

that other believers ('the rest') may fear to follow their bad example. Paul is here speaking of sins that give rise to public scandal, for if any elder 'commits a fault not in that category, it is clearly preferable that he should be admonished privately rather than openly accused' (Calvin).

21: 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.

Paul solemnly charges Timothy to carry out the preceding disciplinary instructions with perfect fairness, neither prejudging the case nor showing any favouritism. As the apostle's every act is governed by his awareness of the divine presence, he fittingly reminds Timothy that his administration of the church comes under heavenly scrutiny. For every church leader needs to be reminded that his conduct is witnessed by 'God and Christ Jesus, and the elect angels'. The first 'and' joins God with Christ as divine, while the second marks off 'the elect angels' as creatures who owe their existence to God. The angels of heaven are here described as 'elect' in contrast to the fallen angels, 'who did not keep their position of authority but abandoned their own home' [Jude 6, NIV].

22: Lay hands hastily on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure.

Do not be over-hasty in laying on hands in ordination, or you may find yourself responsible for other people's misdeeds; keep your own hands clean (NEB): Paul here impresses upon Timothy the importance of ensuring that only men of unquestioned integrity are appointed to the ministry. For if he neglects to guard this holy office against profane intruders, he may find himself sharing the blame for their sins. It is as he thus seeks to preserve the purity of the church that he will keep himself pure. This seems to be the primary meaning of the final clause, though a more general reference cannot be ruled out. Some interpreters maintain that this laying on of hands refers to the formal restoration of penitents to membership, 'but there is no trace in the New Testament of the existence of this custom in apostolic times' (Huther) [cf. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1: 6].