

HASTY HANDS

1 Timothy 5:22



There are numerous government agencies charged with the task of making sure that products on the market are safe for consumers.

FDA (The Food and Drug Administration) tests cosmetics, food, human and veterinary drugs, medical devices

FAA (The Federal Aviation Administration) tests aircraft, air traffic control and other aspects of aviation

Consumer Product Safety Commission tests clothing, flammable goods, household chemicals, etc.

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration tests various elements relating to motor vehicles and highway safety.

While there are things about government agencies that we don't like, we are also glad that there is standardized testing to make sure that automobiles, drugs and food are safe. These agencies refuse to put their stamp of approval on products until they are confident they are safe for consumption or use because their credibility is at stake. We would be very careful to vouch for someone or something if we knew that, by doing so, we would be legally liable in the event of a mishap or tragedy.

When called upon to provide a reference for an individual, we are careful about giving our recommendation. This is especially true if the job or position for which the candidate is being considered pertains to caring for children or overseeing the financial and personal concerns of the elderly and other people who are vulnerable.

Our concern is also for the well-being of the one

for whom the reference is given. We want to also protect that individual from a situation where we doubt his/her ability to succeed. It is not only the employer or the public that we want to protect, but also the individual seeking the position of responsibility for which we have reservations concerning his suitability or preparedness. We don't want to see that individual's reputation or future jeopardized. Giving a recommendation without adequate thought or consideration could put us in a situation of legal or moral liability in the event of a bad outcome. If people were hurt, we would share responsibility for having put that individual into a position for which he was not prepared.

This is the concern Paul addresses in his letter to Timothy regarding the ordination of church leaders. Paul writes,

"Don't be too quick to appoint anyone as an elder, and don't share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure." HCSB

"Never be in a hurry about appointing a church leader. Do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure." NLT

"Do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily and thereby share responsibility for the sins of others; keep yourself free from sin." NASB

The Holy Spirit directed Paul to not only issue this word of caution, but to also provide a standard by which this danger may be avoided. That standard allows us to be responsible in the selection of church leaders; to not only protect the church, but also individuals being considered for the awesome ministry of oversight. Hasty hands are those that give a blessing of approval before giving sufficient attention to God's standard of measure.

God's standard is clearly outlined in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. The biblically qualified elder is a man whose godly integrity is so well established over time that no charge of immoral or unethical conduct leveled against him would be considered credible apart from compelling and corroborating evidence. This is because he has displayed loyal and exclusive devotion to his wife and has demonstrated self-control in circumstances where passions could lead to indiscretion and where anger would otherwise be displayed in violent retaliation and verbal abuse. It is inconceiv-

able that this man would allow his judgment to be impaired by intoxicants or by an inordinate desire for wealth or material things.

He must be a man whose leadership has been tested in real life situations. In particular, Paul says his leadership at home must be examined. Do his family members respond favorably to his leadership? Does his wife willingly and cheerfully submit to his leadership, demonstrating confidence that he genuinely loves her as he loves himself? Do his children respectfully obey him, demonstrating confidence that they are safe and secure under his charge? The best test of this comes after his child has reached an age when rebellion to authority is common; when the child has gained enough independence of will to challenge, and even subvert a father's authority. In other words, it is difficult to know how a man manages his household until he has had to face the challenges of a rebellious teenager. Navigating the storms of adolescent and teenage rebellion is also a good test of a man's relationship with his wife. How she responds to his discipline of their children reveals a lot about his household management. In his letter to Titus, Paul says the child must be trustworthy. Several translators indicate that his child is to be a believer (ESV), that is, one who has surrendered to the Lord and committed his life to God. Furthermore, that the child's conduct is of such high standard that no one would characterize him as being wild or disobedient. All these indicators apply to a man who has shepherded a child successfully through the troublesome passage of adolescence, the transition from childhood to adulthood.

His leadership in society must also be examined. A man with a questionable reputation among unbelievers is not suitable for a leadership role in the church. Overall, he must be a man who is respected in the community and in his home on the basis of his integrity as a representative of Jesus.

The examination must also consider his reputation in the church. Paul says a man must have enough history as a member of the Lord's body to have a measureable track record. He must not be a recent convert. Those who lay their hands of blessing and approval upon a man must have evidence that he will remain faithful to the covenant with the Lord and that he is not motivated by pride and conceit or visions of grandeur that would undermine his service to the body.

His maturity in the faith is also measured by his faithfulness to the trustworthy message, which is demonstrated, in part, by his ability to apply sound teaching so as to effectively refute those who do not uphold it; to "encourage others with wholesome teaching and show those who oppose it where they are wrong." (Titus 1:9 NLT)

We honor God's standard by giving our blessing and approval to those only who satisfy God's standard. To neglect God's standard when selecting elders is to have hasty hands, to be too quick in making a decision of such gravity that has such serious ramifications. For not only do hasty hands place a person in a position targeted by Satan's darts of pride, power and prestige, but they also implicate themselves as accomplices in those sins.

