

The Bishop #3

"Faithful is the saying, If a man seeketh the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work" (1 Tim. 3:1). Our last article discussed six personal characteristics of a prospective bishop. The list continues as one reads that the bishop must be just, fair, equitable, holy; he is to be pure in life. He must be one who is self-controlled.

To be self-controlled is the opposite of one who is *"self-willed."* A self-willed person has respect for one person's wishes; his own. Many congregations are troubled by a Diotrephes, one who rules the church as he wills, casting out all who differ with him. In any eldership, not only must each elder have respect for the wishes of others; he must work in harmony with the other elders. There is no room in any congregation for a "presiding elder;" all are equals in their work. Peter warned that elders were not to *"lord it over the charge allotted to you"* but to make themselves examples to the flock (1 Pet. 5:4).

Other qualities that an elder must not possess is that he is to be no brawler, one who is quarrelsome over wine (agreeing to the instructions he must not be *"given to wine"*), nor is he to be a *"striker,"* one given to blows. This quality agrees with the instructions he must be self-controlled. Further, he is to be no *"lover of money;"* not covetous. In addition to personal traits, there are three qualities (two positive, one negative) which illustrates his maturity in the Scriptures. The word *"elder"* means "older" and while inherently relates to a person's age; in spiritual realms, it relates to his age in the scriptures. The one negative quality *"not a novice"* (1 Tim. 3:6), lends emphasis to this point. A novice is literally one "newly planted" and this is the reason a novice is not to be chosen as an elder *"lest he be puffed up and fall into the condemnation of the devil."* A novice would be a recent convert, implying one whose knowledge was sparse, at very best.

An elder must be *"apt to teach."* This means one who is able to teach. He shepherds, feeds, and directs the flock. To do this, he must be strong in God's precious word. He cannot teach what he does not himself know. The fact that a man has been a member of the church for many years does not, in itself, tell that he has sufficient knowledge to be an elder. The Hebrews were warned, *"For when by reason of the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need again that some one teach you the rudiments of the first principles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of meat"* (Heb. 5:12). No qualification is more important than this. The elder must have knowledge in order that he may be sound in faith, holding to the faithful word (Tit. 1:9). Paul sounded warnings to the Ephesian elders that

he knew that after his departing "*grievous wolves would enter in among you, not sparing the flock, and that from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them*" (Acts 20:30f). Without doubt, "*perverse things*" could include a part spirit, setting one against another; but "*perverse things*" also could refer to different doctrines. Elders cannot recognize error if they are not familiar with truth.

His soundness in faith is essential that he might be able both to exhort (the Christian) and to convict the gainsayer (Tit. 1:9). The apostle must not be understood as saying that elders must be able to convince the "*gaingayer*" of his error; he must be understood to say, he must be able to set forth the error of the gainsayer, if not to him, at least to others who are troubled by him.

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