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1 TIMOTHY 5:17-18 EXPLAINED

What did the Apostle Paul mean with his statement in 1.Timothy 5:17-18, where he said:

Let the elders that rule well be counted WORTHY OF DOUBLE HONOUR, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward. (1 Timothy 5:17-18 AV)

Let's start off by examining verse 17.

What did Paul mean by the expression "counted worthy of DOUBLE HONOUR"? Did Paul mean that such ministers should be paid "a double salary"? This is the way this verse was explained to us when I attended Ambassador College back in the 1960's, though it was never implied that ministers on the Church's payroll actually did receive such "double pay". It was simply stated that Paul meant that ministers who "ruled well" DESERVED double pay, even though this wasn't actually done in practice. But is this correct?

So what did Paul actually mean?

Part of the key lies in understanding the word here translated as "honour". To get this into perspective, we should look at a couple of other Greek words as well.

THREE DIFFERENT GREEK WORDS:

1) The Greek word here translated as "honour" is "time" (NOT pronounced like our English word "time" but basically pronounced as "tee-may"). It is used 43 times in the New Testament and is in the KJV translated 33 times as "honour", 8 times as "price", one time as "precious" and one time as "sum". This is the word Paul used in 1.Timothy 5:17.

2) A different Greek word, "opsonion", is used 4 times in the New Testament and it means "a wage" or "a soldier's pay". This word is also used by Paul in Romans 6:23 ("THE WAGES of sin is death"), and in 2.Corinthians 11:8 ("I robbed other churches TAKING WAGES OF THEM to do you service").

3) A third Greek word, "misthos", is used 29 times in the New Testament and it means "dues paid for work", "the fruits naturally resulting from toils and endeavours", etc.. Jesus Christ used this word in John 4:36 ("And he that reaps receives WAGES..."), and Peter used it in 2.Peter 2:15 ("Balaam loved THE WAGES of unrighteousness"). Paul also used this word in 1.Timothy 5:18. We will look at that verse later.

The point is that when someone did want to refer to monetary remuneration in the New Testament Greek language, then there were two possible words (i.e. "opsonion" and "misthos") available to do so. Paul referred to "taking wages" (Greek "opsonion") from other congregations, and Jesus Christ Himself said that someone who works as a labourer in the fields receives "wages" (Greek "misthos") for the work he has done. So why did Paul not say: "... let him be counted worthy of double OPSONION", or "... double MISTHOS"? Why did Paul use the Greek word "time"?

Let's now look more closely at the Greek word "time", which Paul used in 1.Timothy 5:17, and which is there translated as "honour".

Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament defines the Greek word "time" as follows:

1. a valuing by which the price is fixed,
2. honour which belongs or is shown to one, the honour of one who outranks others,
3. veneration, deference, reverence, praise of which one is judged worthy.

This Greek noun "time" is derived from the verb "tino", which is used only once in the New Testament, and which means "TO PAY A PENALTY", or "TO SUFFER PUNISHMENT". The severity of the penalty was assessed based on the crime that had been committed. It is in this sense that the word refers to "a valuing by which the price is fixed". When the Greek "time" is used with a POSITIVE meaning, it invariably refers to bestowing honour and recognition on someone who has been "valued to be worthy of such honour". With its positive meaning the Greek "time" is never used to refer to money in the New Testament.

So "time" refers to THE VALUING PROCESS, rather than the price itself. That is why it is translated into English as "honour" and as "veneration" and as "respect", because those words imply that we have assigned a certain VALUE to a person.

Now since this Greek word can refer to "a valuing by which a price is fixed", the way we can really be sure of what Paul meant in 1.Timothy 5:17 is to look at the other places where Paul used this Greek word "time", as well as how other people used this word. It may sometimes be one thing to say that a certain word "CAN" have a specific meaning, and another thing altogether to see the meaning with which the writers of the various books of the Bible actually DID use that word. In the following quotations I have rendered the English translation of "time" into capital letters for easier recognition.

