

“The Sinning Elder”  
1 Timothy 5:19-25  
(Preached at Trinity, September 12, 2021)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Beginning with **Verse 17** Paul returns to the subject of pastors within the local church. The church's ability to carry out its ministry is humanly dependent upon the quality of its leadership. And the health of each individual member rests upon the quality of the teaching they receive.
  2. Paul commands the church in **Verses 17-18** to give adequate support to their pastors who labor well for they are worthy of double honor.  
There are a couple dangers that could come from this teaching.
    - a. By instructing the church as to their duty towards their pastors there is always danger that some men will take advantage of the church. Paul guards against this by giving strict qualifications for those receiving their salary from the church. They must be proficient in ruling the church and labor hard in teaching the church.
    - b. The other danger in charging the church to give double honor was the risk of elevating these men above accountability or correction. Pastors are not above correction by the church.
  3. In these verses Paul instructs the church on how to handle cases where the elder has committed sin. This is important in the context of this letter. There were elders who were teaching false doctrine. The church would need to act firmly in correcting these erring pastors. Paul writes in **Chapter 1:3** - "As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines"
- I. The first matter of concern is in protecting the innocent – **Verse 19**
- A. The Bible places great emphasis upon protecting the innocent
    1. Earthly justice will always be imperfect. God would rather a guilty man go free than for an innocent man to be punished. Perfect justice will be rendered in the end as all come before the judgment seat of Christ.
    2. There are many safeguards. For example, there must be valid witnesses. There were serious consequences for bearing false witness.  
**Deuteronomy 19:15-20 NAU** - "A single witness shall not rise up against a man on account of any iniquity or any sin which he has committed; on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed. <sup>16</sup> "If a malicious witness rises up against a man to accuse him of wrongdoing, <sup>17</sup> then both the men who have the dispute shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges who will be *in office* in those days. <sup>18</sup> "The judges shall investigate thoroughly, and if the witness is a false witness *and* he has accused his brother falsely, <sup>19</sup> then you shall do to him just as he had intended to do to his brother. Thus you shall purge the evil from among you. <sup>20</sup> "The rest will hear and be afraid, and will never again do such an evil thing among you."

- B. Pastors are to be protected from false accusations.  
Pastors will often be the targets of complaints and sometimes accusations
1. The nature of preaching sometimes necessitates correction and rebuke.  
**2 Timothy 4:2 NAU** - "preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction."  
This can be a dangerous work. Not all will receive preaching.
    - a. Some will resent correction
    - b. Some resist biblical authority.  
**2 Timothy 4:3-4 NAU** - "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but *wanting* to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, <sup>4</sup> and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths."
  2. It is hard to receive instruction from a mere man.  
Aaron and Miriam resented the teaching and leadership of Moses.  
**Numbers 12:2 NAU** - "Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us as well?"
  3. The pastor is a public figure. Public figures are often the objects of criticism. Do you join in the criticism of the President or other public leaders? How often do you hear others criticize them? What do you do when you hear these criticisms?
  4. Sometimes the pastor will be the object of a false accusation
    - a. False accusations are an instrument of Satan.  
Devil - διάβολος – accuser, slanderer
    - b. Many ministries have been destroyed by a false accusation.
      - (1) The accusation is made and a reputation is destroyed, often without any basis of truth.
      - (2) A pastor's ministry is based on trust – that trust is built upon his integrity, credibility, and personal purity.  
If successfully attacked his ministry can be ruined. This is especially true today when we've become accustomed to our "cancel culture" and where slander on social media is accepted behavior.
  5. John Calvin: "none are more exposed to slanders and insults than godly teachers. This comes not only from the difficulty of their duties, which are so great that sometimes they sink under them, or stagger and halt or take a false step, so that wicked men find many occasions of finding fault with them; but added to that, even when they do all their duties correctly and commit not even the smallest error, they never avoid a thousand criticisms. It is indeed a trick of Satan to estrange men from their ministers so as gradually to bring their teaching into contempt. In this way not only is wrong done to innocent people whose reputation is undeservedly injured, but the authority of God's holy teaching is diminished."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John Calvin, *The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon*, Calvin's Commentaries, (Edinburgh, Oliver and Boyd, 1964), 263.

- D. The pastor's protection – "Do not receive an accusation against an elder"
1. This command is to each member of the church.
  2. Not only must we not make an accusation.  
We must not receive the accusation.  
"Receive" - παραδέχομαι – receive; accept, acknowledge
  3. Unsubstantiated allegations are to be ignored. This is the nature of all gossip. We must not be guilty of speaking it or receiving it.
  4. Idle gossip and negative talk must be rebuked.
  5. This, however, does not mean that pastors are above legitimate accusation. Elders are to be protected from false accusations, but they are not immune from true accusations.

## II. Dealing with the guilty

- A. This was very important instruction for Timothy to receive
1. There were elders in the church who were teaching false doctrine.  
They had to be confronted – even openly before the church.
  2. To allow them to continue in their sin would have brought great harm to the church.
  3. Paul sets forth certain criterion in dealing with elders in sin.
- B. **V. 19** – He affirms God's standard of "two or three witnesses." This is necessary before the charge is even considered.
1. There is a difference between illegitimate and legitimate accusations.
  2. All of this is dealing with public accusations – it should always be proper to respectfully approach the pastor privately with a problem.
- C. **Verse 20** – There are consequences to sin.
1. The pastor should be held to the same accountability as any other church member. If he sins and refuses to repent he must be publicly rebuked.
    - a. Notice it must be an ongoing sin without repentance  
"Those who continue in sin" – a present active participle.
    - b. The sins of the church's leaders are more serious. They are more public and bring greater reproach to the church.  
**1 Timothy 3:7 NAU** - "And he must have a good reputation with those outside *the church*, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil."
    - c. With greater responsibility comes greater accountability  
**James 3:1 NAU** - "Let not many *of you* become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment."
  2. The method of correction – "rebuke before all" – "all" refers to the congregation, not just the elders
    - a. This implies public sin. Public sin in the ministry has an impact upon the whole church. Repentance must be before the entire church.

