



1 Timothy

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Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear.

1 Timothy 5:20

The words, "Those who are sinning," are not as obvious as may be realized. Ask first, "Who is Paul speaking about?" Two possibilities arise. He has been speaking of elders since verse 17. Verse 19 then singled out the elders concerning accusations being brought against them. From the immediate context, one might assume that this is obviously speaking of the elders who were found to be properly accused. This is the view of most scholars. It is a fitting view, and holding it is acceptable.

Having said that, Paul may be summing up his thoughts now by including all in the church. Verses 22 (sharing in other people's sins) and verse 24 ("Some men's sins") are speaking in a general sense. Thus, verse 20 could be a transition verse from the specific to the general. This is even more possible because of the verb used, which is in the present tense – "sinning." This could be speaking of anyone who is actively sinning, such as the offender mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5.

And so, rather than being dogmatic about this, it should probably be considered as a general principle, to be applied to both elders and lay people alike. "Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all." The sinful actions of the offender are to be brought forth, and they are to be addressed. This speaks of spiritual matters. The church had no authority in the affairs of the government, and so those things which Paul writes of are spiritual matters. Obviously, later in the church age, some governments have mixed state affairs with church affairs, but Paul's words are directed specifically to spiritual matters. These sins were to be addressed in the

open church for all congregants to see for a specific reason. It is so “that the rest also may fear.”

Whatever sin is being addressed – be it the teaching of improper doctrine, inappropriate sexual behavior, stealing, or whatever else arises – the people would see the case being brought out openly. The embarrassment of being addressed in this manner by the offender would then warn the entire church that the same type of formal charge would be brought against the next person who would presume to violate the set standards of guidelines found in Scripture. In this, the people would learn to fear acting inappropriately, and confine themselves to what is sound and proper.

Life application: The words of this verse are instructive, and they are prescriptive. But a problem arises in the modern world which didn't exist in the past. In many places, there is a church on every street. If someone is accused of doing something illicit in a church, even before an open trial can be held, all they have to do is head down the road to the next church and sit in obscurity there. This doesn't negate the need of the church to do its job, but it does make it a bit more difficult to follow through with what needs to be done. However, for the person who is willing to stay and receive his rebuke, both the offender and the congregation will ultimately be edified and built up together through the proper conduct which was displayed in accord with God's word.

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. 1 Timothy 5:21

Paul now directs his attention to Timothy himself, especially pointing out what is expected of him. He begins with, “I charge *you* before God and the Lord Jesus Christ.” The word translated as “charge” bears more weight than the translation implies. It is rather, “solemnly charge.” It is a compound word comprised of “thoroughly” and “witness.” Thus, it is a solemn charge or an earnest testimony. Paul's words then hold great weight as presented to Timothy. This is all the more seen by including both “God” and “the Lord Jesus Christ” as witnesses.

Paul is making the most solemn charge possible by calling the infinite God, and His designated Mediator who comes from Him, to witness Paul's charge to Timothy. He then calls on “the elect angels” as well. This term is highly debated. Some see this as not meaning “some of the angels,” but “the choice, or preeminent, among the angels” (John Gill). Others see it as all angels which are not fallen. Those which are fallen are then recorded in Jude, where it speaks of “...the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode” (verse 6). In contrast to these fallen angels would be those recorded in Hebrews 12:22. There it says, “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels.”

In the end, the term is used just this one time in the Bible. The doctrine of angelology is a valid point of study, but much of it rests on inferences and speculation. Even when these inferences are particularly obvious, it is better to not be overly dogmatic on a subject which is otherwise not explicitly stated. What can be inferred without going beyond what is written, is that Paul is using these “elect angels” in his charge to Timothy, thus implying that they are to be witnesses to Timothy’s life and actions, and they will probably be a special part of testifying to his life’s conduct when he stands at the Bema Seat of Christ. Otherwise, there would be no need for them to be witnesses.

Logically then, it follows through that all saved believers are likewise viewed by this heavenly host. Each of us is implicitly included in this. The charge to Timothy is given in this solemn manner because of the especially weighty position to which he has been elevated. Therefore, he is expected to “observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality.”

The idea of “prejudice” is that he is to not make a judgment apart from the facts. The word, *prokrima*, is unique here in Scripture. It is a compound word signifying “to judge before.” He is not to decide before hearing a matter based on the status of another, his affiliation or friendship with another, or for any other reason where he might be inclined to make a pre-judgment based on anything but the facts that will be presented.

The idea of “partiality” indicates a pre-inclination. The Greek gives the sense of a balance-scale inclining one way or another because it is tipped in that direction. Rather than such an attitude, proper application would demand that justice is blind-folded, and that the balances are properly aligned through the entire process of discerning a matter. As the leader of the church, he is to properly weigh out all matters – doctrinal, inter-personal, etc., fairly and without any sort of bias being allowed to enter into his decision making. He is to hold to the highest standards of fairness and proper discernment.

Life application: Due to presuppositions, and due to our personal likes and dislikes as humans, the words given to Timothy are exceptionally hard to apply to our decisions. But this is what is expected of those in the ministry. If we conduct our affairs with bias, or with pre-judgments, we will inevitably corrupt our doctrine, and err in our decisions. First and foremost, we are to hold to Scripture as the ultimate source of our faith. And then we are to apply its high and noble standards to our decision making process at all times. We are not to twist the word in the process as well. Instead, our doctrine should be fixed and unchanging as we deal with such matters.