

Putting Things Together H.L. Collett

1 Timothy 5 and Elders

The Greek word translated elders is PRESBUTEROS. In this chapter it is used in two different senses: that of an older person as in verses one and two and to designate officers that rule over the local church as in verses 17-25. The context must dictate the use of the word in any case we find it in our New Testaments. The context shows that Paul is talking about the older saints in the first instance in as much as verse two mentions elder women within the context of how the younger Timothy (4:12) is to treat those of different ages: The elder men as a father, the younger men as brothers, the elder women as mothers and the younger women as sisters. When I first started preaching I had already been around the world a few times in military service and I resisted and resented being "mothered" by older women in the church. I would have saved myself no little grief had I been better studied and knew of Paul's wise counsel in these verses. By the time I learned this bit of wisdom in 1 Tim 5 I had grown too old for any elderly woman to think I needed mothering.

The focus beginning in verse three through verse sixteen is on widows indeed but also deals with widows both elderly and young. A widow originally was one who has lost her husband and was desolate, that is one who was alone with no means of support; however the word had changed meaning to mean anyone who had lost their husband regardless of her economic circumstances or family circle thus the addition of the word "indeed." A widow then might have no money or means but would have family. A family is obligated to support one in these circumstances: children and grandchildren (verse 4) and those capable of providing for others, verse 8. One who refuses to do so is judged to be worse than an infidel. A widow indeed would be one with no means of support, money or family. Widows indeed would fall into two classifications Concerning the widows indeed that can be taken into the number (verse 9: there are qualifications that identify those that can be supported on a permanent basis as an exceptional group of individual saints. These qualifications include:

1. She must be at least sixty years old.
2. She must be "left alone", that is having no one to care for her, a widow indeed.
3. She must have exhibited confidence in God's ability to meet her needs.
4. She must be a woman of prayer.
5. She must be a woman of self-control.
6. She must be a one-man woman.
7. She must have developed a ministry of caring for people She must be a woman of hospitality.
8. She must be a woman of humility.
9. She must be a woman of generosity.

Such a woman fits in that select circle of godly saints whose lives have demonstrated the Mind of Christ. These were the characteristics that marked the whole of her life, both as a wife and as a widow. She was a woman of discretion, of humility, of proven servitude, of obvious generosity. She is a woman worthy of being on the local church's honor roll that gives those women whose husbands have died a place of respect in the body of Christ rivaled only perhaps by the overseers or elders. The second class of widows indeed is those without the above listed qualifications. These would not be admitted to the "number" mentioned in verse nine. The word in the original, KATALEGO, is the word from which we get our word catalogue.

The last subject addressed in chapter five begins in verse seventeen and has to do with elders in the local church: that is the Rulers or overseers of a local congregation. Again it is the context that identifies the elders here not as older saints only but as men who "rule well." Rule here is the same as that found in chapter three verse four and five and verse 12 where the qualifications for a bishop include "one that rules well his own house" for "if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God" Notice that ruling is equal to taking care of the church of God.

The elder who rules well and who labors in the word and in the doctrine is to be counted worthy of double honor. To be counted worthy is to be considered deserving of double honor. Honor conveys the idea of "value," In this instance it rather relates to our word "honorarium" signifying financial remuneration. The word "labor" (from kopiao, to work to the point of weariness) here in its participle form, means constantly at work. The qualifications for elders include the stipulation that they be men who are "apt to teach" All elders must be capable and eager to teach the word of God, too, all elders must "rule" (3:3-5) thus there are not two classes of elders: those who teach and those who rule.

