



1 Timothy 5:17-25

Thanks again to those of you who were able to attend last Sunday's congregational meeting. We gave a financial report, like we always do, but unlike our annual meeting, we did not have to approve the budget. Thankfully, the Lord has allowed us to increase our budget every year over the past twelve years so that ministry could continue to grow and expand. We always have some good discussion related to the budget and good and helpful questions are put forth, but I have never heard anyone ask this simple question: "Why do we pay a pastor at all? I mean, I know some churches who don't believe in pastors and they save a lot of money."

Most of us are familiar with churches that have at least one full-time pastor but some of you have been part of a church that really did not believe in pastors. They were convinced that paying a pastor went against the teaching of Scripture. This passage in 1 Timothy chapter five will answer this question and others, such as "What do you do if an elder goes astray?" Our state and federal governments have recall elections for bad politicians, but is there any similar process for local church elders? Elders have a lot of responsibility and authority and it would make sense to have some way of holding them accountable.

In these nine verses, Paul answered several questions related to the topic of elders and I have therefore titled this message, Dividends, Discipline and Discipleship.

17 Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. 18 For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer deserves his wages." 19 Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. 20 As for those who persist in sin,

rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear. 21 In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality. 22 Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor take part in the sins of others; keep yourself pure. 23 (No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.) 24 The sins of some people are conspicuous, going before them to judgment, but the sins of others appear later. 25 So also good works are conspicuous, and even those that are not cannot remain hidden.

With a single word—honor—the position that pastors are not to be paid is put to rest. Last week we saw that families and the church were to “honor widows” (5:3) which clearly meant to provide for their needs. In verse 17 we are instructed to *Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.* In the case of widows and certain elders, *honor* was clearly the provision of material goods.

Here are two more important verses on the subject.

1 Corinthians 9:14—*In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.*

Galatians 6:6—*Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches.*

I don't think I need to belabor the point about the Biblical basis of paying a pastor since I would be preaching to the choir on this one, though I probably should emphasize the part about “double honor.” I have always thought that meant that you should double the salary of your pastor. And

should you decide not to pay me at all, I would end up like this guy.



In all seriousness, I am so thankful to make my living from the gospel. It is a true privilege to serve as your pastor.

I do want to spend a few minutes talking about the two verses that Paul cited in this passage to support his position.

For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,” and, “The laborer deserves his wages.”

The first Scripture is taken from

Deuteronomy 25:4—*You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain.* This is not at all surprising since Paul quoted hundreds of times from the Old Testament, especially from Deuteronomy, Isaiah and the Psalms. But the next citation is noteworthy. “*The laborer deserves his wages.*” is found in Luke 10:7—*And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages.* These are obviously the words of Jesus but the amazing thing to note is that BOTH Deut. 25 and Luke 10 are called “the Scriptures!”

1 Timothy 5:18	“the Scriptures”
<i>You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain.</i>	Deuteronomy 25:4 <i>You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain.</i>
<i>The laborer deserves his wages.</i>	Luke 10:7 <i>And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages.</i>

For Paul and other New Testament writers, the word Scripture was used in the same way that you and I use it—it refers to the revealed word of God and almost always means the Old Testament. Long before Jesus’ earthly ministry, there was a collection of inspired books that we now refer to as the Old Testament but Jesus, Paul and others referred to it as Scripture .It was also called by its various components, like The law and the prophets, but either way, the canon of Scripture was a collection of inspired books. Like the famous passage in 2 Timothy 3:16, which we will get to in coming months, “All Scripture is breathed out by God.” It is the very word of God.

But almost as a passing thought, Paul placed the words of Jesus firmly into the category of “Scriptures.” The linking of Old Testament Scripture with New Testament Scripture was earth shattering because you don’t simply add to the Scripture any time you want. Scripture was the inspired word of God and Paul, more than anyone else, would never have used this word unless he really meant it.

Now it might make sense to you that the words of Jesus would have risen to the level of Scripture. After all, Jesus is God and therefore Jesus’ words would have been the very word of God, right? But Peter did the same thing with Paul’s letters.

