

## **Understanding Spiritual Leadership** **1 Timothy 5:17-20**

### **Introduction:**

1. It is so easy for a church to lose its bearings and begin to drift off course. There is so much in the world that tempts a church to compromise God's Word, chase tangents, or get caught up in the latest cultural fads.
2. This is why leadership is so important. After Paul started churches, he would ordain elders in those churches (Acts 14:23). Why? God commissions church leaders with the charge of keeping the church on course and in line with God's Word. Titus 1:9; Hebrews 13:7
3. Spiritual leadership in the church is very important, and Paul knew this. God is a God of order and structure. So, when writing to Timothy, Paul deals with the subject of leadership. He dealt with the qualifications of leadership in chapter 3, and here he deals with very practical matters in regards to leaders and the church body.
4. What is the result when the leaders and the people understand and fulfill their responsibilities? Look at 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13. Peace!
  - In any organization, when leaders are full of self-will, and the people are full of disrespect towards authority, it is a recipe for contention, chaos, and confusion.
5. Leadership is an absolute key issue for any local church, and we must understand what God teaches about it, if the church is to fulfill its God-given purpose.

### **First, we must understand the biblical position of spiritual leadership.**

1. Every church must decide who will provide vision, direction, and leadership for the church. In some churches, one powerful family does this. In some, it is one wealthy man. In some, it is a board of deacons or trustees.
2. But what does the Bible teach? Does God give specific instruction to local churches through His Word? Is there a specific position that God has given this responsibility to?
  - Notice in our text that Paul says, "*Let the elders that rule well...*" When you see the word "*rule*," it does not carry the idea of a dictator. The word "*rule*" carries the idea of spiritual authority. It means "to stand before in rank; to preside."
  - In every organization, God establishes the principle of authority and responsibility (home, government, church, work). God is a God of order and structure. If there isn't leadership, then nobody can stand accountable and responsible.
  - So this is clearly speaking of providing leadership.
3. Let's look at Acts 20, and notice that Paul gathers the elders (vs. 17) of the Ephesian church to instruct them to be bishops (overseers - vs. 28) and pastors (those who feed). vs. 28

- All three Greek words are used here as synonyms for the same group of men.
  - These all speak of that position of leadership that God has given to the church.
4. God never works haphazardly, but is a God of order and structure. It is not a free-for-all to see who can out-muscle who for leadership. When this happens, it is a recipe for disaster and confusion. God has given that position of elder or bishop or pastor to lead, and there is a reason why. It has to do with their work. This brings us to our next point.

**Second, we must understand the primary work of spiritual leadership.**

- God clearly places the responsibility of leading the church on elders (also called bishops or pastors). Emphasis is on the word “responsibility.” There are many, many things they do (it’s a work – 3:1), but let’s summarize the work of pastors.
1. They are responsible to oversee the flock of God.
    - Paul used the word “*rule*.” They are to provide leadership, vision, and direction for all aspects of the local church (as a husband would his home). 3:4-5
    - They don’t **do** everything, but they oversee the affairs of the church. They have a watchful eye to insure that all things glorify God and are done decently and in order and according to God’s Word.
  2. They are responsible to feed the flock of God. Acts 20:28
    - Notice that they should labor in the Word and doctrine (Titus 1:9). This is crucial because if church members are not growing and being challenged spiritually, the church will limp along instead of being a vibrant testimony in their community.
  3. They are responsible to protect the flock of God. Acts 20:29-31
    - Paul warned of grievous wolves who would try to scatter the flock. There have to be shepherds there watching out for them.
    - All three of these things tie together. They are aware of the state of the flock and are constantly in the Word, so they can feed the flock of God. Therefore, they are able to protect the flock from false teachers and false doctrine. Titus 1:10-11
    - The work of an elder/bishop is very important to the cause of Christ.

**Third, we must understand the proper response to spiritual leadership.**

1. The church is to seek to meet their material needs so they can concentrate on the work of the ministry. 1 Timothy 5:17-18
  - The word “*honor*” has the same meaning as it did in verse 3. It is from the same root word that we get the word “honorarium.” It literally is defined as “a value; money paid.”
  - Paul is saying, “The elders that are doing their job, take care of them financially. If you find yourself some good leaders, they are worthy of

double pay.” He uses an Old Testament illustration and a quote from Jesus to prove his point. vs. 18

2. We see the responsibilities of spiritual leaders, but what is to be the response of the church towards their spiritual leaders?
3. The Bible teaches that the church is to know them and recognize their position of spiritual authority (1 Thessalonians 5:12). The church is to also esteem them very highly, which simply means to give them a high degree of respect.  
1 Thessalonians 5:13
  - When Paul refers to those who are “*over you*,” he does not infer that they are more important to God, or that they have special access to God. We all stand before God equal in the body of Christ. But it does denote spiritual authority in the local church on earth. “*Over you*” refers to leadership, not worth or value.
4. The church is simply to love them. Notice that you “...*esteem them very highly in love...*” The respect comes from a love in your heart. You truly love in Christ those who are carrying the weight and responsibility of the local assembly.
5. The church is also to follow their example and leadership. Hebrews 13:7, 17