

“Double Honor”

“... let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and in teaching. For the scriptures saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn. And, the laborer is worthy of his hire” (1 Tim. 5:17-18).

The apostle has spoken of the respect that is to be given to older brethren in verse one. Now he turns to the respect which is to be given to those who are elders of the flock of God. Those of such as who rule well are to be *“counted worthy of double honor.”* From the instructions given here, it is clear that the *“double honor”* consisted of the church providing for the physical needs of such a man. Paul’s quotation from Deuteronomy 25:4 (*“Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn”*) tells that just as the oxen was to be allowed to eat of that which he helped to tread out; so elders who laborer in word and teaching should be allowed to receive reward for their work. *“Double honor”* would consist of honor (respect) which came to him by being chosen by the congregation to be one of its shepherds; double honor would be the financial assistance the church gave him for the labor he wrought.

This same right of support was defended by Paul in his Corinthian letter. The primary different between 1 Corinthians 9 and this passage is that in the Corinthian letter he argued for the right of preachers to be supported in their laborers; here he argues the right of elders to receive support. Yet, here, in an abbreviated argument, he appeals to the same arguments he had made in 1 Corinthians.

In the Corinthian letter Paul not only appeals to the same passage -- the ox treading out the corn, he appeals to soldiers, those who labor in a vineyard, and those who tend a flock (vs. 7). To further strengthen his point, he showed that both Levites and priests were provided for in the spiritual service they wrought. Then he concluded, *“Even so did the Lord ordain that they that proclaim the gospel should live of the gospel”* (1 Cor. 9:14).

One should never confuse “right” and “obligation,” however. Paul had the right, as a gospel preacher, even more so as an apostle sent by Christ, to be supported by those to whom he had brought the gospel. But, he did not always use that right! There were a few occasions in which he made exception to his determination to *“make the gospel without charge;”* notably in the case of the Philippians, but those occasions were the exception, not the rule of his conduct (1 Cor. 9:18; Phil. 4:15). While it may be the right of

elders to be supported in the work they do, most function as Paul; providing for their own needs with no financial support from the church.

It is no less important to “keep souls saved” as it is to preach the gospel that initially saves the soul. The work of preachers and elders function in the same spiritual realm, the souls of men. But, preachers bring the gospel to teach the lost of their state and bring them to Christ; elders watch, guard, zealously so, the sheep under their care, that he see him safely in the eternal fold of God.

Paul’s words to Timothy were to remind him that elders have an important work in God’s kingdom; and if the need so be, they should be sustained in the work they do for Christ.

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