

Pastor: A Somber and Sacred Calling

1 Timothy 5:21–22¹

Introduction

There is an emphasis in the current days on people being broken and in need of God's grace. This is, indeed true. Terms like "messy grace" and "broken grace" have become buzz words. Believers are daily in need of God's grace. Pastor's are just as much in need of God's grace as their precious congregation. Yet the danger of overcorrecting the legalism of past teachings is to steer into the opposite ditch where people have no responsibility toward's personal holiness. With that can come a casual view of God (e.g. God doesn't care about my sin problems because Christ died for me so I am ok to struggle with sin). There can be an implicit acceptance of complacency within one's spiritual walk with God. Yet Scripture unequivocally affirms that God commands that His people be holy even as He Himself is holy (1 Pet. 1:15–16). The process of becoming more like Christ can be messy, yes. But it is also progress that inevitable happens when a believer looks into the mirror of God's Word (2 Cor. 3:18).

The position of Pastor is a holy calling. To speak to God's people His very words and to shepherd their souls is a responsibility that I feel as an immense weight more and more each day (and that is no exaggeration). When I consider men like Daniel, Moses, Joshua, Jeremiah, Paul, and Barnabas, I am reminded that I am so inadequate and yet am in the company of men who depended on the transforming grace of God that I depend on today. I closed my last sermon with this text from James:

James 3:1 My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.

In fact, the man of God is marked by his passion for living a life that accords with God's commands.

1 Timothy 6:11–16 ¹¹ But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. ¹² Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. ¹³ I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and *before* Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate, ¹⁴ that you keep *this* commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing, ¹⁵ which He will manifest in His own time, *He who is* the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, ¹⁶ who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom *be* honor and everlasting power. Amen.

The office of pastor/elder is a very serious calling. Such godly men are a joy to the chief shepherd who will appear one day to reward the faithful ones with an unfailing crown of glory (1 Pet. 5:4).

We saw last time that vv. 17–20 teach us that because biblically faithful elders glorify the Lord and are a refreshing gift to the church, the Lord commands the church to provide for and honor the faithful elders in the church. Continuing the same discussion, Paul reminds Timothy (and thus he reminds us) that *the office of elder is a somber and sacred calling that should be approached with mindfulness and patience.*

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations taken from the New King James Version.

1 Timothy 5:21-22 ²¹ 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. ²² Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people's sins; keep yourself pure.

The office of elder is a calling that should be approached with

Preview Outline:

1. **Sobriety (v. 21)**
2. **Patience (v. 22)**

First of all, the calling to be an elder should be approached with—

1. Sobriety (v. 21)

The calling to be a pastor is such a high calling. This calling is not high in the sense that men of God who lead as pastor's are any better than the people in their congregation or that they are not in need of God's grace as much as others. Men of God who have submitted themselves to His calling will require of those men to give an account for their leading of His church (Heb. 13:17). The man of God acts as the spokesman for God. Consider examples like Moses, Joshua, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Jonah, etc. These men were flawed but still acted as God's mouth piece. How much more should shepherds who have been called to "shepherd the flock of God" (1 Pet. 5:2) and, like the Lord commanded Peter, "feed my sheep" (John 21:15–17) stand in the pulpit and only speak from the Scripture, for that alone is truly what expressed the Lord's heart and mind!

"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" — The charge that Paul exhorts Timothy to observe is "these things" (a reference to vv. 19–20). This is obvious because he tells Timothy that these things must be observed "without prejudice" and "partiality" (KJV "without preferring one another, doing nothing by partiality"). The temptation for an elder is to cloud his judgment by displaying a partial view of an elder who has been accused of sinning. The spiritual leaders of the church are to not let their human tendency to be partial cloud their discernment with regards to erring elders. A spirit of partiality is condemned else where in Scripture. Consider the following examples:

Deuteronomy 1:16–18 ¹⁶ "Then I commanded your judges at that time, saying, 'Hear *the cases* between your brethren, and judge righteously between a man and his brother or the stranger who is with him. ¹⁷ You shall not show partiality in judgment; you shall hear the small as well as the great; you shall not be afraid in any man's presence, for the judgment *is* God's. The case that is too hard for you, bring to me, and I will hear it.' ¹⁸ And I commanded you at that time all the things which you should do."

Deuteronomy 10:17 For the Lord your God *is* God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe.

Deuteronomy 16:18–20 ¹⁸ "You shall appoint judges and officers in all your gates, which the Lord your God gives you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with just judgment. ¹⁹ You shall not pervert justice; you shall not show partiality, nor take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous. ²⁰ You shall follow what is altogether just, that you may live and inherit the land which the Lord your God is giving you.

