

## THE ELDER MUST BE "GIVEN TO HOSPITALITY" AND "APT TO TEACH"

**1 Timothy 3:2**, *“A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach;”*

**"Be Given to Hospitality"** -- The Greek word is “phi-lo-xe-nos”. This is a compound word from “philos” which means “friend” and “xenos” which means “stranger”. Literally “phi-lo-xe-nos” means “friendly to strangers”. The opposite of “phi-lo-xe-nos” is Xenophobia which means the fear of strangers.

Living in a crowded city like Singapore has made us less friendly to strangers. Instead, we have become more wary. We shy away and remain silent rather than say a cheerful greeting. We see our neighbours nearly every day in the HDB lifts but most times not a word is exchanged. Some will be absorbed with their mobile contraptions and a few may stare ahead. When the lift door opens, we troop out of the lift and head off to our respective busy schedules. Is this the way we ought to behave among strangers?

We need to ask ourselves what the meaning of the word “stranger” is, as used in the above verse. If strangers refer to strange men or women whom we do not know at all, and we invite them into our homes for a meal or to stay, then Christians would be putting themselves in great peril. Some of these strangers might be criminals or even psychopaths. Could this be the teaching of the Bible? The word “stranger” does not have to refer to a total stranger or rather “strange” people whom you do not know at all. The Scriptures do not require us to put ourselves or our loved ones in danger in the manner described above. We are to be careful at all times and use our common sense when it comes to whom we invite into the privacy of our homes.

In the days of the apostles, Christians were under persecution. There were many who had to travel from city to city to escape persecution or for business or on missionary endeavors. They would need a place to stay. There could have been families whose loved ones had been martyred or arrested and needed a home to stay for a season of time. There were also missionaries who had come to town looking for a place to stay where “hotels” might have been too expensive or had no rooms available. These are the “strangers” we are told to care for and show hospitality. In other words, they are not part of our family but they are part of God's family. We invite them to our homes for a meal and, if need be and space permitting, provide a roof over their heads.

Inviting “strangers” into our homes for a meal can be quite demanding. There is the cost, the preparation, the cooking, washing and cleaning. The feeling that follows after everyone leaves can be very satisfying but is tiring, both mentally and physically. This is only for a meal. Imagine the “inconvenience” of looking after a “stranger” in our homes for a week or a month! He eats with us; sleeps in our homes and watches every move we make. We cannot be our "relaxed" selves and dress any way we like because there is a “stranger” in our homes. We may have to wash his clothes and so on, as well as accept and learn his culture. We are to do it without blame, i.e. willingly and cheerfully as unto the LORD. In short, he becomes part of the family for the duration of his stay.

Do you like or love to have people over to your home to stay if need be? Some Christians have very nice homes. They are also very picturesque and expensive. They look as if they've been taken out of a magazine cover of "Best Homes". Children are not allowed to sit on the sofa because they might dirty it with their grubby hands. Nothing must be moved or touched at all; it's as if one is living in a museum. Invisible "do not touch" signs are placed everywhere in the house. Owners of "show piece" houses or flats or apartments will find it hard to be hospitable. Guests can't help but feel uncomfortable for fear of dirtying the house and "offending" the host. The host might even grimace at every little "misdeed". Living in such a home would be "torturous". The stranger may indeed feel like a "stranger" when he is supposed to be made to feel like a part of the family, which should be the aim and purpose of one who is "given to hospitality." There are others who would not even allow a stranger to come to their homes for some other reasons. Their homes will not be used for church fellowship. They guard their "privacy" very jealously, so much so that they live like a recluse; home is like their fortress and no trespassers are allowed! A man who treats his home this way cannot be an elder. He will not know how to befriend strangers when he is introduced to them in the church. His demeanor reveals his awkwardness. How can he be asked to reach out to others as a representative of God when he is not a lover of strangers? He needs to love them in order to see that their souls are dying in sin and to reach out to them for Christ's sake.

The elder's house must be a home where "strangers" are welcome and would feel at home. He is "given to hospitality". Amen.

**"Be 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. He will make decisions based upon a worldly philosophy rather than a godly one. There is no substitute for a godly mind in tune with the Word of God. The elder may have a very high IQ in areas such as 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. Without the perfect Word of God to control his mind and his heart, the elder will bring great harm to the cause of Christ and the lives of God's children. He will make spiritual decisions and not carnal ones. He needs the Word of God to guide him. Imagine an elder with a carnal mind in the Board of Elders. The rest of the elders might be godly and want to make decisions based upon God's Word. But this carnal elder has a carnal mind and is not able to grasp the concept of a spiritual decision. He argues and beats around the bush insisting that his way is the best way even though it is a carnal way. The sad part is that he does not even know that his way is carnal. It has been his way of life and so he thinks it is acceptable for the church. He cannot capitulate, for to do so would mean he has to change his own life as well, which he is not prepared to do. To change his life is to acknowledge that his life has been lived wrongly these past many years. The pride in him would not allow him to face this frightful truth. He insists on going the way of the world. The other elders who can recognize the carnality of his way cannot allow his way to become the way of the church. The meeting can go on and on because the Board of Elders

must make decisions based upon unanimity. That one carnal elder can ruin the church because of his carnality. The cause of his carnality is his lack of the knowledge of God's Word.

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.”* This is a non-negotiable requirement. If the word of God is not known and taught by the elder, he cannot be made an elder! Many churches have been ruined by electing a carnal elder into office.

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 says that he 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 be even called an elder, least of all be one? He is not looking after an organization or some finances. He has a responsibility to care for the lives of God's children. The study of God's Word must be paramount in his life. It must be his life-long quest. There is no limit or retirement in the study of God's infinite and perfect Word. He can never 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. There is this person who was asked to study a few Bible Books in FEBC. His reply was that he already knows all 66 books of the Bible! Such a man is lying to himself. The arrogance of this man is very visible today as he thinks that his understanding of the Bible is the only right way and that he is never wrong. He has ruined many lives by his arrogance. Such a person should not be ordained but sadly he has been.

The issue here is more than just possessing head knowledge. There are some who may have a good knowledge of God's Word but are unable to teach others. There is a student of the Bible who thinks that the accumulation of paper degrees would make him a good teacher. He has about 6 to 7 theological degrees but sadly he cannot teach at all. He has no discernment, in that he has no ability to separate what is right and what is wrong from what he has been taught. In class, he merely regurgitated what he had been taught and much of it was unbiblical. His teaching was not coherent. The words came out of his mouth but the phrases and sentences were unrelated. It was a sad display of bad biblical teaching! These people will ruin the hearers' view of the Bible; they will have an impression that the Bible is an incoherent Book!

These teachers may have degrees in theology after their names but if they 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. The Word of God is the only milk and meat for God's children. A church elder has no right to feed God's children chaff, which would be the wisdom of the world, or even 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. 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 and 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." AMEN.