

The Discipline of an Elder



1 Timothy 5:17-20 TEXT, EXPOSITION AND PRACTICAL HELPS

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BEHAVIOR AND RELATIONSHIPS IN THE CHURCH, [1 Timothy 3:14-6:21](#)

The Elders or Officials, [1 Timothy 5:17-20](#)

[\(1 Timothy 5:17-20\)](#) **Introduction:** this is a day in which the minister of God is being attacked not only by the world, but most unfortunately, by those within the church. The attackers are causing a loss of respect for Christ and a neglect, ignoring, abuse, and persecution of the ministry as has seldom been experienced in civilization. Because of this, ministers are being neglected when it comes to meeting their financial needs and quickly deserted when gossip and rumors swirl about their heads. Whether the rumors are true or not, few people care and are willing to support the minister of God. This passage deals with both subjects—critical subjects for our day.

1. **The honor and pay of an elder (v.17-18).**
2. **The discipline of an elder (v.19-20).**

[1. \(1 Timothy 5:17-18\) Elder— Minister, Financial Support: the church is to honor its minister—esteem, respect, acknowledge, and recognize him.](#)

He is to be held within the heart of the believer and held ever so closely, and he is to be esteemed ever so highly. In fact, note what Scripture says: he is to be "**counted worthy of double honor.**"

But note: there is a condition attached to honoring the minister. The minister to be honored is one who "**rules well.**" The word "**rule**" (*proistēmi*) is a general word meaning to oversee, supervise, and look after. The minister who is worthy of double honor is the minister who labors and labors and works and works. If he is to receive double honor then he must demonstrate a double commitment to Christ and the church.

Note also that the whole ministerial staff is covered by this charge. All the ministers of a church staff are to be counted worthy of double honor. But there is one minister who is singled out: the minister who labors in the Word and doctrine, that is, who preaches and teaches. It is he upon whom so much responsibility lies: he is the minister who takes the lead in edifying and building up the believer and the church. He is the one who has to spend hours on his face before God and in the Word in order to preach and teach—this in addition to taking the lead in all the other duties and ministries of the church. If he is a committed minister, a minister who labors and labors for Christ and works and works for the church, then he is worthy of double honor.

Now, one other significant fact. The word "**honor**" (*timē*) means more than just esteem and respect. It means to pay and bestow what is due. A minister is due an honorarium; he is due compensation, some pay, some wage for his labor. And, if he

performs his duty well—labors and labors and works and works—then he is due double honor. Is this to be taken literally? Is the church to pay him a double salary? A.T. Robertson states that there are "numerous examples of Roman soldiers who received double pay for unusual services" ([Word Pictures in the New Testament, Vol.4, p.588](#)). **One thing is sure: double pay means adequate, ample, sufficient, and generous financial support.**

The oxen used to grind out the corn is an example. In the East, oxen have been used to pull a millstone around and around over grain. The oxen was never muzzled. He was allowed to eat as much grain as he wished, for he was considered to have earned all the grain he wished. So it is to be with the minister of God. He is worthy of his labor. As he grinds and grinds away at the harvest of souls for God and His church, the minister is to be given more than enough financial support.

Thought 1. Scripture has already deplored money-grabbing ([1 Tim. 3:3](#)). God equally deplores inadequate compensation. The point is: if God ordained that working oxen should be cared for, how much more has He ordained the church to adequately care for the working minister!

"Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn" ([Deut. 25:4](#)).

"Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat" ([Matthew 10:9-10](#)).

"And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give: for the labourer is worthy of his hire. Go not from house to house. And into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you" ([Luke 10:7-8](#)).

"For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen?" ([1 Cor. 9:9](#)).

"Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel" ([1 Cor. 9:14](#)).

"Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward" ([1 Tim. 5:17-18](#)).

2. (1 Timothy 5:19-20) Minister— Elder: the discipline of an elder.

(When studying church discipline, the instructions of our Lord should always be studied. See [Matthew 18:15-20](#)) Matthew Henry gives an excellent exposition of [Matthew 18:19](#), an exposition that every minister should read:

"Here is the scripture-method of proceeding against an elder, when accused of any crime. Observe [it]. There must be an accusation; it must not be a flying

uncertain report, but an accusation, containing a certain charge, [and it] must be drawn up....

"This accusation is not to be received unless supported by two or three credible witnesses; and the accusation must be received before them, that is, the accused must have the accusers face to face, because the reputation of a minister is...a tender thing...therefore, before any thing be done in the least to blemish that reputation, great care should be taken [and] the thing alledged against him be well proved" (Matthew Henry's Commentary, Vol.6, p.825).

A very practical and warm exposition is also given by Oliver Greene:

"It is possible for even a godly, separated, God-appointed elder to commit sin....It is possible even for those who live very near to the heart of God to be caught off guard and commit sin that will bring shame and disgrace upon the church. But we are not to accuse an elder unless there are two or more witnesses to testify that the accusation is an accomplished fact. We should never repeat anything we hear about a minister, deacon, steward, elder, Sunday school teacher or any leader in the church. If we hear reports of evil, we should investigate in the right way, through the right people—and certainly we should not discuss the situation with unbelievers. It is very clear in [Matthew 18:19](#) that an elder must not be accused unless there are at least two or three witnesses who can prove the truth of the accusation" (The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to Timothy and Titus, p.202).

The discipline is clearly stated: the elder or minister is to be rebuked. The words "**before all**" most likely mean before all the elders rather than before the whole church (A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Vol.4, p.589). To go before the whole church would only add fuel to the flame of the immature and carnal believers within the church. It would make a public spectacle before the outside world. Such would naturally damage the church's testimony—even if an attempt was made to balance the damaged image by claiming disciplinary action.

Note that the point of the discipline is the correction of the sinning minister and the prevention of other ministers from sinning: that they may fear exposure and embarrassment.

William Barclay has an excellent exposition of this verse that merits being read by all ministers:

"Those who persist in sin are to be publicly rebuked. That public rebuke had a double value. It sobered the sinner into a consideration of his ways, and wakened him into a sense of shame; and it made others have a care that they did not involve themselves in a like humiliation. The threat of publicity is no bad thing, if it keeps a man in the right way, even from fear. A wise leader will know when there is a time to keep things quiet, and a time for public rebuke. But whatever happens, the Church must never give the world the impression that it is condoning sin" (The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon, p.135).

In conclusion, charges made against a minister or anyone else is one of the most serious acts that a person can do. Barclay states it as well as it can be stated:

"This would be a happier world, and the Church would be a happier Church, if people would realize that it is nothing less than a sin to spread and to repeat stories about people of whose truth they are not, and cannot be, sure. Irresponsible, slanderous and malicious talk does infinite damage and causes infinite heartbreak, and such talk will not go unpunished by God...." (The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon, p.135f).

"Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican" ([Matthew 18:15-17](#)).

"Then said he unto the disciples, It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe unto him, through whom they come! It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones. Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him" ([Luke 17:1-3](#)).

"Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear" ([1 Tim. 5:20](#)).

"Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" ([2 Tim. 4:2](#)).

"This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith" ([Titus 1:13](#)).

"These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee" ([Titus 2:15](#)).

"A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject" ([Titus 3:10](#)).