

1 Timothy 5:19

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses.

Analysis

Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses (Κατὰ πρεσβυτέρου κατηγορίαν μὴ παραδέχου, ἐκτὸς εἰ μὴ ἐπὶ δύο ἢ τριῶν μαρτύρων, Kata presbyterou katēgorian mē paradechou, ekτος ei mē epi dyo ē triōn martyrōn)—'do not accept an accusation against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses.' Katēgoria means accusation, charge. Paradechomai means to receive, accept, entertain.

This applies Deuteronomy 19:15's legal principle to church discipline. Elders are vulnerable to false accusations from those who dislike their teaching or discipline. Timothy must not entertain unsubstantiated accusations—require corroborating witnesses before investigating. This protects elders from malicious slander while ensuring legitimate concerns receive due process.

The two-witness requirement balances justice: protecting leaders from unfair attack while ensuring genuine misconduct is addressed. Churches must neither ignore credible accusations nor allow baseless rumors to destroy ministries.

Historical Context

In ancient courts, witnesses were essential to establish facts—no forensic evidence or recording technology existed. Multiple independent witnesses provided credibility. False accusations against leaders were common (as Jesus Himself

faced). Paul protects elders from character assassination by requiring the same evidentiary standard God's law required in civil cases.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. How does the two-witness requirement protect both elders and congregations?
2. Why are church leaders especially vulnerable to false accusations?
3. How should churches handle anonymous accusations or single-witness reports of elder misconduct?

Interlinear Text

κατὰ	πρεσβυτέρου	κατηγορίαν	μὴ	παραδέχου	ἐκτὸς	εἰ
Against	an elder	an accusation	not	receive	G1622	G1487
G2596	G4245	G2724	G3361	G3858		
μὴ	ἐπὶ	δύο	ἢ	τριῶν	μαρτύρων	
not	before	two	or	three	witnesses	
G3361	G1909	G1417	G2228	G5140	G3144	

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 18:16 (Witness): But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

Deuteronomy 19:15 (Witness): One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established.

2 Corinthians 13:1 (Witness): This is the third time I am coming to you. In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established.

Deuteronomy 17:6 (Witness): At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death; but at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death.

Titus 1:6 (Parallel theme): If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly.

Hebrews 10:28 (Witness): He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses:

Acts 25:16 (Parallel theme): To whom I answered, It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die, before that he which is accused have the accusers face to face, and have licence to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him.