

## AN ELDER MUST BE NO STRIKER AND NOT GREEDY OF FILTHY LUCRE

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

**No Striker** -- The Greek word for “no striker” is “*me plektes*.” “*Plektos*” comes from the verb “*plasso*” which means “to pound or to flatten up or to shape.” The addition of the negative “*me*”, to the word “*plektes*”, means that the elder must not “flatten” people. This applies to physical violence, but more so to the injury of the person’s character. The elder is not quarrelsome. He does not use his tongue to “kill” a person’s character or good name. He keeps his tongue in check. His tongue is under control. Burkitt explains correctly that the elder must not strike, “either with hands or tongue, no quarreller, that cannot keep his hand from hurting, no word-striker, no striker with the tongue, and passion, and anger; a word, we say, wounds deeper than a sword; the ministers of God may wound the consciences of men with the sword of the Spirit, but they must not wound the reputations of men with their own wrathful spirits; we must use our tongues rather to heal than wound, or if at any time to wound, it must be in order to heal.” [William Burkitt’s Expository Notes, Swordsearcher 6.2.]

He does not retaliate when it comes to personal injury. He obeys dutifully what the LORD teaches in Holy Scriptures as an obedient child of God. For example, in the Sermon on the Mount, in **Matthew 5:39-42**, “*But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.*”

There are three cases of personal injury that a Christian has to bear in life, for the gospel’s sake. Case #1: If someone slaps him on the right cheek, probably using his right hand as most people are right handed, and with the back of the right hand, the command is to turn the other cheek. To be slapped with the back of one’s hand is most humiliating and yet the Christian is told by Jesus to let the person slap the other cheek as well. The teaching is to accept the humiliation for Christ’s sake. The Christian’s own name need not be defended! Defend only the Name of Christ! The problem with most Christians today is that they would spend thousands of dollars to defend their name which is worthless but they would not defend the Name of Christ which is priceless! No one can be saved by believing in the name of any man; whereas all can be saved by believing in the Name of Christ! Every born again believer must ensure that this is his principle in life. The requirement for every elder is that he must truly decrease and Christ must increase. One of the best ways is to keep his temper in check.

Case #2: loss of personal property. The personal loss is total. The people at that time wore an outer coat and an inner cloak. When someone demands the outer coat, give him the inner cloak as well. “Every where our blessed Lord shows the utmost disapprobation of such litigations as tended to destroy brotherly kindness and charity. It is evident he would have his followers to suffer rather the loss of all their property than to have recourse to such modes of redress, at so great a risk. Having the mind averse from contentions, and preferring peace and concord to temporal advantages, is most solemnly recommended to all Christians. We are

great gainers when we lose only our money, or other property, and risk not the loss of our souls, by losing the love of God and man.” [Adam Clarke’s Commentary on the Bible, Swordsearcher, 6.2] When it comes to financial loss, Jesus says it is better to suffer such loss and bear a good testimony for Christ than to retaliate for filthy lucre’s sake. We may win the case but we will lose a soul in the process. Do not go to court for personal gain.

Case #3: surrendering personal rights. The Roman soldiers had the right to conscript anyone to run errands for them “at the drop of a hat”. The enlisted one must stop his own work no matter how important or urgent it may be, and do the Roman soldier’s will. If not, he could face death. Jesus says that under such injury to personal rights, go the second mile. Do not be unhappy about it. Never demand your rights. For the sake of Christ and the person’s soul, be Christ-like and not like the world!

But the Christian will defend the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ even unto death, if need be, like the apostle Paul, “. . . for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.” [Acts 21:13] He is no striker when it comes to his personal injury but not so when it comes to Christ and God’s holy and perfect Word. He must earnestly contend for the faith when it comes to defending the perfect Word of God. He must expose evil men and false teachers and false pastors wherever they are and must not give in to them, not even an inch. The Word of God is very clear on this point. Every faithful believer of Christ must fight the good fight of faith, even unto death! This means that no quarter must be given to these attackers of God’s truth. Many today are not convicted by this teaching. They tend to reverse the emphasis. They would defend their own names but not God’s Name and His holy and perfect Word. This is very sad. Their testimony for Christ would be severely damaged when these believers do not defend God’s holy and perfect Word.

