

Russell Kelfer

Double Honor

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Series: I Timothy

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I think you can visualize what might be happening in the Apostle Paul's mind. You've probably been there yourself. You're writing a letter to a good friend, and you have outlined ahead of time what you're going to say. You told them about the kids. You told them about your job. Then you begin to list the other bits of news that ought to be of interest to them. You're about through writing, and suddenly a series of things floods your mind that you forgot to cover.

So the last page of your letter might be entitled "Things I Almost Forgot". It appears as though Paul is entering that "miscellaneous" section of his first letter to Timothy, and though it may include a number of seemingly unrelated subjects bunched together, they are certainly anything but unimportant. Each item, in fact, might well deserve a chapter of its own.

We're coming down the home stretch now and nearing the time when the aged apostle puts the letter in an envelope, seals it, stamps it, and prays that God will give Timothy grace and understanding as he reads it.

The last of his epistle will somewhat hurriedly cover such issues with Timothy as paying the preacher, early exaltation, lusting for riches, learning contentment, and of course a few last minute reminders about the topic of topics, the matter of false doctrine and its effect on the church. This was, you recall, the primary reason the letter was written.

We left off in chapter five with Paul's somewhat detailed account of dealing with the needs of widows and his command for the church to "honor those who are widows indeed". Now he returns for a moment to the issue of elders; only instead of dealing with their qualifications as he did in chapter three, he begins to discuss the relationship between the overseers of the flock and the flock itself. He discusses everything from salary to church discipline to partiality. It all has to do with spiritual leadership.

It's a section of Scripture every pastoral search committee,

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every elder nominating committee, every budget committee and every missions committee along with the entire congregation ought to read often. God's Word simply doesn't overlook controversial or practical issues. It deals with them head-on. All we need to do is read it and obey it. So we will take up reading in verse 17 of chapter 5:

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

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

Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses.

Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear.

I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality.

Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people's sins; keep yourself pure. (I Timothy 5:17-22 NKJV)

Paul moves effortlessly from the widow to the elder again, and this time it is clear that his burden is for how the congregation is to deal with those who have been appointed their spiritual leaders. It sounds like it was budget time, and some of the congregation may have been murmuring over paying Pastor Benjamin such a healthy salary. There may have even been the threat of a church split over the matter of staff salaries. If so, it certainly wouldn't be the last time.

So Paul decides to enunciate some basic principles that churches for the rest of this age could use in determining such issues. The first is a principle that has been overlooked by some and abused by others, which makes it doubly important that we take a good, close look. Our title is "Double Honor".

I- Paying the Preacher

II- Principles of Honor

III- Rebuking an Elder

IV- The Problem of Early Exaltation

PAYING THE PREACHER

The issue of salary for paid personnel in the church looms greater and greater as this age progresses. Bigger facilities, bigger

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programs, and bigger budgets inevitably mean bigger staffs. This means that an ever-increasing amount of the average church's budget goes to salaries. Extremes exist. The much-publicized ones include air-conditioned dog houses and extravagant limousine lifestyles on the one hand, and grossly underpaid men and women on the mission field who labor diligently sometimes without enough funds for food or clothing on the other. In between lie almost as many varied examples as there are churches. And even within churches, the question of how much to pay each man or woman, and how to compare that salary with those in the marketplace persists.

The Bible, which was to always be as current as the daily news, and Paul anticipated that problem and reached all the way back to Old Testament times for examples. Let's read once again what Paul is saying to Timothy:

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

For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer is worthy of his wages."
(I Timothy 5:17,18 NKJV)

Here comes our word "honor" again. It is a much-used New Testament thought which applies both to God and to man. We "honor" God, and we are told by God to "honor" certain people and certain offices people hold.

I hope you will remember from the previous passage that the word "honor" carries with it the connotation of respect, admiration and appreciation. Perhaps you will also remember that it often carries with it reward as well. The widows were to be honored. Part of that honor included being cared for and having their needs met by the church. It would have been no honor to give them a place of respect in the church while they starved to death. So those God honors, He honors practically. He is, after all, a practical God.

In quoting Deuteronomy 25:4 to make his point, Paul is painting an Old Testament picture so that we visualize not only *what* but *why* he is giving this commandment.

