

How Can We Overcome Prejudice?

International Bible Lessons

1 Timothy 5:1-8, 17-22

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L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

“In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels, I warn you to keep these instructions without prejudice, doing nothing on the basis of partiality” (1 Timothy 5:21—NRSV).

“I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of His chosen angels, to maintain these principles without bias, doing nothing in a spirit of partiality” (1 Timothy 5:21—NASB-U).

“I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality” (1 Timothy 5:21—KJV).

Neither prejudice nor partiality have any place in the practice of God’s moral law in the church or in the world. When Paul applied the divine law of love in his instructions to Timothy on church leadership, the selection of elders, on meeting the needs of others in the church, and other important matters, Paul called upon God, the Messiah Jesus, and God’s chosen angels to witness what he had written. In doing so, Paul reminded Timothy that God and other heavenly beings would be watching to see how well he conducted his ministry according to right principles. In all places and at all times, churches need to carefully study and heed such a solemn warning by the Apostle Paul.

In the world, we find it far too easy to judge that everyone of a particular background are bad or unacceptable based on a few experiences or biased teaching. In New Testament times, the Greeks showed prejudice by calling all who were not Greeks, “barbarians.” The Jews and the Gentiles also called one another degrading names. Furthermore, the church should not show partiality toward the rich and influential, but treat rich and poor alike under the law of God, the law of love. Throughout his ministry, Paul worked to overcome prejudice in the church. Jesus came to serve. He taught His disciples to serve, and those in the church need to practice impartial service. The church should serve as a model for all people everywhere, and show that the same objective standards of the scriptures apply equally to all.

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Thinking Further

1. In what ways might church leaders misuse their authority in the church?
2. Why does Paul emphasize the importance of the way we speak to others?
3. What lessons might we learn today from Paul's emphasis on caring for widows in the church?
4. What types of behavior might indicate that a person has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever? How might a church leader respond to such a one? How might those in the church?
5. In what ways do churches today exercise church discipline? In what ways do some churches fail to exercise church discipline? How does your church exercise church discipline? Why is church discipline important?