

## Message #18

## I Timothy 3:6

## “Not a New Convert”

Of all the qualifications that have been neglected, perhaps this is the one that has been neglected the most. Some prominent person, some wealthy person, some influential or famous person gets saved and many want to forget about this qualification and immediately put them into positions of public limelight and leadership. As a result, not only is the body of Christ hurt, but so is the individual for they never will become what God wanted them to become.

**IF THE CHURCH OF GOD IS TO BECOME A PILLAR AND SUPPORT OF THE TRUTH OF GOD, IT NEEDS MEN AS ELDERS WHO ARE NOT NEW CONVERTS.**

If leadership is to obey the Bible, it must always protect against a new convert ever getting into a place of leadership.

William Hendriksen said a man could possess all of the previous characteristics given in the list, but still not be qualified to serve if he is a new convert (p. 127).

**QUESTION #1** – What do the words “not a new convert” actually mean?

This is the only place in the N.T. where this word is used. The Greek word is “neophutos,” from which we get our English “neophyte.” The word is a combination of two Greek words “neos” meaning new and “phuo” meaning to spring up, to produce, to grow. Literally, the words combined refers to something that has been newly planted.

The actual meaning of this word in this context is that a leader must not be a man who has been newly planted in the faith. He must not be one who is a neophyte, a new convert or a novice. He cannot be one just recently saved.

A man may have great leadership potential. A man may have great teaching ability. A man may have great charisma and be as faithful as he can be to what he knows. But if a man is recently saved, he is not to be an elder in the church. The antithesis of not being a new convert is being an older convert. Time in the faith does not automatically qualify a man for leadership; but no man is to be in leadership unless he has had time in the faith.

**QUESTION #2** – Why does this qualification show up in I Timothy, but not in Titus?

Let us remember that when Paul wrote to Timothy, Timothy was in Ephesus. When Paul wrote to Titus, Titus was on the island of Crete. Timothy was already in an established church, whereas Titus was to establish churches and to appoint elders in every city (Titus 1:5).

Ephesus was a church that had been in existence for at least 12 years when Paul wrote. There were seasoned, faithful, stable men in the Ephesian church. Some of them had personally been taught by Paul and they were to lead the church.

Titus was just starting churches and so he had to pick the best he could. What this tells us is as the church ages, it is imperative that it starts lining up leadership with the Word. Ephesus could now pick faithful men who had been tested and proven faithful. No new convert was allowed to be an elder in that church.

When a church first starts out, it is to have elders. You have to begin with what God has given you. But as the church matures, so do the men and it is the mature men in the faith who are to be the elders of the church. Sometimes people will think well, if we don't put them into leadership they will leave. If that is the criteria for them leaving the church, they don't ever belong in leadership!

**QUESTION #3** – Why is it so important not to allow a new convert to be a leader?

**Reason #1** - The conceited reason. **3:6a**

The word “conceited” is a Greek word that literally means to be wrapped in smoke or to puff-up. Hence, it means to becloud with pride (G. Abbott-Smith, p. 453).

If a new convert is thrust into a position of leadership, the church is actually participating in causing one to be blinded or clouded by a smoke-cloud of arrogance. Such a person's decisions will be clouded by his own pride.

In Romans 12:3, Paul writes: “...I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think...”. The obvious implication is that it is possible for one to think more highly of himself than he ought to think. One way this happens is by putting a man into leadership who is a new convert.

**Reason #2** - The condemnation reason. **3:6b**

A second reason why it is so important that a new convert not be put into a position of leadership is because he may “fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil.” Now of course the real problem is what does this mean that one will fall into the condemnation of the devil?

The word “condemnation” is a forensic term that speaks of a legal judgment or decision that is passed on to someone. This is a very judicial term, which speaks of pronouncing a judgment (G. Abbott-Smith, p. 257).

Now there are two questions that must be answered in deciphering this matter: 1) Who is the one giving the condemnatory judgment? 2) What is the condemnatory judgment?

Grammatically, it is possible to view the “condemnation of the devil” two ways:

**(Way #1)** - As a subjective genitive, the devil would give the condemnation.

**(Way #2)** - As an objective genitive, the devil would receive the condemnation.

The subjective genitive would make the condemnation pronounced by the devil and the objective genitive would make the condemnation pronounced on the devil.

Here is the point—if a new convert is put in a position of leadership, it sets the stage for some type of condemnatory judgment, which is related to the devil, being pronounced on the new convert. Either it sets the stage for a judgment given by the devil, or it sets the stage for a new judgment being given by God.

Theologically, only God has the ability to pronounce a judgment on someone. There is no place where the devil is the judge who pronounces condemnation. Therefore, the idea is that if a new convert is put into a position of leadership, God will see that the person falls into the same kind of condemnation that the devil did.

What was that condemnation?

- 1) The devil had originally been beautifully created by God.
- 2) The devil became proud of his position and prestige and wanted more and more power.
- 3) God demoted the devil from his high position.
- 4) God removed him from having direct, continual access to Himself.
- 5) God cut off fellowship with the devil.
- 6) God never gave the devil a future opportunity to repent.

Because of pride, God literally condemned the devil and gave him a judgment that will never again allow him to be restored to the great position God created him for.

As I understand it, Paul is saying that if a church puts a new convert into a position of leadership, that person will be the recipient of a devilish judgment in which God will see to it that he never has opportunity to grow and develop into all God wants him to be.

God will shut fellowship down, development and usability down. Pride will be so dominating in the person's life that God will never permit the person to become the beautiful creation God intended.

I agree with many commentators who have observed that there are many churches today who are spiritually bankrupt because they put novices into positions of authority contrary to the Word of God. Such churches will never become a pillar and support of the truth of God because God has pronounced a condemnatory judgment on the place.

It is a terrible thing for a church to put a new convert into a leadership position of responsibility. It doesn't matter who the new convert is, he needs to learn, grow, and develop.

If the church is to become a pillar and support of the truth, it needs seasoned, mature believers leading the way. Part of their leadership responsibility is to see that no new convert is ever put into a position of leadership.