When threshing was done in the East, the sheaves of corn were laid on the threshing-floor; then oxen in pairs were driven repeatedly across them; or they were tethered to a post in the middle and made to march around on the grain; or a threshing

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sledge was harnessed to them and the sledge was drawn back and forth across the corn. In all cases, the oxen were left unmuzzled and were free to eat as much of the grain as they wished as a reward for the work they were doing. The idea is that *as oxen must be given the freedom to be sustained by the very grain they were threshing, the portrait applies to those who were laboring to share the Word of God. They, too, must eat of the grain they were preparing. They must be sustained by the people they nourished.*

The second picture Paul paints refers to Luke 10:7, where Jesus Himself shared the principle that “the laborer is worthy of his hire”, as He sent the disciples out two-by-two to share the gospel. Once again it was an overlay of a Scriptural principle that runs from Genesis to Revelation. The principle is that of working to eat and being fed by what you do. “If a man won’t work, he doesn’t deserve to eat”; but on the other hand, “the laborer is worthy of his wages”. An employer was to pay his employees fairly, quickly, and never withhold wages due. So the work ethic is clearly explained. Work is not a means to reach God. God rather reaches man by grace. But work is a means God chooses to reward man, and in the physical realm, it is a responsibility He gave man to work in the garden; He reconstructed and redesigned as a part of the curse. Man was to labor “by the sweat of his brow”. It was not going to necessarily be “fun”. It was not always going to be a source of fulfillment. It was rather going to be an act of obedience. If you do any counseling at all, the first thing you find is that most people that come to you relative to their job will say, I want to change jobs, I’m not fulfilled. And not being very tactful I often ask, “So what?” The Scripture does have some clear-cut objectives for a Christian at his job, but your fulfillment is to come from your relationship with the living Lord Jesus Christ. Your work is to be your reward. You can enjoy it in Christ, but it’s not the source of your fulfillment. Those who worked hard, and those who were faithful in their diligence deserved to be honored or rewarded for their labors. The concept will be beautifully carried out in Heaven.

PRINCIPLES OF HONOR

Before we go further into this principal I want us to go back to this word *honor*. We’ve been using it for weeks and I want to be sure we understand exactly what it means. And I’d like us to take a look at God’s “honor role” principles.

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All I did was take the word honor and go through a concordance and you can do the same. I picked out the verses, particularly in the New Testament, where the word honor is used. Let's see if we can uncover some principles so that when we go back and we're told to honor our pastors or our spiritual authorities or our widows or our parents we will understand what that's all about. So let's begin with honor principle number one.

1- Sometimes those who deserve honor are overlooked by those closest to them (John 4:44). The passage is: "A prophet is without honor in his own country". The principle is that those closest to a person may be the last to give them the honor they are due. It is why children often do not appreciate what their parents do or parents their children. Honor is something that sometimes becomes clearer at a distance.

2- God has the right to honor whoever He chooses without regard to man's understanding (Romans 9:21). You and I simply cannot grasp God's ways. We honor men for their *achievements*. God looks on the heart. We will be surprised in Heaven at who God chooses to honor.

3- Man is commanded to give honor to whom honor is due (Romans 13:7). Honoring those God tells us to honor is not optional. It is a serious matter to God.

4- God sometimes chooses to honor those who appear to be less honorable in order to magnify His grace (I Corinthians 12:23,24). Again, don't try to lock God into man's ways. Just obey Him.

5- Servants were to honor their masters, as we are to honor those under whose authority we are placed (I Timothy 6:1,16). The key to I Timothy 6 is basically that you honor your boss because of the office he holds. You honor the position and you hold it in esteem; it is God ordained. Christians sometimes have a problem learning the difference between honoring a person not the position. We're to honor certain persons because of what God has done through them. We are to honor certain positions and whoever holds the position.

6- In God's eyes, holy lives equal honorable lives (II Timothy 2:20,21). That's what His heart looks for; that's what His Word honors.

7- Jesus is worthy of much more honor than we are (Hebrews 3:3). The issue is that we must be so careful not to

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glorify a church or a ministry or a man. We're not to steal honor due God. He alone is worthy to be honored in the perfect sense of the word.

8- When men are tested and respond properly they are accruing honor to God at His appearing (I Peter 1:7). We don't understand it but at His appearing He will receive greater honor because we have stood and having done all stood.

9- We are always to honor our parents (Matthew 15:4-8). This is the primary illustration God used over and over in the New Testament to define the word honor. It is the relationship between a parent and a child, and the honor a child is to show to their parent as a picture of the way we are to honor our heavenly Father. They may or may not, from our perspective, deserve it, but that's really not the issue.

10- When we serve Jesus, the Father promises to honor us (John 12:26). It is a divine law. Honor bestowed; honor returned.