Proverbs 24:23–25 ²³ These *things* also *belong* to the wise: It is not good to show partiality in judgment. ²⁴ He who says to the wicked, "You *are* righteous," Him the people will curse; Nations will abhor him. ²⁵ But those who rebuke *the wicked* will have delight, And a good blessing will come upon them.

James 2:1–7 My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Lord* of glory, with partiality. ² For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, ³ and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, “You sit here in a good place,” and say to the poor man, “You stand there,” or, “Sit here at my footstool,” ⁴ have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? ⁵ Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world *to be* rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? ⁶ But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? ⁷ Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?

The purity of Christ’s church and message are at stake when an elder refuses to consider with seriousness the accusations of an erring elder.

The sobriety of this calling could not be more explicitly stated than the way Paul phrases it here in v. 21: “I charge *you* before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels.” The word “charge” carries with it the idea of a most solemn charge. Paul solemnly charged Timothy and the church in several other passages (e.g. 1 Tim. 6:13; 2 Tim. 2:14; 4:1). The three witnesses to the solemn charge that Paul lays are as follows: God (the Father), God the Son, and the chosen angels. The fact that this charge is before God “is a reminder that one is living and acting in the very presence of the God who gives life to all and before whom one is responsible (cf. 1 Tim. 6:13; 2 Tim. 2:14) and of the awesome reality that it is God who will be the Judge of one’s actions (cf. 2 Tim. 4:1: ‘who is to judge ...’).”² Christ, who is one with the Father (John 10:30) also witnesses this solemn charge.

It may seem interesting that rather than adding the third person of the holy triunity (i.e. the Holy Spirit) Paul adds “the elect [chosen] angels” (Gr. *ἐκλεκτῶν ἀγγέλων*). This is the only place that the word “elect” is used in conjunction with angels. I believe that the point Paul is making is that these angels have been chosen by God to serve His purposes and were not those who rebelled against Him when Satan led the rebellion of the fallen angels. There are a few other passages where all three (God, Christ, and the angels) are mentioned together (e.g. Matt. 16:27; Mark. 8:38; Luke 9:26; 2 Thess. 1:6–7; Heb. 12:22–24). The point is this: *all of heaven witnesses this charge and will hold the church and its elders accountable*. To observe these commands (particularly the ones with regards to the purity of the elders in a church) is to do so in obedience to the solemn charge laid out in Scripture.

Second, the calling to be an elder should be approached not only with sobriety but also with—

2. Patience (v. 22)

It should come as no surprise that the next verse follows the previous somber charge. If this charge is laid before God the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the chosen angels, then for someone to hold the office of an elder should come with it no small sense of gravity and weightiness. This is, in part, why churches should be extremely cautious with how they approach searching for a pastor.

“*Do not lay hands on anyone hastily*” — Patience. There is some confusion as to what this verse means. Some have suggested that this phrase is a reference to protection of accused elders (i.e. do not just take an accusation at face value—investigate before you cast judgment). However, I believe that in this context it is best to consider that Paul is referring to the ordaining of an elder to ministry. Thus, to “lay hands on someone” is a reference to other elders ordaining an elder to ministry. Paul

² George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 237–38.

has already stated that an overseer is not to be a novice (1 Tim. 3:6; see also about testing deacons in v. 10). Scripture describes how people “laid hands” on a man of God to affirm his call and suitability for ministry. For example:

Deuteronomy 34:9 Now Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him; so the children of Israel heeded him, and did as the Lord had commanded Moses.

Acts 6:1–6 Now in those days, when *the number of* the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. ² Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. ³ Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of *good* reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; ⁴ but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” ⁵ And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, ⁶ whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.

Paul elsewhere in his letters to Timothy described how the laying on of hands was an affirmation of Timothy’s gifts and calling (cf. 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6). What Paul is describing here, then, is a cautious, even patient approach to adding a man to the position of elder. There are two dangers that patience will guard Timothy against.

“*nor share in other people’s sins*” — Protection. If an elder, who has been affirmed by Timothy, was to be accused and found to be guilty of violating his holy calling and qualifications, Timothy to some degree shares in that man’s sins. Believers are not to share in the deeds of darkness (Eph. 5:11). “God’s chastening may be on a church not only for a leader’s sins, but also for the sins of those who failed to properly evaluate him.”³

“*keep yourself pure*” — Purity. The purity of Christ’s church as well as the personal holiness of God’s appointed shepherds is at stake when one does not approach the office of pastor with sobriety and patience. Christ desire for His bride to be spotless:

Ephesians 5:25–27 ²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, ²⁶ that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, ²⁷ that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

The purity of the church and the sanctity of the office of pastor is at stake when a church ordains an elder too soon. The office of pastor is a somber and sacred calling. Let Christ’s church take care that she observe these commands with fidelity to Her bride.

³ John MacArthur, *Timothy*, MNTC (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 225.