*And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, 16 as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do **the other Scriptures** (2 Peter 3:16-17).*

Again, almost in a matter of fact way, Peter placed the writings of Paul on the same plane as “the other Scriptures.” Neither Paul, when referring to Jesus’ words nor Peter when referring to Paul’s writings, made a big deal about this, which actually makes it a really big deal. Here’s what I mean. Since Paul linked Deuteronomy and the words of Jesus as Scripture, he could have taken the time to explain why he was doing this. Paul is very verbose and likes to explain things so had he wanted to, he could have taken a full chapter to explain it all. He could have taken an entire book to explain it all but the fact that he didn’t tells me that it was just an accepted fact by that time. Paul’s main point was that elders can be paid. He did not set out to give an explanation about the canon of Scripture. It did not need to be explained because everyone already understood it as fact. Jesus words were part of Scripture and by the time Peter wrote his second letter, Paul’s writings were also considered to be part of Scripture. This is extremely important because some people talk about the Bible as if a bunch of old white guys got together one day

and decided what was in and what was out but the writers of Scripture themselves told us what was part of Scripture. This should give us even more confidence in the reliability of the Scriptures.

But Paul was concerned about more than making sure that pastors got a paycheck. What he wrote next had to do with what happened if an elder was sent astray.

19 Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. 20 As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear.

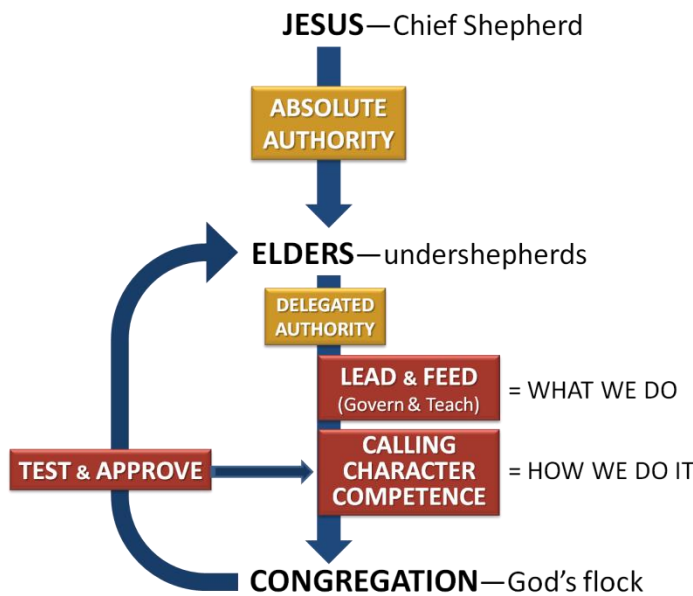
Paul had a double concern here. First, he was concerned for the elder. He didn't want anyone to level a false accusation against an elder and thereby ruin the man and the ministry of the church. Remember that Timothy was pasturing in the midst of dangerous false teachers and a false accusation could prove very harmful. One witness would not suffice but an accusation required 2-3 witnesses.

It's important to note that this was the exact same standard applied to everyone else. This was the same standard under the old covenant. *A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established* (Deuteronomy 19:15). Furthermore, when Jesus laid down a process of church discipline in Matthew, the same standard of 2-3 witnesses applied there as well. *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* (Matthew 18:16). From where do you think Jesus drew his standard for church discipline? It's no surprise that these two teach the same standard because Jesus got it from Deuteronomy 19. The point is that elders were just like everyone else. They did not possess some kind of diplomatic immunity which made them exempt from church discipline. If they went astray, there was a process for bringing a charge against them.

I think this is also an important point because it demonstrated that Paul expected an occasional elder to fall into sin. As much as we don't want this to ever happen, there is something freeing to admitting that it will eventually happen and not to be surprised or shocked when it does.

I think we sometimes have an overly romanticized view of the early church. Don't get me wrong. It would have been most exciting to have experienced it all. Can you imagine what it must have been like to have been there on the day of Pentecost, to have seen the Holy Spirit light on the believers as tongues of fire, to have heard Peter preach? What if you had gotten to meet Barnabas, the encourager? Imagine him putting his arm around you and telling you to keep following after Christ. What would it have been like to have seen the lame healed, the blind restored their sight and the dead to rise? There was something special and wonderful about the early church, but we also know they had plenty of problems, so much so that there had to be a process by which elders could be disciplined and if necessary removed from office. It did happen and it will continue to happen so it was important to have a good process set forth.

