

AN ELDER MUST BE PATIENT AND MUST NOT BE COVETOUS

1 Timothy 3:3, “*Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous;*”

Must be Patient -- The Greek word for “patient” is “*epieikes*.” This is used five times in the entire New Testament. On three occasions, the KJV translators translated it as “gentle” (cf. Titus 3:2; James 3:17; 1 Peter 2:18). Once it is translated as “moderation” in Philippians 4:5. This word “patient” is different from the usual word for “patience” or “patient” (*hupomone*) found thirty one times in the New Testament. “*Hupomone*” is a word that describes a Christian’s “endurance in the face of difficult circumstances.” When the Christian faces a trial like persecution or sickness or loss of a job not of his own failure, he is counseled to be “patient” i.e. to endure hard circumstances and not give up! But “*epieikes*” translated here as “patient” refers to a gentle person. The elder is to have a mild disposition, one who is well mannered and approachable.

He does not fly off the handle at the drop of a hat. The opposite of a mild mannered demeanour is that of a brawler. Hence the contrasting disposition is that the word “patient” is followed by the phrase “not a brawler.” The word for “brawler” appears only twice in the whole NT. The other occasion is found in Titus 3:2 and is also translated as “brawler” and is also used in the same context of good Christian behaviour. The elder is not a fighter. There are some “Christians” and even “elders” who have a quarrelsome disposition. Their nature is sour and cantankerous. The facial features are likened to a “sour plum”, all wrinkled up and constantly frowning. Burkitt rightly describes “a brawler” as one who is a “contentious person, often engaged in law-suits.” Elders who threaten other elders to “fight” it out outside the church or threaten them with lawsuits if they cannot get their way must not be re-elected. Brawlers are people who will often insist on their way and that theirs is the only way! The brawler is definitely not teachable and approachable. He behaves like a gangster who beats people up with his words and attitude. Such a person ought not to serve in any leadership position in the church!

However, the elder who possesses this attribute of gentleness is peaceable. He is at peace with people around him. He may be a defender of the truth but he does it in such a way that his firmness is constantly tempered with gentleness. He is not easily moved by flattery or bought with money; however, his gentleness must not be mistaken for weakness. Underneath his gentle demeanour lies a heart for God. He is not a weakling or a compromiser. He deals with sin uncompromisingly and he is a man of deep convictions and is resolute in his stance for the perfect Word of God with unwavering steadfastness.

The greatest example is our Lord Jesus Christ. He was the gentlest person who walked this earth. He attended to the weak and sickly and healed all who came to Him. He ministered to them even when He was tired. He did not turn away any sinner who came to Him in repentance. He was constantly and firmly determined to do His father’s will, no matter what the cost was to self. The ultimate price was His death and crucifixion on Calvary. Yet when He had to deal with sin, including the sin from one of His closest disciple, Peter, Jesus did not waver. He firmly rebuked Peter but always lovingly. His standard for truth and righteousness

was never lowered or compromised. Jesus says in **Mark 8:33-38**, *“But when he had turned about and looked on his disciples, he rebuked Peter, saying, Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men. And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”*

The elder must be like his Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, able to be firm and yet gentle at the same time. He will not condone sin or the sinner who refuses to repent but firmly with gentleness he will deal with both, always according to Holy Scriptures. He is approachable and demonstrates a “patient” demeanour, prepared to help and counsel anyone, any time and any day.

Must Not Be Covetous -- The Greek word for covetous is “*aphilarguros*.” This word occurs only twice in the entire New Testament. The other occurrence is in Hebrews 13:5. In both instances, the KJV has the word as “covetous.” It is a compound word made up of three words. The word “*aphilarguros*” is made up of the negative “a,” the word “*phileo*” which means “love” and “*arguros*” which means “silver or money.” The three words combined literally means “not a lover of money.” Therefore, the Christian who desires to be an elder must not be a lover of money. This is not the same as being rich or having lots of money. This verse is not saying that a rich person cannot be an elder. The problem is the love of money and NOT possessing money. Both the poor and the rich can be lovers of money. Do not discriminate against the rich and the poor and do not prevent someone from being an elder simply because he is poor or rich. It has nothing to do with a person’s financial status. It is a heart condition and not a condition of his bank account. To vote someone to be an elder because he is rich is a transgression. To disqualify someone who is poor is also a transgression. The person's status in society is of no consequence at all in the evaluation of his spiritual qualification for eldership.

A covetous elder is a man who can be bought with money. For money, he will distort his judgement. Truth to him will be like water having no shape but only the shape of the container it contains! The elder's decision changes according to the money that is offered to him. If he believes that he can gain financially, his decision can be easily changed. He can be likened to pastors who come into churches because of pay and perks. Their slogan would be “more money more preach”, “less money less preach” and “no money no preach.” They will bargain and make monetary demands and perks. They will not die for the flock. They will move on when a better offer comes along. They are like the priest in the book of Judges who was offered a bigger congregation to leave his smaller one. Judges 18:19, *“And they said unto him, Hold thy peace, lay thine hand upon thy mouth, and go with us, and be to us a father and a priest: is it better for thee to be a priest unto the house of one man, or that thou be a priest unto a tribe and a family in Israel?”*

A covetous elder is one who will look at the “faces” of man when he makes judgements. For rewards, he will “colour” his judgement. Proverbs 28:21 describes him well, *“To have respect of persons is not good: for for a piece of bread that man will transgress.”* He will be “offered” positions of leadership in the church by these rich men. Doctrines can be put aside for them. He will support the financially well-off ones to be deacons regardless of doctrines. The covetous elder will also make sure that these deacons are aware that he is the one who “promoted” them. On the other hand, God's judgement will be thrown at those who are not rich. Such elders are like leaches that will suck the blood; they will suck the money from the rich. An elder who loves money does not care for right or wrong. He is a man with little or no Bible convictions. His life consists of the things that he possesses. This is how he measures himself and also how he would measure others around him. The ones with more money are seen as more godly to him and will be treated with special favours. A covetous elder serves for money and serves “money people.” He has very few moral convictions and fewer doctrinal positions. He can move from one conviction to the next according to personal benefit. He is loyal to no one but himself. He cares only for himself and would be ready to compromise anyone or anything, including God and His perfect Word, for filthy lucre.

How do we find out if a person is a lover of money? One of the ways is to visit that person's home, talk to him and observe what occupies his thoughts and heart. The Bible says in Matthew 6:21, *“For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”* A lover of money will not live by faith but by works. His conversation will constantly revolve around money, properties, and worldly endeavours. He seldom studies or reads the Bible. He has little interest in spiritual matters and his knowledge of the Bible is replaced by his knowledge of worldly pursuits. At every meal he talks about how to make more money. The economy of the world consumes him. He is obsessed by money and rich people. Sadly, such elders and pastors are a dime a dozen. They come into “office” with one agenda, and that is to make merchandise of the flock.

Elders have the grave responsibility to make decisions involving the spiritual well-being of the lives under their care. If we should choose one who loves money, it would be like inviting a wolf to live among the flock which will be his buffet spread.

One of the best ways to ruin the Lord's church is to vote in a covetous elder or pastor.