

## Care and Discernment in Appointing Leaders

1 Timothy 5:21-25

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*<sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor take part in the sins of others; keep yourself pure. <sup>23</sup> (No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.) <sup>24</sup> The sins of some people are conspicuous, going before them to judgment, but the sins of others appear later. <sup>25</sup> So also good works are conspicuous, and even those that are not cannot remain hidden. (ESV)*

Do you know that a recent survey of American Evangelicals revealed that 51% of the people surveyed believe God changes and adapts to different circumstances? And this reveals a lack of understanding of the character of the nature of God. It denies God's omnipotence. God spoke through the prophet Malachi saying, *"I the Lord do not change"* (Malachi 3:6). One of the authors of the New Testament James tells us in his letter that *"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is **no** variation or shadow due to **change**"*. James 1:17.

This is good news because we live in a world of prejudice and favoritism but God is impartial. God does not change. And God is good. Matter of fact, Jesus said that *"No one is good except God alone"* Mark 10:18.

Here is our passage, Paul is writing some final instructions to Timothy about honoring widows and elders. And Paul gives Timothy a charge, a command, an order that he should follow without prejudice or favoritism.

In the NLT, verse 21 reads this way, *"<sup>21</sup> I solemnly command you in the presence of God and Christ Jesus and the highest angels to obey these instructions without taking sides or showing favoritism to anyone."*

Paul loved Timothy a dear child in the faith. Paul was Timothy's spiritual father. However, you can see Paul's serious tone in what he says. It's as if Paul is saying to Timothy, "Timothy, God is watching you, heaven is your witness. Your conduct needs to be blameless in God's house". The church is the household of the living God. The church is the pillar and buttress of truth. Paul wants Timothy to reflect God's character when leading the church. Paul's love for Timothy is genuine and yet Paul does not compromise the truth. Truth and Love are two sides of the same coin.

*"Love without holiness turns out to be compromise ... Holiness without love is hard and lacks beauty."*

—Francis Schaeffer

With this charge, Paul then gives Timothy with *three* specific instructions

***Use caution and care when appointing leaders:***

<sup>22</sup> *Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor take part in the sins of others; keep yourself pure.*

The phrase “*laying on of hands*” simply means appointing a church leader.

Jesus laid his hands on many people either to heal or bless them. (Mark 6:5). Jesus took children in his arms and blessed them (Mark 10:16). Before his ascension into heaven, you see Jesus “*lifting up his hands and he blessed*” his disciples (Luke 24:50).

In this context, Paul is talking about affirming someone as an elder. It means being ordained, affirmed, confirmed, being set apart for ministry to serve the church.

Timothy was Paul’s protégé. Paul calls Timothy “*my beloved and faithful child in the Lord*” (1 Corinthians 4:17). Timothy was Paul’s fellow worker (Romans 16:21). In the letter to the Thessalonians, Paul calls Paul “*God’s coworker in the gospel of Christ*” (1 Thessalonians 3:2). So **while** Paul’s love and care of Timothy is evident throughout all his letters, Paul does not show any *favoritism* or *hastiness*.

Timothy himself was appointed by a council of elders. (1 Timothy 4:14). It was a process.

It pleases God **and** benefits the church to take time and appoint leaders. It also brings a level of *accountability* and *protection* to the leader when appointing others into ministry.

That is why Paul says “*Never be in a hurry about appointing a church leader. Do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure.*”(verse 22 NLT). Sadly, when we look at the state of some churches today, we hear about many leaders failing. Could it be that they were too quickly affirmed or not vetted out? When things like those happen, the church’s name gets blemished and God’s name is eventually tarnished.

I love what Paul instructs Timothy in the previous chapter. “*..set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.. Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress*”. (1 Timothy 4:12,15). Paul is telling Timothy - You have been set apart for ministry. Now continue in godliness. Make progress. Let your growth be evident to all. And all that takes time. And the wonderful thing in following this instruction is that the whole community gets to observe and testify.

On a practical note, have you ever tried to do too many things at one time? Some people call it multitasking. Henry Ford once said, “*trying to do too many things at once scatters effort and destroys direction. It makes for haste, and haste makes waste.*”

One year ago, last September, I had announced that John Reddy is a candidate for eldership. Over the last year, it has been wonderful to see his practice of godliness. Lord willing, we will affirm as an elder along with Raj to serve our church.

So, the first instruction – Caution and Care in appointing leaders.

The **second** instruction:

***Avoid extremes in pursuing godliness.*** Look at verse 23.

<sup>23</sup> *(No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments)*

Now this is a very personal note to Timothy. You see how intimately Paul knows about Timothy's life. Paul is just not concerned about his spiritual life but his physical well-being too. Timothy is having all these tummy issues and ailments. And they didn't have pepto-bismol or tums like we have today. But wine was known to have been used for medicinal purposes in ancient times. There is plenty of historical data to see that wine was used to promote health. And poor Timothy may have been thinking how to keep himself pure and guard his testimony but on the other hand he probably knows wine could be a remedy for this stomach problems. So this comes as a refreshing news.