But more than that, the reality of church members and even church elders who needed to be disciplined was not the end of the church or the end of the gospel. The failure of Christians is not the failure of our Christian faith. Far too many people use failure and the sin of hypocrisy as an excuse. “Well those Christians are nothing but a big bunch of hypocrites!” well, yes, that’s true. By the way, if you hear someone ever say this, and you will, the first thing you should say in reply is “You are absolutely right. We are hypocrites. We do sin and some of it is pretty disgusting, but that’s why we all need a Savior.” Don’t ever use the excuse of hypocrisy yourself and don’t allow others to do so either. We need to expect the failure of others—even elders. Pray that it does not happen but don’t be too surprised or shocked when people let you down.



I trust are not getting tired of looking at this diagram yet because we need to use it again. When we studied chapter three we saw that since the role of elders is so important, then the selection of elders is equally important. We need to choose them according to the standards of calling, Godly character and competence. But the responsibility of the church members does not end there. You also have the responsibility to hold your elders accountable, in the same way that we are charged with holding each of you accountable.

I want you to know that in addition to the standards laid out in 1 Timothy 5, our church has standards of accountability built into our by-laws. For example, if I ever went astray, here is the process for removing me from office.

Any pastor may be removed from office by one of the following:

1. his own decision,
2. a three-quarters majority vote of the Board of Elders and followed by a majority vote of the congregation at a business meeting. (remember the pastor I mentioned a few weeks ago who gave himself 50% of the vote on the elder board??)
3. a two-thirds vote of congregation at a business meeting.
4. a loss of credentials from the EFCA.¹

Incidentally, I am the one who suggested that we add #4. The process of adopting our by-laws happened in stages. First, we were given a boiler plate Constitution and by-laws by the district office. This is the basic set of guidelines that all EFCA churches use. Then the leadership team (because we did not yet have elders—only a “provisional” leadership team), carefully reviewed the document and made some changes. We adopted the Constitution and By-laws almost eleven years ago and it I sin need of some revision.

I added option #4 to give the church an extra level of accountability. For example, let's say I walk into sin (by the way, I always try to avoid the phrase "fell into sin" because all sin is a choice. We don't fall into sin, we walk straight into it. Having said that, some people lay traps for themselves so that it feels like you are falling into it, but you really are not.). What if I walked into sin but the elders also went rogue. I was able to convince at least one of them that I was OK. That would mean that option #2 would not remove me from office because two out of four elders could not vote me out. Let's take it a step further. Let's say that I walked into sin but I was able to convince more than a third of the members that I did not have to step down. Now you have half of the elders and almost a third of the church members calling for my dismissal, but there is nothing you could do about it.

I have to stop and make a point here. I firmly believe that if even one of the current elders was absolutely convinced that I should step down, that I would do so. I trust them that much. I don't think it would be very likely that what I am describing would ever happen to me or any pastor at Grace, but there still needs to be a process of accountability built in.² Such things do happen to churches.

OK, let's say I have at least one elder and a little more than one-third of the members on my side. The congregation still has the option of asking our denomination for help. The benefit of their influence is that they would not be as caught up in the politics of what would be happening. The same council that painstakingly approves the ordination of pastors in our denomination would be the same people who would look at the facts of a case of a sinning pastor and could vote to remove the pastor's ordination.

I know of one pastor whose ordination was revoked. Years later he was restored to ministry and also had his credentials restored. After another ten years, he became the senior pastor of a large church in Colorado and he again had his credentials removed because he had a tremendously domineering and controlling spirit. So he was twice ordained and twice had his ordination stripped from him. This happens far more frequently than you might imagine. For example, the pastor who served as my church planting coach when I first moved to Viroqua later was asked to resign and then the denomination removed his ordination. So the by-laws we were given had the first three options in then and then I suggested we add number four to include the denomination as an added level of accountability.³

In fact, this is the very reason that this church is part of the Evangelical Free Church in the first place. When this church was still a very small Bible study, they approached our denomination to inquire about affiliating with them because they wanted more accountability and structure than what they could ever have with an independent church.

As I said before, all of this is for the protection and good of the church. As Paul wrote in verse 20, *As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear.* The classic case of a public rebuke has to be the story of Annanias and Sapphira. They were caught lying to the apostles and church. They were rebuked by Peter and then struck dead by the Lord. The result was that "great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things" (Acts 5:11).

