

Maintaining Your Minister

¹⁷ Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. ¹⁸ For the Scripture says, "*You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,*" and, "The laborer is worthy of his wages." (1 Timothy 5:17–18)

Here in this manual on how to order the church, Paul is dealing now with the church's dependents, those the church will pay. Just before this section, Paul has dealt with widows, and whom to support. After this section, he is going to deal with the hiring and firing of elders, and also the false teaching that some men were teaching that you can use godliness for financial gain.

So with those checks and balances, Verses 17 and 18 are all about the financial support of pastors.

Now a message on remunerating pastors always carries with it some awkwardness, because the man preaching it seems to be speaking out of self-interest. That is, unless you are a prosperity gospel teacher, in which case you speak about money and giving all the time, at every opportunity and never seem to blush.

And Timothy himself would have felt this awkwardness; he likely read this epistle out loud to the church at Ephesus. He may have felt embarrassed to announce to the people he was teaching that they needed to support him. But Paul wrote this inspired Scripture, and knew some of the awkwardness it would create and yet saw it worth the risk to teach it.

A failure to teach and understand this is often enough what hurts churches from becoming what they should be. Too many churches fail to properly understand and apply this principle. As a result, even faithful pastors are eventually unable to survive, or unable to minister really effectively. As a result, the preaching diminishes in quality and power. As a result of that, the church dwindles in size. As the church dwindles in size, it can afford even less, and cannot attract a preacher that will help grow the church, and so a dwindling, dying cycle sets into the church.

Another option is available. The church understands and obeys this principle. They support a faithful, hardworking pastor so he can devote all his time to the ministry. Most times, God blesses this hard work with growth. As the church grows, it can look to supporting more pastors, which in turn, means more ministry, which usually means more growth.

So here in these two verses, Paul is going to teach that faithful, Word-Labouring pastors should be financially maintained by those who benefit from that ministry. We can break down this apostolic command into three ideas: what believers must do – the maintenance, who must receive it – the men, and why it must be done.

I. What Must Be Done: Maintain

¹⁷ Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor

The elders, which we've seen means the pastors, the overseers, these pastors who rule well are to be counted worthy of double honour.

Count these pastors who lead well, count them deserving, think it right, esteem it fitting that they receive double honour.

What does that mean? We saw back in verse 3 what this honour referred to.

³ Honor widows who are really widows. (1 Timothy 5:3)

There Paul meant financially support truly destitute widows. Honour is the Greek word *timas*, which means price, value. It is referring to finances. We have a version of this in English when we speak of giving a speaker an honorarium. What does that mean? It means we compensate the person out of recognition of their service, we honour their work with compensation.

Now here Paul says something quite surprising. For the pastors who lead well, he wants the church to count them deserving of double honour. *Diblys* in the Greek, two-fold, twice as much. Now here commentators have had all sorts of ideas as to what Paul means. Some have said it is to be double the widow's compensation from verse 3. Others have said double the normal compensation, double the average compensation in the church, others have gotten even more specific regarding what salaries you add up and average and then double. But Paul doesn't really tell us; what we can take away is that Paul is calling for generosity. However you calculate it, double honour is more than the usual honour.

But here is the real principle behind it. What really merits this is what the man is working on. If he is truly labouring in the Word, then God wants His people to express their honour and gratitude for His Word laboured over and rightly divided. The double honour goes beyond the man himself and recognises the nature of his work. It is a statement of how much God's people value God's Word.

Think about it. In this world, people pay for all sorts of goods and services which it wants. Some are needful, some helpful, some dispensable, some downright dreadful. Who in the world will pay for God's Word? The answer is that the people who value it will. And those people should be God's people. God's people say to themselves, we pay for food and education and transport and shelter and security. And we even spend money on entertainment and luxuries. Should we not also show our dependence on God and our love for His Word?

At this, the hyper-pious respond, "But God's Word is free! 2 Tim 2:9, the Word is not chained,

¹⁷ For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God (2 Corinthians 2:17)

We agree. No one should be charged to hear God's Word. No one should ever have to pay to hear preaching. And no one should ever use the Word of God as a tool to cash in and make money. But that is not the same thing as saying, let God's people demonstrate how much they value the labour of studying and expounding God's Word.

⁶ Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches. (Galatians 6:6)

Yes, there are of course the practical needs of supporting a pastor. Pastors are human beings who cannot eat and drink prayer and good wishes. Some immature churches wrongly assume that if they have a spiritually-minded man who is not materialistic that he will have fewer material needs. That's wrong. If he is spiritually-minded, he should have fewer material *desires*, but he will have just as many material *needs* as the next man.

