

## **No Partiality among Leaders**

Let us turn to our Bibles to 1st Timothy chapter 5, 1st Timothy chapter 5 verses 21 and 22. A lot of interesting things, at least interesting to me, going on here with respect to the Church of God and how officers ought to act and the like and what officers there are supporting them. So here we are verses 21 and 22.

Let us listen attentively to the Word of God. I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality. Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people's sins.

Keep yourself pure. Let us pray. And here in these words, Lord, we see what is important for the church officers as he exhorts Timothy not to be prejudiced, not to be unduly partial, not to lay hands quickly or hastily upon another man and ordaining them to office, the implication being you should be careful in such things, Lord.

We pray that all our leaders would learn such a lesson, they would know these things before they even come into the office, and indeed we pray that we also see for ourselves the importance for us that there are times in which we are called especially not to be prejudiced and that we ought to be objective and fair with the situation before us. We ask, Lord, that this would be an encouragement for our ears as well. Although given to Timothy and pastors more directly, it is still applicable for us and all Christians, for this is our calling, Lord, to keep ourselves pure in our activities and how we present ourselves and live in our Christian life.

By your grace and mercy, we pray. Amen. So as you know, Paul is continuing here his bullet statements designed to remind the young pastor Timothy of various ecclesiastical matters, matters of the church, the church, of course, organized, the structure of what it is, the hierarchy of courts, who the church officers are, the responsibilities they have to one another and to the church and the church to them.

As we read in verse 17 and following, he reminded them of the honor due unto the elders, especially the pastors, and supporting them in their ministry. He further cautioned the church officers should here not be given to prejudice and before then in verses 20 and 21 there, verse 19 and 20, that they should be given the same judicial rights as everyone else, that you can't bring charges against them without two or more witnesses, right? Lest they become an easy target of malice and discontentment because they are public figures. And here, as I'd mentioned, he seems to be closing the case now about emphasizing to Timothy that pastors and leaders in the church should not be biased or prejudicial in certain matters.

It's a strong terms here to exercise his God-given gifts of office and all fairness, we would say today. Church officers should not show partiality in public and judicial matters, but ever keep their eye on the truth of the matter of the substance of the difficulties before them. And so I give it a very ineloquent title here, right? No partiality among leaders.

## **No Partiality Among Leaders**

They should not be biased in these regards. That's the first point. What I want to highlight here is the severity or the seriousness of the charge.

I charge you. That's a good translation. Timothy, who? This young man, this pastor, this church officer, in no uncertain terms, to testify, to strongly urge, or to charge.

Pay attention, Timothy. This is serious stuff. Church matters, organized church matters, indeed are serious stuff.

You can imagine being brought to a kangaroo court that happened to one of the founders of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, J. Gresham Mason, in which the mainline Presbyterian Church, the biggest Presbyterian Church at the time, or one of the biggest, was full of liberals and people who like to pretend that they're conservatives and pretend they believe the Bible and pretend they confess the confessions, and they didn't, and they don't, even today. And they brought Mason up on a trial and said, you've done bad things, and we're going to stick it to you. A church court trial.

Kangaroo court. You know what that old phrase means. It's stacked against you.

He wanted to defend his case by quoting the Bible, and they wouldn't let him. They wouldn't let him defend his case. To show, because the matter before them was, is it true or not? And they're like, it's not true.

It's all about procedures. Weak men like to use proceduralism to hide the substance of the matter. And that's exactly what happened.

They, as you can see, it was a very serious matter. Brought a man up and deposed him from the ministry. Ruined his livelihood, more or less.

He died about a year after the OPC was founded. And he died of sickness, of course, but it'd be very hard on him. Thankfully, by God's providence, he had money.

He had southern money, as I understand. He wasn't poor, but many ministers today are poor. And if they got charges, or if you got charges against you, it'd be very hard.

It'd be very difficult. It is a serious matter when it comes down to it at times. Although I know, again, church ecclesiastical matters aren't the most exciting thing to learn about.

