

Approving and reproving church leaders

What do we mean by elders? Elders doesn't necessarily mean the elderly, although it can. Elderly people should be honoured and treated with respect. However, when we're talking about elders in the church we're referring to church leaders, including the pastor. Now, treating someone with respect doesn't mean that we put them on a pedestal and almost worship them. There's far too much Pastor worship going on in the church these days with pastors, also now called by various titles, elevating themselves to be honoured in ways beyond the stipulations of Scripture, and even in ways that Jesus didn't expect to be honoured. Honouring an elder gives them the recognition and encouragement that they're due without elevating them beyond their worth.

1 Timothy 5:17-25 The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.¹⁸ For Scripture says, "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain," and "The worker deserves his wages."¹⁹ Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses.²⁰ But those elders who are sinning you are to reprove before everyone, so that the others may take warning.²¹ I charge you, in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, to keep these instructions without partiality, and to do nothing out of favouritism.

²² Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure.

²³ Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses.

²⁴ The sins of some are obvious, reaching the place of judgment ahead of them; the sins of others trail behind them.

²⁵ In the same way, good deeds are obvious, and even those that are not obvious cannot remain hidden forever.

1) Elders who serve well

- 1 Timothy 5:17-18 The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. For Scripture says, "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain," and "The worker deserves his wages."
- In what ways do elders direct the affairs of the church well?
 - Diligent spiritual oversight
 - Servant leadership
 - Teaching that's faithful to the Word of God
 - Shepherding and caring for the members
 - Developing leaders through discipleship
 - Faithful in prayer
 - Biblical discipline and restoration
 - Godly character
- Elders ought only to be elected as elders if they match the requirements of eldership.
 - These requirements are laid out in Scripture and the church needs to watch a person's life before they elect them as elders
 - The elders who already hold that position need to be faithful in continuing the lifestyle and practices worthy of that office.
 - When they do that well, they are the worthy of honour.
- Sometimes someone can be given the position of an elder, but then not fulfil his obligations that he had promised to fulfil.
 - He might not care for the members who need care – spiritual, emotional, or material support
 - He might not be faithful in prayer for the members of the church
- So, it's not necessarily that they sin, but just don't direct the affairs of the church well.
- How then should those who direct the affairs of the church well be honoured?
 - Double honour means financial support - The worker deserves his wages.
 - Respect – treat the person with appropriate value and worth.
 - Submit to their authority
 - Hebrews 13:17 Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.

- Pray for them
 - Ephesians 6:19 Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel.
- Use your gifts to serve the church
 - Ephesians 4:11-13 So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

2) Reproving elders who sin

- 1 Timothy 5:19-21 Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses. But those elders who are sinning you are to reprove before everyone, so that the others may take warning. I charge you, in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, to keep these instructions without partiality, and to do nothing out of favouritism.
 - Church leaders are people who sometimes mess up. They're not perfect. However, there are right and wrong ways to deal with leaders who've sinned.
- How to deal with a leader who has sinned?
 - Be sure that the leader has sinned and that it isn't merely a false accusation against the person
 - There needs to be two or three witnesses who will be able to verify what the person has done.
 - This is to avoid mere slander by someone who has a personal grudge against a church leader and attempts to bring his name into disrepute by saying that he's done something that he hasn't done.
 - However, if the elder has sinned, then he needs to be reprov'd / rebuked.
 - Paul tells us "to reprove before everyone, so that the others may take warning."
 - This is referring to an ongoing sin that the elder hasn't repented of.
 - Prior to public rebuke the steps of discipline as outlined by Jesus in Matthew 18: 15 – 17 should be adhered to
 - Matthew 18:15-17 "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. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ 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.
 - Don't show favouritism or partiality when disciplining a church leader
 - Don't prejudge the person before you know all the facts.
 - Don't be lenient on an elder because of his position or influence.
 - Some sins are obvious, whilst others are done in secret, but will eventually come out into the open.
 - 1 Timothy 5:24-25 The sins of some are obvious, reaching the place of judgment ahead of them; the sins of others trail behind them. ²⁵ In the same way, good deeds are obvious, and even those that are not obvious cannot remain hidden forever.
 - Both have a negative influence and affect on the church and need to be dealt with decisively.

3) Watch your own life

- 1 Timothy 5:22-23 Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure. Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses.
- Paul is exhorting Timothy not to overlook the sins of elders and then merely lay hands on them to bless them when they need a rebuke so to share in their sinfulness.
- We need to watch our own lives closely so that we remain pure before God and don't sin or be hypocrites by dealing with the sins of others while sinning ourselves
- Before dealing with someone else's sin, make sure that we are blameless ourselves
- Paul is also concerned about the physical wellbeing of the leader.
 - Don't be so spiritual that we don't concern ourselves with their physical, mental, and emotional health.