

1 Timothy 5:17-25 — How Should I Treat My Church Leaders?

June 4, 2017

Welcome to the CrossWinds Spirit Lake Campus. Before we jump into this morning's message, I need to talk a little family business. In recent summers, we had a special emphasis. Last year, it was reading through the book of Proverbs. This year, since we are already reading through the New Testament as a church with the Take Up and Read challenge, it isn't appropriate to have another Bible reading challenge. This summer we are going to focus on sharpening our church culture. I want us to put a special effort into becoming an even more welcoming church family. The key phrase you will hear me say many times this summer is, "Don't just attend church. Be the church." I want you to ask yourself if you just attend CrossWinds or if you are being a church family on Sunday morning. Whenever a family has guests over to their home, they always give them a warm welcome.

Following in the footsteps of David Letterman, I put together a top 10 list of steps we can take to be a more welcoming church. Let me take a few minutes to introduce you to them.

1. **Sit by someone you don't know, not in the same seat.** When you walk in the door, don't just sit in the same place. Look for someone you don't know and join them. Make sure he or she feels welcomed.
2. **Go out of my way to talk to someone I haven't met.** This means before church, after church and during the greeting time in church, meet someone new.

3. **When I meet a visitor, introduce him or her to others in the congregation.** Sometimes nothing is more intimidating than meeting new people. Use your relationships to introduce our visitors to your friends in the church family.
4. **Add a visitor to my social media accounts.** If you meet somebody in church, add him or her on Facebook or whatever social media you use.
5. **Wear my name tag.** Wearing your name tag not only helps us take attendance but it makes people feel at ease and helps people learn names.
6. **Don't tell people where to go, take them there.** That means if someone is looking for a bathroom or the church office, don't send him or her on a wild goose chase. Walk with him or her to where he or she wants to go.
7. **Remember that welcoming visitors is fulfilling the Great Commission.** Sometimes we wonder how we will be able to take the gospel to our community and nation. The honest truth is many people in our community walk through our doors as visitors. One of the best ways to introduce people to Christ is to simply be a welcoming church.
8. **Invite a visitor to lunch or over to my home for a meal later in the week.** One of the best ways to make people feel welcome is to have people over to your home for a meal or offer to take them out for a meal to get to know them better.
9. **Write down a visitor's contact information and call him or her.** Call people later in the week and ask if they have any questions about the church.

Let them know you were glad to meet them and you hope they will be able to visit again soon.

10. Help a visitor integrate into the CrossWinds family. That means to make sure people are invited to special events like our summer picnic. Another way to make them feel welcome is to invite them to join you at the summer Bible conference.

That is a lot of action steps for the summer. I will review one or two each week to keep us on task. Take this card and put it someplace prominent like your kitchen table. I ask you to prayerfully work together so we become an even warmer and more welcoming church this summer.

This morning we are studying the book of 1 Timothy. This book was written by the Apostle Paul to young Timothy. He was only a little older than 30 when he was given the job of pastoring the mega church in the city of Ephesus. It was a tough church that had many things he needed to get in order. We are in the last third of the book where Paul focused on relationships in the church. He taught us we are a family and we treat one another like family. For our last two studies, we looked at how the church has special care for the lonely and vulnerable among us, like widows and single mothers. Today, we are looking at how a church treats its leaders. This is a very important topic because our culture does not encourage respect, especially respect for those in leadership. Paul said the church should be noticeably different from the world around us in the way we give honor and respect to those who lead the church family.

Our study will fall under three headings. First, we see how the church honors pastors and leaders. Second, we will see how the church handles accusations against pastors and leaders. Third, we will see how a church selects its pastors and leaders.

Show honor to pastors and leaders.

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer deserves his wages." 1 Timothy 5:17–18 (ESV)

The leaders in the church are called elders in this passage. This is the first time Paul used that term in this letter. In 1 Timothy 3, Paul gave the qualifications for church leaders but he called them overseers. One of the questions that crops up as you study through 1 Timothy is who are the elders and who are the overseers? Are they different groups? If they are different groups, what is the difference between them?

Let me quickly bring clarity.

Elders and overseers are one and the same.

Overseers and elders are synonymous terms that Paul often used interchangeably. If there is a difference, it is usually that the term elder is the name of the office and overseer is the function of the leaders in the office. Let me show you what I mean.

Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. Acts 20:17 (ESV)

Paul called the elders of the church of Ephesus to talk with him. As you continue reading, what did Paul say to these elders?

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. Acts 20:28 (ESV)

The job of the elders is to oversee the flock. We find the same interchangeability of these terms when Paul wrote to Titus.

This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you... Titus 1:5 (ESV)

What did Paul call those very same elders only two verses later?

For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, Titus 1:7 (ESV)

I hope that clears up the difference between elders and overseers. Now, let's see how we treat church leaders.

