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## PAYING YOUR PASTOR(S)

1 Timothy 5:17-18

By

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Lesson 17

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1 Timothy 5:17-18

Three small boys were bragging about their dads. The first boy said, "My dad writes a few short lines on paper, calls it a poem, sends it away, and gets \$25 for it." "Well, my dad," said the second boy, "makes dots on paper, calls it a song, sends it away, and gets \$100 for it." "That's nothing," declared the third boy. "My dad writes a sermon on sheets of paper, gets up in the pulpit and gives it, and it takes four men to bring in the money!"

Our text for today deals with the subject of pastors and pay. I confess, it's not easy for me to preach on these verses for a couple of reasons: First, money is never easy to talk about. It hits about as close to home as you can get. Many people have the notion that the church is always pleading for money, and so whenever the subject comes up, they grab their wallets and put up their defenses.

But if you've come to this church for any length of time, you know that we do not emphasize money. My normal method is to preach consecutively through a portion of Scripture. If money is in the text I come to, I preach on it. But if anything, we probably under-emphasize it. We don't have fund raising campaigns or stewardship drives. We don't solicit pledges or approach individuals for donations. I believe that God's people need to know what God's Word says about money (and it has much to say). I believe you need to be informed as to where we're at financially as a church family. Then, as you respond to the Lordship of Christ, He will enable you to be good stewards of the money He has entrusted to you. I agree with Hudson Taylor's familiar statement: God's work done in God's way will not lack God's means of support.

Another reason this is a ticklish text for me to preach is that it deals with the subject of a pastor's salary, and I am a pastor! I resemble these remarks! Sadly, the public scandals of recent years, exposing TV preachers who live in luxury by exploiting people, have given the subject of pastors and pay a black eye. So any time a

pastor talks about money, especially as it relates to his pay, people think he's crossing a line he shouldn't cross.

I'm glad that we hit these verses just *after* I got a raise, so that no one can accuse me of using a sermon to hint about my personal needs. I'm not teaching on this text because it needs to be applied in my case. I'm teaching on it because it's a part of God's Word, and we all need to understand and obey God's Word. My understanding of the New Testament is that Christian workers should be careful not to make their own needs known, except to God in prayer, and that God, who hears in secret, will meet their needs as they trust in Him.

I realize that this goes against the way the modern church goes about fund-raising. While I don't condemn others who hold to differing views, I believe you can build a biblical case for Christian workers mentioning *others'* needs, but not their own. If you're interested, I'd be glad to loan you my master's thesis which deals with this subject. I don't want my comments to be taken in any way as a hint of need on my part. With Paul I can say, "I have received everything in full and have an abundance ...." (Phil. 4:18).

But we do need to understand what God's Word teaches about supporting those who labor in the gospel. Paul is saying ...

Churches should make sure that pastors who work hard in leading and feeding are highly respected and well-paid.

To understand these verses, we need to keep in mind the historical situation in Ephesus where Timothy was ministering. Some of the elders had fallen into false teaching and were leading some of the flock astray. Paul wanted to affirm the office and ministry of the leaders who were doing their job well by encouraging the church to continue supporting such men financially (5:17-18); but also to give some guidelines for the correction and, if necessary, censure, of those who were in sin (5:19-25). We need to probe four areas to understand Paul's teaching in 5:17-18: (1) The definition of "elders"; (2) the department of elders; (3) the duties of elders; (4) the duty of the church.

1. We need to define "elders."

The terms “elder,” “overseer,” and “pastor” are used interchangeably in the New Testament to refer to the same office or leadership position in the church (Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5, 7; 1 Pet. 5:1-4). “Elder” focuses on the character of the man, that he is spiritually mature. “Overseer” (1 Tim. 3:1, 2) looks at the task, which is to superintend or watch over God’s church. “Pastor” means “shepherd” and looks at the task from the common picture of the church being God’s flock of sheep.