To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and HONOUR and immortality, eternal life: (Romans 2:7 AV)

COMMENT: This is Paul's first use of this word, and he clearly does not have "money" or "pay" or "a salary" in mind here.

But glory, HONOUR, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile: (Romans 2:10 AV)

COMMENT: Again Paul is not in any way using "time" here to refer to money.

Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto HONOUR, and another unto dishonour? (Romans 9:21 AV)

COMMENT: Again Paul is not speaking about "money" or "price".

Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; IN HONOUR preferring one another; (Romans 12:10 AV)

COMMENT: No reference to money in this usage either.

And those *members* of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant HONOUR; and our uncomely *parts* have more abundant comeliness. For our comely *parts* have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant HONOUR to that *part* which lacked: (1 Corinthians 12:23-24 AV)

COMMENT: Again the Greek word "time" is not used to refer to "money" or "pay".

That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and HONOUR; (1 Thessalonians 4:4 AV)

COMMENT: Paul is here speaking about a right relationship within marriage, and "money" does not feature in this verse.

Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, *be* HONOUR and glory for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Timothy 1:17 AV)

COMMENT: This is Paul's first usage of this word "time" to Timothy, and it is not used in reference to money. It is used in reference to God Himself.

Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all HONOUR, that the name of God and *his* doctrine be not blasphemed. (1 Timothy 6:1 AV)

COMMENT: Again Paul was not really speaking about "money" ... he didn't expect servants to pay their masters some money; Paul really meant "honour and respect".

Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom *be* HONOUR and power everlasting. Amen. (1 Timothy 6:16 AV)

COMMENT: This reference to God is not a reference to "money" either.

But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to HONOUR, and some to dishonour. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto HONOUR, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, *and* prepared unto every good work. (2 Timothy 2:20-21 AV)

COMMENT: We have now looked at every occurrence of the Greek word "time" in Paul's two letters to Timothy. These two verses here don't speak about "money" either. So in none of his communications with Timothy, ignoring 1.Tim 5:17 for the moment, did Paul use the Greek word "time" to refer to money or to payment.

Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and HONOUR, and didst set him over the works of thy hands: (Hebrews 2:7 AV)

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and HONOUR; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. (Hebrews 2:9 AV)

COMMENT: Again Paul has not used the word "time" to refer to money or to payment.

For this *man* was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more HONOUR than the house. (Hebrews 3:3 AV)

And no man taketh this HONOUR unto himself, but he that is called of God, as *was* Aaron. (Hebrews 5:4 AV)

COMMENT: Again Paul is not speaking about money or payment.

That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and HONOUR and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: (1 Peter 1:7 AV)

Unto you therefore which believe [he is] PRECIOUS: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, (1 Peter 2:7 AV)

COMMENT: The Apostle Peter also did not have money or payment in mind when he used this word "time".

Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with [them] according to knowledge, giving HONOUR unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered. (1 Peter 3:7 AV)

COMMENT: Again Peter did not use the word "time" to refer to money or payment.

And when those beasts give glory and HONOUR and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, (Revelation 4:9 AV)

Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and HONOUR and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created. (Revelation 4:11 AV)

Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and HONOUR, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and HONOUR, and glory, and power, [be] unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. (Revelation 5:12-13 AV)

Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and HONOUR, and power, and might, [be] unto our God for ever and ever. Amen. (Revelation 7:12 AV)

And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and HONOUR, and power, unto the Lord our God: (Revelation 19:1 AV)

And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and HONOUR into it. (Revelation 21:24 AV)

And they shall bring the glory and HONOUR of the nations into it. (Revelation 21:26 AV)

COMMENT: In all of these places in the Book of Revelation this Greek word "time" really has nothing to do with money or with payment.

IN SUMMARY: We have looked at the places where Paul used this Greek word in writing to Timothy, as well as in numerous other places where this word is used. It is quite evident from the way this word is used, as well as from the contexts within which it is used, that it really does refer to "honour" rather than to "wages" or to "salary" or to "remuneration".

To infer that in 1.Timothy 5:17 was saying that "elders that rule well" should receive "DOUBLE PAY" is simply not justified, and it certainly is not correct to make such an inference. This inference was made based on the negative meaning of the root word "tino", which refers to paying a penalty. But when used in a positive sense, then the Greek noun "time" does not refer to money at all.

