

# Not Quarrelsome, Not Quick-Tempered, and Not Violent, but Gentle

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As we study and learn the qualities listed in First Timothy 3 and Titus 1, we get a picture of the type of man who is fit to lead the church. Throughout our studies, we have seen such a man is a moral man who has proven faithfulness, commitment, and leadership in his home (husband of one wife and manage his household well). An elder's ability stems from his own self-control and discipline (sober-minded, self-controlled, & disciplined) that he has developed and is evident. He is not a worldly man driven by pleasure (not a drunkard) or materialism (not a lover of money and not greedy for gain). He is a mature, experienced Christian (not a recent convert) who loves goodness and godliness (a lover of good), and that love is seen in his holy life and his care for others (upright, holy, and hospitable). In His Christian maturity, he can humbly lead through his example and with his words (not arrogant, able to teach). The man who has lived this type of life will be a man who enjoys a good reputation and is well thought of, even by those who are not members of the church.

In this final study of a Christian elder's qualities, we will observe some attributes that should come as no surprise yet are extremely important. They are characteristics that affect how a man interacts with, helps, and leads other people. These qualities are that an elder must:

- Not be Quarrelsome
- Not be Quick-Tempered
- Not be Violent
- Be Gentle

A man who does not possess these qualities could be a disastrous and dangerous leader. Then again, a Christian who does not possess these qualities could be disastrous and dangerous. Once more, the attributes we have before us are qualities for all Christians. When it comes to the eldership, these are simply essential traits that a man must have recognizably mastered in his years of Christian service. When a man has, he is well-equipped for much of the role of shepherding God's people.

## **Not Quarrelsome**

To begin with, we'll start with the quality that an elder must not be quarrelsome. This attribute is found in First Timothy 3:3. The Greek word *amachos* is variously translated as "not quarrelsome" (ESV, CSB, NKJV, NIV, NRSV, RSV), "not contentious" (NET, YLT, ASV), "not argumentative" (MEV), "not a brawler" (KJV), and "peaceable" (NASB, LEB). Notice that the final translation in the list renders this attribute as a positive one instead of a negative one. That is, an elder *is* peaceable instead of an elder *is not quarrelsome*. While this may not be a completely literal meaning, it is a very accurate one.

Louw & Nida define this particular word as “pertaining to a lack of conflict and contention” (Louw & Nida, p. 495). Bill Mounce defines the word as “not disposed to fight” (Mounce, p. 1079) and the **Lexham Bible Sense Lexicon** describes this word as “unhostile—inclined or disposed to peace.”

Sadly, some people love nothing more than a good argument. They are ready to quarrel at the slightest provocation and will argue nearly anything and everything. A quarrelsome person will always be able to find something to criticize, even when no criticism is warranted. They certainly will not accept criticism, as they’ll just see such as an opportunity to argue. No one who is a disciple of Jesus should be a quarrelsome, contentious person.

Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people. (Titus 3:1-2, ESV)

In normal circumstances, a quarrelsome person is, at best, a nuisance. When such a person is a leader, however, disaster looms. The Lord’s church is supposed to be characterized by peace and unity. When a congregation is roiled in contention, it will stunt existing members’ growth and discourage efforts to convert new souls. But for a congregation to be at peace, the members must be peaceful. For the members to be peaceful, they should have peaceful role-models and leaders.

As we look for such a man, what do we look for? Consider again the definition “inclined to peace.” While we seek peace, there are times when problems occur. When issues have arisen, has a man shown the ability to handle them without escalating the tension? Has he handled criticism and rebuke (either taking or giving it) in a gentle and forbearing manner? Some people are good at diffusing tense situations—that’s an excellent trait for a leader. An elder needs to be a person who can put out a fire, not add fuel to it.

To be such a person, one needs to be more than a lover of peace. They need to be what Jesus calls a “peacemaker.” In the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord says, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Mt. 5:9). Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is also known as the “Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6). As such, He calls upon all of His people to be peacemakers—people who not only desire peace but work to establish and maintain peace. If you are a Christian, you are to be a peacemaker. That means no Christian should be characterized as a contentious, argumentative, quarrelsome person. But if the Good Shepherd requires His sheep to be peacemakers, how much more important is it that His under-shepherds are peacemakers?

The connection between being peaceable and not quarrelsome is important. A man can meet the definition of being “not contentious” or “not quarrelsome” but may not be a peacemaker. He may hate conflict and despise it so fervently that he will personally avoid it at all cost. He may even allow chaos to reign so long as he does not have to confront conflict. This attitude is not acceptable for an elder. An elder does not pursue peace at all costs—as we’ve seen in previous studies, he must defend the truth and refute false teaching. But he can do that in the proper manner and toward the right goal—that is peace in truth and Christ. An elder should not be an argumentative, quarrelsome man. But neither should he be a coward. He must be a man who can gently,

respectfully, and straightforwardly defend the truth, rebuke falsehood, and generally lead others towards a resolution of peace.

