

AN ELDER MUST BE OF GOOD REPORT

1 Timothy 3:7, “Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.”

The Greek word for “good report” is “good witness.” The emphasis is not so much on the “good report” per se but the location in which he is to have that good report. The phrase which captures this emphasis is “of them which are without.” Apparently it was found then, as it is today, that “Christians” were well behaved inside the church but behaved like the devil outside the church.

Such hypocrisy has stumbled many unbelievers, even preventing them from accepting Christ as their Lord and Saviour. How much more when the stumbling comes from church leaders, even elders of the church? I have heard about an elder who embezzled money from his own firm. He was entrusted with looking after the firm’s funds when they found out that he was an elder. They thought that he was an honorable man. Sadly, he became the culprit and he was sent to prison. Do you think that the unbelieving colleagues of this elder would want to become Christians? Many of us can behave quite well for about two to three hours in church on Sunday. But it is a very different story when it comes to the work place or home, day in day out, and sometimes under very trying circumstances. The worldliness and hypocrisy would surface eventually. It is easier for the world to see the real conduct of the candidate for eldership, like at his work place, because they observe him 8 hours every day, five days a week and throughout the number of years he works in his company. It is hard pressed to be a hypocrite for such a long period of time.

The report has to be good, i.e. the elder must be very well behaved in his conduct. He must reflect Christ-like qualities such as joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance, standing up for truth and righteousness; he must not be a liar or compromiser; he will not do like the Romans do but will always do what the Bible teaches. At home, he will honour his parents and is a loving husband and a godly father. His wife will be able to give a good assessment of him as husband and father. Does he impart Christian principles to his children or worldly ones? Will he succumb to pressure at work and adopt the world’s methods? Does he have the courage to speak up for Christ whenever the name of Christ is maligned? Do his colleagues see Christ in Him? If he is his own boss then his employees should be asked about his character and conduct. Will he receive a good report from those who are without? Of course, the unbelievers will see him with eyes that have not been enlightened by God. Their evaluation of him would not be like that of a believer. But that does not mean they cannot see Christ in him, the way that Potiphar was able to see Christ in the life and conduct of young Joseph.

Genesis 39:1-4 (KJV) "And Joseph was brought down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him of the hands of the Ishmeelites, which had brought him down thither. **2** And the LORD was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. **3** And his master saw that the LORD was with him, and that the LORD made all that he did to prosper in his hand. **4** And Joseph found grace in his sight, and he served

him: and he made him overseer over his house, and all *that* he had he put into his hand." [Emphasis added]

This implies that Joseph must have shared about the LORD with Potiphar and other fellow slaves. Joseph must have also given credit and glory to the LORD the way he did when he stood before Pharaoh.

Genesis 41:14-16 (KJV) "Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they brought him hastily out of the dungeon: and he shaved *himself*, and changed his raiment, and came in unto Pharaoh. **15** And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, I have dreamed a dream, and *there is* none that can interpret it: and I have heard say of thee, *that* thou canst understand a dream to interpret it. **16** And Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, *It is not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace.*" [Emphasis added]

Therefore like Joseph, the candidate for eldership must be witnessing for Christ at his work place so that his colleagues can comment, like Potiphar, about his life and testimony.

Satan is the accuser of the brethren. He, together with his fallen angels, will go all out to point accusing fingers against God's children, especially the leaders in God's church. The Bible's warning is that the reproach (accusing finger) and snare (trap) of Satan will come, and it is only a matter of time and frequency. The adage from the Bible "be sure your sins will find you out" adds to this warning. All existing elders and those who are being considered for eldership must possess this qualification. This is a very accurate and serious criterion of his sincere and consistent character. If the church does not take this criterion seriously, and these hypocrites are elected, it will only be matter of time before their hypocrisy is revealed and by then the damage would have already been done.

If a Christian desires to be an elder but lives a hypocritical life outside the church, Satan and his hosts will set "traps" for this man. This man will fall. His sins will become public. Great shame will be brought to the name of Christ! Lives will be hurt. If he is repentant, then the damage can be better contained. But if he is defensive and denies the obvious evidence against him, then more trouble will follow. He needs to be defrocked especially when the sin committed is a grievous one. Bear in mind the fact that the congregation is called the "sheep" by the Lord. This means that even when such an elder is exposed as a hypocrite he might still find "followers" who will blindly follow him. He will continue to lead these "followers" astray and their lives will be ruined.

