

# Judge Courageously

---

*Detailed Outline*

*Part 3 of 4*

## I. Disciplining an Elder, 1 Timothy 5:20-23

### B. Public Rebuke

1. Paul's instructions go on to add that an elder who has been proven to be guilty of sin by witnesses is to be rebuked before the church.
2. The imperative verb "rebuke" includes the ideas of public exposure, correction, reproof, censure, or reprimand.
3. Elders must be wise in how they implement this rebuke depending on each particular case.
  - a) In the previous example of the elder who embezzled from the church, the elders would call a public meeting and there expose the sin.
  - b) They would correct the situation, explain to the congregation that the brother had repented and that he will pay the money back. Then they would call the people to come to them (the elders) if they had any questions or concerns.
4. Godly wisdom, counsel, and prayer will guide the local church and its spiritual leaders in implementing this instruction in individual cases.
  - a) Each case will be different in how it needs to be handled. The context is general enough and flexible enough to let the particular situation determine all that has to take place.
  - b) The main issue is the trust of the people. Do the people trust the elders, or do they feel the elders are trying to hide something?

### C. In the Presence of All

1. If the elder is proven guilty, Paul states clearly: "*rebuke them in the presence of all.*" This means public exposure before the entire congregation, not just the council of elders.
2. An elder's sin must be publicly exposed, not hidden or swept under the carpet.
  - a) A spiritual leader's sin must be treated with great concern because it has grave ramifications; it can lead more people astray and can cause the unbelieving world to mock God, the church, and the gospel.
  - b) If the world sees that local churches take sin seriously, especially in the discipline of sinful leaders, then it will believe that Christians mean what they preach.
  - c) The church is a holy temple and its leaders are to be examples of holiness.
  - d) Furthermore, only when the discipline of an erring church leader is made public is there any chance of controlling one of the most divisive forces in a church: rumormongering, gossip, and misinformation.

3. Public rebuke of an elder who sins fulfills another important purpose: *“that the rest may stand in fear.”*
  - a) Other people are to learn important lessons from the public exposure. Not only is the public discipline for the correction of the sinning elder, it is also for deterring others from sin.
  - b) “The rest” seems to refer to the other elders, but the entire congregation would also experience some measure of fear.
  - c) The fear the elders would experience includes not only the fear of sinning, but also of the shame of public exposure.

Example of an elder our church had disfellowshipped over sexual issues, and the church that wasn’t ready to act on discipline.

- 1) In our Deuteronomy 19 passage, the malicious witness against an innocent person is to be severely punished:  
*“And the rest shall hear and fear, and shall never again commit any such evil among you.” (Deut. 19:20)*
- 2) In Acts 5, when Ananias and Sapphira lied to the apostles and were struck dead by God, the Bible says,  
*“Great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard these things.” (Acts 5:11)*
- 3) When we as elders execute discipline properly, great fear comes upon the church and the world, as it sees the church openly and transparently dealing with the sin of our elders.
- 4) God uses such fear as a powerful deterrent to keep people, especially church leaders, from sinning. This is a righteous and good fear!

## II. A Call to Courageous Obedience and Justice

To see how seriously God takes this matter of disciplining a sinning elder, look carefully now at verse 21. The Scripture says,

*“In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality.” (1 Tim. 5:21)*

No part of Christian ministry is more difficult than investigating, exposing, and disciplining sin, especially the sin of a church leader. One can easily think of a thousand clever excuses for evading the discipline of a church leader. This is particularly true if the leader is rich or a prominent member of a powerful or large family within the church, or a highly gifted leader and teacher.

At heart, we are cowards, afraid to take action, afraid to disturb the balance of church politics, afraid to face angry people or a church split or just the emotional turmoil of facing a person with sin. This is one of the most emotional things to do in the life of a church. We’re afraid people will leave or that the offerings will decrease if we follow through with discipline.

## A. God, Christ, and the Angels are Watching (v. 21)

Knowing the human propensity to avoid such harsh realities, Paul dramatically charges Timothy (and the church) to comply with his instructions in verses 19 and 20. The absolute seriousness of Paul's words is seen when he says, *"In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels,"* I am making the following charge.'

1. The mention of "God" Himself, the Mediator "Christ Jesus," and the elect "angels" of God emphasizes all who see and will someday judge.
  - a) The heavenly court is watching Timothy and the elders. God is watching, and all this will be brought up someday at the Judgment Seat of Christ.
  - b) We should fear God's judgment and evaluation more than we fear losing money or people at the church. Our values are all mixed up.
2. Then Paul adds his own apostolic authority: *"I charge you to keep these rules."*
  - a) Paul is not just a missionary or a theologian. He is Christ's ambassador. He is Christ's sent one. To hear Paul is to hear Christ. To disobey Paul is to disobey Christ. His writings are Christ's writings, divinely inspired and breathed out by God. The point is, we must obey these rules.
  - b) Paul uses the word "charges." This is a strong word: "adjure" you, "warn you." Paul adds that Timothy is to execute "these rules," that is, these apostolic rules.

*"The solemnity thus created suggests that this task was among the most important Timothy was to attend to." – Philip Towner*

## B. Judge Without Prejudging

1. Timothy is to be objective and to administer justice as God would and as the Old Testament demands.
2. "Without prejudging" means without "bias" or "discrimination," that is, without judging someone guilty or innocent before the facts are known.
  - a) "Without prejudging" seems to refer particularly to verse 19.
  - b) It is possible to be prejudiced toward those who accuse an elder of sin, or toward certain elders, so we are to guard ourselves against such prejudices.
  - c) This is particularly true if we don't like someone or we have something against a leader. We will be quick to show bias and to discriminate and not act as just judges.

## C. Judge Without Partiality

1. The second term, "partiality," may refer primarily to verse 20.
2. Showing "partiality," "favoritism" or "preferential treatment," to prominent leaders is a common practice in the world.
  - a) But Paul says, when listening to an accuser or rebuking the guilty, all proceedings are to be done "without prejudging" and without "partiality."
  - b) God is a just judge and those who are leaders of his people must be just judges also.
3. This is an important requirement because God, Christ, and the angels see and will someday judge the proceedings.