

1 Timothy 5:21-25, Everything you do happens in God's presence.

Having addressed proper handling of widows in the church, compensation for elders, and how to address accusations against elders, Paul tells Timothy just how serious these matters are and the precautions he must take: these things don't just take place in front of humans but God and the angels, which is why he must not prejudge or favor anyone. And he must take his time when ordaining new pastors/deacons otherwise he too will bear the consequence of their sins.

5:21-22, “before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels” what Paul says here and what he goes on to say about laying hands in 5:22 shows that what we do takes place in God's presence. Notice, what he's asking Timothy to do happens “before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels [i.e., angels who didn't rebel along with Satan¹]”. What we do happens in God's presence, especially when we ordain new leaders. You might think, “It doesn't actually say that. This sounds more like metaphor, right?” What does it mean to be a Christian? Does God's Spirit actually live in us or not (Galatians 2:20; 4:6)? Are we supposed to walk by that Spirit or not (Galatians 5:16-26)? We're in God's presence all the time; He's in us and we're in Him. In fact, when we meet as a gathered church, guess where we meet? In heaven before all the angels, the saints who've gone before us, God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ (Hebrews 12:18-24). If this is hard to believe; we walk by faith not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7) but our faith is not blind, it's 20/20, based on the concrete events of our Lord's life and death.

In order for God's will to be done concerning the next ordained deacon or elder, both the elders making the selection and the candidate must be walking with God. They must be attuned to His voice so that they can recognize God's choice in leadership. That's how many become elders and deacons: the current leadership guided by the Lord selects the future leaders (though the individual can also seek the office, 3:1).

“without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality” since Timothy's role as pastor/elder takes place in God's presence, he's not to prejudge or favor anyone (widows or elders). Why does Paul need to tell Timothy this? Isn't he one of the godliest men around? Yes, he is, but the Christian life takes place in real life, in the midst of real broken people including pastors. Timothy is a very godly man who's been sent to restore godliness to a whole lot of ungodly people. If Timothy weren't godly, God wouldn't have given him a task that requires such godliness. Since he has to correct and rebuke some very nasty and difficult characters of both genders and all ages, Timothy may be tempted to prejudge or be partial. That is, in the process of doing his job, some of these folks may antagonize him and he might be tempted to act unfavorably towards them. Or he may find others to be more agreeable, which may tempt him to favor them. He must do neither.

“Do not lay hands on anyone hastily” laying hands on anyone (deacon or elder) hastily (something the qualifications warn against, 3:6, 10), may prove very problematic later. What does laying hands on someone signify? Why do ordination services include this? It's not to recognize the decision of the leaders; it's to recognize the decision of God to elect the next leader of the church. Thus, it's a symbol of the position and responsibility that God has already decided to give an individual. It is not our church, it's God's and He selects its leaders (e.g., 1 Timothy 4:14). In other words, God directs the elders and their laying of hands is a public recognition and announcement of God's decision (e.g., Acts 13:1-3). It also shows that all our actions take place in God's presence, especially the selection of church leaders.

¹ There are fallen and unfallen angels. The angels in heaven who surround God are unfallen angels. The rest of the angels, i.e., Satan and his minions are fallen angels: when the angel Lucifer rebelled against God (Ezekiel 28:11-19), he took a third of the angels with him (Revelation 12:1-9). He became known as Satan or the Devil and the rest became known as demons.

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"Nor share in other people's sins; keep yourself pure," if Timothy (or any leadership) ordains an elder or deacon prematurely and he's later revealed to be a sinful individual, God will hold him/them responsible for that man's sins, not just the man who committed them. Therefore, Timothy must keep himself pure from this folly.

5:23, "No longer drink only water, but use a little wine" some believe that Paul was advising Timothy to drink wine because the water in Ephesus was bad. This is unlikely since Paul said, "No longer drink only water" i.e., Timothy can drink water but he should add wine for his stomach's sake. Why does Paul advise this? It appears that Timothy made a personal choice to stop drinking alcohol (we're not told why). However, Timothy also has stomach issues and constant infirmities. Therefore, Paul suggests that he also drink wine since wine has many medicinal benefits, including helping with the digestive system. Why did Timothy have stomach issues? We're not told why but perhaps he had a hard time dealing with stressful situations that later caused him digestive problems (1 Corinthians 16:10 may be an indication of this, i.e., the Corinthians were difficult to deal with so Paul tells them not to give Timothy a hard time perhaps because these kind of encounters caused Timothy stomach issues). And since Timothy is going to deal with many stressful situations in Ephesus as he rebukes and corrects everyone there (1:3-7; 2:8-11; 4:1-3; 5:1), his stomach issues might flare up, thus, wine will help him.

Is it OK to drink alcohol? Some believe that it's a sin to drink alcohol. Is it a sin? No, it's not a sin to drink alcohol, even hard liquor. However, it is a sin to get drunk (Ephesians 5:18). First, the words used for wine in both the Old Testament Scriptures and the New mean wine not grape juice. If the authors wanted to say grape juice, they would've used other words (e.g., Numbers 6:3). Second, God condones not only drinking wine but hard liquor (Deuteronomy 14:26). Third, Jesus made and drank wine; He drank often enough that He was falsely accused of being an alcoholic (John 2:1-11; Luke 7:34). Fourth, God created wine as a blessing for mankind (Psalm 104:15). Finally, just because it's OK to drink alcohol, it doesn't mean that you can get drunk; to abuse wine is beyond foolish (Proverbs 20:1; 21:17; 23:29-35). And this includes getting "buzzed." Getting "buzzed" is getting drunk. The moment alcohol impairs you in any way, you are drunk. You may not be falling down drunk or slurring your words, but you're impaired.

5:24-25, having given Timothy some advice for his ailments, Paul gets back to his point of not laying hands on anyone too quickly. Why should he take it slow, why investigate the man thoroughly? Because you may not know right away what you're dealing with: someone you thought was a good man may turn out to be a bad man. Someone you thought was a bad man might actually turn out to be a good man. That's what both of these verses are saying. Paul first addresses the sins of a man, then the good works of a man:

'preceding them to judgment' that is, sometimes, we're aware of a man's sins long before we're aware of them personally. Thus, their sins preceded them to the judgment, i.e., their sins show up long before they do.

'but the sins of some men follow later' sometimes a man appears to be a good man; that's the impression you walk away with. Later you discover that he's actually a scoundrel. He acted righteously but in the end he turned out to be a snake.

"those that are otherwise cannot be hidden" the good works of some men will be evident right away. But the good works of some men are not clearly evident (that's what "otherwise" refers to). These good works will take time to be revealed, but they cannot be hidden forever.