



Ruling Elders

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 Timothy 5:17-18, KJV 1900)

On occasion Scripture uses "elder" with reference to older people. However, and particularly in Paul's and Peter's letters, the word appears to be used to refer to the minister or pastor specifically. I believe that is the case with our present study passage. Not only do these men labor in the church, a work common to both pastors and deacons, but they labor in the word and doctrine, far more a description of the minister or pastor.

The first element that Paul surfaces regarding these men, and their work in the church, deals with their "rule." Yes, they do rule. There is a leadership role for them to fill, and Paul here requires that it be respected by Timothy and by the church itself. I will offer two passages that define the correct nature of a preacher's "rule" in the church.

The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. (1 Peter 5:1-3, KJV 1900)

Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation. Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever. Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein. (Hebrews 13:7-9, KJV 1900)

Based on Peter's words, the elder is to rule, to take oversight of the local, individual church that he serves "...not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. Let's break this condensed and highly instructive passage down into simple points.

1. His "oversight" is limited to "...the flock of God which is among you..." to one

church. No preacher can claim any New Testament authority to impose his influence on anyone outside the church where he serves as pastor. When a pastor tries to usurp (claim more than he is entitled to) authority over all the churches in a region, he becomes something far beyond what Scripture describes as his godly and Biblical role. He has just set himself up in competition with the Lord of the church, who alone can righteously take the title and role of "...head over all things to the church." (Ephesians 1:22) Inevitably any such attempt will end with devastation to the man and to the churches who submit themselves to this domineering man.

- 2. His oversight is to be carried out "...willingly..."** He is not to act as an unwilling and rebellious preacher, a Jonah. I've heard people say that we must all go to "Jonah School." I disagree. The only man who went to "Jonah School" failed graduation. Look at the closing verses of the Book of Jonah. The book ends with Jonah, isolated and mad at God, hardly an honorable outcome of his experience.
- 3. His rule or "oversight" is not to be implemented "...by constraint."** That is, he is not to lead or rule over the church by coercion, by "constraining" the people to do things his way by force of any kind. He may not use physical force, but the force of bullying, intimidating words is no less an ungodly "force" and violation of this passage than if he required people to do his biddings on threat of physical harm.
- 4. His rule is not to be based on money, on "...filthy lucre..."** The motive for his oversight is not to be for money or for any other personal gain, for that matter. To see what gross violation of this principle really looks like, just watch TBN for a while. You'll see smooth charlatans playing the angles to separate their listeners from their money. The man in the pulpit need not be so offensive or blatant, but his motive cannot be his personal gain. If we apply Jesus' primary discipleship rule of conduct, self-denial, to the preacher, the man is thereby

required to serve others and to serve God, but never to serve his own personal interests for gain. We have a powerful example of the depth of this sin in Jesus Himself. He entered the temple, supposedly a place for worship, and discovered money-changers, making profits from worshippers. Our Lord reacted with righteous anger and threw them out! So what are we missing when we either follow the money-changers or even when we tolerate them?

5. **His oversight is to grow out of "...a ready mind."** Interestingly, Peter juxtaposes this attitude to "filthy lucre." Rather than ruling for money, he is to fulfill his preaching, pastoral assignment willingly, joyfully, and always ready to serve, not weigh the angles by which he can coerce others to do what he wants them to do.
6. **And, finally, his oversight is to avoid any appearance or substance of being "...lords over God's heritage." Instead he is to take this oversight, to rule, by example, by "...being ensamples to the flock."** His life is to lead by imitating His Lord, and those who follow him are to do so by first testing and then by following his good example. They are always to be wise, and Biblically informed "Bereans." (Acts 17:11)

If we build our expectations—and our requirements—of a preacher or pastor on these qualities, fully and consistently demonstrated in the man's life, Paul in our study verses directs us to give such a man "double honor." He is to be respected. We are to listen to him and to work at following his godly example in our personal conduct.

Now let's notice a few major points from the second passage.

