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The Value of Leaders

1 Timothy 5 v 17-25

Introduction

Value - how do you decide how much something is worth? We might have different criteria for different things:

1. Parts & labour - some things are worth what they cost to produce. That might be the cost of the materials or the labour cost to make or harvest whatever it is. TVs are a really competitive market, so you'll usually pay what it costs to make them, plus a very small profit margin. Sometimes the shop will try to sell you a cable to go along with the TV, as they'll make more profit on that than the TV itself.
2. Brand - there are some things that sell for a lot more than they cost to make. They get away with it by giving the item a luxury or sought-after brand. It could be exactly the same as the cheap stuff, but the name doubles the price. Look at the Prime drink for a recent example. For a few crazy days people were spending hundreds of pounds on a bottle of juice.
3. Need - the price of something can be artificially high because we need it, and can't get it anywhere else. Or we've left it to the last minute. Don't get your foreign money at the airport - they know you've missed out on all the competitive rates and they can charge you what they like.

Leland Stanford knew about pricing items based on how much they're needed. The founder of Stanford University went to California with his 5 brothers at the start of the gold rush. He made his fortune, but not by finding gold. He knew that not every prospector struck gold. But every prospector who came to California needed a shovel. And so Leland sold shovels.

How do you decide how much your leaders are worth? Based on their time? Based on their brand, their reputation? Based on how much you need them and how you'd struggle without them?

Timothy is being given instruction by Paul on managing the church in Ephesus. Last week we thought about how he should deal with widows in the congregation. Now we look at dealing with the church leadership...

Pay

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The labourer deserves his wages." [1 Timothy 5 v 17-18]

Paul gets straight to the point - elders should be considered worthy of honour. This is the same language he was using at the start of the chapter when talking about widows. In this case he says double honour is due, perhaps partly in respect for the position, and then also for the good job they're doing - he does say "elders who rule well". That's no different to the case for widows, is it? In verse 10 the widows were to be well thought of in doing good works. So it is that the elders who rule well should be the ones worthy of honour. And that should be obvious to the church - the leadership should be seen to be making a difference and playing a part in the life of the church, certainly not some remote figures sitting on their special seats and looking for praise for their high position.

Note that Paul particularly picks out preaching and teaching as a noteworthy part of the leader's work. Why those? There are plenty of other jobs the elders do, but preaching and teaching are central to the spiritual health of the church. It's what the church is about - imparting the word of God to people. Good preaching has great value.

Paul then uses a couple of illustrations to tell us that elders deserve a reward. The picture of the ox treading the grain, and not being muzzled, refers to a law in Deuteronomy. The ox deserves to get some of the benefit of the work it is doing. Then he does an interesting thing: he quotes the gospel of Luke, where Jesus is sending the disciples out to spread the word of the kingdom of God. He tells them not to take much with them but to rely on hospitality at each place they stop. This quote is notable as Paul here is calling a New Testament book "scripture". The only other place this happens is when Peter refers to Paul's letters as scriptures.

The question this might lead us to is "how many of our leaders should be paid?"

Should it be none? Some churches practise this, that no one puts a burden on the church by taking a wage. However this would limit the people who could be elders, and limit the amount of time they could commit to the church. Our passage has just said we should count them worthy, and not to muzzle the ox that works away treading the grain. So it's obvious that paid staff are a good thing.

Maybe all the leadership should be paid then? But that would limit how many leaders a church could appoint. A small church could maybe only afford one wage, but the Bible recommends a plurality of elders. And Paul himself used his job as a tentmaker to cover his expenses while he served at his various churches.

So a mix of paid and unpaid elders would seem to be a good balance to make. That allows us to have some dedicated full time to leading the church, while also having the backup and experience of others, and a greater range of views than we might otherwise have.

Discipline

Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear. In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality.[1 Timothy 5 v 19-21]

Now we get to the tricky subject of disciplining an elder. As we saw in an earlier chapter, the expectation of the character of an elder is pretty high, and Paul says any charges against an elder should demand a similar level of robustness. The leadership position is one which is visible, and one which people can easily take against, from personal dislike to a grudge about a decision, or envy of the position. And so gossip can't be allowed. Any charge must come with weight behind it to be considered - Paul says two or three witnesses are required.

Now this has got churches into a lot of trouble in the past. Serious crimes have been ignored or covered up using this excuse of two or three witnesses. As our safeguarding policy says, if a criminal act is claimed it should be reported to the police.

If a misdeed is proved though, it must be dealt with, and Paul says it should be dealt with publicly. A leader continuing in sin should be named and shamed in the church, in the hope of turning them around, and also as a deterrent for others.

This is serious stuff, and Paul points out there are dangers for Timothy here. He could easily find himself swayed by what he thinks about people. He could have prejudices about some of the folk in the church and decide they are guilty before hearing out the facts. Or he could consider someone wealthy or friendly with more favour than he should. In tackling sin and deciding on guilt, we need to be as objective and fair as possible.

Promotion

Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor take part in the sins of others; keep yourself pure. (No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.) [1 Timothy 5 v 22-23]

I used to know someone who quoted this verse a lot. Every time there was an argument he would come out with "lay not hands suddenly upon a man". But this verse is not about fighting. The laying on of hands was the way Paul and Timothy would ordain someone into service, showing their approval and praying for them as they brought them into their position.

Paul is suggesting that Timothy take his time in choosing elders for the church. If he is too hasty he may make bad decisions. A bit of time helps the congregation get to know the candidate, and see more of his character.

He also urges Timothy to keep away from the sins of others. It's easy in a group setting to just join in with what the group is doing, even if it's not something we would normally do by ourselves. Timothy is to keep himself pure, if he's going to make good decisions about the leadership. No one will be able to use any leverage on him if he hasn't done anything. We get another little analogy here. Timothy was known to have poor health, and the water was full of stuff that could cause him problems. A little wine would kill off some of the bacteria in the water, purifying the whole lot. Maybe if Timothy can live a pure life in front of the church it will help purify the rest.

Appraisal

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. [1 Timothy 5 v 24-25]

The truth will out! It's a popular saying and it generally does apply to people. There are those who wear their hearts on their sleeves. We can see what sort of person they are right away. But there are also those who would hide or suppress who they really are, and only reveal themselves when they get comfortable with others. Paul says that their nature is shown eventually, if not right away. So perhaps this is another reason to be cautious in appointing leaders: taking time to get to know them well before making decisions.

Application

So how much do we value our leaders? How much are they worth? How much would you miss them? Do you notice a difference when they take time off? We should be thankful when God puts good leaders in our church.

But don't overinflated their egos too much. It's important to remember that this is God's work, and God does the work. Robert Murray McCheyne was working away in Dundee, giving his all to evangelise the people of his parish, looking for the Holy Spirit to bring conviction to hearts. He, like Timothy, suffered from poor health and he found he had to take a break. He decided to go on a tour of the holy land, which took a good few months. When he returned he found that God had brought a revival to Dundee without him, the church was packed with convicted sinners, calling out to God and seeking Christ. Always remember it's his battle and his victory. That was the theme of our memory verse at the holiday club. It was Psalm 118 v 24:

This is the day of the Lord's victory. Let us be happy and celebrate [Psalm 118 v 24]