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Miscellanea

The Meaning of "Double Honor" in 1 Tim. 5:17

The question has been asked: "Just what does St. Paul mean when in 1 Tim. 5:17 he speaks of a "double honor" which should be accorded to the elders that rule well, especially those who labor in the Word and doctrine?"

There is no doubt that the term "double" is often used in Scripture in the general sense of a greater or very great measure. Thus, in our opinion, the well-known Gospel text Is. 40:2: "For she hath received of the Lord's hand *double* for all her sins," announces to the weary and heavy-laden among God's people the comforting message that "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Rom. 5:20). Sinning Israel received "double" grace, *superabundant* grace. So also in Is. 61:7 the words: "For your shame ye shall have double" signify that the gracious recompense of God shall far exceed Israel's shame. In the New Testament we find the word "double" used in precisely the same way. When, for example, Rev. 18:6 tells us that Antichrist's cup shall be filled *double*, the meaning doubtlessly is that God's judgments on him will be very great or, in other words, extreme. Of course, there is always the literal or primary meaning of "double" to reckon with; but usually the context makes it quite plain where the term is used in its original and where in a wider sense.

In 1 Tim. 5:17 the expression "double honor" is manifestly employed with respect to the special respect for the well-ruling and teaching elders that shows itself in proper remuneration, for this is proved by v.18, where both an Old Testament text (Deut. 25:4) and a special command of Christ (Luke 10:7) are quoted to support the Apostle's admonition, both inculcating liberal compensation of the faithful workers. On the basis of v. 18 we believe that the explanatory note in the *Concordia New Testament with Notes* is altogether correct and to the point: "Special respect, manifested, as the next verse shows, in provision for their wants. As the service of the church would occupy much of their time, especially when they devoted themselves to the work of preaching and teaching, a proportionate provision was to be made for their maintenance."

A similar explanation is found in G. Buechner's *Handkonkordanz*, which says in explanation of the passage: "He does not speak of a two-fold honor which should be accorded to the elders, but of their livelihood (*Lebensunterhalt*), which should be granted to them from the treasury of the congregation. Nevertheless, honor, in its original sense, should not be excluded." Buechner, however, in annotating this verse, offers the explanation that elders (pastors) should receive a double amount of salary over against the almoners or other servants of the congregation. Such an exposition clearly forces the words of the text to say what in reality they do not say; it is no longer *exegesis*, but *eisegesis*.

Very fitting is the remark of the Weimar Bibel which takes the term "double" in the sense of "especially great" (*sonderbarer grossen*)

and adds: "Everybody should honor them with obedience because of their office and, besides this, let them give them also a becoming livelihood (*gebuehrlichen Unterhalt*).

Meyer, in his *Commentary*, holds (in opposition to De Wette) that "we must keep here to the general meaning of τιμή, honor, although we may grant that the Apostle was thinking particularly of the honor which the church was bound to show to their elders by presenting them with the means necessary for their support." But he adds by way of caution: "It is quite erroneous to interpret τιμή of a maintenance definitely fixed." He closes his remarks with the words: "The double honor here is that which comes to the presbyter on account of his office . . . and that which he obtains by filling his office well."

The Expositor's Greek Testament comments on the passage: "On the one hand, διπλῆς [double] certainly warrants us in concluding that presbyters that ruled well were better paid than those that performed their duties perfunctorily. Bengel justifies the better pay given to those that 'labored in the Word, etc.,' on the ground that persons so fully occupied would have less time to earn their livelihood in secular occupations. On the other hand, we must not press the term *double* too strictly."

What St. Paul means to inculcate in 1 Tim. 5:17, 18 is, no doubt, this: Well-ruling, faithful elders, particularly those laboring in the Word and doctrine, that is, those engaged in teaching, should be accorded a special measure of deference or respect, and this grateful reverence should manifest itself by proper remuneration. The passage may thus be quoted in the interest of a more adequate payment of teachers and pastors, though, as has been pointed out, the admonition should not be misused by pressing the "double" too strictly. It may be added, too, that the application of the passage should always be made in an evangelical, and not in a legalistic spirit. This is proved by the very way in which the Apostle quotes the two proof passages in v. 18.

There lies, of course, also in the passage an admonition for all pastors and teachers and whoever else is engaged in the service of the Church; for St. Paul very emphatically speaks here of elders that *rule well* and of elders that *labor* in the Word and doctrine. Only such elders may expect proper respect and remuneration as really are laborers worthy of their hire. Faithless, work-shirking elders should be properly admonished and if they fail in their holy office despite all warning, should be dismissed; for indolent servants do not belong in the King's vineyard.

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