

Introduction:

1. A large company was looking to hire a new manager.
    - a. The looked over all of their employees and decided that the person they wanted was Jack.
    - b. Jack had been with the company 17 long days.
    - c. Do you think the company made a wise decision promoting a new employee to a position of leadership?
  2. That same company decided they needed a PR person to interact with the community and help bring them more business.
    - a. So, again they looked over their employees and they picked Michael.
    - b. Michael had been with the company for years and knew the inner workings of the company better than almost anyone.
    - c. No one in the company could doubt that he was a hard worker.
    - d. However, away from work, Michael had earned a reputation of being disagreeable, untrustworthy, and downright cantankerous.
    - e. Do you think the company made a wise decision promoting to a position of leadership someone who had a bad reputation in the community?
  3. There are reasons why God said an elder must “not be a novice” and must “have a good report from those who are outside.”
    - a. These are the two qualifications for elders we will be discussing tonight.
    - b. The next two weeks, we will be discussing “husband of one wife” and “faithful children.”
- I. An Elder Must Not Be A Novice (I Timothy 3:6).
- A. What does it mean to be a novice?
1. “Novice” can mean someone who is not well-trained in a certain area.
    - a. When it comes to repairing cars, I am a novice.
  2. “Novice” can mean someone who does not have understanding in certain areas.
    - a. Someone might say that they are a novice when it comes to understanding football.
  3. “Novice” can mean someone who is just beginning something.
    - a. He is a novice at his job, having started there only last week.
  4. Other translations:
    - a. “he must not be a recent convert” (ESV)
    - b. “not a new convert” (NASB, Living Oracles)
    - c. “He may not be a young scholar” (Tyndale)
    - d. Some ancient Greek commentators on this verse said it meant “newly baptized” (which to them and us means the same thing as “new convert”).
      - 1) Some modern commentators might mention that reference, but then quickly dismiss it as not correct, because they deny baptism’s role in salvation.
    - e. Literally, it means “newly planted.”

- B. Why should a new convert not be made an elder?
1. There are many reasons for this.
  2. Elders must be able to teach and guide people to heaven.
    - a. It would be difficult for a new convert to immediately go from learner to teacher.
  3. Elders must correct the erring brethren.
    - a. A new convert does not have the respect of erring brethren that a long-time Christian would.
    - b. Therefore, it would be much harder for a new convert to go correct erring brethren who have been brethren for much longer.
  4. Elders must hold to the faithful word of God so that they can teach it.
    - a. How many of you have ever taught something, based upon the Bible, that you later realized was absolutely wrong?
    - b. A novice does not have the understanding needed to accurately teach much of God's word.
  5. Novices "know just enough to be dangerous."
    - a. How many people hear a bit of information on a topic, and then all of a sudden act like they are experts on the matter?
    - b. What is your opinion about those kind of people?
  6. Novices make ineffective leaders.
    - a. How many of you have worked at a place and they hired a new man, fresh out of college, to come be the manager?
    - b. These people usually act as if they know everything, and try to implement programs and changes within the company which rarely work.
    - c. They quickly lose any respect from the people under them (if any existed in the first place), because they don't understand how to be effective in leadership.
  7. Novices do not know the flock.
    - a. Elders have the responsibility to oversee the flock, which includes knowing them.
    - b. How can a new convert know the members well enough to oversee their spiritual lives?
    - c. How can a new convert know the spiritual condition of the members?
- C. The Scriptures state that an elder must not be a novice "lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil" (I Timothy 3:6).
1. A novice, one not grounded in the faith, is at high risk for being prideful, especially if he is instantly placed as a leader in the church.
    - a. The same is true when a new member (recently moved here) is quickly given a leadership position (as a teacher, deacon, elder, etc...)
      - 1) I can't tell you how many times I have heard about people who are made teachers soon after moving into a congregation and then later they were the causes of major problems in the church.

- b. Doing this gives them a sense of entitlement, an “I deserve it” type of attitude.
    - 1) You see the same thing with certain football players coming out of college.
    - 2) They feel like they are owed enormous amounts of money by the team before they ever play for them.
    - 3) If a man is made an elder before he has ever proven his worth to the congregation, he likely will begin to think he is greater than he really is.
  - c. If he is quickly made an elder, what else might he aspire to within the local congregation?
    - 1) Power, which would lead to him trying to mold the congregation to his own will.
  - d. The phrase “being lifted up with pride” might also be translated:
    - 1) Puffed up.
    - 2) Being blinded by pride.
    - 3) One person observed that it means “a beclouded and stupid state of mind as the result of pride.”
2. The prideful person often will “fall into the condemnation of the devil.”
- a. There are different ways of understanding this phrase.
    - 1) Some say it means that the prideful person will be condemned just like the devil was condemned because of his pride.
    - 2) Some say it means the Devil (literally the slanderer) will be able to make a successful accusation against him.
    - 3) Others say it means that a prideful elder will give occasion for people to speak evil about him (since literally, the phrase is “the slanderer”).
    - 4) The last of these seems to make the most sense, but obviously Satan would be able to make a successful accusation against him as well.
  - b. Someone who is a novice will likely be full of pride and bring condemnation upon himself.
    - 1) We should not want to put someone in a position which would cause them to be condemned.
- D. Paul gives another reason an elder must not be a new convert.
- 1. It takes time for a man’s character to be known (I Timothy 5:22-24).
  - 2. Since all of the qualifications reflect on the man’s character, we must allow there to be sufficient time after conversion to determine whether his character matches up with what Paul says.
    - a. This is not something that can happen quickly.
    - b. This will most likely take years.