Give respect and honor to my church leaders.

The first thing Paul told Timothy is that the church should give honor to its leaders.

When Jimmy Fallon had presidential candidate Donald Trump on his late-night show, Fallon asked if he could put his hand in Trump's hair and tussle his hairdo. Donald Trump rolled with it. Many people in the media were upset, even those of a more liberal persuasion. They thought Jimmy Fallon should have shown more respect for someone that was a candidate to become the most powerful man on the planet, the president of the United States. While our culture shows low respect to those in authority, the church is different. We go out of our way to honor those who lead us. We especially honor those who lead us well and those who do the hard work of teaching the Word of God.

Honoring those in leadership over us is theologically essential to the Christian life but it is also practical. When anyone doesn't honor those in leadership over them, it makes the leader's job difficult, and it makes the life of those being led very frustrating. The Bible tells us this.

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. Hebrews 13:17 (ESV)

How do can you honor your leaders? First, listen when they teach. Pay attention and learn from those who love you and want to teach you the Bible. Second, serve others in the church faithfully and joyfully. Volunteer to serve and then keep your promise to serve. Third, when the leaders of your church ask for your help, honor your leaders and heed their words. For example, I just issued a summer challenge to work together to be a more welcoming church to our visitors. Many of you are wonderful and will go out of your way to embrace this challenge. Unfortunately, others of you plan on throwing this card in the first trash can you can find. You do not plan on being more welcoming or caring about anybody. That is disrespectful toward church leadership. I know those are hard words but they are true.

Why do your church leaders issue this summer challenge? We are trying to help each of us lead more people to Jesus.

Give double honor to those who lead well, especially to those who work hard at preaching and teaching.

Paul told Timothy how the church should treat good elders and those who do the hard work of the preaching and teaching. Paul said good leaders and those that preach and teach deserve double-honor. What does this mean?

Most pastors think this verse means they should be paid twice as much as every one else. Sorry, that is not what it means. It means that if you have a good church leader, you should make sure you give him extra honor and respect. This is especially true for church leaders who do the work of preaching and teaching. I like the way Paul described preaching and teaching and why those who do it deserve extra honor. He said those who *labor* at preaching and teaching deserve extra honor. The Greek word behind this English word *labor* means work to extreme fatigue or exhaustion.

Paul said, “If you are going to do a good job at preaching and teaching you need to work really really hard.” From your perspective in the pew, it may look like an easy job to preach and teach but there is a ton of hard work that happens behind the scenes to make a sermon look easy. Let me tell you what goes into a Sunday sermon. For me there is eight to 12 or more hours of research, reading, and highlighting books that begins no later than Tuesday afternoon. I spend another four to five hours typing all pertinent material into a Mind Map program where I can move around ideas and organize my notes. On Thursday I write and edit a full manuscript, sermon handout and the Digging Deeper study guides, which takes another four or more hours. On Saturday afternoon from 3 p.m. until 8 p.m., I memorize the manuscript and write a few

cheat notes in the sermon outline in case I get stuck. On Sunday morning before I preach I reread my notes then step into the pulpit. There are 20 to 30 hours behind a Sunday message. It is hard work. Just like Paul said, preaching and teaching is hard work.

Honor pastors and church leaders in their salaries.

The question all of us are asking is how does honor and double honor relate to the pastoral paycheck. Paul didn't address the pastoral paycheck directly. He began with the root issue, which is honor. Those who are good leaders and teachers are worthy of double honor, and that honor should be reflected in salary. He talked about the size of the pastoral paycheck by two quotes, one from the Old Testament and one from the New.

He quoted from Deuteronomy 25:4 which says, "If an ox is treading out the grain, do not put a muzzle on its face. Allow it to eat some of the grain it is laboring hard to produce." Paul used the Jewish style of argumentation called a *qal-wah-homer*. That simply means arguing from the light to the heavy. If God is concerned that an ox gets food from the labor of its work, how much more does God want a church pastor or leader to have his food supplied by the labor of his work? If an ox gets its food from working hard to feed us physically, how much more should a pastor or church leader be supplied if he works hard to feed us spiritually?

Paul then quoted from Jesus in the Gospel of Luke 10:7, when Jesus said that a laborer deserves his wages. What people do for their work is something for which they should be paid. Those who work for Bomgaars, should be paid by

Bomgaars. Those who work for the church, should be paid by the church. How much should they be paid when they work for the church? Either make them feel honor or double-honored in their paycheck.

Now I know what you are thinking. I wonder if Pastor Kurt feels honored and if he feels double honored in his paycheck? The answer is, "Yes." I feel very honored by the CrossWinds family both personally and professionally. I feel so blessed to pastor CrossWinds. I also feel very honored financially. The board that determines my salary has been very generous and has kept up with the increasing costs of health care. I am filled with gratitude to you.