The terms are always used in the plural for local churches. There is never to be a one-man ruler over a church or a single man to do the work of shepherding. Unless it’s a very small flock, the task is simply too much for one man, even if he works at it full time. Since the early church met in homes scattered around a city, it may be that a single elder was over each house church, but when the church in a particular city is referred to in the New Testament, it always refers to the elders (plural) of the church (singular), such as Ephesus (Acts 20:17) or Philippi (Phil. 1:1).

Some elders (or pastors) may be paid so they can devote their full attention to the work of shepherding and teaching God’s flock, whereas other elders support themselves by other work. While the paid elders may have greater influence and responsibilities due to their ability to give more time to the work, or due to their training, or to their knowledge of Scripture, no elder is the head of the church. Jesus Christ is the living head of His church, and the elders collectively oversee Christ’s church as they learn to seek His mind and to submit to one another and work in harmony under the authority of God’s Word.

## 2. We need to understand the department of elders.

As we saw in 3:1-7, elders are appointed to their office by virtue of their spiritual maturity and godly character, not because they went to seminary or because they’re popular, likeable men, or for any other reason. Seminary training is helpful if a man is going to devote himself full time to teaching God’s Word, but it must be accompanied by spiritual maturity or he may “fall into reproach and the snare of the devil” (3:7). If a man is going to be supported financially in ministry, he needs to be “free from the love of money” (3:3), so that he doesn’t fall into the trap of using ministry to get rich.

Since an undisciplined man can waste a lot of time in the ministry, Paul mentions (5:17) that he must “work hard” at preaching and teaching. The biblical support he adds of the ox threshing and the laborer reinforce the condition that an elder who is supported must not be lazy. I have known men in ministry who use their time in a sloppy fashion. If they were employees of a secular company, they would be fired. I’m not talking about over-work, which is another sin many pastors fall into. But a pastor needs to be conscientious about working hard, since he is doing the Lord’s work.

A pastor had three young men installing insulation in the attic of his church building. He sat down with them to eat lunch and one of the men, having noticed that the pastor had spent his morning reading, asked about his duties. “Do you have a job besides serving as pastor of this church?” he asked. When the pastor replied that this was his only employment, the worker asked, “Well, Reverend, could you work if you wanted to?” (*Reader’s Digest* [2/87]).

I’ve often been asked whether I do this full time, and when I answer yes, have been asked, “What all do you do?” I guess people think, “A pastor’s pay isn’t very good, but the hours are great—just Sunday mornings!” But believe me, there aren’t enough hours in the week to do the things demanded by shepherding a church this size. But even so, a man must not be lazy, because you have to determine your own schedule, so it’s possible to become sloppy with your time.

Paul had already given the same requirements about hard work and freedom from the love of money to the Ephesian elders: “I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or clothes. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’” (Acts 20:33-35). So elders, especially those who are supported financially, must conduct themselves in a godly manner, being on guard against laziness and greed.

3. We need to understand the duties of elders.

We could come up with more categories, but here Paul gives two broad duties of elders or pastors, leading (“rule”) and feeding (“preaching and teaching”).

A. Elders must lead God’s flock.

“Rule” (NASB), “direct the affairs of the church” (NIV). The Greek word is only used six times in the New Testament in this sense. It means literally, “to stand before” and thus has the meaning of “lead,” “manage,” or “superintend.” It is used in Romans 12:8 to refer to the spiritual gift of leadership. In 1 Timothy 3:4, 5, it refers to the elder (and in 3:12 to the deacon) who “manages his own household well.” In 3:5 management is compared to “taking care of” the church of God. That word is the same word used of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:34-35) who took care of the injured man. Thus “to rule” has the nuance of assuming responsibility for the care of those under his leadership, as a good husband and father is to do for his family.

Thus one major task of elders is that of “ruling” in the sense of overseeing or shepherding the church. It does not mean to “lord it over” people (1 Pet. 5:3), but rather to care for people, to guard them from error, to admonish them, and to help each one grow to maturity and fruitfulness in Christ.