3. Paul did not ordain elders in newly planted congregations because they were all new converts, even with the miraculous gifts which came by the laying on of hands.
- E. This qualification applies to all Christians.
1. Though it is permissible for all Christians to at one time be new converts or novices, it is NOT permissible for them to stay in that condition.
  2. We are commanded to study God's word (II Timothy 2:15).
  3. We are commanded to grow in the grace and in the knowledge of Christ (II Peter 3:18).
  4. One man said "God will take you just as you are, but he won't let you stay that way."
- II. An Elder Must Have a Good Report From Those Outside of the Church (I Timothy 3:7).
- A. Why would God command a qualification which says "you can't be an elder unless non-Christians speak well of you"?
1. Wouldn't we expect the opposite?
    - a. If non-Christians speak well of you, doesn't that mean you aren't doing your duty as a Christian?
    - b. Some people have that opinion (that you are compromising God's word if non-Christians speak well of you).
  2. This qualification instead is speaking of the character of the man.
    - a. He is honest in his dealings with all people (Christians and non-Christians).
    - b. He is known for being an upstanding man who can be trusted.
    - c. He is not a troublemaker.
  3. Why, though?
    - a. A man who becomes an elder must have a good reputation so that he can convert other people.
    - b. A man who is known as a liar, a cheater, untrustworthy, or any other bad characteristic is going to have a very hard time converting the lost.
    - c. A man who has a bad report from those outside the church will bring reproach upon the church.
      - 1) A preacher moved into an area and purchased a lot of items from the local furniture stores and appliance stores.
      - 2) He also opened a credit account at the grocery store.
      - 3) They all trusted him because he was the preacher.
      - 4) After 5 years, he was fired for one reason or another, and then the church found out that he owed literally thousands of dollars to the stores in town (and this was back in the 60s).
      - 5) This gave a bad name to the church which took years to overcome.
      - 6) The church stopped growing.
      - 7) All of this was because one person in a prominent position had a bad reputation with those outside the church.
  4. This is to keep the elders from falling into reproach.

- a. If they have a bad reputation outside the church, you can rest assured that eventually that reputation will eventually begin to infiltrate the membership.
    - b. This will make the elder's job much more difficult, because the sheep will stop trusting him.
  5. This is to keep the elders from falling into the snare (trap) of the devil.
    - a. God wants men as elders who have a good reputation (and deservedly so) so that they can avoid the devil's traps and help others to avoid them as well.
    - b. If someone has a bad reputation, making him an elder can lead to pride, which is playing into the devil's hands.
- B. Does this apply to all Christians?
  1. Must all Christians have a good report from non-Christians?
    - a. Remember that this is discussing the character of the person.
    - b. So, if people outside of the church know you as being untrustworthy, a liar, or anything else like it, then there is something wrong with you as a Christian.
    - c. So, yes. All Christians should have a good report from non-Christians.
  2. Must all Christians have a good report (literally testimony) from ALL non-Christians?
    - a. If this was the case, then no one could ever be an elder.
    - b. Obviously some people are simply going to be cantankerous and speak badly about anyone connected with the church because of a preconceived bias.
    - c. In general, though, all Christians should be well-regarded by those who know them, even those outside the church.
  3. There are people who have said, "I won't ever go to that church of Christ because so-and-so goes there."
    - a. Like it or not, there are some who will reject the truth because one Christian had a bad reputation.
    - b. We cannot be people who don't care about what other people think about us.

Conclusion:

1. It is important to realize that elders cannot be newcomers to Christianity.
2. It is also important to realize that no Christians can stay a novice, but instead are commanded to grow.
3. We also need to take seriously the qualification that an elder must have a good reputation from those outside of the church.
  - a. Many times, people will install an elder saying "we know him better than they do."
  - b. They ignore how he is viewed by those in the community, and do more harm than good.
4. We should all live to be the best examples we can be to all people.