It's still in the Word of God. We have to take it seriously. And Paul is certainly pressing point, pressing this point home very, with much urgency.

I charge you, such strong language, before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, and elect angels. It's not just me saying me here, but God himself is involved in my charge before you, Timothy, to do these things without partiality, with fairness, with objectivity. We don't want to see that kind of prejudice in the church leadership.

You can imagine how discouraging it would be, how I prefer this half of the church and not that half of the church. You'd be like, what's going on here? Why is he treating them special

and not us? Aren't we all members of the household of God? You can see how much of a problem that would be. So he is very serious in this matter, and urging them, the church organized is important, the church leaders must have godly requirements, and church discipline and charges must be exercised in all fairness of the matter.

They're not insignificant important, but they are here for our good. And so we cannot, we are called, or excuse me, he has called here the Timothy and the pastors through him to observe these things. What things? I already gave you part of the answer there.

What he just talked about, let elders rule well, let them be honored, don't muzzle them, don't receive an accusation against them without two or three witnesses, and those who are sitting amongst the leadership, sitting, you must rebuke them in the presence of all. So it's a matter of church discipline amongst church officers, and if it's true for them, it's true for all of us. These things are the things I charge you, young Timothy, to observe and observe carefully, and without partiality, without prejudice, do nothing with partiality, we read in this translation, verse 21, it's the immediate matter of church discipline, church officers, and the like, and the very serious matter here.

Imagine how much better I think churches would be if Christians, not just church officers, took church matters to heart. It's not just a little thing to join a church, it's not a little thing to be involved in the structure and the organization, the leadership, and to be a church officer for that matter. It shouldn't be a, hey, I want to be a church officer so I could be a big name.

No, it's a serious matter. Are you up to the task? This young man, older man, perhaps, called into the ministry, called to be a ruling elder, called to be a deacon. They must understand these are serious charges that is to be brought before them in the ordination vows, for example, that would be the second point.

Now, to drill into here, no partiality, right? It says it twice. Observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality, right? Say it two different ways. First thing I want to say to you, may sound kind of weird, but partiality, or the idea of bias or prejudice or other ways, other, you know, synonyms you want to use, it's not always wrong.

If you understand that word in a neutral fashion, it's not always wrong. And what do I mean by that? It's context dependent. If you're in a trial, right, as I mentioned, Jay Gresham Mason, and the people bringing him up on trials are, they're probably mostly men, but today it'd be a bunch of women, women officers, and their prejudice is, you're a man, you're white, toxic masculinity is the problem here.

So they're already prejudiced against him in the court case, and they were back then, their prejudice was, he's conservative, we're liberal, we don't take the Bible seriously, he does, we don't care, you're bad. That's obvious partiality as opposed to impartiality. That's obvious unfairness.

That context is a very serious context. Well, when I'm opening a door, and I have a choice between a woman and a man, who am I going to open the door for? That's right, the woman. I'm prejudiced to the woman in those situations, and that's a good prejudice.

I'm not going, well, it's the first one that got here. No, no, I'm going to pick the woman as a general rule. And nobody thinks twice about that.

I don't know what I'm going to call that. It's a preference. It's a prejudice in that sense.

That's what I mean. It is context dependent. Here, it's the trials and charges and judicatory matters that require fairness and I'm prejudicial, that is impartial or objective evaluations, examinations, investigations.

Upright and fairness. That's what we're talking about. It's the ability to objectively deal with the matters.

That's what he's saying here. Don't be partial in these things. Look beyond the people and look to the substance of the matter, the disagreement, or the charges, or the sins, the omissions, and whatnot.

And that's what we're called to do. That's what church officers are called to do, particularly, of course, the elders, the ruling elders and the teaching elders of the pastors. Without letting what? Personal feelings sway you.