Properly handle accusations against pastors and leaders.

Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. 1 Timothy 5:19 (ESV)

If someone has a random complaint, ignore it.

Pastors and leaders are on the front line. The best way for Satan to destroy them is through malicious gossip that tries to discredit them. Pastors are consistently accused of things simply because they are on the front line. For instance, one time I noticed someone hadn't been to church. Later I found out they weren't coming because they thought I snubbed them in the church foyer. I was clueless they felt this way. I called them and we talked it through. It turns out I was on my way to teach a class and didn't stop to talk with them. I didn't know that, so they were offended. This kind of little stuff happens all the time. You will hear random gossip directed against church leaders and pastors from time to time. Since those kinds of snide comments can be damaging, it is helpful when congregations protect their leaders by not repeating those kinds of unwholesome

comments or by trying to put a stop to them. Challenge the person making the silly accusations not to say those things but to go to the church leader and try to solve the problem. Many times people don't want to solve their problems. They just want something they can gossip about to try and tear down their leaders. That isn't honoring to Christ or his church. Honor your pastors and leaders by trying to put a stop that that kind of silly stuff.

I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive. Romans 16:17–18 (ESV)

As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him... Titus 3:10 (ESV)

If two or three people are concerned about the same thing, investigate it.

If two or three people are concerned about the same thing, it should be checked out to see if it is true. That doesn't mean it is true. Many times when multiple people are concerned about the same issue you can trace it back to the heart of one extremely gossipy person. Never-the-less, investigate it to find out if it is true.

Let me give you an example. When I was a youth pastor in my 20s, I had a great youth group. I also had kids in my youth group who were a real handful. Sometimes they refused to listen. They didn't give their youth pastor honor. On one youth trip I was really stressed with the kids, and I said a naughty word around the kids. It wasn't a hard-core swear word but it wasn't the best choice of words. I had no idea I even said it. Two or three kids reported this to their

parents. Their parents reported it to the elders. The elders sat down with me to tell me I had used inappropriate language on the trip. Thankfully they were specific and they told me the word I used. Personally, I was dumbfounded. I couldn't see myself saying that word. They insisted they heard it from the parents of two or more kids in the youth group so they were sure it was true. I took the rebuke but left scratching my head wondering how or when I said that word on the trip.

About a month later there was a really stressful situation at home. I spoke in anger and I heard that same word come out of my mouth. I covered my mouth with my hand in a state of disbelief and realized I had a problem. The elders were right. When I get frustrated, I let an unwholesome word slip out of my mouth. I immediately thought of this verse.

Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips! Psalm 141:3 (ESV)

I am so thankful those elders cared enough to approach me because they heard a concern from multiple people. They were gracious in their approach but also firm. It helped me become aware of sin in my life that I didn't see before that happened. That is the way the church should work. If there are multiple people with a concern over something a church leader has done, it should be investigated, and if appropriate, other elders should approach that leader and give him an opportunity to repent.

Leaders who persist in sin must be admonished publicly.

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. 1 Timothy 5:20–21 (ESV)

What about pastors or elders who are rebuked privately by the elders but their behavior does not change? The Bible tells us that church leaders who either refuse to repent or who continue in sin should be publicly admonished. This is usually not the way things are done in church. When there is a problem with a pastor or church leader, the ruling board of the church usually encourages the sinning leader to leave quietly so nobody knows what led to his or her departure. Here is the problem with that approach: First, it starts a rumor mill. Since nobody knows why a leader was asked to leave, people start making things up. Second, it begins to tear the church apart. Those who love the leader that was asked to leave will side with that leader. Those who support the remaining leaders will side with them. You end up with a torn-apart church. Paul said leaders who will not listen to the private rebuke of the elders must face their sin being exposed to the church. This will end with one embarrassed leader, but the unity of the church will be protected. Third, keeping the unrepentant sin of a church leader quiet doesn't help future leaders. Future leaders should know that with high levels of responsibility in the church, come high accountability to the church. If future leaders fail to deal with private sin, it will lead to public shame.

Paul then reminded Timothy how the church leaders were to handle accusations against pastors and leaders. God was holding them accountable for how they rendered their judgments. "Be as fair as possible and as gracious as possible. Whatever you do, don't show favoritism. Just because you like somebody in leadership, don't ignore their sins if they persist."

In addition, don't prejudge them. Prejudging is one of the most common problems I have seen as a pastor. Prejudging is knowing something about a situation so you jump to conclusions without taking the time to investigate. This happens all the time in church. Let me give you a silly but true example. When I was a youth pastor in my 20s, the youth ministry bought a few old video games from the 1970s and 1980s. They were legitimate, full-size arcade games. We rigged the quarter slot so they didn't need money. The kids had a blast but the games took up a lot of space. Eventually the kids in the youth group wanted a Nintendo 64 so they could play four-player Mario cart on the big screen during youth lock-ins. I told the kids there was no money in the budget, but if we could sell the old video game consoles we would have enough money for a Nintendo 64. During the summer, another youth pastor approached me about the old video games and he bought them. I bought a Nintendo 64 and put it in the youth room over the summer. The youth pastor didn't want to pick up the old video games until fall because his youth room was being rebuilt over the summer.