11- Those ministered to, honored those who ministered (Acts 28:10). Once again we see the principle in this chapter. Those fed or healed or helped honor those whom God used in their lives.

12- We are to honor widows (I Timothy 5:3). We have covered that. God help us not to forget it.

13- We are not to exclude anyone from positions of honor who deserve it (I Peter 2:17). Partiality based on personality has no place with God. We will see that more clearly later in this passage.

So this just a little mini-study on honor. It was deeply engraved in Scripture for the Ephesians and, when they took Paul's letter they totally understood what he was talking about when he said, "Honor those in authority over you," —honor the elderly, honor the widows, honor pastors. And I think they really understood. But I think through the years the church has come to misunderstand the concept of honor. And I think some presumptuously misuse this passage for personal gain and, as a result of that, people have backed off from the reality of what it says.

The issue of honor was one that God ordained to demonstrate respect for authority and gratitude for ministry, and it was to be illustrated not only by a sense of appreciation, but by a tangible expression of generosity that, in a sense as with parents, *repays*

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that person or that office for spiritual food received.

And so it is that Paul gave the Ephesian church a three-tiered measuring stick by which to gauge how to pay a man of God. Here it is again.

1- The man who “rules” or “oversees” is worthy of honor. That honor includes remuneration.

2- The man who “rules well” or whose life is in keeping with his teaching is worthy of “double honor”.

3- The man who “labors in the Word” (preaches or teaches) is to be especially rewarded.

Paul is clearly setting the stage for the man who labors in the Word to be paid by those who benefit from his labors. And as always with God, those who do so halfheartedly are not to be cared for as generously as those who “rule well”. Thirdly, those whose ministry involves the unearthing of the treasures of the Word and sharing those with the spiritually hungry ought to be given special consideration.

Now in Timothy’s day, it was not uncommon for some preachers or elders to earn at least a part of their salary through what we have come to call “tent making” (based on Paul’s part-time endeavors). On occasion, Paul seemed to feel that by doing that he had more freedom in his ministry to deal honestly with people, particularly those people who were not mature enough spiritually to understand this concept. But even as he did, he made it clear that God’s provision for the preacher was that he be materially cared for proportionate to his spiritual ministry among the people. To do so, he once again invokes the Deuteronomy passage, and takes the time to explain its implications as he does.

It is found in I Corinthians 9. Here is what it says:

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?

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.

If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things?

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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.

Even so, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.

But I have used none of these things, nor have I written these things that it should be done so to me;”

(I Corinthians 9:9-12,14,15a NKJV)

It appears that from what Paul is saying in I Corinthians 9:9-15, several principles must be considered:

1- God’s illustration of the oxen and the grain was written for our admonition to demonstrate God’s perspective of honoring those who labor on our behalf (verse 9).

2- Those pastors who sow spiritual fruit in your life or in your church’s life have reason to expect material compensation (verse 11).

3- If, however, those who receive the spiritual benefits cannot grasp that, *it is better for God’s man to labor to meet his own needs than to be a stumbling block* (verse 12,15).

4- Paul was not given these principles for his own benefit, but to instruct the church. Pastors or evangelists are not to promote themselves and use this principle to achieve more income for themselves, but those in the church who are responsible ought to see that it is never necessary to do that. It is our task as members to see that pastors have their financial needs met in a way that is commensurate with the church in which they serve, and in keeping with whether or not they “rule well” and “are men of the Word” (verse 15).

The words “double honor” apparently mean “in great increase” and not necessarily twice as much. But the emphasis is clear. Those who labor to preach or teach are to be honored by support.

One additional thought: We often apply these principles to the local pastor, but then treat the one who labors in the Word on the mission field as a second-class citizen, when in reality, his or her willingness to leave home and undergo hardships on the field should not have to add to those hardships the absence of adequate income. They shouldn’t have to spend their time “raising support”. It should be done for them by those who “send them”...the sending church or churches.

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Remember, when Paul wrote this he was a traveling evangelist and missionary. His ministry was not confined to his home base. His letters to the churches who were not constant in their support indicated that even then it was easier to give to the one who is directly feeding you than to send gifts to those who are laboring on the mission field, planting churches or touching lives.

