

AN ELDER MUST BE APT TO TEACH AND NOT BE GIVEN TO WINE

1Timothy 3:2-3, *“A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous;”*

Apt to Teach -- The phrase “apt to teach” comes from the Greek word “di-dak-ti-kos,” which means “to be able to instruct.” From this Greek word we get the English word “didactic.” The elder has to be a capable teacher of God’s Holy Word. In order for the elder to be able to teach, he must first know the Word of God. If he does not know the Word of God, how is he to teach?

The knowledge of the Word of God in every elder’s life is of utmost importance. Without the Word of God, he is unable to live a godly life according to Scriptures. His testimony is crucial to his ministry. If he does not know God’s Word well, he makes decisions based upon a worldly philosophy rather than a godly one. There is no substitute for a godly mind that is in tune with the Word of God. The elder may have a very high IQ in the areas of science or arts or technology, but when it comes to spiritual things, God’s perfect Word says that the elder needs the Word of God. His IQ is useless in the spiritual realm. Without the perfect Word of God to control his mind and his heart, the elder will do great harm to the cause of Christ and the lives of God’s children. He will not be able to make spiritual decisions but only carnal ones. He needs the Word of God to guide him. The primary nature of an elder’s responsibility is stated by the Apostle Paul in Acts 20:28-30, *“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.”*

The elder has to nurture and protect the flock. He cannot do that if he does not know the Word of God. The Word of God must be the highest priority in his life. If an elder is not interested in theology, then he has no right to be an elder simply because theology is the study of God. If he not interested in the study of God, how can he even be called a believer, least of all be an elder? An elder does not look after an organization or some financial institution. If he fails as an elder, he will hurt and destroy the lives of God’s children. The life of every child of God is priceless. The study of God’s Word must be paramount. It must be his life-long quest. That is why the Word of God is described as the milk and meat to the believer’s soul. Just as the human body never stops eating and drinking as long as he is alive, so also the soul of the believer who is alive in Christ. There is no limit or retirement in the study of God’s infinite and perfect Word. No true believer, especially an elder, can ever say that he has “arrived” and does not need to study God’s Word any further. He should have a proper system to guide him in his study of God’s Word. Attending a conservative bible college like FEBC would be a good start.

The issue here is more than just possessing head knowledge. The memorization of Holy Scripture without obedience is useless. It is like putting human food into a robot. There are

some who may have a good knowledge of God's Word but are unable to teach others. They may have degrees in theology but are unable to organize their thoughts and lesson plans to instruct others in the Word of God. They would not be sufficiently qualified to look after the flock. A church elder has no right to feed chaff to God's children, which would be the wisdom of the world or his own opinions based on experience. The Word of God is the living Word and if he is not able to teach the Word of God in a clear and an exciting manner, he might just "kill" any interest in God's Word. That is arguably the worst sin anyone could commit against another human being. This would be likened to the wayward children of Eli, the high priests who caused the people of Israel to abhor the Levitical system of worship and offerings by their wicked ways. Every elder must be life-long students of God's Word and at the same time be good teachers of God's Word, feeding the flock so that they may conform to the image of Christ.

Albert Barnes comments correctly on the phrase "apt to teach": the elder "is, capable of instructing, or qualified for the office of a teacher of religion. As the principal business of a preacher of the gospel is to teach, or to communicate to his fellow men the knowledge of the truth, the necessity of this qualification is obvious. No one should be allowed to enter the ministry who is not qualified to impart instruction to others on the doctrines and duties of religion; and no one should feel that he ought to continue in the ministry, who has not industry, and self-denial, and the love of study enough to lead him constantly to endeavour to increase in knowledge, that he may be qualified to teach others. A man who would teach a people, must himself keep in advance of them on the subjects on which he would instruct them."

Not Be Given to Wine -- Literally the phrase "not given to wine" means "not be seen along side wine." The Greek word is a compound substantive from "para" (along side) and "oinos" (wine).

The wine in the days of Christ and the apostles was not the wine in our time. Wine today is manufactured in large quantities through the process of distillation. This is very different from the wine that existed in the days of Christ. Back then, wine was simply fermented grape juice with a very low alcohol content of less than 2%. This fermented grape juice, or wine, was used like chlorine for the purpose of purifying the water that the people may drink without getting a stomach upset. The only alternative back then to not using the wine was to drink unclean and untreated water. In strict obedience to the injunction of total abstinence, Timothy the pastor abstained from drinking water mixed with wine and thus his stomach was affected. Hence Paul's injunction to him was "*Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities.*" (1 Tim 5:23) Paul told Timothy to use a little wine as a means to purify the unclean water before drinking and as "medicine" to settle his stomach problem.

Wine is not used for purification today. With advanced technology in science and medicine and the copious varieties of safe drinking water readily available, there is no reason why any Christian should go near wine or beer or any form of alcoholic drink. Total abstinence is certainly required of every elder. Total abstinence is taught explicitly in both the Old and New Testaments. In the OT, the injunction for the priests was: "*And the LORD spake unto Aaron,*

saying, Do not drink wine nor strong drink, thou, nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations: And that ye may put difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean; And that ye may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the LORD hath spoken unto them by the hand of Moses (Lev 10:8-11).” The injunction for kings was: *“It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink: Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted. Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts. Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more. Open thy mouth for the dumb in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction. Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy (Prov 31:4-9).”* The sacred responsibility of the priests and the grave duties of a king over his nation forbade them to go near any wine.

Some have argued that the rule for elders is total abstinence but for the deacons in 1 Timothy 3:8 it is that he is “not given to much wine”. They say this means that deacons are allowed to drink a little wine but not much wine. This interpretation is faulty. The wine then and now are different. Even when used for purification purposes, the deacons were not allowed to think of drinking this wine mixed into the water. This is the literal meaning of “not given to much wine.” Barnes explained 1 Timothy 3:3 well, “The word *much* is added here to what is said (1Tim 3:8) of the qualification of a bishop. It is not affirmed that it would be proper for the deacon, any more than the bishop, to indulge in the use of wine in small quantities, but it is affirmed that a man who is much given to the use of wine, ought not, on any consideration, to be a deacon. It may be remarked here, that this qualification was everywhere regarded as necessary for a minister of religion. Even the heathen priests, on entering a temple, did not drink wine.--Bloomfield. The use of wine, and of strong drinks of all kinds, was absolutely prohibited to the Jewish ministers of every rank, when they were about to engage in the service of God, Lev 10:9. Why should it, then, be any more proper for a Christian minister to drink wine, than for a Jewish or a heathen priest! Shall a minister of the gospel be less holy than they? Shall he have a feebler sense of the purity of his vocation? Shall he be less careful lest he expose himself to the possibility of conducting the services of religion in an irreverent and silly manner? Shall he venture to approach the altar of God under the influence of intoxicating drinks, when a sense of propriety restrained the heathen priest, and a solemn statute of Jehovah restrained the Jewish priest from doing it?” [Albert Barnes’ Notes on the Bible, Swordsearcher 6.2]

There is absolutely no justification from Scriptures for the drinking of any wine today. The wine today is not the wine of biblical times. The wine in biblical times was for purification and medicinal purposes. We have many alternatives today in terms of medicine and clean water that does not involve wine at all. Total abstinence is demanded of every Christian, especially if he is to stand for eldership. This is also a non-negotiable qualification when he is to be blameless. AMEN.