CONSIDER THE CONSEQUENCES OF A "DOUBLE PAY" INFERENCE:

But let's for a moment consider the consequences if Paul really HAD meant to infer that some elders should receive "double pay" because they were doing such a good job. What would that lead to?

1) First of all, it would place the job of the ministry on "AN INCENTIVE PROGRAM"; i.e. the better you do your job, the more money you will earn. And that is surely not what the ministry is intended to be ... a vocation with a financial incentive program? And the whole Church would be aware of that "incentive program"?

2) It doesn't make sense to assume that Paul, the minister who worked without pay in Corinth, was urging Timothy to give some ministers "double pay" in another church area. It would also assume that Timothy should assign himself "double pay". [Timothy is the one minister Paul praised more than any other, see Philippians 2:19-22.]

3) Since such performance assessments are easily subjective (e.g. those in the congregation who feel their minister is doing a great job may support him being paid "a double salary", while others in the congregation who are somewhat unhappy, whether justifiably so or not, would be inclined to be critical of him being paid "double"), it would open the door to unfair discrimination in the area of remuneration.

4) If the congregation knew that Timothy was paying some ministers twice as much as some other ministers (since all the congregation would have read this letter from Paul at some point), it would have had a divisive effect on the congregation.

5) It just doesn't make sense to say that in about 64-65 AD (when Paul wrote 1.Timothy) Paul was

encouraging Timothy to pay some ministers a double salary ... when about 4 years earlier Paul had openly told the churches (in Philippians 2:21, written about 60-61 AD) that, apart from Timothy, ALL THE MINISTERS under his jurisdiction were selfishly motivated. As Paul put it,

FOR ALL SEEK THEIR OWN, not the things which are Jesus Christ's. (Philippians 2:21 AV)

Furthermore, it is one thing to recognize someone's diligence by a 10% or even 20% increase (in a no-inflation context) in pay, but going to a 100% increase seems rather extreme. Paul's reference to "DOUBLE honour" should really make clear that he was not speaking about FINANCIAL remuneration. Would God have wanted those Levites that did their job well to receive "A DOUBLE TITHE" from the people?

The many places where this Greek word "time" is used that we have examined above should really make quite clear that Paul was NOT saying: "pay those who rule well a DOUBLE salary".

So what did Paul mean in 1.Timothy 5:17?

Paul was saying that Timothy should in some way acknowledge that certain elders were doing a very good job, by bestowing some "honour" on them, perhaps by acknowledging them as "senior pastors" or as in some way "more competent" or "more qualified". Not all ministers are equally qualified in helping and serving God's people, and greater qualifications, as evidenced by the fruits produced, could certainly be recognized. As an example: in Acts 6:5 one of the original 7 deacons that were selected was a man named "Philip". Years later the same man is recognized as an EVANGELIST in Acts 21:8 ...

And the next *day* we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of PHILIP THE EVANGELIST, WHICH WAS ONE OF THE SEVEN; and abode with him. (Acts 21:8 AV)

Clearly Philip had received "DOUBLE HONOUR" by Acts 21:8 when compared to the time when he was first selected in Acts 6:5. Whether or not Philip was on any kind of "salary" from the Church is debatable, but he certainly had increased considerably in "honour" amongst God's people.

Where in 1.Corinthians 12:28 Paul stated an order of some kind by using the words: "... FIRST apostles, SECONDARILY prophets, THIRDLY teachers, AFTER THAT miracles, THEN gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues", in Ephesians 4:11 Paul simply said: "... And He gave SOME apostles, and SOME prophets, and SOME evangelists, and SOME pastors and teachers ...". The list in Ephesians 4:11 has simply inserted another group (i.e. "evangelists") between the second and third group of 1.Corinthians 12:28 (i.e. between prophets and teachers). [Note that in Ephesians 4:11 Paul equates pastors and teachers as one group; i.e. pastors really must have the ability "to teach" in order to be able to "pastor" a congregation of God's people.]