When it comes to walking in obedience, I try to stress the love and grace of God as much as possible because this is what Scripture also stresses as means of motivation but here we see that a fear of the holiness of God is also a valid motivation. If an elder is publicly rebuked for a persistent sin, Paul specifically wanted the rest of the church to “stand in fear.” He wanted them to see that the holiness and glory of God was too important to overlook sin. He wanted them to understand that if elders can be rebuked for their sin, then any believer could also—and will also—be rebuked for their persistent sin. God disciplines us out of love—because we are his children—but he disciplines us all the same. And even though putting us to death is not God’s standard *modus operandi*, we are to stand in fear of his discipline. This is not God’s judgment or wrath for that is reserved for unbelievers alone, but it still remains that fear is a valid motivation for obedience to the Lord.

Verse 21 gives further guidance to the process of a potential rebuke.

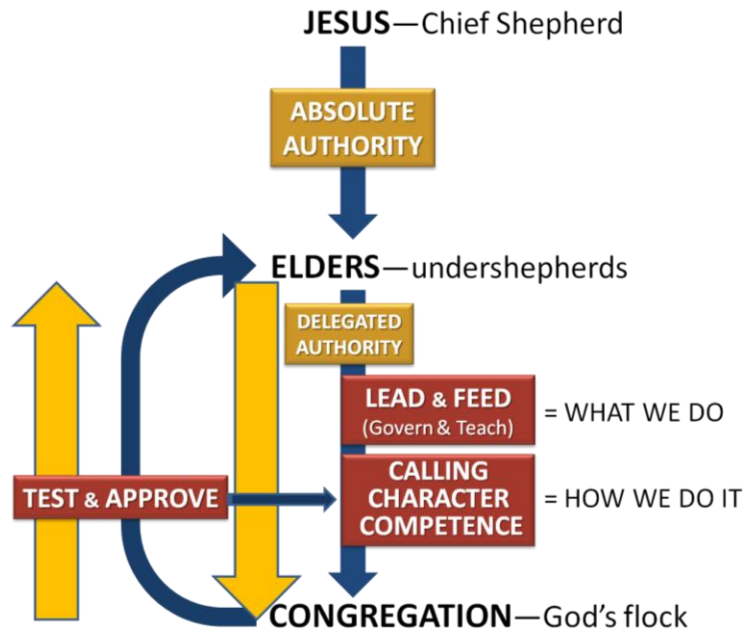
21 In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality.

Partiality and prejudice are some of the greatest sins because they are the very opposite of justice. I once witnessed a court official engage in an extreme form of prejudice and partiality, the very thing they are sworn to avoid. This person declared a man guilty without looking at a single piece of evidence from the case. He had prejudged this person and therefore, prejudged the case in the most atrocious manner. He literally looked at this man and boldly and angrily declared, “I know you’re guilty!” Had I not seen this with my own eyes, it would have been very difficult to believe. Finally, after a fair amount of begging and pleading, he agreed to take a look at the evidence. It was an extremely sad case of injustice and extreme partiality among those sworn to protect the law and citizens.

But partiality can also go the other way. It is possible and perhaps even more likely that bias would tend toward leniency and an overlooking of sin. Furthermore, Paul said that the Father, the Son and the angels are watching us live out our Christian lives.

All of this leads up to verse 22. *Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor take part in the sins of others; keep yourself pure.* If you lay hands on an elder hastily or prematurely, you will “take part in the sins of others.” In other words, if you elect an elder hastily and without a rigorous process of selection and then the elder turns out to live in persistent sin, the ones who elected him share in the guilt of his sin because we placed him in leadership in the first place.

But if you have a good, rigorous process for the selection of elders, you are far less likely to have to discipline any of them. This is why chapter 3 is so important—it lays out the full qualifications of an elder. And this is why the careful selection of elders is so important. If the process of testing and approving is strong (up arrow—see diagram below), then the elders ability to lead (down arrow) will be effective but if the process is weak, the elders can only lead weakly.



And this is also why local church membership is so vital. If we don't want just anyone to lead and feed our church, then we don't want just anyone to elect the leaders. There must be a standard for those who are permitted to cast a vote for elders. If you are a regular and committed part of our church but are not a member, then you are not able to take part in arguably the most important function of membership—the election of good leaders. And remember—as go the leaders, so goes the church.

I know there is a sentiment which says, "But that doesn't really seem fair. After all, if I give to the church

and serve in the church and faithfully support the church, why am I not permitted to vote?" Such a thought merely serves to prove my point because what you are arguing for is some form of qualification for those who can cast a vote. You recognize that your service and faithfulness ought to qualify you to cast a vote for an elder or to approve the annual church budget. In so doing, you are implicitly agreeing that you don't think anyone and everyone ought to be able to cast a vote in the church.