### **Not Quick-Tempered (Titus 1:7)**

Next, let us consider the qualification found in Titus 1:7 that an elder must not be quick-tempered. The Greek word is *orgilos* and is translated in a variety of similar ways. The majority of translations have “not quick-tempered” (ESV, NKJV, LEB, NIV, NASB, NRSV, RSV), but other renderings include “not hot-tempered” (CSB), “not easily angered” (MEV), “not prone to anger” (NET), “not irascible” (YLT; Irascible means “having or showing a tendency to be easily angered”), and “not soon angry” (ASV, KJV). Aristotle once defined such an attitude saying, “quick-tempered persons lose no time being angry, and do so with those they ought not, over things they ought not, and far more than they ought.”

Titus 1:7 is the only occurrence of this particular word in the New Testament. Still, this Greek word is found in the Septuagint, and anger is generally addressed throughout the New Testament.

Make no friendship with a man given to anger, nor go with a wrathful man (Pro. 22:24, ESV)

A man of wrath stirs up strife, and one given to anger causes much transgression. (Pro. 29:22, ESV)

Better to live in a wilderness than with a nagging and hot-tempered wife. (Pro. 21:19, CSB)

Proverbs warns us to avoid quick-tempered people. If it’s wise to avoid quick-tempered people, indeed it would be foolish to appoint a quick-tempered man to the eldership!

In the New Testament, Ephesians 4:26 says, “Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger.” While that verse doesn’t speak directly to being “quick-tempered,” it teaches a similar notion that a Christian should not stay angry for long. And James addresses quick-temperedness from the opposite angle, saying, “Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger” (James 1:19, ESV).

There are times when anger is appropriate, but the Bible is clear: the Christian should not get angry quickly, should not remain angry for long periods, and must never allow anger to lead to sinful action.

This is especially true of church leaders. Elders must deal with difficult situations. They must confront false doctrine, rebuke sin, and correct problematic behavior. As shepherds, they strive to bring back wayward and wandering sheep. All these situations can be vexing and can lead a man to anger if he isn’t careful. In most circumstances, anger will not help the elder or his work. In cases where anger may be appropriate, he must have uncompromising control so that his anger does not break out and cause harm instead of healing. Simply put, an elder must be a man who controls his anger, not a man controlled by it. The same is true of all Christians—an elder is simply a man who has proven such control.

## **God & Jesus—Examples of Righteous Anger**

As we consider anger, the best examples we can turn to are God and Jesus. The Bible records multiple occasions in Jesus' life when He was angry, and yet, He was never quick to anger. For all the hard-hearted and hateful people he dealt with, Jesus was astonishingly calm. Despite the mistreatment, He suffered, both in life and especially on the cross, He never lost His temper because of personal slights.

Likewise, the Bible contains many stories, especially throughout the Old Testament, which tell us of God's anger. Many more passages in both the Old and New Testaments warn us of God's holy wrath. But God has never been wrongly angry and has never lost control of His anger. Once again, when we consider all God has put up with from man, His patience and longsuffering are what truly stand out. God often gave humanity generations, if not hundreds of years, to correct evil behavior before pouring out judgmental wrath. God did not strike the Israelites down the first time they complained or went astray—it was after repeated rebellion that God punished them to wander in the wilderness. Israel and Judah were warned and warned and given ample opportunity to repent before God judged them and punished them. The Psalmist is spot on when he says, “But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” (Ps. 86:15, ESV).

As Christ's disciples and children of God, we must strive to follow Their example when it comes to anger. We must be slow to anger, we must be angry for the right reasons, and we must always be in control of our anger. Again, what is true for every Christians is especially true for the elder.

## **Not Violent**

To both Timothy and Titus, Paul writes that an must not be “violent” (1 Tim. 3:3; Tit. 1:7). The Greek word translated in the ESV as “violent” is *plektes*. Several translations mirror this rendering (MEV, NKJV, NIV, NET, NRSV, and RSV), but there are few other translations worth considering. The CSB says “not a bully,” and the NASB has “not pugnacious.” Pugnacious means “having a quarrelsome or combative nature.” The KJV (along with YLT and ASV) has “not a striker.” That translation comes from the fact that the root word for *plektes* is *plezzo* which simply means “to strike.”

Interestingly, the New Testament has little to say directly against “violence.” But Bill Mounce says of this, “...perhaps it is not surprising that the NT contains little violence, since Jesus came to present a message of peace, humility, and hope” (Mounce, p. 767). The collective teaching and general tenor of the New Testament overwhelmingly condemns violence. A violent person (a person who physically harms others) is not a faithful Christian. It goes without saying that a violent person should never be a church leader. So, it seems likely this attribute which finds itself in both eldership lists, addresses something more than just prohibiting physical and dangerous violence.

