

“HONOR HELD HIGH”

I TIMOTHY 5:17-20

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INTRODUCTION

God is Holy. God is honorable and has great dignity. God is a perfect Leader and an example to human leaders. Those who represent Him must reflect Him and must hold high the honor and dignity of their sacred office. Those who serve under God’s chosen servant-leaders must give these leaders the honor and dignity that they deserve. At the same time, they must hold their leaders to a high standard—a higher standard even than the ordinary believer. A church must never be quick to accuse its leader/s; it must always take the high ground and be confident of the strength and accuracy of any accusations brought against the man of God. However, if an accusation is shown to be accurate and the man of God does not repent and forsake his sin, he must be publicly rebuked for his sin and be properly disciplined—until he makes things right between himself and God and between himself and the congregation. A leader must be held in high honor, but must never abuse his position.

YOU MUST HONOR YOUR LEADERS AND SEE TO IT THAT THEY HOLD HIGH GOD’S HONOR.

The connection with 5:1-16 is fairly obvious:

- Paul had spoken about older men etc. in v. 1.
- He had discussed the honor and financial support due “widows indeed” in vv. 3-15.

“Elders” here does not simply mean “older men” as in v. 1; it refers as elsewhere to the spiritual leaders of the church—those called “overseers” in 3:2, 5 and both “elders” and “overseers” in Titus 1:5, 7. Paul had been appointing such elders in every church he established, as we see in Acts 14:23, as the congregation selected them based upon such qualifications given in I Tim. 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9.

This passage shows the church’s responsibilities toward their elders.

I. ELDERS MUST BE HONORED. (17-18)

A. All elders must be honored (implied with “double honor” for especially effective ones).

B. Elders who “govern/rule” effectively should receive “double honor.”

- The verb “rule over” was used of fathers in vv. 4, 12. Pastors do have authority and are to be followed by those put under their leadership.
- “Double honor” likely comes from the concept of the “double inheritance” given to the firstborn. It does not necessarily mean exactly double—but abundant, sufficient, more than the ordinary amount. But, what is this “honor”?
 1. It certainly includes the usual concept of honor.
 2. It also must include financial remuneration. Often such support has been called an “honorarium.”

C. Elders who “labor hard at teaching and preaching” should **especially** receive double honor.

- All elders are required to be able to teach (3:2); not all work as hard at it and are as effective as they should be.
- “Teaching and preaching” are the most important responsibilities of the pastor.
- This passage does not justify the frequently made distinction by Reformed, Presbyterian, and other groups between “ruling elders” and “teaching elders.”

- D. Elders must not be “muzzled” while they “thresh.” [Dt. 25:4; see I Cor. 9:9 where Paul also quotes the passage]
 - 1. The elder must be able to receive of the benefits of his own labor.
 - 2. The very illustration shows how hard and difficult the work is.
- E. “The laborer is worthy of his hire.” [his wages; see e.g. Lev. 19:13; Dt. 24:15—wages must be promptly paid]
 - The precise wording is found in Jesus’ saying in Luke 10:7—nowhere else!
 - Note that both passages are called “Scripture.”
 - Despite liberal critical dates putting this gospel later, Luke was likely completed by about 60 A.D.
 - Paul and Luke were close traveling companions—especially on his final trip to Jerusalem and then to Caesarea and the voyage to Rome and imprisonment there.
 - **This verse then gives us the first example of the NT being quoted along with the OT as authoritative “Scripture.”**

However, there is another way elders may be properly honored; they must not be lightly and carelessly accused of wrongdoing.

- II. ELDERS MUST NOT BE FALSELY ACCUSED (19)
 - A. Frivolous and unsupported accusations must be rejected.
 - B. The OT standard of 2 or 3 credible witnesses must be followed [Dt. 19:15; cf. Paul’s use of the verse also in II Cor. 13:1]; the leaders’ position is too important and too influential to be careless in this instance.
 - It is easy for the leader to make “enemies” in maintaining the purity of the church.
 - The high standards would find some resistance among “casual Christians.”

However, leaders also stumble and sin, and when they do they must give account.

- III. SINNING ELDERS MUST BE DISCIPLINED (20)
 - A. Sin Must be publicly rebuked.
 - 1. Such is necessary when sin is persisted in.
 - 2. Sin must be brought to light, exposed, and the sinner convicted of its wrong.
 - 3. Such is necessary when other attempts prove fruitless (Mt. 18:15-17).
 - B. The Purity of the Church must be protected—of both leaders and congregation.
 - C. The Fear of God must be promoted.

CONCLUSION

Elders, especially effective and hard-working ones, are worthy of high honor and sufficient remuneration. They also must be permitted to carry out their functions without unnecessary and frivolous distraction through worthless complaints and false accusations. However, if and when elders not only are shown to be guilty of either mismanagement or inappropriate living but also continue in such even after approached by others, they must be publicly rebuked in front of both the other elders and the entire congregation. Such will enforce the importance of godliness and will lead to godly fear.

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