Since the youth weren't meeting over the summer I didn't have a way to tell the kids the good news. Multiple kids saw the game console and two or three kids told their parents I lied to the youth group because I bought a Nintendo 64 but hadn't sold the old video games. Those parents complained to the elders who brought me before an elder meeting to answer for my dishonesty to the kids. I was dumbfounded as to why the elders wanted to talk with me on this issue. It was a massive case of prejudging. All somebody needed to do was talk to me

and I could have given the rest of the story if I had known they wanted to know the rest of the story.

Here is the best way to avoid prejudging: If you see something in church that doesn't make sense, assume the reason things don't make sense is because there is information you don't have. If the issue really bothers you, simply ask somebody to help you understand. Ninety-nine percent of what happens in the church is public information anyway and somebody would be happy to share it with you.

Maybe your observation or idea will be a good idea that people can implement.

Appoint church leaders slowly.

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. 1 Timothy 5:22–25 (ESV)

What did Paul mean when he said don't be hasty in laying on of hands? The concept of laying on of hands comes from the Old Testament sacrificial system. If you remember our series called Christmas From the Book of Leviticus, we learned that before many of the offerings in the Old Testament, people laid their hands on the head of the animal to be sacrificed so they identified with the animal before it died in their place. In a similar way in the New Testament times, when someone becomes a leader in a church, an elder or a pastor, the elders of the church were to publicly lay their hands on them in a worship service to pray over them and identify with them. Laying hands on a church leader is a way of

saying, “He is one of us. He is orthodox. This guy is a legitimate leader, and we want to identify with him.”

While electing church leaders slowly is something that is appropriate for elders in a church, it is also appropriate in denominations. In the EFCA denomination, even if you graduate from an EFCA seminary, we have something called ordination. It is a three- or more-year process while you are in ministry where you are monitored and tested before you are officially recognized by the denomination as an ordained EFCA pastor. To begin the process you write a licensing paper to defend the EFCA statement of faith in front of a counsel of fellow pastors. If you pass the licensing exam, you begin a two- or more-year process of monitoring in ministry while you write an even larger paper called an ordination paper which you must defend before a counsel of peer pastors with an even higher level of proficiency. It is only after this three- to five-year period of getting licensed, being monitored and finally getting ordained that you have a special ordination service at church where pastors and elders gather around you and they lay their hands on you and pray over you. It is when they lay their hands on you that you officially become recognized as “one of us.” It is a lengthy process, because Paul said to Timothy that it should be a lengthy process so people are tested over time.

Just so you know, I am ordained in the EFCA. Pastor Stephen is in the process of getting licensed in the EFCA, which is the first step toward ordination. Pastor Jordan just passed his licensing counsel and has two years to go before he faces his ordination counsel.

In a similar way, when it comes to leaders within a church, not just the pastor of a church, Paul told Timothy to be slow in selecting those leaders. It is much better to have an empty seat around the leadership table than to have someone who is not qualified to sit around the table. If you get leaders who are not spiritually mature in those seats, you just hitched yourself on a difficult ride, and their sins will become associated with you.

Then Paul summed it up on why Timothy needed to go slow when it came to appointing church leaders. Paul gave us a principle that doesn't just apply for selecting leaders but it applies to all of life. The sins of some people are obvious and you can tell right away. The sins of other people appear later. This means some people look like great leaders but it is only after you get to know them for a while and see them in different circumstances that you realize they are not as perfect as they look.

In the same way, the results of good works don't always show up at first. Many times you find out over time that quiet people are some of the most God-honoring people but you wouldn't know it for months or years.

Here is what we need to remember. The truth and time always go hand in hand. The truth about every person will be seen over time. Poor character will come out, and great character will come out. You just need to wait. You will eventually see it.

That is why you always choose people in important positions slowly, like people that will serve in church leadership.

Conclusion

Today, Paul talked about leaders in the church and how we are to treat them. Let's review what we learned.

1. Honor leaders in the church.
2. Give extra honor to church leaders that do a good job, especially to those who do the hard work of preaching and teaching.
3. Show honor to church leaders in their salaries.
4. Protect your leaders from gossip and silly accusations.
5. If multiple people share the same concern with a leader, the elders should investigate, and if appropriate, encourage the leader to repent.
6. If a leader doesn't repent, rebuke him or her publicly, not privately.
7. Don't prejudge a leader without knowing the fact and make sure you judge leaders fairly.
8. Don't push people into positions of church leadership too quickly.



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