Without getting embroiled in any kind of "hierarchy arguments", it certainly seems to me that these two passages imply "MORE HONOUR" being bestowed on apostles than on evangelists, and "MORE HONOUR" being bestowed on evangelists than on pastors or teachers. Bestowing such "double honour" does not carry any "double salary" implications with it.

When you think about it, whether a servant of God is designated as "an apostle" or as "a prophet" or as "an evangelist" or as "a teacher", this doesn't really have any effect on the reward he will receive in God's kingdom. All of these titles, while highlighting a specific job or function carried out by the man involved, really bestow different degrees of HONOUR upon the man. We would expect an apostle to

receive more honour than an evangelist, and an evangelist to receive more honour than a local church pastor.

In chapter 3 Paul had given Timothy instructions regarding how to select the men to ordain into the ministry (1.Tim 3:2-7). Was Paul a little later (i.e. in 1.Tim 5:17) not just making a statement about how to recognize that some of those Timothy had ordained should be acknowledged as holding a position of "more honour", meaning, acknowledging them as fellow-evangelists (since Timothy himself was an evangelist), even as the deacon Philip had been acknowledged as an evangelist? Or perhaps some other recognition along these lines?

Consider Paul's own example: In Acts 13:1 Paul was just one of the men (elders) in the Church at Antioch. Then in verse 2 GOD selected Paul and Barnabas for a specific job, and so these two men were ordained as "apostles", and by Acts 14:4 we have the first reference to them as "apostles". Clearly the ordination process in Acts 13:2-3 had bestowed MORE HONOUR upon Paul and Barnabas. It seems unlikely that God had any intention in Acts 13:2-3 of immediately putting Paul and Barnabas on "double SALARY".

WHERE MOST MINISTERS IN THE N. T. ON A SALARY?

Most congregations in the New Testament, apart from Jerusalem, Corinth and Ephesus, were really rather small. Many met in people's homes. Yet in some of these there may have been two or three elders. Others might not have had any elders.

When Paul was at Miletus, about 30 miles from Ephesus, he called for the elders to come to him from Ephesus (Acts 20:17). Paul promptly warned them that some of them would "speak perverse things" (verse 30); he was hardly thinking of any of them needing to be paid "a double salary". But the point to consider is: were all of these elders from the one city of Ephesus actually on the Church's payroll? Without knowing the numbers involved, Acts 20:17-38 gives me the impression that there were half-a-dozen, if not more, elders who had come to Paul from Ephesus. That's rather a large number of ministers to have on the payroll for one single congregation.

Next, a small congregation of up to perhaps 20 or 30 people is hardly large enough to require the full-time attention of one minister as their pastor. With such a small congregation the man will have very little to keep him busy most of the time.

There was a congregation that met in the house of Philemon (see Philemon 1-2). Was Philemon on the Church's payroll for looking after such a small congregation? That seems somewhat unlikely to me.

Notice Paul's own example:

EVEN UNTO THIS PRESENT HOUR we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace; AND LABOUR, WORKING WITH OUR OWN HANDS: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: (1 Corinthians 4:11-12 AV)

Even at this point Paul was STILL working physically to provide for his own needs. In another situation Paul wrote:

For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: FOR LABOURING NIGHT AND DAY, BECAUSE WE WOULD NOT BE CHARGEABLE UNTO ANY OF YOU, we preached unto you the gospel of God. (1 Thessalonians 2:9 AV)

It doesn't sound like Paul just worked the odd hour here and there to provide for his needs. He seems to have worked very hard to provide for his own needs. In Corinth itself Paul had worked with Aquila and Priscilla, as they were also "tentmakers".

And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, AND WROUGHT: for by their occupation they were tentmakers. (Acts 18:3 AV)

If Paul, working in his profession as a tentmaker, was not distracted from the job of being an apostle, then surely a minister in a local congregation of perhaps 20 or 30 people could equally well hold down the job which he had learned as a trade, IN ADDITION TO looking after that small group of 20 to 30 people. When Paul worked as a tentmaker in Corinth, he was at the same time looking after one of the larger congregations in existence at that time.