It is an ability to put aside personal preferences, influences, prejudices, inclinations, and to care and to carry about in your mind as much as possible an objectivity to the case at hand. We know this because we love the judicial system, at least ideally in the American scene, right, with Lady Justice. Blindfolded.

Holding the scales. It's the weight that counts of the substance of the matter, not what I see with my eyes. You look better than her.

You sound better than him. I have a good relationship with you, and I don't like him. None of that's relevant to justice.

So, no partiality in church officers. A qualification not listed in Chapter 3. You notice that? I don't believe it's listed in Chapter 3. I might read the whole thing to you, but blameless, temperate, sober-minded, able to teach, not giving a whine, gentle, quarrelsome, not covetous, rules his house well, not a novice, good works, good temper, good testimony. That's about it.

It's here it's listed. Sure, that's true. But my point here is to remind you that list is not exhaustive in Chapter 3, for one thing.

And another thing, let's be frank. We know all kinds of people who have a hard time being objective. The first thing that comes to mind, of course, are kids.

But adults can struggle with it well, as well. And it's not necessarily a bad thing. It's not like you're inferior somehow.

It just depends on who you are. Taking the relationship out of the equation is what's required here. And we're going to see this for some of the language there in the Old Testament.

I'm going to quote from the Old Testament. If a man, under consideration for church office, cannot put aside feelings of preference and the like, he is not equipped to be a ruler in God's household. It's not a crime.

It's just a limitation. And it weeds them out from church officers, officership. And I think if we had that as an explicit in our mind in thinking these things, local churches mostly, because it's harder at the presbytery level, when it comes to pastors, in particular, to understand these things.

We're not there. We don't see the pastor in real life. We just take the word of the testimonies from other people, the written letters saying, Hey, this guy's a great guy.

We're like, I know. I don't know this guy from Adam. It's hard.

But one thing we need to do, I think, especially what I've seen in my limited, almost 20 years now, next year, 20 years in the ministry, and two or three or four years as a ruling elder and a deacon before that, objectivity is hard for people and it's doubly required and even hard amongst church officers. I have a hard time finding people like that. I struggle with it at times, but it seems to be a weakness, I suspect, and I hope I'm wrong.

We have this example in the Old Testament. The language used here is interesting. We don't use it in New Testament as much.

We do use more objective or abstract words, partial, impartial, prejudice, bias. Deuteronomy 17, you shall not show partiality in judgment. You shall hear the small as well as the great.

You shall not be afraid in any man's presence, for judgment is God's. This is more concrete. Don't be fearful of this man.

He's rich. He's popular. He's famous in the church, perhaps.

Famous pastor, right? Big church. That shouldn't make anything. What that person is, is irrelevant to the matter at hand.

And once it becomes relevant, then you become partial. You become prejudiced. You become biased in the worst way possible when it comes to the weight of a man.

I think that's the wrong chapter. I don't think it's chapter 1, but it's verse 17 of Deuteronomy. If you're looking that up, I might have had a typo.

So, not just trials. Those are good, exciting examples to be sure, but other important matters that require discernment. Not just trials, but other important matters that require discernment.

Examination of church officers. That's the next point. Doctrinal claims.

You can examine doctrinal claims without a trial, and you ought to. You're called to be Bereans. And therefore, you ought to do it, what? Objectively.

This guy's really great. This woman's really wonderful. But what saith the Lord? That's the question.

So, personal feelings should put aside on those important things. No partiality to trials. So, I mentioned amongst officers.

It's a requirement amongst officers. They ought to have that level of objectivity, of ability to put aside their emotions when need be. There's an old saying.

I ran across one in the older commentaries from the 1600s. A judge must not sit to hear persons, but causes. Therefore, justice is drawn blindfold.

We must not hear persons, but causes. That's what a judge, a ruling elder does. That's what a pastor does.

In fact, that's what you're even called to do as a Berean. So, I've experienced firsthand. I've suggested this before.