For example, there are no doubt hundreds if not thousands of people in our community who think we are hateful and hopelessly archaic because we refuse to ordain a practicing homosexual. (I want to add a side note at this point. Whenever I use an illustration about homosexuality, I always try to use the phrase "practicing homosexual" for good reason. There are some people who do struggle with a same-sex attraction just as most guys struggle with lust, like many people struggle with anger and a long list of other temptations. All of these are struggles against the flesh and our church is here to help you in this good fight for your faith. But we will never accept the excuse "That's just the way I am" for the sin of a practicing homosexual any more than we would for someone who is battling lust and anger. No temptation is a sin, including the sin of same sex attraction, but like all sin, it quickly moves from temptation to action and this is what we want to help you to avoid.) It is conceivable that if anyone could cast a vote, all it would take is a few activists to come into our church, make a motion that we should ordain homosexuals. If anyone could cast a vote, these folks, who are equally adept at organizing rallies and protests, could drastically sway an important vote. They could change our doctrine, our policies, our leaders and our entire church.

Some may think that this is an absurd example but you see this all the time in churches which have membership roles which are 2-3 times the size of their average attendance. Every time there is an important vote in the church, the inactive members come out in droves to cast a vote. They have the power to make drastic change when they should never have that right or ability in the first place.

Therefore, almost everyone would agree that we can't allow just anyone to vote and that implicitly you agree that there should be some kind of standard for who is allowed to vote. We are in agreement that there must be some form of standard which is why we have a process of membership. It is the standard by which we qualify folks to engage in voting but also much more than just voting. Elders must be members but also leaders of Bible studies and all heads of ministries like missions, children's church, nursery and facilities.

Therefore, if you are active in our body but are not a member, the message you are sending is that you really don't care who we choose for elders. You don't care if an elder goes astray or if he does, you want no part in it. You are not concerned about how we spend the money you generously donate. You don't have an opinion about the kinds of ministries we develop. And had you been here five years ago, you would have no say in whether or not we had a building, what the building would look like or how much it would cost.

But the fact is, I know that you *do* care. Many of you are active and involved. I realize that you can already do nearly everything in the church except vote, but do you see that your vote is so much more than a simple vote? Selecting leaders, perhaps rebuking leaders and determining how our church spends money are all issues of personal and corporate discipleship and I want you to be involved in these, for your benefit and for the benefit of the entire church.

I don't want this to sound too harsh because the majority of adults in our church are not members. I do intend it to be a challenge to you but mostly, I want you to see the vital role that you could play as a member. I want you to see that this goes hand in hand with discipleship. I want to help you become more deeply engaged in all kinds of ministries of service.

Although there are lots of people engaged in many ministries in our church and not all active people are members and not all of the members are active, I believe that we are at a crossroads in the life of our church. Our average attendance is 150 people which I freely confess, is too many for one pastor to effectively disciple. And if we move to two services, which I am convinced we must do if we are to facilitate greater outreach into the community, then the numbers of people will continue to grow. Eventually, we will need to hire more pastoral staff, but we cannot afford to do so right now.

Here is a just a quick list of ministry needs that we currently have. Many, but not all of these require you to be a member.

- Committee to revise the Constitution and By-laws
- Assimilation team to assure that new people are welcome and connected to the church
- More people engaged in discipleship to our young people; SWAP, Bible quizzing, Super Saturday
- More Nursery workers
- More Children's Church workers
- More Facilities Committee members (or those willing to be assigned certain tasks)
- Ask Sheila if they need more people to serve on the Mission's Team
- More people to clean the church and develop and care for the grounds.

- More people to run sound and powerpoint

Some people have told me that they were not ready for membership. That's OK, Some of you are fairly new to our church and may not be ready also. That is OK. Bit for the rest, this is an issue of your own discipleship. I want you to be fully engaged in the life of our church, fully accountable in our church and full co-laborers in Christ together.

Rich Maurer
March 24, 2013

¹ Grace EFC By-laws, Section 2-D

² To add a further level of accountability, our by-laws also state: "The Senior Pastor, though a member of the Board of Elders may not vote regarding his own removal from office or in regard to his own salary and benefits."

³ Elders have the exact same level; of accountability except there is no "option 4" because they are not ordained or licensed with the EFCA.