There are two things Paul is saying. Timothy appears to be following a very strict water only diet at the expense of his health. Secondly, if you recall, Paul wrote to Timothy that there were false teachers promoting *asceticism*. These false teachers were *forbidding* marriage and *abstinence* from certain foods (1 Timothy 4:3)

Paul is saying that Timothy and you and I today need not live like *ascetics* or *legalists*. So the first extreme is *asceticism*. Asceticism can lead to denying the good things God wants us to enjoy with thanksgiving. The other extreme is *legalism*. Legalism is a having an excessive bent on rules and can lead to self-righteousness.

Some look at this verse and say Paul is promoting the use of alcohol? To that I say NO with caps on.

Paul had already written in chapter 3 that an elder **must** not be drunkard. "*Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,* <sup>3</sup> *not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.*"

In light of the subject of alcohol and drunkenness, I would like to remind you of a few things. Paul wrote to the Galatians that drunkenness is a work of the flesh and those who continue to take part in such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. Therefore, every believer is called to live a life of temperance, self-control and sobriety. Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit. And you must ask God for filling you with the Holy Spirit so you can see its fruit. Some people must **never** think about alcohol because you never where you will end up. Alcohol impairs your ability to drive or do certain activities

that you would normally do. Alcohol can cause so many health issues. Alcohol consumption can cause so many social evils.

Now the biblical prohibition is against drunkenness. And mature believers must be ready to give up their preferences for the sake of weaker believers who may struggle in this area. Also, leaders must lead by example.

Lastly, just because one abstains from alcohol, one must never display self-righteousness.

So, second instruction is avoid extremes – asceticism or legalism.

The **third** instruction:

***Use discretion when appointing leaders.*** Look at verse 24 and 25.

*<sup>24</sup> The sins of some people are conspicuous, going before them to judgment, but the sins of others appear later. <sup>25</sup> So also good works are conspicuous, and even those that are not cannot remain hidden. (ESV)*

Paul is giving Timothy some excellent instruction. It's very easy to see and point the sins of others that are very obvious. But some sins can be so subtle. Sins like jealousy or envy or lust or secret sins. So it becomes very difficult to assess in a short time who is to be appointed for leadership. Therefore it is imperative to test candidates for leadership. When we live godly lives in this world that is increasingly corrupt by the day, godly leadership is the need of the hour.

Verse 25 draws an analogy with verse 24. Just as some sins are obvious, good works are obvious. But even if you do good works in anonymity they cannot be hidden. God sees the good work that you do for others. Even if no one knows about it, God knows it and your love for others will be rewarded.

Allow me to summarize the instructions that we saw:

1. Caution and care
2. Avoid extremes – asceticism or legalism
3. Discernment

Leadership comes with its joy and sorrows. I want to close with some encouragement from a pastor who had served for fifty years in the eighteenth century. Charles Simeon was a man known for his *humility* and *self-degradation*. It is said this was secret strength. My prayer is that you are encouraged by his words as well.

*“While we continue in this spirit of self-degradation, everything else will go on easily. We shall find ourselves advancing in our course; we shall feel the presence of God; we shall experience His love; we shall live in the enjoyment of His favor and in the hope of His glory. . . . You often feel that your prayers scarcely reach the ceiling; but, oh, get into this humble spirit by considering how good the Lord is, and how evil you all are, and then prayer will mount on wings of faith to heaven. The sigh, the groan of a*

*broken heart, will soon go through the ceiling up to heaven, aye, into the very bosom of God.”* - Charles Simeon.

As we prepare to affirm John and Raj as elders, let us keep them in prayer. They need your prayers. And you have any questions for them, feel free to interact with them during the fellowship time.

----- Discipleship Questions-----

MESSAGE SUMMARY: **Care and Discernment in Appointing Leadership.** 1 Timothy 5:21-25

HEAD: These questions help you examine the truth of God's Word.

1. Why does Paul urge *caution* and *discernment* before appointing leaders in the church?

HEART: These questions help you wrestle with what you believe.

2. What are some essential qualities of godly leadership does Paul tell Timothy to practice and immerse himself in? What *extremes* does Paul tell Timothy to avoid? 1 Timothy 4:12-15, 4:2-5, 5: 23

3. What is God convicting you of and to believe in light of this message?

HANDS/HABITS: These questions help you bring the truth into your everyday life and develop behaviors that change your habits.

4. For personal reflection: Do you see a need to exercise *caution* and *discernment* in your daily walk of life? Which areas? What will you do about it?