

## A Faithful Shepherd

Pastor Ryan Roach

November 4, 2018

1 Timothy 5:19-25

### Introduction

In his book *The Death of Expertise*, professor and expert in foreign relations, Tom Nichols, details how our culture has not only ignored people who are considered experts, we've completely rejected them.

The book gives examples of how the public seeks to undermine anyone who claims to have an expertise in a specific field. *A Ph.D.? That's just a piece of paper! Years of experience? You've been there too long to know anything! Facts and numerical data? Anyone can make numbers say what they want! A doctor who has been practicing for 30 years says I have a disease? Let me check what a bunch of friends on social media have to say first!*

Nichols argues that we've gone so far to the extreme of rejecting experts that we now celebrate our own ignorance. Studies have shown this to be true...the less someone knows about a topic, the more confidence they have in their intellectual abilities to deal with it.

Now, hear me, I am not an expert in anything. I know a little about a lot of things but not a lot about anything. But God and the church has called me – and every other elder – to a certain task, and that is to lead you in your spiritual journey.

What I think *The Death of Expertise* shows is that we have a tendency to mistrust anyone who is an expert or a leader, especially when they say things that we don't already agree with. In church life, we see this often. A church practices discipline and people get upset.

Certainly, it's not a pleasant thing to do and so some leave a church over how they saw their friend or family member supposedly mistreated. They know what the Bible says about it, but their mind was made long ago that actually doing it is just too mean.

It's a distrust of authority. We do it in our jobs without even thinking about it. Even when we like our boss, they're still our boss. We still instinctively question and doubt what they are telling us because, well, we know better than they do.

In the church, I don't think it's a failure to trust experts (again, many pastors are not experts), but rather a failure to trust leadership in their lives. It's true, some of you have experienced bad leadership in your lives. You've witnessed elders and pastors spiritually abusing their flock.

Maybe you've been the victim of this. But I think a word of warning is helpful here: don't ignore the clarity of scripture because of a few bad examples. Don't ignore what God has said because a few have misused those words for selfish gain.

God has given his church leaders – elders and pastors – to shepherd his people until Jesus returns to gather up his bride. Today, we've seen what a faithful elder is and how the church should respond to these men that God has called for his purposes.

### What is a faithful elder?

I want to be honest with you. There is a term in this passage that I had heard but was never taught for my first 25 years of life. I had attended church my whole life, finally converting to the faith when I was 17, so I've heard many sermons and even more Sunday school lessons.

But I was never taught what an elder was. See, I had never attended a church that had elders – so it was strange to me...it was something that people in churches where the pastors wore fancy robes talked about, but not at my Baptist church.

Some of you may be in that same position right now. Maybe you're new to our church or new to any church and this is the first time you've even heard the word *elder*. If that's you, we appreciate that you're here, and I want to take a moment to define what an elder is before we go any further.

To put it simply, elder and pastor mean the same thing. They are interchangeable. It simply means overseer...a man called out by God and the congregation to serve the church through teaching, leading, and being with the people.

I know that we don't do this intentionally, but we often say that we have three elders and one of those elders – me – is the pastor. We do that – as most churches do – to show which elders are full-time and paid by the church. But remember that pastors and elders are the same thing.

So, what do you want from your pastor or your elder? If we could take a poll of this church to see what you would expect from your shepherds, what would the list include? A good teacher. Someone who visits me in the hospital. A gifted counselor. Someone who is open about his own sin. All of those are good. But they can be summed up in one word: faithful. You would want your elder to be faithful.

Above everything, you would want him to be faithful to his God and faithful to his wife. He would also need to be faithful to his children and to his church. Faithful to his community and his neighbors.

We all want our elders to be faithful because they are the ones who feed Christians the word of God. In a few weeks, we're going to see what the Bible says about false teaching, and there is an illustration that works for these verses as well as 1 Timothy 6.

My son is allergic to peanuts. If he gets near one or briefly touches something with peanuts, his eye gets puffy and he becomes lethargic – sluggish. He's 7 years old, so he gets his own snacks and makes some of his food, but my wife and I do most of the bigger things. We cook and prepare most of the meals.

Now, suppose for a moment that I wanted to hurt him. It wouldn't be difficult because all I would have to do is insert some peanut butter into every meal. All sorts of terrible things could happen to him. But I am careful about what he eats or touches, why? Because I am a faithful parent to my children.

I care about his safety, so I carefully watch what he eats. I make sure to remind him about his allergy. If I think he may have had contact, I watch him to see if it had any effect on him. We even carry around an epi-pen just in case something terrible were to happen.

This isn't because I'm something special. I'm doing what any faithful parent would. If I didn't do those things, you would have every right to think that I don't care about my children or that other things are more important to me.