And as much as the man is dealing with spiritual matters that should not be corrupted by greed, and avarice, in the end, a simple, practical principle still prevails: in life, you get what you pay for.

Now here is something to understand for those who interview a man to take up a position of pastor. A spiritually-minded man will seek to be **affordable** to the church calling him. He wants to preach and teach full-time. He is not trying to get rich, or he should have chosen another vocation. So he will try to be affordable, and sometimes to a fault. Those deacons or call committees considering

him should understand that while it is the pastor's job to try to be affordable to the church, it is their job to try to be generous. A good leadership team should not try to score the best deal they possibly can on the man's salary, just as a good pastor should not try to score the best financial deal at the church's expense. When those two meet, you have a happy medium.

Now, all of this leads us to what we need to know next, which is the who. Who must receive this double honour?

II. Who: The Men / Ministers

¹⁷ Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.

So here it is in one sentence: the double honour goes to elders who rule well, who labour in the word and doctrine. Let's break that down.

First, elders. We've seen that is the same office as overseer or pastor. It is not a separate position. Every pastor is an elder, every elder is a pastor, every elder and pastor is an overseer.

Second, these must be elders who **rule** well. This is the same word we saw back in 3:4-5

⁴ one who rules his own house well, having *his* children in submission with all reverence ⁵ (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); (1 Timothy 3:4-5)

It means to manage, to oversee, to lead. Shepherding as the head, the one who takes both the burden and the responsibility of being at the steering wheel.

¹² And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are **over** you in the Lord and admonish you, (1 Thessalonians 5:12)

Now by ruling **well**, Paul doesn't mean that there are elders who are allowed to rule in a so-so manner, or rule in an average or mediocre fashion. No, every elder is supposed to rule well. If he doesn't, he isn't qualified and should step down.

Third, we learn, these are the ones who labour in the Word and doctrine. This word for labour means serious toil, working till severe weariness, working hard, toiling, striving struggling. This kind of effort should be put into the Word and doctrine. In other words, into studying the Word and teaching the Word.

Now, here's a question. Can he really toil at that? How hard can it be?

Well, I won't bore you with the details, but I will say, it depends how deep you want to go. As someone said, if you are content to rake the surface, you can have leaves, but if you dig, you can have diamonds. It's possible to rake the surface of the Bible and give some superficial thoughts. But people don't grow on shallow insights they could have got for themselves. People grow when a pastor labours in the Word. That means he labours to understand the original languages, the Hebrew and the Greek. He labours to look at the words used, the grammar, the syntax. He labours to understand the logic of the passage, and its context: phrases within sentences, sentences within paragraphs, paragraphs within the whole book, the whole book within the Bible. He tries to close the gap between the original audience and his present audience: cultural gaps, historical gaps, language gaps. And then he has to labour to turn this into explanations of what this means, persuasion of why it matters, illustrations of what it is like, and applications of how to do it. He

needs to labour at good writing, clear language, good organisation, and then a helpful delivery.

Now that isn't usually accomplished in one hour or two or even five or six. He usually needs the working hours of a day or two for one sermon, and he is usually preparing more than one sermon or lesson a week.

That's the labour. And the fact that Paul says this is what should be remunerated tells a congregation what they should want from their pastor above all else. Paul doesn't say that elders rule well when they have tea and biscuits with everyone during the week, or run puppet shows for the kids programs, or hold soup kitchens. There are plenty of other good things that pastor could do, but this is the one thing that is specifically said to be how the elder rules well. "Pastor, if you don't get to do anything else in a week, this one thing you must do!"

Now there is one other thing here about the men that we need to clarify. You will notice the word "especially". That translates the Greek word *malista*. This word is used two ways in the New Testament. Sometimes, it narrows a group down, defining a sub-group within a group. It's like saying, "Please buy me some fruit, but especially strawberries." Sometimes it is used *descriptively*, to emphasise the same thing. "Please buy me some fruit: specifically strawberries". In the first example, fruit includes strawberries, in the second case, fruit equals strawberries.

Now that might seem trivial when we are talking about strawberries, but it is not trivial when we are talking about pastors. And there is a quite a significant difference in how churches have structured their leadership based on this word *especially* here in verse 17. Many of the Reformed and Presbyterian churches have taken this word *especially* restrictively, to mean that there are different kinds of elders. Elders that rule, and then elders that labour in the Word and doctrine. They say that especially is specifying a sub-group within the elders. So you have ruling elders, and then you have teaching elders, and the only ones you have to pay are the teaching elders. And many churches have a version of that model with lay elders, who are unpaid, secular elders, elders who don't give themselves to labouring in the Word and doctrine, and then you have the teaching elder or vocational elder, or sometimes they even say the pastor-teacher amongst the elders.

