

1 TIMOTHY 5:17-26

False teaching had distracted the local church in Ephesus from its mission of preaching the gospel and making disciples.

So Paul writes to Timothy and the big message of his letter is: "Sort out the church for the sake of the gospel!"

Chapters 1-2: By fighting for the gospel: silencing false teachers, praying for all people, teaching church how to display the gospel.

Chapters 3-4: By sorting out the leadership of the church: installing elders (and deacons) and teaching what it means to be a group of faithful elders.

Now in chapter 5, Paul turns his attention to aspects of life within the local church, and particularly areas that could damage its witness.

In 1 Timothy 5:17-26 he addresses some issues to do with the leadership of the church that could damage the witness of the local church in Ephesus.

A. Failing to pay the pastor

"Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The labourer deserves his wages." (v17-18)

1. Why should elders who rule and labour in preaching and teaching be considered worthy of double honour?

Not because they have some magical powers.

Not because they are better than anybody else (the qualifications in 1 Timothy 3 show them to be quite ordinary).

It is because of the responsibility they have been given of shepherding the flock and preaching God's Word.

2. What does Paul mean by 'double honour'?

Not double pay.

Double honour means respect and remuneration.

3. Within the eldership, there will be one or more who is set aside as a "pastor".

Not every elder should be paid by the church.

Only those who have the primary responsibility for leading, caring, and preaching (i.e. the pastor), because for them to keep doing this vital work, the church needs to support them.

If the pastor spends adequate time, reading, studying, praying and preparing, they are unlikely to have time to earn a living doing something else.

It is a poor witness to the gospel when churches, that are able, fail to look after their pastor properly.

4. Application – How do we encourage the congregation to show honour to the elders/pastor?

Pray for them.

Don't gossip about them.

Listen to their preaching.

Make sure the pastor is adequately supported so they can carry on their ministry.

B. Failing to protect the elders

1. One of the easiest ways to damage a church is by attacking its leadership, which is why it is vital to protect the elders of a local church.

Paul highlights three ways that this should be done.

2. Don't discipline an elder on the basis of rumours and gossip.

"Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses."

Be sure of the facts.

Make sure there are witnesses who will back up the accusation that has been made against the elder.

3. Don't fail to discipline elders who persist in sin.

"As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear. 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."

Discipline of leaders should take place publicly.

Leaders should not be given special treatment – God knows if they are.

3. Don't be too quick in appointing elders.

"Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor take part in the sins of others; keep yourself pure. (No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.) The sins of some people are conspicuous, going before them to judgment, but the sins of others appear later. So also good works are conspicuous, and even those that are not cannot remain hidden."

Take care about who you put forward to the church to be elders.

Don't be in a hurry.

Some sins are obvious – but others take time to be seen.

Some good works are obvious – but others take time to be seen.

Give time for the character of the man to show itself.

In the long term this might prevent having to discipline an elder.

4. Application – How do we encourage the congregation to protect the elders?

Don't entertain gossip about a fellow elder – if they have a problem with one of us, encourage them to speak to the elder face to face.

Allow the congregation an opportunity to voice objections to any men put forward to become elders.

5. A failure to adequately support elders who have the role of the pastor or protect the elders can seriously damage the witness of the local church.