Wouldn't you want your elders to be just as caring and responsive to you? Elders are human, just like parents, and there are plenty of times that an elder will miss something important to you or he will say something that offended you, but don't you want the pattern of the elder's life to be a faithful one?

We've seen the qualifications that an elder must have in chapter 3. As the book goes on, the Apostle Paul – the writer of the letter to Timothy, a young pastor – even gives instructions for how the church is to treat those God has called to shepherd them and care for them.

But we've all heard stories about pastors who fleeced the flock. Men who were trusted by their congregation stole money from their people or who mistreated them. Maybe it was that they were abusive toward their members, only caring about what they could get out of the relationship.

Others are thrust into the pastorate without training or experience and are simply not prepared for the challenges that every pastor or elder faces. But I can help you this now, as important as experience is and as important as education is, if a shepherd is not faithful, none of that other stuff matters.

That's why books like 1 Timothy matter so much. You may think, "Well, that's written by a church planter to a pastor. There isn't much for me." Church, you need to know this because you need to know who to follow. You need to know who to trust.

There are spiritual wolves waiting for you. They are everywhere and if you don't know how to discern what a faithful elder or pastor is, you will be easily deceived, and you will be tossed around with every idea that sounds good by every preacher and teacher who sounds like they know what they are talking about.

This passage is important because it talks about the relationship between an elder and his church.

**Do not admit a baseless charge against an elder. (v. 19)**

So, with the stage set for why it's important to have these conversations and why it's important to recognize a faithful elder, look at verse 19 with me. "Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses."

This verse is one of those verses like we saw last week, where it is uncomfortable to me because I don't want to be a dictator. I know what my flesh wants – that everyone does what I say and believes exactly what I believe – so I try my best to avoid conversations that would allow me to demand your allegiance.

Simply put, you follow me in my flesh, you will be led somewhere you do not want to go. Instead, follow me as I follow Christ. That means that these uncomfortable verses that talk about the relationship that you have with your elders *must* be studied and understood and accepted because the care of your soul is at stake!

So, hear me on this...I'm not preaching these verses because I'm demanding your allegiance to me. I'm not doing it to protect myself. I'm doing it because I care about your soul.

As you read 1 Timothy, you see these warnings over and over again, not because Paul is trying to dominate people, but instead because he loves them.

And you can imagine young Timothy reading this letter to his church. He's probably read it to himself a few dozen times and he knows those portions that will certainly cause some to get angry or upset. By the way, the verses that caused people to frown back then are the same ones that cause people to frown today. Times have changed but our hearts have not.

So, what is verse 19 saying? You might think that pastors and elders don't face much criticism because the requirements for ministry leadership are so high. What is there to complain about when a pastor is faithful and doing the right thing?

If you've spent time around me or any other pastor or elder, you'll quickly see how easily accusations fly at us. Most of the ones we get are minor, but they still come. They come because those in leadership are often in difficult situations.

Couples on the brink of divorce. Rebellious children who have abandoned the faith their parents taught them. Hospital visits. Deaths. Struggles with sin and addiction. Depression. Loss. Lack of faith. Church discipline. These are all things that pastors and elders are often right in the middle of.

The nature of what we do forces us to be in situations that are spiritually dangerous. A medical doctor must have good malpractice insurance because he or she is literally dealing with life and death issues in their practice. A mistake or error could cost someone their life. They are in a dangerous position and that's why they must not only be insured, but licensed and examined by different agencies. It's all done to ensure that they are qualified and capable to do what they must do.

Church leaders are not cutting people open or doing brain surgery, but what we do is spiritual medicine. But what do you think happens to a pastor who is eager and willing to jump in the middle of difficult situations? Accusations begin to fly. A faithful pastor doesn't seek these things out, but a faithful pastor cannot avoid them either.

This is why Paul gives the warning in verse 19 about bringing a charge against an elder. Before we go any further, I want to be clear about something, especially in light of what has been happening over the last year or so in our country. If a pastor is accused of abusing someone – like we've seen happen far too many times – that goes directly to the police.

Churches that try to handle these things internally are hurting their own people. We must follow the law because that's what obedient Christians do. My hope is that this would be understood but we've seen far too many examples of this not happening and it's a stain on the church and the gospel.

But though terrible things do happen, it's not the norm for the church. Most of the accusations against pastors and elders are far less serious but they are still damaging to the pastor, his family, and the church.

You may be thinking, "Why not just deal with everyone like this? Why is Paul singling out the way we treat our leaders?" Again, it's the nature of what we do as shepherds. It's a public position where we stand before you each week preaching and teaching and giving vision for the church. It's who you often go to when you need counseling. If unsubstantiated accusations were free to be said, the trust of the church would dwindle, and the pastor's effectiveness destroyed.

Billy Graham had a rule about how he would never be alone with a woman who was not his wife. He did this because he wanted to eliminate whatever temptation would come but publicly, he never wanted to give anyone the opportunity to accuse him of something he didn't do.

