

Message #14

I Timothy 3:2g

“Able to Teach”

Being “able to teach” is not a neat suggestion for leaders; it is a Biblical qualification. Albert Barnes, the old Presbyterian preacher of the 1800’s from Philadelphia, really plays hardball when it comes to this qualification as it relates to a minister. He writes these words: “No one should be allowed to enter the ministry who is not qualified to impart instruction to others on the doctrines...and no one should feel that he ought to continue in the ministry who has not the industry and self-denial, and the love of study enough to lead him constantly to endeavor to increase in knowledge, that he may be qualified to teach others” (p. 1139).

William Barclay observed there is any amount of topical preaching and exhortation going on in churches, but the real disaster of modern day church is the lack of a sound teaching ministry in the church that is really exercised as it should be.

IF THE CHURCH OF GOD IS TO BECOME A PILLAR AND SUPPORT OF THE TRUTH OF GOD, IT MUST HAVE ELDERS WHO NOT ONLY DISPLAY THE TRUTH BY THEIR LIVES, BUT ALSO COMMUNICATE TRUTH THROUGH THEIR LIPS.

QUALIFICATION #1 – An elder must be above reproach—he must have earned for himself a good name as being a faithful man of God, who is not continually called into accountability because of some sin.

QUALIFICATION #2 – An elder must be the husband of one wife—he must be a man devoted to one woman, not one who is promiscuous or flirtatious.

QUALIFICATION #3 – An elder must be temperate—he must be a man who can remain clear-headed and controlled in any given situation.

QUALIFICATION #4 – An elder must be prudent—he must have a mind that is sober, sound, and self-controlled.

QUALIFICATION #5 – An elder must be respectable—he must have an orderly dignity, decency, and modesty. His life should be one of continual organization, not confusion.

QUALIFICATION #6 – An elder must be hospitable—he must be a man who is willing to open up his heart and home to strangers.

QUALIFICATION #7 – An elder must be “able to teach.”

Dr. John F. MacArthur says that all the other qualifications for an elder have to do with character, but this one has to do with function (*The Master’s Plan for the Church*, p. 186).

Dr. MacArthur goes on to say that the one difference in qualifications between the elders and deacons “is that the elder must be able to teach, but the deacon doesn’t have to be” (Ibid., p. 213).

Question #1 - What does it mean to be “able to teach”?

The actual Greek word “able to teach” is actually only used twice in the New Testament (I Tim. 3:2 and II Tim. 2:24). This word strongly carries with it the idea of teaching and instruction. The clear implication of this word is that one has been taught; one has been instructed and is able to teach and instruct others.

Richard Lenski gets very close to the meaning when he writes: “Ability to teach means not merely a fair natural aptitude but the qualification of having been taught (p. 584).

Being able to teach means the elder has been taught and understands things from the Word of God and is able to communicate the truth of God to others. Gerhard Kittel says this word is very technical. It is not a general term for teaching, but a technical term that implies definite skill and ability in the things of God (Kittel, Vol. 2, p. 149).

J. Vernon McGee said concerning this qualification: “This is something I emphasize because I do not feel any man ought to be an elder in a church unless he can teach the Word of God. I used to say to my church officers that I wished it was possible to give a theological exam to each one of them to determine if he was qualified to be an officer. I never actually did that, but I always thought it would be a good idea” (p. 442).

Question #2 - Why must an elder be “able to teach”?

(Reason #1) - Elders must be able to teach so they can exhort God’s flock to sound doctrine.
Titus 1:9a

Dr. John MacArthur said elders “are to determine doctrinal issues for the church and have the responsibility of proclaiming the truth to the congregation” (p. 186).

(Reason #2) - Elders must be able to teach so they can refute anyone who contradicts sound doctrine. Titus 1:9b

In the context of the church, there are many rebellious people. Some of these people are empty talkers who can deceive others. Elders need to be able to spot them and silence them by their understanding of the Word of God. Elders need a grasp of God’s Word so they can communicate the error of those who contradict it.

The Pauline assumption is that there will be those in the church who will attempt to sway the church in the wrong direction. It is imperative that the elders are able to handle accurately the Word of God.

The stronger the elders are in their understanding of the Word, the more able they are to teach things that pertain to the Word and the more the church is the pillar and support of the truth of God.

Question #3 - Does the elder have to have the gift of teaching?

It is very clear that not every person has the gift of teaching (I Cor. 12:28-29). Naturally one who has the gift will be in a much better position to teach the Word of God rather than one who does not have the gift. Paul, even in this letter to Timothy, makes it very clear that there is a difference between a ruling elder and a teaching elder (I Tim. 5:17).

An elder does not have to have the gift of teaching to be an elder. In fact, he does not even have to teach publically to be an elder; but he must possess the ability to teach to be an elder. He must possess an aptitude for handling God's Word with skill. He does not have to automatically do this publicly.

Dr. Paul Benware does an excellent job of communicating the sense: "The sense of this adjective is that a man is teachable and is then able to teach others. This does not require that a man must have the gift of teaching. The actual teaching may be on-on-one or in a class of hundreds. An elder must know and understand the Word of God and then be able to pass on that understanding" (Paul N. Benware & Brian Harris, *Leaders in the Making*, p. 50).

Question #4 - What is the attitude an elder must have in teaching?

We get our answer to this question in the only other place where this word "able to teach" is used -II Tim. 2:24-26.

People who are in opposition to the truth of God are, in part, in opposition because of satanic blindness. The devil likes to hold people's minds captive concerning any area of theology. The truth of God will set a person absolutely free and Satan does not want God's people knowing God's truth.

The elders must try not to quarrel; they must try to be gentle and patient, but they must never back down when they know the truth of God. They must stand their ground against their opponents and calmly set forth the truth of God. Sometimes God will grant victory.

Church life is a war. If a church is to become a pillar and support of the truth of God, it needs elders who know the truth of God and will communicate that truth. When you have elders standing together for the Word of God, you have a powerful church for the glory of God!