But the point is: yes, those who were working full-time in the ministry should certainly have been supported by the membership. But with all of Paul's examples, WHY would Paul possibly have wanted to urge Timothy to pay some men "a double salary"? Do you really believe that Paul actually expected Timothy to DO that ... to just DOUBLE the salary he was paying some of the elders under his jurisdiction? Did Timothy actually have "A BUDGET" from which he could assign such salaries?

From everything that I can understand here in 1.Timothy 5:17 it seems quite clear to me that Paul was encouraging Timothy to openly ACKNOWLEDGE those ministers who were doing a good job, by openly bestowing double HONOUR on such men, possibly by elevating them to a higher position in the ministry. The Greek word Paul used here really DOES refer to "honour" rather than to "financial remuneration"!

Notice one last thing about 1.Timothy 5:17.

Timothy was to bestow such "double honour" on any ministers who "ruled well", BUT ESPECIALLY on those who were serving the Church full-time. However, Paul's use of the phrase ..."ESPECIALLY they who ..." work full-time in the ministry implies that such "double honour" was not limited to those who "laboured in the word and doctrine" (i.e. those who worked full-time in the ministry). Ministers who still held down their own job and took care of the responsibilities given to them in a commendable way could also be eligible for such "double honour" (probably somewhat like being eligible for outward recognition, like in our age being elevated from a "local elder" to a "preaching elder" to indicate to the congregation a growth in maturity). And such ministers would not have been paid by the Church, and so they would hardly suddenly be rewarded with "a double salary".

Now let's look at the next verse, 1.Timothy 5:18.

For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward. (1 Timothy 5:18 AV)

NOW WE ARE TALKING ABOUT A WAGE OR A SALARY!

But this is NOT speaking about "a double wage" or "a double salary"!

The Greek word here translated as "reward" is "misthos", which we saw earlier means "dues paid for work", "the fruits naturally resulting from toils and endeavours", etc.. The word also specifically means "wages".

Paul quotes two biblical principles in this verse. And both of these principles imply "fairness", but not

"DOUBLE honour". The ox is not rewarded DOUBLE for treading out the corn (grain). Neither is the farm labourer paid DOUBLE for carrying out his job (recall Christ's comment about being an "unprofitable servant" if a labourer only does what he is expected to do; Luke 17:10).

Both principles in 1.Timothy 5:18 imply FAIR pay for the work done. However, "double honour" for having "ruled well" goes above and beyond what is "fair". DOUBLE honour has nothing to do with being paid for work done. Simply because someone does a GOOD job, that does not entitle that person to expect to therefore be paid DOUBLE. And the wage or salary paid to a full-time minister is not really different from the wage or salary paid to a labourer in any other profession, as both the principles Paul quoted in this verse make clear.

THE POINT Paul was making in this verse is that those who DO work full-time in the ministry should really be able to count on receiving a fair wage or salary from the Church. The previous verse had included elders who were NOT working full-time for the Church; but those who DO work full-time for the Church should expect to receive a fair wage for their work. And if any of the elders under Timothy were making the transition from being able to take care of all the responsibilities given to them on a part-time basis to suddenly devoting ALL their time to the responsibilities of the ministry, THEN certainly Timothy was to acknowledge this by arranging for them to also receive a wage from the Church.

Was the man Philip, who had been one of the original deacons and who was an evangelist by the time of Acts 21:8, still working "full-time" in the ministry? Perhaps? Or was he just living in Caesarea? How big was the congregation in Caesarea? Were there any other local ministers in Caesarea in addition to the evangelist Philip? Was Philip receiving a wage from the Church in Caesarea? Were any ministers in Caesarea on "double pay"? Should Philip have been on "double pay"?

I have checked 1.Timothy 5:17 in a large number of different Bible translations. I certainly may have missed some translation or other, but nowhere have I found where the expression in this verse is translated to mean "double PAY".

So "fair pay", yes! But "double pay", no! And, where appropriate "double HONOUR", yes!

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