I remember having a young lady ask me for a ride home one night and I said that I couldn't do it, but I would try to find someone to ride with us. I grabbed another guy and we took her home. On the way to her house, I said that I wasn't doing this to necessarily protect me from sin, but instead to protect myself against allegations.

All it would take is for one person to make an allegation and my ministry or, at the very least, my ministry effectiveness is lost. The church has a duty to their leaders to ignore gossip and accusations that are made against them.

Why? Because it's not so much the one who is teaching, but rather, the gospel that is damaged when this happens. Look, I am equally as prone to sin as you are. I don't have any special way to communicate with God beyond what you have too.

But being a pastor, I know what a disqualifying sin could do to you and to this church. I know that my calling is a big one and I don't take that lightly. Years ago, I attended a conference for pastors in Jacksonville.

During one of the sermons, the preacher talked about how Satan wanted to destroy pastors' marriages. New to the impact of social media, I started tweeting quotes from the sermon. One of our church members who happened to be quite feisty wrote back, "Satan wants all marriages to fall apart."

She wasn't wrong, but she missed the context of the statement I made. That sermon I heard struck me because it was the first time that I understood the weight of this calling. Yes, any marriage that falls apart is a terrible tragedy, but often, its impact is felt only by family and close friends.

But for the pastor, a broken marriage touches everyone in the church and even many outside of the church. Beyond that, the church may never recover its gospel witness after the pastor does something sinful.

I say all this to show that the pastor doesn't get special protection, but he should get (along with all the elders) extra consideration when accusations are made.

### **Rebuke the elders who persist in sin (v. 20a)**

But what happens when a pastor or elder is in sin? Look at verse 20 with me: "As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all..." I love God's word. I've given my life to it, but even though I love it, there are things in it that I don't like.

That doesn't make them any less God's word than the stuff I do like. And it also means that I must follow the instructions and commands even when I don't like what it says. This is one of those verses that my flesh simply does not like.

Who wants this? Would you choose a career where you could lose everything due to something going on in your personal life? Most would not. But God has given the church very clear instructions about what kind of man their elder must be.

Does this mean that the pastor who eats a little too much or parks where he shouldn't park must be publicly rebuked in front of the church? I don't think that's what Paul had in mind here. I think he is giving a warning about pastors that John gives to the church in 1 John 3...

John writes, "Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil...No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God..."

Now, you don't need to read much of the Bible to realize that every person sins. We sin a lot before we are converted, and we sin a lot after conversion, though we fight it as hard as we can. So, John isn't saying that if you sin once, you've lost your salvation because we all would have lost it mere seconds after we got it.

And Paul isn't saying that pastors must be publicly shamed every time they sin because, again, the shaming would never stop. Paul and John knew well that Christians sin. We know that too. I think Paul is doing a few things here. First, I think he's warning the church and its leaders about the dangers of unrepentant sin.

He knows that it doesn't take much for sin to creep into one's life and then destroy it from the inside. Think back to the people you've known in your life who had a great testimony and then years later publicly disavow themselves from the Christian faith. If you were to map out their entire life story, you would find small things...cracks in the foundation of their faith...things that they didn't address that grew into bigger things until, ultimately, they abandon their faith.

Paul is saying, "Church, when you see a crack, you better fix it, because if you don't, it will only get bigger." Sin is destructive, and we know that from our own hearts but also from the examples of so many that have come before us.

Second, I think Paul gives this warning because he understands that, as the leaders go, so goes the church. If a church has faithful leadership and biblical preaching, it may not grow as fast as you'd like but it will grow spiritually. Discipleship will happen.

I've never been a farmer and I know very little of what it takes to grow crops, but I do know that the ground must be prepared before seeds are planted. That's what leaders in the church do. We aren't responsible for the growth – that's the work of the Holy Spirit – but we are responsible for getting rid of the things that could prevent real growth, real change from happening.

Giving a warning to pastors about their own sin is necessary and Paul sees it. He gives the reason in the second half of verse 20: "so that the rest may stand in fear." If you saw an elder in this church have his unrepentant sin addressed publicly, how would you feel?

In most cases, you'd feel strange because you've never seen that happen. But you'd hopefully feel convicted too. If an elder – a man who is called out by God and the body to lead the local church – can fall into sin and not be broken over it and not repent of it, then I better keep a better watch over my own soul.

### **The church is ultimately responsible for ensuring that elders are qualified (v. 22)**

This is why Paul gives the warning in verse 22 about how a church must not be quick to make a man an elder. If a church allows an unqualified man to be an elder, it is responsible for what it gets. I don't say that casually, but it is a warning against appointing men quickly because they are successful in business or even because they know the Bible.