1. **Those who rule over God's children in the church "...have spoken unto you the word of God."** They are to be "remembered." We are to be mindful of them, not politely ignore them. Why? The content of their lives and of their preaching is the word of God, not their private opinions or privately "revealed" ideas. They and others who preach "...the word of God" preach the same message.
2. **...whose faith follow.... We are to follow, to imitate, their faith.** Faith in the New Testament at times refers to a specific body of core beliefs regarding God and His government of His children, often appearing in the text of Scripture as "the faith." However, particularly when "faith" appears as something to be followed, a way of life, the word identifies a comprehensive

lifestyle, a "worldview," if you please. The man here to be remembered and followed leads by example; we are to follow his faith, not his private opinions in blind, mindless, lock-step compliance with his every desire or command.

3. **This obedience to the man's faith, not his ego, constantly emphasizes the ultimate outcome of his behavior.** "...*considering the end of their conversation. Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.*" If the outcome of a man's "conversation," his whole lifestyle, not just his words, leads his followers anywhere other than the one objective mentioned—Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever—the man is not leading Biblically, and no one should follow him.
4. **The man's preaching and teaching will affirm sound, Biblical teachings, and doctrines, not whims and fads aimed at human success.** *Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines.* The question for every preacher and for every church is not "What works?" but "What does God teach us in Scripture?"
5. **The man's lifestyle, his example, will impact his hearers to the depth of their heart.** *For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein.* Notice the contrast between a heart, established, stabilized and anchored in grace and a heart that is swayed and moved by personal gain, by "profit" to the man who leads.

In these two passages, we have a world of instructive New Testament teaching by which we may evaluate ourselves, as well as those with whom we interact. Only those who "rule well" are to be blessed with double honor, with godly respect for them and for their righteous example that we are to worthily follow, for it is in fact the Lord's example.

For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward.

This honor clearly includes financial support, the ox feeding from the grain that he treads out, but we should not limit it to finances by any means.

This verse reveals something quite enlightening for our study. "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox..." appears in Deuteronomy 25:4, the last book written by Moses, Old Testament. However, "The labourer is worthy of his reward" comes from Luke 10:7. In this verse, Paul recognizes both Moses, Old Testament, and Luke, New Testament, by one highly respected term, **Scripture**. In Romans 6:14, Paul writes, "...for ye are not under the law, but under grace." God gave the whole of the Mosaic

Law to His people in the Old Testament. He did not intend that all of its rites and directed behaviors apply to all people in all times. However, being now under the New Testament, defined and described as “grace,” the rule of life that we are to follow, appears in the writings of the New Testament. In this New Testament, we often find specific principles from the Old Testament that New Testament writers cite and interpret so as to apply to us in the here and now of our conduct. In this case, both Moses, in principle, and Luke specifically make similar logical points. They agree. The ox does not tread out the grain for his personal food, but for the benefit of another. In this way, the laboring ox in the threshing floor beautifully depicts the spirit of the New Testament’s gospel ministry. We are to view what we preach as food, but it is food for the benefit of others, not a vehicle to gain for ourselves. And, based on this teaching, those who are blessed by such a ministry are taught to support the “ox” in his labors, so that he can labor all the more for their spiritual instruction.

Once in my ministerial youth, I was shocked to hear an older, seasoned preacher, on the golf course no less (one of about five or six times I ever tried to play golf), say, “The church is to support me with its finances, so that I can study and preach. It is the deacons’ responsibility to visit the sick and those in need in the church.” I wanted to say—but resisted because of my “junior status” with this man, “Then what are you doing out here on the golf course? You need to be practicing what you preach.” True enough, the minister is to study and maintain insightful and fresh knowledge of Scripture from which he preaches and teaches the people, but he no less must visit and minister to the people in their times of need.

Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord:
(James 5:14 KJV)

Do not miss two points in this verse. When someone in the church is sick, he/she is to “...call for the elders of the church...” Hmm, this takes the man off the golf course, doesn’t it? Also, notice the first point, “Is any sick among you?” When a church member becomes sick or faces a personal need, he/she is not to presume that the preacher is all-knowing. **He only knows your need if you call him and ask him to come and minister to you.** And when they call, preachers, God requires us to go and to minister to those under our charge who need our spiritual and personal support.

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church
16434 Woodruff
Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor