

Against An Elder

"... receive not an accusation, except at the mouth of two or three witnesses. Them that sin reprove in the sight of all, that the rest also may be in fear. I charge thee in the sight of God, and Christ Jesus, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing by partiality" (1 Tim. 5:19f).

Instructions in this chapter began with Paul's command to Timothy as to how he was to treat elders, particularly those who had fallen into error. He was not to *"rebuke him;"* rather he was to entreat him as a father. Clearly that context bears out that the *"elder"* of verse one was an older brother in Christ.

Paul now advances from *"elders"* (older brethren) to elders over the flock. Against these Paul instructed Timothy he was to entertain no accusation except at the mouth of a plurality of witnesses. Certainly the command given touching the treatment of elders should be adhered to in accusations which come to us against others but Timothy is dealing particularity with elders in the Ephesian church. Paul had left Timothy there *"that he might charge certain men not to teach a different doctrine"* and while this within itself does not necessarily refer to elders, it certainly would include them as well as anyone else who might teach a different doctrine (1 Tim. 1:3). When Paul told the Ephesian elders farewell at the conclusion of his third journey, he warned them, *"... from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them"* (Acts 20:30).

Those who fill any role of leadership are open to criticism in the decisions they make or their course of action. This must be expected for often those who are disgruntled make unwarranted or unfair charges against their leaders whether it be our nation's President, our employer, the preacher or elders. Any person in authority must not be *"thin skinned"* for he/she will waste valuable time fretting over petty complaints if he is.

Still, elders are human and as such are susceptible to temptation. When a charge is made and confirmed to be true, then elders are to be publicly reproved. The circumstance in Antioch where Peter was reproved by Paul illustrates this. The matter was public (no witnesses were needed to be called upon to verify Peter's actions). Peter had mingled freely with Gentiles, eating and having social dealings with them. But when some came from James, Peter, fearing those of the circumcision, withdrew; retreating from the position dictated by the Holy Spirit. Peter's actions influenced others to do as he, including even Barnabas. Paul withstood Peter, asking him, *"If*

thou, being a Jew, livest as do the Gentiles and not as the Jew, how compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews” (Gal. 2:11-15)?

The advice Paul gave Timothy later was consistent with what he had done in Antioch. Should there be “elders who sinned” in Ephesus, Timothy was to rebuke them publicly.

Like withdrawal, public rebuke has two goals in mind. First and foremost, the erring one is to be dealt with in such a way that he may see his error and turn from it. Secondly, the bystanders are to be considered. They must realize that sin is sin, whether committed by an “ordinary” disciple or one who has a prominent role in the church. Public rebuke may cause others to fear. Such is its design.

What a serious charge Paul gave Timothy! In the sight of God, Christ, and the elect angels, his instructions were to be observed without prejudice or partiality. Sometimes we are prejudiced against others and in that case administering rebuke could be easy. On the other hand there are those who “*stick closer than a brother*” and we might be inclined to defer rebuking such a one. Considering human nature being what it is, we must always guard ourselves that we deal wisely and fairly with all -- friend or foe!

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