

Message #15

I Timothy 3:2a-d

“Not Addicted to Wine, Not Pugnacious, Gentle, Not Contentious”

Leaders are to have soaked in the Word of God and developed to such a level that when you put the pressure on them, what gushes forth from their lives is the character and quality of godliness.

For leaders, this kind of thing is not an option; it is a “must.” To want to be a leader is a fine “aspiration.” One who desires to lead in God’s church desires something God deems as good. Leadership is an attainable goal for all who would aspire, but in order for the goal to be attained, certain qualities must be met.

IF THE CHURCH OF GOD IS TO BECOME A PILLAR AND SUPPORT OF THE TRUTH OF GOD, IT NEEDS MEN AS ELDERS AND DEACONS WHO MEET THE CHARACTER QUALIFICATIONS.

Qualification #1 - An elder must be above reproach—he must have earned for himself a good name as being a faithful man of God, who is not continually called into accountability because of some sin.

Qualification #2 - An elder must be the husband of one wife—he must be a man devoted to one woman, not one who is promiscuous or flirtatious.

Qualification #3 – An elder must be temperate—he must be a man who can remain clear-headed and controlled in any given situation.

Qualification #4 - An elder must be prudent—he must have a mind that is sober, sound, and self-controlled.

Qualification #5 - An elder must be respectable—he must have an orderly dignity, decency and modesty. His life should be one of continual organization, not confusion.

Qualification #6 - An elder must be hospitable—he must be a man who is willing to open up his heart and home to strangers.

Qualification #7 - An elder must be able to teach. He must know God’s truth and be willing to stand on God’s truth and communicate that truth to others.

Now we come to our next qualifications. You will notice that with the exception of one of the qualifications in **verse 3** (“gentle”), all of these are negatives. In other words, in the preceding list of qualifications the emphasis is on what a leader must be and now in this verse the emphasis changes to what an elder must not be. The first two words in **verse three** actually contain the negative prohibition “not,” and the last two contain the negation vowel “a” at the beginning of the word. So verse three really centers on what a leader must not be:

QUALIFICATION #8 - If the church of God is to become the pillar and support of the truth of God, it needs men in leadership who are not addicted to wine. **3:3a**

There are those who have taken this qualification to mean that this is a reference to total abstinence from alcoholic beverages. Homer Kent, for example, writes: “The overseer must not be a drinker” (Homer Kent, *The Pastoral Epistles*, p. 128).

First of all, the Bible has much to say about drinking. Drinking can bring woe, sorrow, arguments, complaints, and wounds. It can cause physical problems and cause one to do perverse things (Prov. 23:29-35; Gen. 19:33).

The word “addicted to wine” is the Greek word *paroinos*. This particular word is only used twice in the N.T. and both are in reference to elders (I Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:7). This particular word is a combination of two Greek words—“para” and “oinos.” The word “oinos” is the Greek word for wine. The word “para” is a Greek preposition that has in mind motion that is toward, from and alongside of something (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, pp. 336-337). Together, these two words give us the idea of one who is continually moving toward the wind and from the wine and one continually coming alongside wine and drinking it.

This word refers to one whose habit is to continually drink wine. The idea, as near as I can determine, is not just getting drunk, although that would certainly be in view; the idea is that a man who desires to lead God’s church cannot be a man who continually, as Calvin said, guzzles wine.

If we are totally honest with the text, there is no question that one who takes a little wine now and then is not disqualified from being a leader. In fact, Paul exhorts Timothy to drink a little wine now and then (5:23). The emphasis of this word is that the leader cannot be one who is continually coming alongside alcoholic beverages.

The words of Professor Lock are true in its interpretation; the leader must be “temperate in the use of wine.”

We completely agree with Albert Barnes, of the 1800’s, who said that by virtue of the fact that Paul put this qualification as one for a leader, he clearly saw the danger that can exist in wine. It can potentially be very harmful to those who continually indulge. Senses become dull, defenses are weakened and drunkenness can take over a person to the point that decisions and thinking are affected (Barnes Notes, p. 1139).

