

## Qualified Elders

### Part Two

Last week we began our study of this section of Paul's letter to Timothy, and I made the statement that a church cannot rise above the level of its leadership. It is because of that that I want to spend more time in this section today and next Sunday, examining the qualifications for elders. As I said to you last week, these qualifications are not for elders only but are for all of us. There is not a member of Christ's body anywhere who should not desire to be the type of person Paul is describing, and more than just desire it, to BE that person. It is the standard every Christian should aspire to. Every member of the church should have these qualifications; every elder MUST have them; they must be the identifying marks of his life. The church's spiritual health depends on it. The reputation of the Gospel depends on it. As Alexander Strauch writes, "Elders cannot teach and defend the gospel if their lives discredit the gospel."

Now, you may have noticed that this list of qualifications could be divided into the positives and the negatives. There are eight qualities which the elder must have. There are six qualities which he must NOT have, and one quality that is both a positive and a negative. Paul doesn't throw this list together haphazardly; he has a plan and the qualities fit together nicely. Last week we looked at the first set of seven, all positives, in verse 2. Today I would like for us to look at the list of five negatives in verse 3. Next Sunday, Lord willing, we will complete the study of an elder's qualifications.

#### 1 Timothy 3: 1-7

Alistair Begg has a great illustration which I have changed a little. Two people are talking and one says to his friend, "Hey, do you know George Brown?" The friend says, "You mean George Brown who hangs out down at the bar?" Yeah. "Oh, sure, I know him. He comes in every day at 5:00 and sits at the same table, right in front of the screen, where he can watch the stock ticker at the bottom. He watches for certain stocks to scroll by as he drinks his wine. He's got money in those stocks and he gets so happy when his stocks are doing well. He orders another glass of wine or a beer. And you can't get him away from the screen. He is glued to it. UNLESS you can get him in an argument." "An argument?" "Oh, he will argue with anybody if you get him on the right subject. He gets all red in the face and gets louder and louder and bangs on the table, and on occasion he has been known to pick up somebody and throw him across the room, banging his head against the wall!...So, why are you asking about George Brown?" "Oh, well, we were thinking of...making him an elder in our church!"

Maybe that seems a bit far fetched, but is it? Not according to Paul. Were there men in the church in Ephesus who might have been just like George Brown? Well, according to the qualifications we just read, yes there were. Are there men in the church in Burlington, and Elon like that? Oh yes. These characteristics that elders CANNOT have are in the Bible because they were not uncommon in the church in Ephesus...or Burlington!

- He must be a man who is "not given to wine."
- This tells us that there were men in the church who WERE given to wine, and they must be avoided, Paul said, when selecting men to serve the church as elders. In fact, we know that it was a problem in the church in Corinth, too, as Paul said that he had heard some people were getting drunk at the communion service. Do we have a problem with substance abuse in the community? I heard recently about one of the current fads among high school students that has sadly made its way from the west

coast to our little town. The high school students get together at someone's house with a handful of pills that they took from their parents' medicine cabinet. All of the pills are put in a bowl, and then each young person walks up and takes a handful of them, not knowing what they are taking and what the combination will do to them. We are horrified at the prospect. But to be honest with ourselves, how can anyone who is addicted to alcohol, or any other substance, say anything about this high school party game? An elder, as we saw last week, is a man who has the fruit of the Spirit of self-control in his life. Drunkenness is clearly identified as a sin in the Scriptures, so if a man is addicted to alcohol, he is certainly not going to be an effective elder. But it is not just alcohol. Darren Patrick was a speaker at this year's church planting conference sponsored by Sovereign Grace, and he has helped lots of men work through the process to plant a church. He said he translates this phrase, "not given to wine," as "not controlled by any substance or addiction." He said, "You would not believe how many church planting pastors are addicted to prescription drugs!" He also said that food is a substance that could fit Paul's profile for elders as well. You see? Paul knows that elders have to deal with problems in the congregation, those wrecks outside their houses I talked about last Sunday, which may include addictions to alcohol or drugs or food. So, how can they set others free when they are in bondage themselves? (You can only pull a man OUT of a pit if YOU are out...Gal. 6:1)