Note that this is a skill that a man can grow in. Some elders “rule well.” It’s not an easy task, so each man needs to work at it. In Romans 12:8 Paul says that the person with this gift should exercise it “with diligence.” In 1 Thessalonians 5:12, it is translated “have charge over you in the Lord” and is also linked with diligent labor. That means that even if you’re gifted, leadership doesn’t happen effortlessly. The church doesn’t run on autopilot. It involves diligent work to lead well. Things need to be dealt with. It’s always more of a hassle to take the initiative to correct situations that are off-course. It’s easier to procrastinate and let things slide. So one of the major duties of elders is to be diligent to rule well, to do the hard work necessary to take care of God’s flock.

B. Elders must feed God’s flock.

Paul singles out elders who “work hard at preaching and teaching.” Not all elders are going to have the gift of teaching, although all should be able to teach (1 Tim. 3:2) in the sense of sit-

ting down with someone and explaining the basic Christian truths. But some will be gifted in teaching and they should work hard at it.

And it *is* hard work! Preaching involves about 9/10 perspiration and 1/10 inspiration. It takes time to study, pray, and think in order to be accurate, clear and interesting, and to apply it practically. I average about 15 hours to prepare a sermon I've never preached before, and 8-12 hours to rework a sermon I've already preached. I can't just dust off an old sermon and give it again. I need to get back into the text and allow it to speak to my heart in a fresh way and to think about how the people I'm speaking to need it applied. Before a man can preach properly, he must allow the Word to preach to him. As John Calvin said, "It would be better for the preacher to break his neck going into the pulpit than for him not to be the first to follow God."

It would be almost impossible to devote adequate time to that task plus be involved in oversight of the church and hold down a full-time outside job. Thus Paul instructs the church to support the elders who work hard at preaching and teaching.

I don't see a major distinction between "preaching" and "teaching." The words here are literally, "in word and teaching." Some people have told me that I'm a teacher, not a preacher, because I don't yell and shout at people in a preachy voice. But the Greek word for "preach" means "to proclaim as a herald" who announced the message of the king. In that sense, preaching means to set forth the authoritative word of the King.

Teaching is setting forth and explaining the truths of the Bible. I agree with Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who said, "The greatest need in the Church today is to restore this authority to the pulpit" (*Preaching & Preachers* [Zondervan], p. 159). As I've said before, God's Word doesn't give us helpful hints for happy living. The man who speaks for God had better not waffle! God's people desperately need a sure word from God on how to live in this evil world.

We live in a day when preaching, especially doctrinal preaching that sets forth the great truths of Scripture in a systematic fashion, is viewed as out-of-touch with where our TV-oriented culture is at. Sermons keep getting shorter and shorter, and some-

times are replaced by drama and storytelling. But Paul clearly elevates the need of the church for strong leadership and for solid preaching by directing that those who labor in these ministries receive double honor. That leads to ...

4. We need to understand the duty of the church: To give such men "double honor."

There is some debate over what Paul means by this term. Clearly, verse 18, which explains ("for") verse 17, shows that Paul is referring primarily to pay. Some take "double" literally and say that these elders should be paid twice what the widows (5:3) or the non-teaching elders were paid. I understand "double" to mean "ample" (Theodoret, a fifth century theologian explains it by a Greek word meaning "more" or "greater"). The Greek word, "honor" can mean either honor or pay or both (as we saw last week; see 5:3; 6:1). So Paul is directing that elders who work hard at preaching and teaching should be highly respected and well-paid.

Honor and pay are related. A Newsweek cover story a few years ago [9/24/84] on American school teachers dealt, in part, with the problem that teachers in our country are not respected. It stated, "One reason for the disrespect, of course, is money." If we underpay someone, we don't respect him. You can shrug off free advice, but if you pay a counselor \$100 an hour, you're more likely to respect and follow what he tells you. Many churches expect their pastors to survive on a subsistence salary, but then, to their detriment, they don't respect either the man or his message.