With such an attitude, every Christian will be able to not strike back, whether verbally or physically when he is attacked for the sake of Christ. He will learn to submit and accept willingly our Heavenly Father’s will. Jesus Christ is his example par excellence because He, the very Son of God, was led as a lamb to the slaughter. An obedient believer who is no striker will make a good elder. He knows when the stand and when to be humble for Christ’s sake! WE need such men today!

**Not Greedy of Filthy Lucre** -- The Greek word for “filthy lucre” is “*aischrokerdes*”. It is a compound word that is made up of “*aischro*” which means “sordid” and “*kerdos*” which means “gain.” Combine the two words together and we have the phrase “sordid gain.”

This is not describing poverty as an attribute or a virtue to be sought by an elder. It is not saying that the mere status of being poor is to be sought after by a Christian. There are many poor people who are very greedy. This notion that being poor has some sense of "spirituality" stems from church history and some “popular” books. These emphasize the unbiblical teaching that a believer must live a "simple lifestyle." It is not taught in the Bible. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were very rich and they were godly. King David was extremely rich and he was called "a man after God's own heart." Being poor has nothing to do with being spiritual. A simple lifestyle is unbiblical because it can never be defined and quantified! God alone is the only One who can determine it but He did not! No man has been entrusted to absolutely define

what the simple lifestyle is in the practical sense! Many naïve believers have been deceived into thinking that he is more spiritual when he is underprivileged! This is a lie of the Devil. Such thinking results in legalism and fills man's heart with sinful pride!

It also does not mean that a wealthy person cannot be an elder. The Bible is not giving us the impression that being wealthy is carnal or sinful. King David was very, very wealthy as he was the king who united Israel and brought into his kingdom great wealth and fame. Job was also very wealthy and so were men like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as mentioned above. All these men were godly at the same time. Joseph was the prime minister of Egypt and Daniel was made counselor to the king of Babylon and the first president to the king of Persia. They were very godly, wealthy and influential as well. The fact of the matter is that the emphasis of spirituality is precisely what the term means. It is measured in terms of spiritual qualities and not material! Thus it is sad that many churches today have unspiritual men of the world who have material abundance and worldly accolades as elders of churches. These men make carnal decisions when they are supposed to make only spiritual decisions for the spiritual well-being of God's people. One must not be disqualified or made qualified for eldership because of material and worldly status. These have nothing to do with the position of eldership.

The adage “the love of money is the root of all evil” emphasizes a trait that must not be found in an elder. Money is not the root of all evil but the LOVE of it is. An elder who loves money, which is what “greedy of sordid gain” means, will be corrupt in his judgements. He will give affluent members in the congregation preferential treatment. The elder will be blinded to the sins of these wealthy members. Not only will he cover up or ignore their sins, he might even endorse them for high positions in the church. Proverbs 28:21 describes such elders well, “*To have respect of persons is not good: for for a piece of bread that man will transgress.*” Such elders will sin “for a piece of bread”.

Godly leaders are needed in the ministry in every age. Moses’ father-in-law, Jethro, told him to seek out men who could help him rule the two million Israelites who came out of Egypt and were marching to the Promised Land. Exodus 18:19-22: “*Hearken now unto my voice, I will give thee counsel, and God shall be with thee: Be thou for the people to God-ward, that thou mayest bring the causes unto God: And thou shalt teach them ordinances and laws, and shalt shew them the way wherein they must walk, and the work that they must do. Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people **able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness**; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens: And let them judge the people at all seasons: and it shall be, that every great matter they shall bring unto thee, but every small matter they shall judge: so shall it be easier for thyself, and they shall bear the burden with thee.*” [Emphasis added]

Moses was to teach these leaders the Word and wisdom of God so that they could help him rule and counsel the many who needed attention on a daily basis. Moses could not look after them alone. Jethro rightly defined the character of these men. They were to be “able men” who feared God, men of truth who were characterized by truth, and men who hated covetousness. When we truly fear God we will not fear any man. When truth is most important to us, we will not practise situational ethics and we will definitely ensure that truth is paramount in all our decisions. When we hate covetousness, we cannot be bought with or be

influenced by money. These same spiritual qualities and more are very much needed in our church today.

If an elder looks at the faces of people before he makes judgements, he will ruin the church. Flattering “the right people” with the right words and “looking out for them” for the right amount are sure ways to destroy God’s people. An elder who is greedy for filthy lucre will sell his office for a piece of bread. His judgements will be corrupt and made according to the “face” of a person. Therefore, it is imperative that an elder must not be greedy of filthy lucre for the safety and well-being of God’s church. Amen.