- He must be a man who is "not violent." Some translations say "pugnacious," or "striker." The word means that they handle conflict with their fists. It is fitting that this quality follows the one before it. Hendricksen writes, "Between the immoderate use of wine and the eagerness to engage someone in combat there is but a small step." We expect this type of behavior in the world. There was an article in the Times-News a few years ago, "A nice day out for the whole family." It happened in McMinnville, Tennessee. (**Read article**). Now, THERE'S a family in desperate need of an anger resolution course. (not anger management; they managed it fine, just like MOST in society). But it is not just happening in the world. Again, Paul would not have had to list this as a quality to avoid in a potential elder if it were not a problem in the church. We have all read with utter amazement the stories of fist fights that break out sometimes during church meetings. About 30 police officers from five agencies were called to break up a fight this past February at Greater New Zion Baptist Church in Fletcher, about 94 miles west of Charlotte. "We are all people of faith," one man screamed as he punched a fellow parishioner in the face. Church members were divided over the recent ouster of the Rev. LeVonia Ray as pastor. The fight apparently began over whether a vote should be held to reinstate him. One churchgoer stated, "The last man standing got to decide, we thought we would do it MMA style, in an octagon style free for all. Then the godless cops show up and (stopped) 'god's magic' from working." Seriously? Certainly a man in leadership must learn how to deal with conflict in a healthy manner. Why? Because leaders ATTRACT conflict like a lightning rod attracts lightning.
- But gentle. The ESV reads, "not a drunkard, not violent but gentle." I like that reading better and it makes sense that Paul would commend the quality of gentleness as a counterpart to the man who uses violence to get his way.
- Alexander Strauch writes, "Gentle(ness) is one of the most attractive and needed virtues required of an elder. No English word adequately conveys the fullness of this word's beauty and richness. 'Forbearing,' 'kind,' 'magnanimous,' 'equitable,' and 'gracious' all help capture the full range of its meaning." We know that gentleness is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:23), and it speaks of a willingness to yield (not in principle, but rather to be wronged than to wrong someone else.) Gentleness was a character trait of the Lord Jesus, wasn't it? As much as He hated sin and its effect on mankind, He was gentle as a lamb with those who came to Him by faith. Even those who rejected Him did not receive wrath or defensiveness from the Lord but a gentle rebuke. The Bible says Jesus looked at the rich young ruler who was rejecting His call to salvation and LOVED Him. In the same way, we are to shepherd the people of God, even when they are unwilling to yield, we love them with the gentleness of Christ, while holding onto the principles of God's Word without compromise.
- Not quarrelsome. Also translated, "not contentious." This is the word that means "peaceful," not eager to fight. It refers not so much to the person who is quick to fight with his fists but to the person

who has to win every argument and is quick to fight with his tongue. The number one reason why people are fired from a job in this country is because of the way they handle, or mishandle, conflict. They drift from one job to another and last just long enough to blow up at someone and let them have it! MacArthur writes, “To have a contentious person in leadership will result in disunity and disharmony, seriously hindering the effectiveness of that leadership team.” A mature man knows that you can never quarrel your way into someone’s heart. Paul said in the second letter to Timothy, ***And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all...*** (2 Timothy 2:24).

- He must be a man who is “not greedy for money...not covetous.” Or, “not a lover of money.”
- We know from Paul’s writing to Titus that false teachers are usually motivated by greed: ***who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain.*** (Titus 1:11). Peter warned that shepherds are not to serve ***for dishonest gain but eagerly*** (1 Peter 5:2). Jesus leveled some of his harshest rebukes on the Pharisees, who Luke tells us were ***lovers of money*** (Luke 16:14) and Jesus said they would ***devour widows’ houses*** (Mark 12:40). In fact, what was the besetting sin of Judas Iscariot, the man who would eventually betray Jesus? It was selfishness and greed! (John tells us in John 12:6 that Judas “was a thief, and he had the money box, and he used to take what was put in it.”) A man of God who will help lead the church must not be given to greed. Alexander Strauch writes, “Like a powerful drug, the love of money can delude the judgment of even the best men.” Dave Ramsey likes to say, “Money is a wonderful tool, but a HORRIBLE taskmaster.” If your money is used to serve you and the body of Christ and the Lord, it is a wonderful thing to have it, and there is no sin in making lots of money. But beware! Those who desire to be RICH, the Bible tells us, WILL fall into temptation, and worse! Chapter and verse? 1 Timothy 6:9. ***But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.***
- Os Guinness said, “If a man is drunk on wine, you’ll throw him out. But if he is drunk on money, you’ll make him a deacon.” It is because it is so easy to buy into the lie that if a man has made a lot of money, he must be wise. He must be blessed of God. He must be a good manager. But it is not necessarily so! And the Scriptures are plain here. If a man has made a lot of money, he can still qualify to be an elder. But if the man is a lover of money, whether he has made a lot or whether he barely has too pennies to rub together, he is not qualified to be a leader in the church.
- Well, there are five things which men who serve elders must NOT be. Let me remind you that we serve a gracious and a powerful God who is able to make all things new. If you find yourself struggling in one or more of those five areas, and at the same time you have a desire to be an elder, that is GREAT news! It says to me that God is at work in your heart to help you put off the flesh and put on Christ. That is the only way any of us can grow and mature, by God’s grace and through His Spirit.