It would appear, then, that those we send to the mission fields must be monitored and those whose ministries are touching lives ought to be honored, especially those who labor preaching and teaching the word. Double Honor. That's what Paul called it. Not a bad idea. But then, God doesn't have any bad ideas, so we shouldn't be surprised. I think it means that those on the mission field who are struggling in areas where the cost of living is spiraling ought not to have to spend their time begging for additional support. The churches that send them ought to run to help. And they ought to do it, if need be, at the sacrifice of things they would like to do, but don't have to do. Double Honor. It is ministry of the church to the shepherds, one that should be an outpouring of love, not a matter of duty.

REBUKING AN ELDER

Paul goes on to the next verse to apparently reprove those in the flock who were casting allegations or spreading rumors about those in spiritual authority. He was spotting a deadly cancer that would inhabit the church for the next 2,000 years. It would cause needless division; on occasions paralyze the body of Christ so it could not fulfill its normal objectives; and often so bring brother against brother that the church would become the laughingstock of the outside world. It was the matter of *how to confront an erring elder or pastor*. There were really three points:

1- Don't ever whisper about or murmur about something done by spiritual authority considered worthy of rebuke. You must go directly to the one involved; and you must do so with more than one witness. That will eliminate 95% of the accusations. If they are genuine, the one in authority must be told. If not, no one must be told. And unless you take two or three witnesses, Satan has an inroad he does not need; for each one will have a slightly different version of what was said. And it may even be an honest evaluation, but the parties involved need witnesses. It is a Scriptural principle that goes all the way back to Deuteronomy 17:6. God's principles are consistent all the way through

Scripture. We are the ones who are inconsistent.

2- If a pastor or elder is found to be guilty of something worthy of discipline, to not do so is just as great a sin. The reason is the same one that God engraved in the Old Testament law, once again, in Deuteronomy 13, as well as in many other places. It is the same reason God allowed such severe punishment for certain sins against man and society. He wanted public examples lest the people begin to believe that sin can be tolerated without discipline. Once that happens, the world is on a collision course with absolute chaos. It is such a world that we live in today.

3- The third principle was that these acts of confrontation and discipline must be done impartially. One person, because of his charisma or place in the church or place in the community or popularity with the flock must not be allowed to operate at a different level of accountability. It must be done “without prejudice” and “without partiality”.

God’s Word is so extremely practical. We must understand that these principles of dealing with authority work in the home and in the marketplace as well as in the church. Our problem is not that we have not been instructed. Our problem is sin. We want to do what the flesh wants to do, rather than what God wants us to do.

THE PROBLEM OF EARLY EXALTATION

Finally, Paul settles in on another matter that affects elder-flock relationships and affects the whole body of Christ. It is the matter of early exaltation. He is saying “lay hands on no man hastily”. Don’t be in a hurry to give a man spiritual authority. “Let him first prove himself” as he has already written. Give a man menial things to do, and let him be faithful. And remember, a man’s faithfulness in some areas may qualify him to be a deacon. His faithfulness in other areas may qualify him to be an elder. There is no need to confuse the two just because he is likeable, or because you need more people.

We learned early in I Timothy that early exaltation is bad for the church and bad for the person involved. It gives Satan an inroad. And the phrase “without partiality” indicates that it doesn’t matter how successful or unsuccessful a man may have been in the community, the issues are spiritual; and the requirements are primarily matters of spiritual maturity. Let a man be found faithful in the “few things” first: faithfully

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committed, faithfully consistent, faithfully spiritual. Then and only then consider him for a spiritual office. It might thus give churches school for thought to use young men just out of seminary or school in positions under authority first and let them be tested for their sakes and for the church's sake.

Oh, what a practical God we have. And, oh, what a fair and just God we have. He longs for His practicality and His fairness to be demonstrated in the relationship between a church and its shepherds. And should those men be found faithful, they are worthy, according to the apostle, of *double honor*. They are worthy of our respect, of our obedience to Biblical principles of correction, and of our honoring them by supporting them as well. Double honor—a principle of honor from a God who alone is worthy to be honored above all. Let's pray.

Our Father,

Thank you for the practicality of your Word, for the clarity of your Word, for the gentleness of your Word, for the power of your Word, for the endurance of your Word and for the immutability of your Word. Thank you, Father, that we can stand upon the ground of Scripture and know that the volcanoes of life that shake the earth beneath us will never move one jot or tittle. Not one word will ever be changed. Not one word will ever fail to stand. It will always be. The grass will wither the flowers will fade, but the Word of our God will abide forever. May we leave this place today having placed our confidence in the one who wrote this word and living in obedience to the principles therein, recognizing that apart from you we can do nothing.

To Jesus be praise and honor, supreme honor and glory forever,

Amen.

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