- b. In severe cases his ministry is forfeited – particularly involving sexual sin - Repentance in this case is not the only issue – he is no longer blameless.  
**Proverbs 6:32-33 NAU** - "The one who commits adultery with a woman is lacking sense; He who would destroy himself does it. <sup>33</sup> Wounds and disgrace he will find, And his reproach will not be blotted out."
          - c. It is wrong to allow him to resign privately only to continue elsewhere.
          - d. If churches would maintain high standards for ministers unqualified men would be removed and credibility restored to the ministry.
        - 3. The purpose – “that others also may fear”
          - a. This refers to the other elders as well as the whole congregation.  
**See Deut. 13:6-11**
          - b. The ultimate purpose is to maintain purity within the local church.
- D. Exhortation to maintain this purity – **Verse 21**
  - 1. All of heaven is watching – we must maintain these principles of holiness and maintain high standards.
  - 2. Without partiality – without prejudice. Without effort to protect the popular or specially gifted.
  - 3. We must maintain purity at all costs
- III. Preventing Unqualified Ministers - “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure”
- A. **Verse 22** – "Do not lay hands upon anyone *too* hastily"
    - 1. I’ve heard some say this verse could refer back to **Verse 19** – do not receive an accusation too quickly. Do not lay the hand of condemnation too quickly.
    - 2. More likely, it refers to ordination
      - a. This laying on of hands was spoken of in 1 Tim. 4:14.  
**1 Timothy 4:14 NAU** - "Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery."
      - b. We are not to be quick to ordain (both pastors and deacons).  
**1 Timothy 3:6 NAU** - "not a new convert"  
**1 Timothy 3:10 NAU** - "These men must also first be tested"
      - c. There must be a thorough and honest evaluation.
    - 2. To ordain too soon is to share in their sin – “partaker of other men’s sins.”  
κοινωνέω – literally to come into fellowship with their sins.
  - B. A parenthetical note – **Verse 23**  
This verse may seem out of place, but it brings clarity to Paul’s call to maintain purity among the leadership in **verse 22**.
    - 1. Some of the elders in Ephesus were pressing an unbiblical ascetism. Perhaps they had been ordained too quickly. Those who ordained them had to bear some responsibility for their sin.

2. Apparently, Timothy had committed himself to total abstinence from wine. Was he falling prey to the unbiblical ascetism pressed by these false teachers?
    - a. Paul had already given instructions regarding the consumption of wine in the context of the officers of the church.  
Elders – “not addicted to wine” – **1 Tim 3:3**  
Deacons – “not addicted to much wine” – **1 Tim 3:8**
    - b. Wine abstinence was not a requirement for office bearing, but drinking in excess was strictly forbidden.
    - c. There were certain sects such as the Essenes who forbid wine altogether. Some denied wine for ascetic reasons. Timothy may have been influenced by these groups. Paul is telling him don’t be so strict as to deny its medicinal qualities.
    - d. Wine was often used to aid stomach ailments. Red wine contains polyphenols that increase healthy microbes in the stomach. Hippocrates, Pliny, and Plutarch all spoke of its value.
  2. The things we allow or refuse must never become religious acts without reason. Paul is not asking Timothy to lower his standard – only to use it wisely and consistent with the teaching of Scripture.
- C. Principles concerning the selection process – **Verses 24-25**
1. "The sins of some men are quite evident, going before them to judgment"
    - a. Some men are obviously unfit to serve as elders.  
Their sins precede them.
    - b. Those who are deemed unfit should not be considered.
  2. "for others, their *sins* follow after."  
Some sins are not evident before-hand but discovered upon examination.
    - a. A man wishing to enter the ministry must be carefully examined.
      - (1) direct questions must be asked – questions of doctrine.  
Their life and behavior must be examined.
      - (2) More importantly, like the prospective deacons, the elder candidates must be tested, proved  
**1 Timothy 3:10 NAU - "These men must also first be tested"**
    - b. Some sins are open, others are hidden. A man must be proved to show a consistent pattern of purity.
    - c. We must not fear to reject a man from ordination.
  3. "Likewise also, deeds that are good are quite evident"
    - a. They are well known for their faithfulness both inside the church and outside.
    - b. Their qualifications for office are self-evident.
  4. "and those which are otherwise cannot be concealed."
    - a. It is easy to put on a façade for a season but you can’t hide forever.
    - b. By being cautious about laying hands on a man much harm to the church can be avoided. His disqualifying sins will not be concealed indefinitely.

5. It also points to the fact that God knows all.
  - a. Some sins are open for all to see and the church must deal with them. Some sins are hidden and few are aware of them – but God knows. They cannot be concealed from Him.  
No man should think he has gotten away with sin.
  - b. Likewise, some good deeds are open for all to see, and the Church should give honor where honor is due.  
But there are some good deeds that will never been noticed.  
They have never been appreciated, never thanked, never praised, never valued – always taken for granted. No man should ever be disappointed or embittered. God sees and knows all. God will repay.

**Conclusion:**

1. The church must take seriously the importance of its leadership. The pastors are given to the church for its edification. But the pastors must be held to a high standard.
2. The pastors are God's anointed servants. It is a devilish deed to falsely accuse.
  - a. Good pastors must be protected.
  - b. But those who sin must be held accountable. The church must maintain its purity.