That's why I think that may need to be more explicit as a requirement of church officers to be impartial. Because I've seen it firsthand more than once. Not only locally, not only at regional church level, but at the General Assembly level as well.

It's hard, I know. Men can slip up a little bit here and there. But public judgment requires a higher level of care.

Doesn't it? Of course it does. You expect more out of a judge in these matters. To rise above the petty politics, as we say today.

We've had that long tradition in America because it's part of common sense. And it's clearly part of the Word of God. Pray for sessions in presbyteries and General Assemblies, brothers and sisters, to turn a blind eye to persons.

That they would not sit to hear a person, but to hear causes. And the substance of the matter. To weigh things objectively.

Both for the trials, appeals, examinations of men. And even life decisions, like divorce. It's not a trial per se, but they come to the session and ask, Is this a legitimate divorce I have here? Do I have grounds for divorce? We have to make that decision.

We might really like that person. Of course, anything you want. I grew up, you were a wonderful kid.

I loved you growing up. I baptized you. No, no, no.

What sayeth the Lord? It doesn't have to be trials. It doesn't have to be examinations. Serious moral questions.

You have to examine the thing, and not the person. Temptation for churches. I've seen this.

I think I mentioned this before. To take the woman's side. I've seen it with my own eyes, unfortunately.

A number of times. Assume the man's always at fault. I suppose in the old days, you could say they always assumed the man was at fault, not the woman.

That could have been the case as well. That was wrong. They're both wrong, obviously.

Must weigh the facts, and the like. No partiality in teaching. Not just trials.

The matter's important as well. Teaching, preaching, Sunday school, books, audio. Whatever the case is.

When they are involved, and we are influenced today. The last 50 years or so. Especially with the growth of technology.

And the cassette tapes. And CDs. And then MP3s.

And now digital streaming, and phones, and everything else. We have access to all kinds of people, and teachers, and books. Myself, the pastor, I don't have time to go through all this stuff.

If each one of you came to me and said, What about this book? I would be swamped, because there's that many books out there I can't keep on top of. It's crazy. I think it really needs to be curved back.

But I'm not Pope Sean. I'm not King Sean. I can't limit these things.

This is where you are. This is where we are. I am at as well.

You need to be aware that the session does have responsibility. If we're aware of something wrong with a book, a teacher, an instruction, an audio. We need to say something.

It's not quite up to par. This is a little subtle here. This is a little shifty.

I'm not clear. He's unclear. Or, of course, the worst case scenario.

This is crazy stuff. What's this guy talking about? You may be like, I didn't read the book. I didn't know.

Good. I'm glad. I'm glad you didn't know.

I'm glad we talked about it. That's our calling. We must do it carefully.

No matter how popular that writer is. How long he's been around. No matter how much good he's done.

We ought to be, as we are able. That's the problem. I really struggle with that.

To examine such things. To give warning. We don't take pleasure in saying this is a bad book.

This is a bad video. This is a bad ministry. But if it is that bad, because of course there are degrees of bad.

To be sure. Or weaknesses. Or strong.

I prefer to use that often in Christian circles. It's a weaker ministry. It's a stronger ministry.

We need to tell you for your own good. It doesn't have to be heresy. It just can be something we think could cause problems in the church.

Or even division. Unnecessary division. A reminder here.

There is a time for preferences. For bias. For partiality.

Our Father above prefers his people. Brothers and sisters. And he blesses us in a way he doesn't bless others outside the church.

You prefer your spouse or family over others. I hope you keep it that way. You prioritize time and resources and other things.

So that kind of partiality. That sense of preference is not wrong. Partiality is circumstantial as I mentioned.

It's the last point I'll make here with respect to that as a reminder. Courtroom examinations is a fax. We should be blind to the persons at hand.

But if you're seeking money for a worthy cause for a neighborhood park, you're going to go to a rich person. And there's nothing wrong with that. Hopefully the rich person is like, yeah, I expect that because God gave them the money for a reason.