But Baptists like our church have typically taken the word *especially* not to be restrictive, specifying a sub-group, but *descriptive*. It is our second example: Please buy me fruit, specifically, strawberries. Paul is saying, Count worthy of double honour those pastors who rule well by labouring in the Word and doctrine. In other words, all elders should rule well, and they rule well by labouring in the Word and doctrine. And therefore all elders are worthy of the double honour. For that reason, our church doesn't have the practice of unpaid elders, or lay elders. If a man is not labouring in the Word and doctrine, then he is not ruling well as an elder, so he is something else. If he is labouring in the Word and doctrine then he is worthy of the double honour.

No church should be built off the backs of unpaid elders who are genuinely labouring in the Word. Conversely, no one should be recognised as an elder who isn't doing that labour.

Now, we can recognise distinctions among elders. They may be different in ability, in experience, in giftedness, and the church should recognise those differences in how they remunerate the elders. There can be differences in the remuneration. But what a church should never do is call a man to the office of elder and simply expect him to be permanently without remuneration.

Now this leads to the third idea, which is why. Why should every elder who labours in the Word be remunerated?

Why: The Motivation

¹⁸ For the Scripture says, “*You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,*” and, “The laborer is worthy of his wages.”

To justify his command, Paul quotes from two Scriptures. The first is Deuteronomy 25:4 ⁴ “You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out *the grain*. The second, best we can tell is the words of Jesus in Luke 10:7: “⁷ And remain in the same house, eating and drinking such things as they give, for the laborer is worthy of his wages. (Luke 10:7) This shows, by the way, that Paul regarded the Gospel of Luke as inspired Scripture.

Now what do these verses teach? The Deuteronomy passage commanded Israelites not to muzzle an ox while it was treading out grain. An ox would be used to tread upon grain to force the seeds out. Now while the ox was doing this, it might stoop down and take a mouthful of the grain. The Lord commanded, “Don't be so stingy, that you refuse to let the animal engaged in work for you experience some of the benefit of its work. Don't muzzle it, spare some of that food for the creature doing the work. Don't expect to gain the benefit of the ox's work without losing a little bit of grain to the hungry animal. In other words, the work should contain its own sustenance.

Similarly, in the Luke passage, Jesus was teaching that His apostles should rely on the hospitality of those that they ministered to, not go about soliciting money from those they have not ministered to. Whomever they had healed, helped, or taught, they could expect some food and lodging from those same people. The work should contain its own sustenance.

Now Paul makes this point at length in 1 Corinthians 9

⁷ Who ever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock? ⁸ Do I say these things as a *mere* man? Or does not the law say the same also? ⁹ For it is written in the law of Moses, “*You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.*” Is it oxen God is concerned about? ¹⁰ Or does He say *it* altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, *this* is written, that he who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope. ¹¹ If we have sown spiritual things for you, *is it* a great thing if we reap your material things? ¹² If others are partakers of *this* right over you, *are* we not even more? Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ. ¹³ Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat *of the things* of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of *the offerings* of the altar? ¹⁴ Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel. (1 Corinthians 9:7–14)

Here's the point: both natural law and the Mosaic law teach that a man should live off the proceeds of the work he does. If his work is in the Word and doctrine, he has a normal right to expect he should live from his work.

If a man is immersed in the vocation of studying and teaching God's Word, don't begrudge him the expense of time in doing it.

Clearly Paul had people in his day, just as we have people in our day, that imagine that spiritual work is so spiritual it should have no relationship to the material. We can mistakenly think that spiritual things have no real-world cost, or that ministers should always refuse compensation, or hold their noses at the mere mention of money. And certainly, a man can choose to refuse this remuneration. But it does not appear that a church can refuse to offer it.

Sometimes you will find pastors and churches that part ways unpleasantly. And if you interview both parties you will find that both parties feel hurt, and injured and aggrieved.

The church will tell you that they were really good to him, and one day, he just announced his resignation, and up and left.

The pastor will tell you that he and his family eked along on a shoestring budget, trying to be affordable, until it all became too much, and they found another place where they could survive.

The church feels like the pastor left for no good reason, the pastor feels the church took advantage of him, and everyone is bitter.

What could have been done differently?

The pastor needed to teach this passage, and patiently disciple the saints in this area. And then the most mature men of that congregation needed to have taken this Scripture seriously and made double-sure that the man was not running on fumes, and was able to live a normal life materially among the people.

This then should be our attitude: if the man labours in the Word, then we honour that, and honour it generously, because we love the Word. If he so labours in the Word that it takes up all his time, then we take him on full-time, knowing that the more he labours, the more ministry we will receive, and the better off we will be, spiritually. Put simply, the more we sow spiritually, the more we reap spiritually.