Don DeWalt believed this verse teaches that it is a sin to have a man in this office who is not biblically qualified. And that ordaining such a person is a sin of "giant magnitude." Others would not be as drastic or dramatic as Mr. DeWalt. But none of us should diminish the gravity of consequence that is associated with the selection of church leaders.

William Hendriksen writes, "Ordination without preceding thorough investigation would render Timothy co-responsible for the wrongs which such elders might subsequently commit. This in turn, would add to the difficulty of disciplining them." Paul had just given instructions on the proper treatment of elders, specifically when one is accused of some wrong. He said there must be corroborating evidence to support the accusation. If the accusation is proven true, the elder is to be publicly rebuked. This situation, which would result in a great disruption in a congregation, can be avoided many times by giving due diligence to the careful examination of the man before appointing him to the position of high responsibility. Whatever pains are endured in the vetting process are much less than those suffered in a situation requiring the discipline of an elder.

Experience has taught me that appointing a man to the work of elder who is not carefully examined compromises every other process or system in the church and, as a result, the health of the congregation. One group of elders with whom I worked was hesitant to confront a member of the church for his sin because they feared the man would point out their sins. In another congregation one of the elders was placing an empty offering envelope in the plate

every Sunday. His stewardship had not been properly examined before his appointment. As it turned out, other aspects of his life were not honoring proper stewardship. His loyalties were divided. His heart and treasure were being invested in an unholy relationship that resulted in his divorce from his wife and eventual forsaking of his covenant with God. That man was in no position to oversee others' spiritual health, much less the affairs of a congregation. In yet another situation, in which the congregation sensed an urgency to appoint leaders, unwisely put into a leadership role a man who was not prepared on at least two levels. That man eventually lost his family and his faith. Needless to say, the congregation suffered a setback that could have been avoided had proper care been taken to examine the man.

A congregation will be only as strong, vibrant, spiritually grounded and doctrinally pure as her leaders. Those who follow will never rise above the leaders. It is axiomatic that a congregation's capacity of spiritual development will be hindered by the least qualified elder, for that elder can resist and reject at the leadership level initiatives and proposals for spiritual growth which he is unprepared to model.

There is nothing more precious to the Good Shepherd than His flock. We must be careful in selecting those who tend His flock. Elders do not comprise a board of directors for a corporation but shepherds for the Lord's church. Elders are not officers of an organization but servants of a living organism, the Lord's body, the church. It isn't business we need them to conduct, but ministry. Their focus is to be on prayer more than processes and people more than policy.

This is why our elders have approved and are implementing a comprehensive questionnaire that is designed to help prepare those who have agreed to be considered for the work of oversight and shepherding for this flock. Both preachers, two former elders and all but one of the current elders have completed the questionnaire, thereby setting the example of leadership. Those who offer their service of leadership in this capacity will devote considerable time in prayer and preparation to serious introspection, as required by the questionnaire. The elders will engage each one in conversation designed to provide coaching and encouragement, as they determine his suitability for the task. When all are satisfied that

God's standard is met, the elders will recommend the man for congregational approval. That period of time is when the congregation participates in the laying on of hands, or the ordination of an elder. Raising no objection to his appointment is to approve his ordination, giving the elders your consent to empower that man with congregational oversight. It is your statement of commitment to submit to this man's leadership and discipline. It is expressing your confidence in his ability to protect the flock from intruding wolves masquerading as sheep. Your silence indicates your confidence that he will feed this flock biblically nutritious food that produces good health and growth.

Barring any valid Scriptural objections, he will be appointed to the shepherding team by the elders.

Every member of this family has a personal responsibility and stake in the ordination of elders. If we are too quick or careless, not giving due consideration to the matter, we will be held accountable for negligence that endangers the body. At the same time, there is great joy and delight in finding a man for this ministry who is described by Paul in his letters to Timothy and Titus. Having affirmed his suitability, it is a pleasure to commit to him our support by submitting to his oversight, following his lead and undergirding him through prayer.

The final instruction in this verse is to keep yourself pure. This purity indicates a strict conformity to what God has set forth. Ignoring, neglecting, or otherwise relaxing the standard God has revealed reflects negatively on one's purity.

Implications and ramifications emanating from hasty hands can be devastating and longstanding. At risk is the one prematurely ordained and the congregation subjected to his leadership. In addition, the purity of those who participated in his confirmation is tarnished. Hasty hands should be arrested by serious consideration of and careful compliance with God's standard.