No partiality among Christians. I already hinted at that in the sermon here. Look, it's not just him.

It's not just the trials. But when you have to listen and you have to examine, you are called to be a Berean as we read in Acts 17. And that mindset therefore must be a level of objectivity.

A level of impartiality. An ability to say, you know, this guy's great. Paul is great.

But Paul said, you're even greater because you examine even Paul's words in accordance to the Word of God. Right? You didn't look at me and was partial to me and say, I'll just give Paul a pass. No, the Bereans said, we're not going to give Paul a pass.

We're going to examine the Word of God and compare it to his notes. That is his preaching and we find it of course true. And so what is true often for Christian leaders as you know, it's true for us.

These kind of responsibilities of serious matters, bad practices and lying that we have to examine. Even in the family where you have typical prejudice insofar as you prefer your own family. Nevertheless, if your family member lies, it doesn't matter if they're a family member.

They're lying. You have to take care of it. Put aside your feelings and don't let the kid get away with it.

Don't let the teenager get away with it. Don't let the parent get away with it if it's serious enough sin. You can have prejudice that way.

Well, it's my mom and dad. How could I ever bring up charges against them? Well, you know, they're starving your kid, your sibling. It's a gross lie.

It's a serious lie. They're undermining the pastor and his ministry in the church and passing terrible rumors and what not. You're going to have to turn them in.

I'm sorry. Because you're called to follow Jesus before you follow your parents if there's a conflict. So there's another example of bad partiality.

And of course, love covers a multitude of sins. So don't be quick to run around and I'm always partial objective. I'm just going to hammer everybody.

## **No Hasty Ordination of Leaders**

Boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom. No hasty ordination of leadership. Second point.

Right? Verse 21. Excuse me, 22. Do not lay hands on anyone hastily.

I think you know already. He's not saying whack them, you know. We talk about, get your hands off me.

Don't lay hands on me. That's not what he's talking about. It's the idea of ordination.

That's the way they spoke back then because they were referring to an actual act in which they put hands on the other man that they publicly ordained for office. And when they're called, he is called not to be hasty in this regard. Ordination there, a public act identifying the man with his office and therefore responsibility and thus everyone involved in the church knows this is the man who's been given this responsibility to do these things.

And everyone recognizes this and there we have it. It's made official. That's all it is.

Nothing magical about ordination. 1 Timothy 4 14, we proofed on this a few weeks ago, I guess a month or so ago. Do not neglect the gift that is in you which was what? Given to you by prophecy with the laying on hands of the eldership or of the presbytery.

There's a better translation in there. Laying on the hands of the presbytery. They were ordained.

It was a common practice back then. The Jews did it. In Acts 6 the deacons were ordained by laying on the hands.

In fact the apostles themselves, you recall had hands laid on them as they were given official evangelical efforts by the presbytery of Corinth or wherever else, Antioch. So partiality in ordination in other words is what he's attacking. Don't be partial.

Be impartial when it comes to ordination. When choosing your favorite regardless of his qualifications, that's a problem. You have to look at the qualifications first and foremost and not fudge the qualifications and the requirements for the office because well I kind of like the guy.

I knew him for a long time. But what we like or don't like or feel comfortable with is not the measure of the office God is. And being human of course we can be weak.

So what can we do to overcome that weakness of partiality when it comes to here although the pastor is Timothy here and laying on the hands of the act of the presbytery, a collection of ruling elders and pastors, a collection of presbyters. Already having a presbytery is one way to overcome that partiality. Because this local church in my case I grew up here spiritually, came here in 1994-95, became a deacon, became a ruling elder and I went for ordination in 2006.

And the church really liked me. It was unanimous. But they really liked me.

I was amongst them. They can cover a multitude of sins because of their love and that's a good thing, but are they covering the wrong sins sometimes? So it's good to have an outside objective, i.e. presbytery, other churches, other men examine me independent of the local church. And I think it's doubly important for teaching ministry because of its importance in the church.

