

Paul's Pastoral Concern

1 Timothy 5:23–25¹

Introduction

Paul's pastoral concern for Timothy is obvious as you read both of his letters to the young elder. This was "his own/true son in the faith" (1 Tim. 1:2). I am not surprised that the man who was mentored by Barnabas, "the son of encouragement," also showed such tender affection for a young man who no doubt needed that encouragement.

Such encouragement is not only imperative in the congregation, it is also important for the pastor. Many people do not realize what challenges that pastors face mentally, physically, and spiritually. These are, in part, due to the somber and sacred calling that we looked at last time. I know that the Old Testament is filled with men of God who struggled. One that I tend to think of most often is Elijah, who needed the tender care of the Lord Himself:

1 Kings 19:1–4 And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, also how he had executed all the prophets with the sword. ² Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So let the gods do *to me*, and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time." ³ And when he saw *that*, he arose and ran for his life, and went to Beersheba, which *belongs* to Judah, and left his servant there. ⁴ But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said, "It is enough! Now, Lord, take my life, for I *am* no better than my fathers!"

Elijah had experienced the thrill of God's magnificent manifestation on Mount Carmel. But he also experienced the trials and hardships of ministry in that Jezebel opposed him, threatening to take his life. These challenges are true in ministry no matter where you may be. The enemy is strong:

Ephesians 6:12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*.
¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

Yes, our Lord is greater in us than the Devil and his minions who are in the world (1 John 4:4), but that does not negate the immense pressure a spiritual leader faces on a daily basis. This is why it is so important for a congregation to pray for its pastors. These men will give an account for how they watched over your souls (Heb. 13:17).

The serious nature of the office of elder can bring with it great pressures that can take a toll on the pastor. Paul reminds Timothy (and you) that there ought to be a concern and care from the congregation for the pastor and his family.

1 Timothy 5:23–25 ²³ No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities. ²⁴ Some men's sins are clearly evident, preceding *them* to judgment, but those of some *men* follow later. ²⁵ Likewise, the good works of *some* are clearly evident, and those that are otherwise cannot be hidden.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations taken from the New King James Version.

Concern for an elder includes his—

Preview Outline:

- 1. Physical Health (v. 23)**
- 2. Spiritual Health (v. 24–25)**

Notice that Paul displays a deep concern for Timothy's—

1. Physical Health (v. 23)

This verse may seem a little out of place. Paul has described the very serious reality of an elder (which we saw in the sermon “Pastor: A Somber & Sacred Calling”). And then he goes to mentioning something about “don’t drink water but drink a little wine.” What did Paul have in mind? Is this the start of a new thought or is this somehow connected to the previous discussion? I believe that we will see this verse as Paul’s pastoral care and concern for Timothy’s physical health in the face of such a serious responsibility.

There are many pastors and their wives who experience burnouts because of the demands and pressures of ministry.

“No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach’s sake and your frequent infirmities”— Paul’s concern for Timothy begins with a rather surprising statement. The KJV reads “Drink no longer water” which may seem odd, but the word “drink water” (Gr. ὑδροπότηι) which means “to *only* drink water.”² Why would Paul have to say this to Timothy? Apparently, Timothy was only drinking water to the exclusion of all other beverages (particularly wine). There is speculation as to why Timothy would only drink water. I believe that Timothy likely only drank water (and conversely did not drink wine) *as a conviction*. After all, Paul had already said that those who desire to be elders will “not (be) given to wine” (1 Tim. 3:3, KJV). Perhaps Timothy did not want to even get close to the line that he determined he would not drink any wine whatsoever. Perhaps he held to an asceticism like that which Paul condemned in 4:1–6 to the point that even that which would help him medicinally he rejected.

Pastor Dickson has already preached a sermon on wine in the Bible so I will just do a quick review rather than get in depth. Wine in ancient culture was used both to purify as well as to preserve. Water was purified from its impurities with wine. The use of wine for medicinal purposes is well documented, as well. So it follows logically that Paul, out of concern for Timothy’s “often infirmities” (v. 23, i.e. frequent ailments/sicknesses), exhorts his young protege to drink wine for his health (“stomach” refers to his physical health).

Please note Paul’s tender and compassionate care for Timothy, his “own son in the faith” (1:2, KJV). He expresses care for this young pastor who experienced “frequent ailments.” But why does Paul add it here? *He added it here because the demands of ministry combined with the serious nature of Paul’s solemn charge in v. 21 and the stress of removing sinning elders all brought about health problems to which Paul refers.*

² This word happens only here in the entire New Testament (we call this a *hapax legomenon*—“the only time a word or words is used in a written work).

Perhaps it may come as a surprise that a pastor of notable impact such as Charles Spurgeon suffered greatly due to the demands of Scripture. Yet through his suffering Spurgeon learned to view the pressures, pain, and suffering as designed by God for his good. He wrote:

“It would be a very sharp and trying experience to me to think that I have an affliction which God never sent me, that the bitter cup was never filled by his hand, that my trials were never measured out by him, nor sent to me by his arrangement of their weight and quantity.”³

Spurgeon did not paint ministry as a bed of roses. But he did recognize that the God who called him into ministry also would enable him to grow through the pressures.