We cannot suggest, in all honesty, that this qualification means a leader is absolutely prohibited from drinking an alcoholic beverage; but we can suggest that it means a leader must be very careful if he chooses to drink an alcoholic beverage for it is something that could cause one to be disqualified from leadership. Dr. Paul Benware said, “Although this directive is not an absolute prohibition against wine, it probably is wisest, in our indulgent culture, to take the position of total abstinence” (p. 50).

Based on Scripture, the following seems to be a solid Biblical position:

- 1) A believer does have liberty to drink an alcoholic beverage (Rom. 14:21; I Tim. 5:23).
- 2) A believer does not have liberty to cause another brother to stumble (Rom. 14:21; I Cor. 8:13).
- 3) A leader is responsible to be an example to the flock, not just one who lords it over the flock, telling them what to do (I Pet. 5:3).
- 4) A leader must realize overindulgence in wine can disqualify one from leadership.

Having said this, the point is this: when a man aspires to the office of being a leader in God's church, he cannot be one who is continually given over to coming alongside of wine to drink it. He cannot, as Lenski says, be one who "lingers long beside his wine."

Dr. John MacArthur says the question that should be asked here concerning the man's reputation is "Is he known as a drinker?" If the answer is yes, he is disqualified. If a man is known to frequent bars, taverns, inns, nightclubs, etc., and if his lifestyle is one that continually associates him in the world of the drinker, so that he is known for this, he is disqualified from being a leader in God's church (*The Master's Plan for the Church*, p. 225).

QUALIFICATION #9 – If the church of God is to become the pillar and support of the truth of God, it needs men in leadership who are not pugnacious. **3:3b**

The word "pugnacious" is one that means one who is not a striker or brawler. This word is only used two times in the N.T., both in the context of elders (**3:2**; Titus 1:7). This particular quality refers to one who always wants to settle something with his fists. Literally it refers to one who always wants to pursue some unnecessary course of physical violence.

Many commentators suggest that this qualification naturally and contextually stems from the preceding qualification. One who regularly drinks may also be one who regularly fights. Ralph Earle said, "The person who is given to wine is apt to become involved in drunken brawls" (Vol. 11, p. 365).

The idea here is a person regularly loses his temper and gets into physical fights. William Hendriksen says this describes the kind of man who is always walking around with a chip on his shoulder, eager for combat (p. 125). Calvin calls this a man with a "fierce disposition" (p. 81).

QUALIFICATION #10 – If the church of God is to become the pillar and support of the truth of God, it needs men in leadership who are gentle. **3:3c**

The conjunction "but" is a strong, adversative conjunction that is used as an opposite of the foregoing thought. In other words, in direct opposition to the fact that a leader must not be pugnacious, he must be gentle.

The word “gentle” is one that speaks of the fact that the man must be equitable, fair and moderate. G. Abbott-Smith called this a “sweet reasonableness” (*Greek Lexicon*, p. 169). This word has to do more than with just one’s spiritual and emotional demeanor; it has to do with his judgment in being equitable and fair. The man who leads cannot be partial but must show a sympathetic equality to all.

Dr. Paul Benware says this qualification describes a man who will look “humanely and reasonably at the facts of the case” (p. 53). We might add that it will also imply the man will calmly look Biblically at the case as well.

QUALIFICATION #11 – If the church of God is to become the pillar and support of the truth of God, it needs men in leadership who are uncontentious. **3:3d**

The word “uncontentious” is a Greek word that means one who abstains from fighting, one who is non-combatant (Smith, p. 24). This word refers to one who always wants to quarrel and fight (*Ibid.*, p. 280).

Christianity is a constant warfare and leaders who take their responsibilities seriously are to “fight the good fight.” In fact, Paul specifically told Timothy that he wanted him to be a “good soldier” (II Tim. 2:3-4). One who leads will discover there will be times of confrontation and war. But this qualification has to do with a continual character tendency to quarrel and fight with others over unbiblical issues and matters. Homer Kent called this offensively aggressive.

If the church of God is to become a pillar and support of the truth, it needs men in leadership who are quality men of God; men that are developing character and integrity in the things of God.

When men are like this, the church is destined to become strong. It will become all God wants it to become.