Paul supports his point from two Scriptures: Deuteronomy 25:4, which commands that oxen should not be muzzled when they are threshing; and, Luke 10:7, Jesus' words about the worker being worthy of his wages. (Note that Paul put Luke's gospel on a par with Old Testament Scripture.) The Scripture comparing pastors to unmuzzled oxen may not seem too complimentary. But as Paul argues in First Corinthians 9:9-11, it's an argument from the lesser to the greater. If God showed concern for oxen to be "paid" for their work, doesn't He care much more for those who labor in the gospel? They have a right to receive a decent wage for their work.

Charles Spurgeon once had the officers of a small country church ask him to recommend a pastor for them. But the salary

they were prepared to pay was so small that he wrote back to them, "The only individual I know, who could exist on such a stipend, is the angel Gabriel. He would need neither cash nor clothes; and he could come down from heaven every Sunday morning, and go back at night, so I advise you to invite him" (*Autobiography* [Banner of Truth], 2:108).

Grace Church, pastored by John MacArthur, is often asked to recommend pastoral candidates from among the young men who are trained there. When they send out a man to candidate, they also often send some of their elders to talk to the leaders in the prospective church. On one occasion a few years ago, a church was offering the new pastor \$12,000 a year, which was not adequate for his needs. The elders from Grace Church dismissed the pastor for a few minutes and then told the elders, "Each of you get out a piece of paper and write down your annual salary." The average came out to \$24,000. They said, "Start him at \$24,000." To their credit, they did it!

That isn't necessarily the way to determine a pastor's salary, but our text does show that a pastor's salary should not show disrespect for the man or his office. Wayne Grudem observed, "Scripture doesn't caution us against paying our ministers too much, but it does caution against paying them too little" (*Leadership* [Spring, 1981], p. 67).

Someone once pointed out to baseball great, Babe Ruth, that he made more money than President Hoover, and asked whether Ruth thought he deserved to make more than the president. The Babe replied, "Why not? I had a better year than he did." I heard Bill Yaeger, a veteran pastor, say, "Remember, it's the Catholics who take a vow of poverty. But we're Protestants!"

## Conclusion

Please remember what I said at the beginning of this message: I am amply supplied and content. I am not asking you to apply this message to me. But I would ask you to ask yourself, "Is my giving to this church pleasing to the Lord?" As I've taught before, giving 10 percent is not the New Testament standard. Neither is it biblical to view 10 percent as belonging to God and 90 percent as yours to spend as you please. The New Testament teaching is, God owns it

all. We merely manage it for Him. We are to give generously (2 Cor. 8 & 9), as God has prospered us (1 Cor. 16:2). We all just finished doing our taxes. If you didn't give enough to make it worth your while to fill out Schedule A, you're not giving generously to God's work.

We have just adopted a new church budget that is lower than last year's budget, but still requires an increase in giving over last year's giving to meet it. We still owe over \$40,000 on the house next door. If we could pay it off, it would free up both that house and the one across the street for ministry. In addition, there are many improvements that could be made on our facilities if funds were available. Also, we are at a size where we could probably use another full-time staff pastor. But we can't do any of these extra things if we fall short of our bare-bones budget.

Increases in giving don't come out of the air. They are the result of God's people trusting Him by increasing their giving and then doing it regularly and faithfully as unto Him. I do not know what anyone except me gives to this church, so I have no one in particular in mind. I just ask you to go before the Lord and evaluate whether He is pleased with your giving.

The late radio Bible teacher, J. Vernon McGee, used to admonish his radio audience by saying, "Friends, if you go into a restaurant and eat their food, you pay the bill. But some of you are being fed by this ministry and aren't paying." My job is to work hard to lead and to feed you. Some of you may need to ask whether you're paying your tab!

### Discussion Questions

1. Why have Christian workers traditionally been underpaid? Is this biblical?
2. Does our church emphasize money: a) too much; b) not enough; c) about right? What do you base this on?
3. Some argue that to communicate with people in our multi-media culture, we need to shorten and adapt preaching (more drama, stories, etc.). Agree/disagree?

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