

Speaking to the soul



Accusations

Do not listen to an accusation against an elder unless it is confirmed by two or three witnesses. Those who sin should be reprimanded in front of the whole church; this will serve as a strong warning to others. 1 Timothy 5:19 -20

It is always sad when accusations are made, and it's particularly tragic when a church leader is the one being accused. However, that's all a part of being human. I often hear people say things like: "You wouldn't expect such things to happen in a church." My question would be: "Why? If a church is made up of sinners, then surely such things are sadly inevitable." I do not find bad behaviour in any way acceptable. I simply believe that it's inevitable, and the whole history of the Church indicates that this is true. We should all be extremely disappointed when things go wrong, but at the same time, we should ensure we have effective procedures in place to cope when they do. That was precisely why Paul wrote to Timothy in the way that he did.

Paul followed the usual Jewish legal position that an accusation brought by one person was not sufficient. Deuteronomy laid down this principle: "You must not convict anyone of a crime on the testimony of only one witness. The facts of the case must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses" (Deuteronomy 19:15). The reason for this law is clear enough – an individual might lash out in anger in the heat of the moment or because of a personal grudge, so it was vital that other testimonies should be heard.

If an elder was found guilty of sinning, Paul urged Timothy to do this publicly. This is uncomfortable, but one can easily see his wisdom. He was eager that such things should never happen again, and that was more likely if everyone knew the facts.

There are still accusations flying around in churches, and we should all be deeply sad about that, but we shouldn't be

surprised. The Church isn't perfect – it's a hospital for ill people. We need to ensure that our churches have wise procedures in place to cope when things go wrong.

QUESTION

What do you think is the best way to handle accusations in your church?

PRAYER

Loving Father, grant our church leaders the wisdom and grace of your Holy Spirit to ensure that accusations are always handled in a decisive and healthy way. Amen

Photo - Entrance to Portstewart Strand. A National Trust facility.

