the Law of Moses, 'You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain.' Is it for oxen that God is concerned? ¹⁰ Does he not certainly speak for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop. ¹¹ If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you?"

¹³ "Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? ¹⁴ In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel." (1 Corinthians 9:4-5, 7-11, 13-14)
Paul made a concerted effort to help the brethren in Corinth understand their need to support and honor those called by God to serve them. The brethren in Galatia must have had a better grasp for Paul wrote simply, "The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches *him*." (Galatians 6:6)

Elders have the reasonability of ruling well. They have the oversight of the spiritual needs of the church. Paul wrote earlier, "It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires *to do*. An

overseer, then, must be above reproach...” (1 Timothy 3:1-2) Peter saw ruling well was a mixture of strong leadership and a servant’s heart. “Therefore, I exhort the elders ... ² shepherd the flock of God ... exercising oversight ... according to *the will of God*; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; ³ nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.” (1 Peter 5:1-3) Leading a church under the authority of Christ and submitting to the authority of God and His Word is a great responsibility. In fact God says the goal is, “Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.” (Hebrews 13:7) Who am I that people should imitate my life? This is a great burden of love and a great responsibility. You can ask my wife and children I am not always the man God calls me to – I fail at times. I think they would also say I do have a heart that desires to serve God and His people. What is it that Christ calls elders to be? I will direct you to the 4th chapter of 1st Timothy to read this coming week. An overview includes elders are to be good servants of Christ, be trained in the word of faith and good doctrine, live in spiritual faith, place their hope in the living God, command people to live God’s Word through preaching, be an example in their speech, conduct, love, faith and purity and the list continues. This is a great challenge to live up to, strive for and be held accountable to. It is what an elder strives for and desired because of his love of Christ and the people Christ has entrusted to him.

Paul uses both the words preaching and teaching. Why? Is there a difference? Yes, preaching proclaims the Word of God to those who will hear. Preaching calls people to obedience to Christ and the Bible as the authority for their lives.

Preaching is the proclamation of God’s Word. The prophet Isaiah wrote of God’s Word, saying, “So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” (Isaiah 55:11) Teaching may or may not be

preaching for its primary purpose is to instruct against heresy. How do we live the Word of God and how is it different from the way the world lives, and how does it apply to our daily lives. This can be done both through preaching and teaching.

Honor and Wages

Paul now brings his point of honoring elders home in verse 18, “For the Scripture says (*Paul is teaching as he just talked about*), ‘You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,’ and, ‘The laborer deserves his wages.’” Paul begins with, “For the Scripture says” to make the point what he is relating comes from God not man. First Paul quotes Moses from Deuteronomy “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain” which he also quotes in his letter to the Corinthians. (1 Cor. 9:9) The Old Testament law provided that the oxen that threshed the grain were entitled to eat of it. Because this was their right they were not to be muzzled to prevent them from eating. God was making sure the animals men use to provide their food were also fed. Paul is relating this principal to elders. If elders are working hard to provide spiritual food to their flocks, their needs are to be provided for by the flock.

Paul’s second quote in verse 18 is from Luke chapter 10 where Jesus said, “The laborer deserves his wages.” (Luke 10:7) There are two things to note here. First, some do not accept Luke writings; Gospel Accord to Luke and the Book of Acts as scripture because Luke was not one of the 12 with Jesus during His earthly ministry. However, Paul who was commissioned directly by Christ Himself here refers to the writing of Luke as Scripture. It is an example of one New Testament writer recognizing the authority of another writer. Secondly, Paul moves his command from the level of an animal to that of a servant. Both Moses in Deuteronomy 24:14-15 and James wrote concerning wages. James said, “Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud,

are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.” (James 5:4) It is not just a matter that the laborer deserves the wage for work done. Here once more, God through one of His inspired writers is making clear it is a heart issue.

Closing

How a church community honors their elders is spiritual worship before God. It is a heart issue; if that community loves God, it will love its elders, care for them with honor. Paul clearly is showing two things. An elder has a great responsibility to shepherd and care for the flock given to him by Christ and he is to work hard to care for them well. The congregation in turn is to graciously care for the elders Christ has given to them for their shepherd. Only God can give people a heart of flesh that is capable of this unselfish love for each other. Paul is calling us this morning to examine our hearts and to make them right before the Lord. The goal is to live with a heart like the heart of Christ. Are we striving for this? Are we improving in being more like Christ? This includes how we love, care for and pay our elders.

Next week we will examine what the scriptures says about protecting, rebuking and selecting elders.

Let me close our time this morning in prayer. Please gather and pray about the possible merger with First Baptist, pray for leadership to clearly see the will of God. Pray for the needs of our community.