



1 Timothy 5:17-6:2a
 House Rules: 1 Timothy
 “Wisdom Rules”

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We’re continuing our series in 1 Timothy this morning. It’s our next to last Sunday, as we close it out next week and then will begin a new series in the Gospel According to John. Last week we looked at the first 2/3 or so of 1 Timothy chapter 5, which has a strong emphasis of how the church cares for widows. And one ministry I should have mentioned about our church but didn’t, I think in large part because this ministry has been on hiatus as far as activity at the church goes, is our own ministry to widows and women who are single. It’s called “Teacup Ministry.” And it’s not all about drinking tea, but it is about fellowship and support, and ministering to one another. And like the passage last week encouraged widows to care for other widows, the Teacup Ministry here follows that Biblical wisdom. If you’re a woman who’s lost a husband, or if you’re a single gal...if that describes you and ministry along these lines appeals to you, then you’re invited to be a part of this ministry and be blessed by it.

Following these instructions on caring for widows, Paul continues the theme of caring for others, but turns to the Elders in the church, and then continues on with a series of instructions that are somewhat connected, but also have a certain degree of disconnectedness. Each one feels like its own wisdom statement, and so this section has a very proverbs-like feel to it. Let’s dive into **1 Timothy 5:17-6:2**, and you’ll see what I mean. This God’s Word to you and me this morning.

So, as I said, **Paul continues the “caring” theme here, turning from widows to elders.** Now, the role of elder in that time is a little like a hybrid of what elders and pastors tend to do today. In older translations, verse 17 was frequently translated to read “Elders who rule the church well...” which is not really a very good translation. Even today churches and denominations will speak of “ruling” Elders and “teaching” Elders – with the former primarily describing Elders as we tend to think of them, and the latter usually describing what we normally call “pastor.” But in their day, there was no separation between ruling elder and teaching elder. They were all “elders.”

And: Rather than “ruling” over the church – like a king or dictator – they directed the affairs of the church.

So, Paul says those who do a good job are to be given “double honor” and particularly those who do the teaching. He goes on to quote Deuteronomy 25:4 about not muzzling an ox when it’s doing its work. In other words, encourage the ox to keep going strong. And Paul says that’s how you want to treat and care for Elders. And then he also quotes Jesus verbatim from Luke 10:7 – “for the worker is worth his wages.” And note that Paul calls this “Scripture.” **Both the Old Testament quote and this quote from Jesus from the Gospel of Luke he calls Scripture.** For those Biblical skeptics who believe that the gospels were all written 4 or 5 decades or more after Jesus’ death and resurrection, this gives evidence to their existence much earlier than that, because Paul wrote this letter in about 64 A.D. So not only was Luke’s gospel *written* by then in order for him to quote it, it was written early enough that Paul and Timothy and the church in Ephesus would recognize the quote as coming from Scripture. It wasn’t considered Scripture the moment Luke penned it. It would take a little time to be given that status.

The point of it all is that the Elders, “especially those whose work is preaching and teaching,” to quote Paul, are to be shown “double honor.” **The word for honor (“timay”) can also mean “price” or “the valuing by which a price is given.”** Even taking “timay” as more of a metaphorical valuing – like “honor” as it is frequently translated – Paul clearly means to include financial remuneration based on the quote from Jesus that Paul gives about the worker being worth his wage.

So, without Elders committed to Jesus and the mission of our church, and today in the 21st Century we can add in without good staff – which we have – who help lead things, and without our deacons and without the participation of each and every one of us... **Without all of that coming together, Rose Hill Church would not live into its mission and vision effectively.** It takes all of us being in this together, with everyone doing their part.

In verses 19-22 we get wise counsel about how to handle sin in the church, particularly with leaders. Every single one of us as a sinner and have sin

deeply seated in us. Through Jesus, God has forgiven us, and this is the good news, the gospel, of Jesus Christ. But sin at the leadership level – elders, and in the modern church staff as well – can have disastrous effects. Just this last week toward the end of our denomination’s National Gathering that I attended with Elder Quenten Pippel. We were in Dallas this year, and I had a great time until the last night when they brought in a country western band, and suddenly I had a vision of what hell might be like for me. ☺ (Emphasis on “for me” because I know it would be heaven for some of you.) But I had a chance to have dinner with Chris Ward, the pastor of the ECO church in Medford, OR. He shared about how the largest church in town has gone through incredible turmoil because of the sin of their senior pastor. Sin in leadership can have huge consequences.

Now, there are guidelines to how we handle this. For instance: **Paul advises not to give serious consideration to an accusation unless it comes from multiple sources.** It is too easy to ruin a person and their ministry with a false accusation – and unfortunately, false accusations do happen, whether they’re straight up fabricated lies, or some kind of misunderstanding of a situation. Another pastor at the National Gathering shared with a few of us about a divorce he went through prior to going into the ministry. There was a vindictiveness on his ex-wife’s part that made things worse. She told him that if they got divorced she would tell everyone she could – including at the church they were members of – that he had had an affair. He told her that this wasn’t true, and that she knew it wasn’t true. She said that he was right, and she did know it, but she was going to say it to everyone anyway to take him down and sabotage his reputation. And that’s exactly what she did. To this day, when he sees certain people from that church, they turn away from him and will not even look at him because of the lies that she spread – with no second witness or third because it was all lies. There’s wisdom in this 21st verse.

