

## I Timothy 5:19-21

**Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses.<sup>20</sup> Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also may be fearful of sinning.<sup>21</sup> I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of His chosen angels, to maintain these *principles* without bias, doing nothing in a *spirit of partiality*.**

Here, the Apostle Paul is establishing not only for young Timothy the guidelines in dealing with any accusations against an elder, but for the rest of us as well. To speak against a leader is something that very few people take seriously, and even fewer when it comes to one who holds an office in spiritual authority. A sin that was rampant in the days of Paul is one that continues to battle the church today, gossip. Unfortunately, it knows no boundaries. People speak out and against leaders in spiritual authority, as if it is their God given right. There are even church leaders who speak against other church leaders, and hardly anyone deals with it Biblically. It seems the one point that could be easily forgotten here, is when you bring an accusation against an elder or leader in the church, don't forget to invite them! If all you do is take a group of people and go around and assassinate someone's character without them having an opportunity to defend themselves, and you call yourself a Christian, then you are a hypocrite. Don't forget the Golden Rule, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Clearly there is a right way to do things, and I absolutely believe in confronting sin. Why, simply because we are mandated by God to do it. But before you go off half-cocked, make sure that your motive is to expose sin, and see your brother restored, rather than just looking to destroy their reputation. I was speaking to a man who is a pastor recently, and he told me that it is his job to share whatever he knows, and that it is the other persons place to defend themselves. I guess we must be reading from a different translation, or possibly a different book all together. Our responsibility is to love and cover one another; then if sin is an issue, to confront it as Paul directs us. If the party involved is in unrepentive sin, then they need to be exposed publicly, but not before. So what do you do when someone goes around and shares about a person's past before they were an elder or leader? Do you listen to it without giving the other party an opportunity to share whether or not that the accusations are true? If it was true, do you check to see if it was ever dealt with at the cross? What if the accusations are false, what do you do then? Unfortunately, too many people are unconcerned with slander, until they're the victim. Ministers and church leaders have a responsibility to ensure that such claims are true before sharing them amongst one another. I think that too often we are like the slave who was forgiven much, but was incapable of forgiving a debt that was much less, than the one he owed.

Finally, Paul exhorts us at the end of these verses, "**to maintain these *principles* without bias, doing nothing in a *spirit of partiality*."** One of the most dangerous things that can take place is to listen to only one party, perhaps a friend or colleague, before you make a judgment against another. Does this happen in the church? Everyday, this is in part why we are in such a state of spiritual apathy. Look with me at what Moses told the children of Israel in **Deuteronomy 16:19**, "**You shall not distort justice; you shall not be partial, and you shall not take a bribe...**" and then in verse **20**, "**Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue...**" It is our decision whether or not that we will pursue justice, or take the path of least resistance.