In verse 24-25, he gives the command to carefully assess future elders. "The sins of some people are conspicuous, going before them to judgment, but the sins of others appear later. So also good works are conspicuous, and even those that are not cannot remain hidden."

How long does a church need to wait before bringing on someone as an elder? Long enough, I suppose. Each church can make that determination for themselves, but there should be enough time to watch how he handles difficult situations. He should be given small responsibilities first and watched by the elders and the church.

There should be a time for him to study doctrine and scripture, so he is prepared for the battles that come his way. He should also be watched to see how he loves and serves the people under his care. This is godly wisdom for how an elder should be appointed.

### **An aside (v. 23)**

Some of you are reading this and you circled verse 23. Paul inserts this verse, seemingly out of nowhere: "(No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.)"

How does this fit into the passage? It's something Paul would have thought about as he is writing this letter, so we can figure that he has good reason to include it. I think a reasonable scenario for this was that Timothy may have had a conviction about alcohol.

If you remember in chapter 4, we saw that people were prohibiting certain foods, posing as the really religious people. Timothy obviously had a problem in his church with it so perhaps he could have been working through this in his own life.

Paul is letting Timothy know that drinking a little wine shouldn't be a problem for him, especially for someone with stomach troubles. Drinking wine was not something that would disqualify Timothy from the pastorate nor would it make him impure.

I will say this about this verse: I don't think we should build a theological system on these words. Yes, they are God's words through the Apostle Paul, but it's a verse that can easily be manipulated. Remember, what is the main point of these words that Paul wrote? The main idea of the passage has nothing to do with wine, but instead the church and its leaders.

### **Conclusion**

I really think there are two main things to consider in this passage. First, the local church needs to show their leaders grace. We need to show everyone grace, giving them the benefit of the doubt until proven otherwise, but we need to do that even more with those who we are following.

I don't know anyone who would admit to this, but our actions often speak as if we think our pastors are Jesus. That sounds ridiculous but listen to how people who leave a church describe why they left. "I

wasn't being fed." "The pastor didn't do this or that for me." "The teaching didn't connect with me." "I didn't feel loved."

I've heard all those said and behind all those things are words that tell me how a person feels about their pastor. They want him and the elders to be perfect. "Love me how I want to be loved." "Preach the way I want to hear a sermon preached." "Be what I want you to be."

In other words, they want Jesus to be their pastor. Many of us want a perfect man to be their pastor and the first time the pastor proves himself to not be Jesus, I'm out the door.

I want to share something with you that may be shocking: I am not Jesus. There will be many times that I will say something or do something that you find to be either wrong or un-pastor-like. There will be disappointments and you may find yourself discouraged.

In fact, you may even want to leave to find another church. I believe that membership is a lot like marriage, where you commit to someone before you're comfortable. You stand with each other, even when you would rather do anything else. It's because you are here for a bigger purpose than your own comfort and desire.

I have said this to other audiences and other churches: don't be so quick to give up on your leaders. Don't let gossip detract you from serving and growing and leading others to do the same. Don't let baseless accusations kill your faith because you've held your pastor too high. Don't hold your pastor and elders so high that they can't ever meet your expectations for them.

Second, churches need to protect the purity of the local church. The sad truth is that pastors and elders fail. Sometimes, they fail with a sin so egregious that they disqualify themselves from ministry leadership. We hate to see it, but it does happen.

The church *must* protect itself from these men who would show themselves more concerned with a paycheck and a position than they are about the people and the power of God's word.

Church, remember, the *gospel* is the power of God unto salvation. It's not the pastor or elder who gives this to you. It's God. The men who stand here and preach should never preach themselves. That's a path that will lead to destruction. Our flesh craves that. We want a gifted speaker who motivates us with stories about his life and how he's figured out the secrets to success. We want to feel good, feel encouraged, and feel motivated to be winners!

A faithful elder avoids all those trappings and instead stands firm on the word of God as the only source of perfect truth. A faithful elder gives his life to the work of God through teaching, prayer, and spending time with his people. A faithful elder may not be a gifted communicator and he may never have a big audience, but he will honor God through his life and his teaching.

It's a strange thing, the Christian life. In every other area of our lives, strength in something often means success. But not in the church. God uses the weak to accomplish his purposes. God uses those who are outcasts in society to lead his people. God uses those who are deemed worthless by the culture to change the world.



The gospel is what a faithful elder must cling to. It's what he must preach and teach. Because the gospel is power. The gospel is the power that I can't ever find on my own. Church, this is your measuring stick for figuring out how to apply 1 Timothy 5:19-25 to your life.

Is the pastor preaching Jesus and not himself? Is the pastor living the gospel – repenting of his sin and warning others to do the same? Is the pastor devoted to truth? If the answer is yes, you have a faithful pastor. The faithful pastor or elder wants nothing more than to point people to Jesus.