Not only does Paul show a concern for Timothy’s physical health, he also shows a tender concern for Timothy’s—

2. Spiritual Health (vv. 24–25)

You may wonder “How do vv. 24–25 refer to Timothy’s spiritual health?” Consider several things about the context:

- A. Elder’s Qualifications — Paul has argued for a very specific set of qualifications of Overseers (3:1–6). Included with these qualifications are the qualifications for deacons and their wives.
- B. The Care of Widows — The widows who qualify as truly widows can be honored with financial aid, whereas the younger widows were to be rejected from the financial aid of the church (5:9–16).
- C. Elder’s Financial Remuneration — The elders who rule well were to be considered worthy of “double honor” (or financial remuneration; 5:17–18).
- D. Elder’s Protection — Since there are those who wish to see Christ’s work destroyed by destroying His messengers, the Lord protects the character of those godly men by setting in place a set of checks and balances (5:19).
- E. Elder’s Removal — Those “elders” who turn out to be charlatans upon investigation are to be rebuked before the entire congregation so that everyone would not only fear sin, but also that they would rejoice in the holy God to Whom they will all stand and give an account (5:20).
- F. Patient Ordination — The office of elder is such a somber and sacred calling that Paul charges Timothy before God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the chosen angels to not only judge fellow elders without partiality, he must also not rush a man into the ordination of an elder to replace the erring elder (5:21–22).

For anyone to look at these discussions and not feel the weight of pastoral responsibility is beyond me. Paul no doubt recognized the immense pressure that young Timothy felt as he read these imperatives. It is not surprise that Timothy had “frequent ailments”—he had a stressful responsibility!

But what does all this have to do with vv. 24–25? *I believe that Paul was gently encouraging his overwhelmed young follower with the truth that the Lord does not leave His children to lead their Christian lives alone and helpless.* Paul was going to remind Timothy of several truths that would

³ John Piper, *Charles Spurgeon: Preaching Through Adversity* (Minneapolis, MN: Desiring God, 2015), 17–18. You can access a pdf copy of this book at the following link: https://cdn.desiringgod.org/website_uploads/documents/books/charles-spurgeon.pdf?1425420757

encourage his heart in the face of a daunting task (very much like Barnabas, the man who had mentored Paul!).

“Some men’s sins are clearly evident, preceding them to judgment” — How was Timothy to know who should be an elder and who should not be an elder? When he waited to ordain a man to pastoral ministry what measure was he to take in order that he would know that the man was a genuine spiritual leader as opposed to a charlatan? How was he to verify the character of a man? Paul reminds Timothy that for some men, the answer will be obvious. Some men who are not fit to be spiritual leaders in the church will evidence their lack of spiritual maturity or sinful lives in a clearly manifested way. The phrase “preceding them” parallels the previous phrase, namely, that before these men even get to the ordination process it will be evident that they have sin issues which disqualify them from being in pastoral ministry. The “judgment” is not the ultimate judgment seat of Christ, but rather the judgment (or “evaluation”) of whether a man is a qualified candidate. In this way, the Lord truly does make it clear that such men should never be considered for the office of elder.

“but those of some men follow later” — Not everyone will clearly manifest their sin issues. For some, their secret life of sin will not necessarily be evident at the beginning. A man may have a life that appears to be in harmony with the Lord’s will/Word and even pass the process of ordination. However, eventually their sin will be exposed. The Lord will reveal the sin.

One commentator summarized “Whether sins are visible or hidden, they are all known to God and will be dealt with in his wisdom, grace, and justice. Timothy should neither ruin his health (v. 23) nor be derelict in his duties (vv. 22–23) but rather should take heart in what God will put right in due time.”⁴ Each of these phrases speak to the sin of an erring elder—a grievance to the cause of Christ and a sad reality of life in a sin-cursed world. Yet Paul does not finish the discussion on a negative note.

“Likewise, the good works of some are clearly evident” — Many men who wish to become an elder will display by their lives their character of integrity. They will obviously display their fitness for spiritual leadership by their “good deeds” before the congregation (cf. Jesus’s discussion of bearing fruit in John 15:1–11).

“and those that are otherwise cannot be hidden” — This is not to say that pastor’s will not always do their good works in overt ways. Jesus Himself said with regard to prayer:

Matthew 6:5–6⁵ “And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. ⁶ But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who *is* in the secret *place*; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. (see also Matt. 10:26; Luke 8:17)

The sovereign Lord who sees all will ultimately see the good deeds of the people who do so in less overt ways. The phrase “those that are otherwise” does not refer to the “good works” in the previous rather; rather, “those that are otherwise” refers to the words “manifest beforehand” (KJV), meaning that those good works “that are otherwise” (i.e. those good works that are *not* clearly evident) cannot be hidden. Why can they not be hidden? *Because the One who sees in secret knows.* The Lord will ultimately reveal those works. These cares and concerns by Paul serve as an example to us in remembering our pastors in prayer and encouraging their hearts with the truths these men hold dear.

⁴ Robert W. Yarbrough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2018), 299.