And so having a presbytery helps in this regard. The implication, of course, and other safeguards built into this, don't lay hands on anyone hastily or too quickly with the idea in verse 20 of being partial towards them. I really like the guy.

He's wonderful. He married my daughter. He's my son-in-law.

Oh boy! He gets everything now. No! No, don't do it so quickly. And the one way to avoid that is you examine the man.

Ordination, examinations, not just I like him. He should be a pastor. I think he could preach.

He did a few preaching runs. People like him. Let's do it.

No! Examine the man because part of his office in particular the ruling, the teaching elder, is to preach and teach and examine the people of God with the word of God and present it to them and apply it to them. Does he know the Bible? Does he know theology? And examine him in the languages and history. Does he know enough to do his job? That's one way to avoid what? Being hasty because you may like the guy.

It turns out he's a dud in languages. He knows very little theology. But he's a great orator.

Okay, well that's a fraction of his requirements. You need more than that. And so that prevents being too hasty in bringing a man into the office.

And so this locally of course is examined. The people and the sessions should examine the man they're interested in to be sure. That's never taken away by Presbyterianism.

Same with the ruling elders. They too should be examined locally. And as I already mentioned, Presbyterianism is another safeguard, another regional church of objectivity, again ideally.

Ideally. The seriousness of hasty ordination. How serious is it? Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, too quickly, nor share in other people's sins.

I think it's saying the consequence of that. You bring the man into ordination. You bring him into office.

He becomes set aside with his public authority too quickly than you are sharing in his sin, perhaps. Sharing other people's sin. If church ordination involves unqualified men, they are doubly in trouble.

They participate in a faulty ordination. The man shouldn't have been ordained in the first place. And that ordination leads to a faulty ministry that harms the church as well, downstream.

And so sharing in such a sin may be them going along with the others of the presbytery, for example, or the local church, in this hasty ordination when they shouldn't have. Or by going along with the man himself who was ordained when they shouldn't have and he should have been disqualified from the beginning. Whatever the case is, I think it's tied, this idea, sin is tied to this hasty ordination.

And it's a good general principle beyond ordination to be sure, right? That we don't want to share in other people's sins. We don't want to be a means or cause or occasion unto their stumbling. Or the stumbling of the church in this case.

Because now you have a church officer who shouldn't have been there and he's going to affect the entire church. And keep yourself pure. That's another way of saying it.

It ends here. Again, clearly a command not only for Timothy, but applicable for all of us brothers and sisters. We are called to take seriously the law of God.

The church organized the structure of the church as listed here in all these verses, verses 17 to 22 so far, and others. Of what it means to be a Christian. Of what it means to choose an officer.

Of what it means to pray for them. And to help them. Because you too can admonish them.

We talked about that. It's not just pastors admonishing pastors and ruling elders admonishing pastors. You yourself can admonish pastors.

An officer without bringing charges. Galatians 6.1 is applied to all Christians. May our leaders at all levels of church government, we pray, be fair and partial and be equipped as the circumstances dictate to put aside their own preference and to judge and judge things aright in accordance to God's word.

May all of us indeed do thus by God's grace. Let us pray. Indeed, Lord may we have more of your spirit and understanding of these matters.

Give us the wisdom. Give us the courage. Lord, because it can be hard sometimes to say to someone that we like, a family member, especially hard, and say, I'm sorry, but you're wrong.

Say it gently. Say it sweetly. We don't have to bring charges.

But it must be said, it must be said to the truth of the matter when the seriousness of the issue is before us. Our Lord and Savior, help us in this regard. Help our leaders, we pray, especially for theirs is a double work.

Not only as a Christian are they called to this impartiality, but as a pastor, as a ruling elder, as a deacon, as a church officer, they are called to an impartiality of a greater measure because it is now a public office with public decisions. Our Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we pray for our leaders. We pray for all of us in this regard to follow you in such matters.

Give us more grace, we pray. Amen.