Then, in verse 21 Paul advises Timothy to keep these instructions without partiality and not to do anything out of favoritism. You know, this “favoritism and partiality” issue is one of the hardest things about churches. The term we frequently use today is “conflict of interest.” We want to avoid these situations. It’s why I don’t conduct job reviews for Gwen or

sign off on vacation requests or expense forms for her. It's a conflict of interest. It's the same thing with Tim and Elaine Weltz. We set up policies and procedures to eliminate or at least minimize those kinds of situations.

But churches are fraught with opportunities for partiality, favoritism, and conflict of interest because we're a family. We have husbands and wives and children and grandchildren in church together. We're in Bible studies together, we've had meals together, we worship together, we raise our kids together, we partner together in ministry, we serve one another. But then there are others in the church that you haven't done some of those things with. We have 40 years of history with some, and 4 months with others. It's challenging not to avoid favoritism, partiality, and conflicts of interest.

This last week Adam Grant, who is an Organizational Psychologist and professor at the Wharton School of Business, shared three brief points that summarized a much larger article he wrote on why a company is not a family. He says:

1. It [treating employees like family] sets unrealistically high expectations of care.
2. If you do make it [the company] about love, people end up getting evaluated on relationships rather than results.
3. Families are often dysfunctional! You don't want people to bring their whole selves to work; you want them to bring their best selves to work.

There's serious wisdom in these principles for a company or non-profit organization; but they are problematic for churches. **The problem is that a church has a significant emphasis on caring for people; a church is built on loving God and loving neighbor which makes it difficult to evaluate our results – or “fruit” as Scripture calls it; Lastly, we do bring our whole selves to the church – baggage and all.** We often speak of a church as a family, and he's saying that that metaphor is bad for business. And the fact is, in a church there are inherent conflicts of interest, partialities and favoritisms. And then add in that we frequently can't get rid of our consumer mentality, and so our first partiality is our own. We all want our church to be the way *we* want it, even if that way inhibits our results of reaching people for Christ and making disciples of Jesus. We're partial to our own desires and

wills. All of this is why so many churches too often are dysfunctional just as families oftentimes are. So, the counsel in these verses is to keep these instructions that Paul gives, without partiality. Be as fair, even-handed, and above board as possible when correcting elders, or for that matter, anyone in the church.

Then, in verse 22, Paul gives some advice on choosing new elders: Don't do so too quickly. In other words, give someone time to demonstrate their faith and their character. Last Sunday we elected new elders and deacons...and let me tell you, you 2 new elders and 4 new deacons may not know this, but you have been watched like a hawk the last few years prior to being nominated and elected! Lol...ok, maybe not. But you've demonstrated your faith and your character and your commitment to Christ and this church in a variety of ways, and we believe you will lead Rose Hill well.

Then comes Paul's advice to Timothy to stop drinking only water, and drink some wine, too, as it will help his stomach and illnesses. A friend of mine was traveling in Asia many years ago with a group of 6 or 7 people. And occasionally some of them would get a little sick from something they ate or drank. And routinely, those who had a beer or glass of wine with their meal did not suffer the consequences that others did from eating the same meal but only having water or soda to drink. There's wisdom in this verse.

Chapter 5 then closes out with a reminder that the truth will always stand the test of time and become evident to all – whether it's the truth of our sin or the truth of our good deeds. Those things will eventually will see the light of day – for better or for worse.

And then in the first couple verses of chapter 6, he writes about slaves and masters. Probably we all wish Scripture more overtly condemned slavery. But the way the Bible goes about doing that is not so much to speak against the practice, but for the freedom and equality of slaves that Christ brings. It's a less explosive, and ultimately more effective, way to bring about social change. Pastor Ray Stedman writes: **“The great principle of Christianity looking to the reform of existing social evils is that of working “as leaven,” and not as ‘dynamite’” (Ray Stedman).** Similarly, if we're going

to impact our culture with change and transformation, it will take Christians working together with wisdom, more in the style of “leaven” and not so much like “dynamite.”

So, I know this is kind of a different feeling sermon. But I pray that something here has touched you... **May God’s word speak to your heart on something here so you would live with greater wisdom for Jesus this week.** Maybe it’s giving honor to our elders and appreciating them for the work that they do. Maybe you have sin in your life that needs confessing that you’ve tried to hide in the darkness; Maybe you’ve done some good deeds that have been recognized as you wish; Maybe God is calling you to a new way of serving in the church and you just need a little more seasoning and maturing to step into that role - whether it’s serving as an elder as he speaks to here, or a deacon, or some other role. Maybe you’d like to see social change happen – or maybe it’s change on a smaller scale even. Bringing that about explosively or too quickly is frequently not as effective moving in the Spirit and in God’s timing. Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., is a great example of living into that Biblical principle.

What’s the wisdom God is speaking into your life today through these verses, so that you might live more vibrantly for Jesus? Whatever it is, receive it and live into it so you, and we together as the church, would be the hands, feet, and heart of Jesus here on the Eastside and wherever we go. Let’s pray...Amen.