The Care and Feeding of Elders

A Family of Faith, 1 Tim. 5:1-16

Introduction

- In 2021, Mojang Studios added axolotls to their popular video game, Minecraft. Since then, millions of people have brought the lovable salamanders home as pets – and many have returned, abandoned, or released them into the wild. Marketed as "easy pets to own," axolotls actually require a lot of care - with specialized aquariums, strict diets, and expensive equipment to keep them alive. People who aren't prepared are overwhelmed, giving up eventually.
- Elders are not pets…but they are a role of leadership in the church associated with management and care (see 1 Tim. 5:5)
  - Elders care for doctrine, people, & the affairs of a local church.
  - But what responsibility does a church have to care for its elders? What about deacons? Is there a reciprocal component to this relationship?
- 1 Timothy 5:17-25 seems to say that, **as an office of leadership, churches should treat their elders with care**. (Read passage)
  - This relationship of reciprocal care is complicated by the realities of life.
    - Some people just don't like authorities, secular or sacred – bishop or pastor – it doesn't matter; they don't want anyone to tell them what to do.
    - Some church leaders are "bad apples," and they ruin it for everyone else.
    - Satan hates the church, & he will destroy it in any way he can – through its leaders, through its members, or through both.
  - Remember, the church at Ephesus had its share of struggles.
    - Some of the elders were promoting false doctrine that distorted the gospel.
    - Some of the church rejected Timothy's ministry because of his age.
    - Some viewed godliness as a means of financial gain.
- In the midst of struggle, how can a church care for their elders? Here are 4 ways:

Body

I. Elders who do a good job should be respected & remunerated. (v. 17-18)

A. Two of the duties assigned to elders are in view here:

1. Leadership: Ruling, guiding, directing, and providing oversight.

2. Teaching: Preaching and providing instruction for the church.

B. Those who "do well" & "work hard" should receive "double honor"

1. In the context of the chapter, single honor or regular honor seems to be equal to respect and honor for their position.

2. "Double honor" refers to the ability to make a living or get paid

a. The quotes from Dt. 25:4 & Lk. 10:7 both address pay.

b. Paul chose to support himself financially, but he agreed with the idea of ministers being paid for their labor in the church.

C. In our approach, we have volunteer elders & vocational elders (pastors)

1. Our elder body is made up of a majority (50% plus 1) of volunteer elders.

2. Our pastors are also elders & serve in the elder body.

3. This structure provides care for the elders as they care for the church.

II. Elders should be protected from baseless accusations. (v. 19-21)

A. Elders are people who can make mistakes; they are also convenient targets for unhappy people. (This may be a surprise to some, but it's not a promotion)

B. These verses assume the same pattern for addressing sin outlined in Matt. 18.

1. A personal confrontation with the offender

2. A private confrontation with the offender and "2 or 3 witnesses"

3. And if the offender (elder) persists, a public confrontation w/ the church.

a. This last step should be taken to warn the rest of the elders about sin.

b. This last step should be pursued without bias or partiality. (v. 21)

C. This approach also cares for elders as they care for the church.

1. It puts "guardrails" around the souls of church leaders.

2. It also shields church leaders from unfair & mean-spirited criticism.

III. Elders should be acknowledged for their sacrifices. (v. 23)

A. Timothy is often thought of as a young, timid man who struggled to lead.

B. Paul's personal counsel here paints Timothy in a different light.

1. Paul addressed the problem of drunkenness in Ephesus. (Eph. 5).

2. Timothy sacrificed his own Christian liberty so that he would NOT be an offense, and his physical health was suffering because of it.

C. Some elders, pastors, & ministers are scoundrels, but most are not.

1. I've served with those who have sacrificed sleep, family time, mental & emotional energy, personal finances, friendships, privacy, and their preferences, all for the sake of serving ministry.

2. Most don't do it for the praise, but awareness & appreciation can be helpful.

IV. New elders should be appointed with caution. (v. 22, 24-25)

A. In context, the "laying on of hands" is about selecting new elders.

1. Haste makes the church partially responsible for their mistakes.

2. Cautious reflection & prayer aid the selection process in 2 ways.

a. It aids the church in avoiding those who are not truly qualified.

b. It aids the church in identifying those who might be overlooked.

B. Like most churches, we have a process for selecting new elders, but that process requires <u>people</u>, <u>prayer</u>, and <u>patience</u> as we work it out together.

Conclusion

- God's Word says a lot about how His church should be run, and when it comes to the office of elder, **an office of leadership, churches should treat their elders with care**.
  - This is a relationship of reciprocal care, as the elders care for the church and the church cares for its elders in all the ways we've talked about this morning.
  - I know this message may seem self-serving, coming from me, one of your elders, so I want to <u>invite</u> you to hear, not as an opinion, but as a message from God.
  - And since care is more of an attitude than an action, I'm gonna <u>invite</u> you to do something else – pray for your elders, deacons, CG leaders, committee chairs, and on down the line – anyone who leads and serves here at Northside.
- May these prayers be a tangible expression of care & support as we work to evangelize & disciple the Northern side of Indianapolis together.