Verse 18 provides scriptural precedent to support the practice of bishop compensation. "For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward." Paul here quotes scripture. The Greek word is 'graphe' that is sacred writing. This is an affirmation of the divine character of the biblical documents. The first quotation is from Deut 25:4 and second is from Luke 10:7. Paul considers both Old Testament and New Testament as equally "sacred," that is inspired. Since Paul quotes from the book of Luke this would indicate that Luke was written before 1 Timothy was written (in the mid-sixties). The present tense verb, "says" or KJV (saith) demonstrates that the authority of the Scriptures continues in force long after the completion of the actual documents. The singular form of "says" combining quotes from both Testaments, along with the conjunction "and" between the quotations underscores the unity of these two major divisions of the Bible. The apostle argues from the lesser to the greater; if God cares for the ox, then surely he is mindful of the needs of his human servants. The Point is: there is a qualitative difference between an animal and a human being, contrary to Darwin's dogma. Too, there is an obligation to properly compensate a laborer for his work when he is "worthy of"

such. Finally, though the law of Moses as a legal system was abrogated by the death of Christ (Col. 2:14), there still are principles contained therein from which the Christian may be instructed (Rom. 15:4)

Paul next (v. 19) proceeds to provide a measure of protection for God's bishops against slanderous charges that might be made against them by disgruntled members or by false teachers. "Against an elder receive not an accusation." The word "accusation" is important. It derives from *kategoria*, a compound term; *kata*, "against," and *agora*, "a place of public speaking." It thus denotes a formal, public charge. This would be a crucial charge such as might cause the elder to forfeit his position. The exception to the prohibition would be if evidence, sufficient to pass the two-to-three witnesses test, should be available. The Old Testament background test is found in Deut. 19:15: "*One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established.*" The principle is extracted from the setting provided by the teaching of the Lord himself where it is incorporated into judicial proceedings anticipated in church controversies. "*Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. 16 But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. 17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.*" (Matt. 18:15-17) The idea that if one goes privately to an offending brother and he refuses to listen or agree with your charge you then take with you another brother or two and repeat the charge in their hearing then when the offending brother again disagrees and denies your charge you take it to the church and repeat the charge before all is not what these verses are teaching. Once you have gone through that procedure you are still only one witness to the sin of the allegedly offense brother. There must be two or more witness to the sin of the brother so charged. A witnesses is one who can give testimony to what he or she has seen or heard. In the scenario described above only one witness to an alleged sin is involved. The Lord nor Moses was describing witnesses to the accusation being made but had reference to witnesses of the sin committed by the offending brother.

It does illustrate what a serious matter it is to publicly accuse an elder of misconduct. This does not mean that one may never disagree with a decision elders have made. It does not imply that one may not, in a calm and respectful fashion, point out to an elder wherein one thinks he may have erred in judgment, one may even talk with him privately about what appears to be a sin. The restriction is designed to prevent self-motivated, reckless, and frivolous charges being filed openly against the godly shepherds of God's flock.

On the other hand, the elder is not granted a license to sin in an unrestrained fashion with no remedy available to the church. "Them that sin reprove in the sight of all, that the rest also may be in fear." "Them" refers to the "elders," "sin"

is from the Greek hamartano, "to miss the mark" (hence to violate the law of God), but here it is in a present participle form, the "sinning ones." The present tense could suggest a sustained sinfulness, or possibly that the elder remains in a state of guilt (i.e, no repentance has been evident) even though the transgression was committed but one time. Obviously the sin is one of a public nature. In the event of the elder's resistance, he must be "reproved in the sight of all" – in a church assembly (Matt. 18:17; 1 Cor. 5:4)

"Reproved" from elencho means to "rebuke, convict" and would carry the idea of one being convicted by the available evidence and, if steadfastly resistant, the implication would be that he should be formally removed from his leadership role. There is even the possibility that he might be subject to church discipline. This verse may well allude to the presence of some potential (or real) false teachers among the elders in Ephesus (cf. Acts 20:29-30)

Conclusion

1 Tim. 5:21 "I charge you..." introduces a weighty caution to those who might be tempted to abuse the previous instruction. Those who may be involved in disciplinary procedures are cautioned to deal with such matters in the most judicious way. Disciplinary actions must be done without "prejudice" (prokrima – to judge before knowing the facts) or "partiality", not to lean towards a party because of favoritism.