In short, before a person is to be considered for eldership, it may be wise to obtain testimonies from loved ones at home and colleagues at the work place. The above text says, he "must" have a good report and not "may" have a good report. This would not be a formality but a serious necessity in view of the hypocrisy and moral laxity existing in our age and time.

LET THE DEACONS BE LIKE THE ELDERS

1 Timothy 3:8, "*Likewise must the deacons be grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre;*"

The term “deacon” was derived: “probably from an obsolete diako (to run on errands; compare 1377); an attendant, i.e. (genitive case) a waiter (at table or in other menial duties).” [Strong’s Greek Dictionary] When used in the context of Christianity, and especially a Christian teacher and pastor (technically, a deacon or deaconess), it refers to a minister, or servant.

His role and duties include assisting the elders in the care, nurture and feeding of the flock. The standard is not as stringent when compared to the requirements of an elder. For one thing, the word “blameless” in 3:10 is not the same as in 3:2. The latter demands a stricter scrutiny whereby his entire life and character are to be irreproachable; whereas the former points to a law abiding citizen who has no criminal record. Perhaps it may be likened to the elder’s life being scrutinized by his enemy and the deacon’s life scrutinized by his best friend.

This does not mean that with a “lower” standard than that of the elder’s, the deacon’s qualifications can be slighted or looked down upon. The standard is still all spiritual and to be far higher than the world’s. Some of these qualifications will be the same as those of the elders; but some of the qualifications for elders will not be required for the deacons. For example, the first on the list is that the deacon must be “grave” which means “to be honest” and “not be doubletongued”. This is such a simple and obvious spiritual qualification that must be found in every believer whereby honesty in speech is required. “Let your yea be yea and nay, nay” was how the Lord Jesus Christ puts it, and “anything more than this comes of evil” [cf. Matt 5:37]. It reveals an evil heart. Perhaps an illustration might help explain the reality of this problem in our age and time. Some years ago, our church Session issued a statement on the King James Bible that “it has no mistakes.” Some doubletongued mischievous people would twist it and say: “yes I believe and can agree with such a statement but what I really believe is that the KJV translators translated all the mistakes in the original languages without mistakes.”

Some deacons may not eventually become elders as they may not possess eldership qualities. There must never be an “automatic promotion” for “senior” deacons just because there is a need. This method will destroy God’s church. It is in our Asian culture to promote individuals because of seniority; but this cultural practice must not be used in God’s church. Men who do not have all the eldership qualities must not be made elders. The argument that the “senior” will be slighted must not be taken into consideration at all, as eldership is not to be likened to a promotion like in the secular world. If he threatens “resignation” because he has not been made an elder, then without hesitation his “resignation” must be accepted. He serves God and not man. This kind of “threat” reveals the unspiritual heart condition. He has truly disqualified himself. The deaconship should also be removed from him. This is an office created and given by God Himself. No man has the right to correct or ignore God’s prescribed qualifications. To disregard or lower God’s high standard for an elder is to sin against God and His church, and will inevitably ruin the person elected who lacks eldership qualifications. The greater sadness is that he will be severely judged by God together with those who knowingly made him an elder because of his “seniority.”

If, however, there is a younger deacon who is mature and has eldership qualities, then he should be considered to serve as an elder.

There were people in the church who practised the sin of simony. The term “simony” was coined from an account that happened in the Book of Acts. **Acts 8:9-23** (KJV), "But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: **10** To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. **11** And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries. **12** But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. **13** Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done. **14** Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: **18** And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, **19** Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. **20** But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. **21** Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. **22** Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. **23** For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and *in* the bond of iniquity."

 [Emphasis added]

These professing Christians have money, and they used their money to buy themselves into the leadership. They made sure that when they gave their five figure “love gift”, it was made known to the pastor or elders in the church. They also gave generous “love gifts” so that the “sin of obligation” was committed. This placed them in the good graces of the leaders so that when the next election came around, the “right words” were spoken into the right ears and at the right time. These are carnal men using carnal and sinful snares to entrap the gullible(?) leaders. The church suffers and will die because these men became deacons or worse still elders! These are the killers of godly churches.

The deacon’s requirements might be a little less stringent than those of an elder, but this does not mean that the office is to be taken lightly or is not as crucial. In Calvary Pandan, the deacon has to be found faithful for at least two full terms of service, i.e. six years, before he can even be considered for eldership. There is no “automatic promotion.” A faithful deacon will make a faithful elder, for he that is faithful in little will also be faithful in much. Deacons also serve the King of kings and Lord of lords.