Remember the word pugnacious, which means “having a quarrelsome or combative nature.” Other definitions included the idea of a bully. We have already seen Paul disqualify a quarrelsome man—someone who is disposed to arguing and quarreling simply for the sake of it. With the attribute “not violent,” Paul disqualifies a man who uses intimidation and force of any kind to get his way.

The elder is a shepherd, not a taskmaster. He leads gently, and he cares for the sheep. A bully leads forcefully and for his own benefit.

Also, this word's idea is "not a striker" or "not apt to strike." The "striking" does not have to be physical. We can strike with our words and our actions. I have known men, even in the church, who would never think to raise their fists against another person but were more than ready to strike out with words that cut and wounded in other ways. People can strike a blow to others in the way they treat them, ignore them, or act around them. Essentially, a striker is a person who will use some method to inflict harm. As Christians, our goal is never to harm. Even when we rebuke and chastise, the purpose and goal is correction and help, not simply to inflict pain. This is crucial for an elder.

An elder cannot be a man who is likely to inflict pain and harm in any situation for any reason. He cannot be a vindictive man who is always ready to settle the score. He cannot be a man who tears others down with his words. He must be a man that helps and heals and never harms, especially intentionally.

### **Jesus' Example**

Once again, Jesus provides us with the perfect example. The Lord never sought to harm or inflict pain. Yes, He rebuked sin and error, but even His strongest condemnations were meant to shake people out of their hard-heartedness or warn others. In this sense, Jesus truly was the Lamb of God—He was incapable of causing pain, for striking and hurting simply is not His nature. Isaiah describes the Messiah thus:

Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law (Isaiah 42:1-4, ESV)

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth (Isaiah 53:7, ESV)

Of all people, Jesus had the right as the Holy One of God to strike others, yet He never did. Even when He was falsely accused, maliciously maligned, and unjustly mocked, spat upon, and beaten, He never struck out in word or action against others. He epitomized His instruction of "turn the other cheek."

And that is a key for Christians and elders. Not only do we not harm others maliciously, but we also don't harm others in retaliation. Even when we are unjustly injured in some way, we do not respond in kind. Instead, we pray for and love our enemies. Once more, this is paramount for elders. Church leaders may very well face false accusations and unfair treatment, but they must weather such soberly and peacefully. They can never resort to striking out and getting even. Instead, they must be willing to suffer the loss of all things in order to gain Christ both for themselves and those they lead (cf. Php. 3:8)

## Gentle (1 Tim. 3:3)

In his letter to Timothy, Paul contrasts the command to not be violent by saying instead an elder must be “gentle.” The Greek word *epieikes* is almost universally translated as “gentle” (MEV and KJV have “patient”).

A fantastic definition of this word is “not insisting on every right of letter of law or custom, yielding, gentle, kind, courteous, tolerant” (BDAG, p. 371). A simple definition is “gracious and forbearing” (Louw & Nida, p. 748).

The quality of being gentle is the antithesis of the other attributes we’ve considered. A man who is not quarrelsome, not quick-tempered, and not violent is, in a word, gentle. An elder is an overseer, and thus he must guide and direct the people he oversees. But far from a driving taskmaster, the elder is a gentle shepherd. An elder must stand firmly against false doctrine and rebuke false teachers—yet while he can do so firmly and directly, he can also do so gently. The overseer must handle issues and problems and will sometimes need to rebuke sin and error. But as he works with people—even people with big problems—he must be reasonable, patient, and forbearing with them. An elder who looks to bring the hammer down on every person every time they make the slightest misstep will discourage and harm the flock over time. Instead of being quick-tempered towards those who make mistakes, an elder must be patient and gracious. When making decisions, offering a rebuke, or supplying counsel, an elder must be fair and reasonable. All of this is what it means to be gentle.

Essentially, it is not enough for the elder to do the right thing. He must do the right thing the right way, in the right spirit, and from the right attitude. A man may do the right things, make the right decisions, and hold the right lines, but do so in such a way that he hurts others and ultimately hinders the cause of Christ and the growth of the body. Such a man cannot be an elder over the Lord’s people.

Further, an elder must be a man of wisdom. How can we tell a man is wise? Among other things, gentleness points towards wisdom! James 3:17 says, “But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.” That verse is directed at all Christians. Every saint should seek the wisdom from above. But what an excellent description of an elder! Nearly every attribute in James 3:17 correlates to one or more of the qualifications of eldership.

Surely, we understand why gentleness is an essential quality for leadership, and we probably all want gentle leaders. But once again, while this is an attribute an elder must possess, it is not for elders only. Paul said to Titus:

Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you. Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people (Titus 2:15 – 3:2, ESV)

All Christians should strive to avoid quarreling and should instead be gentle and courteous towards all people. The way we treat and speak to others is important. Being courteous is not a matter of good manners—it is a matter of godliness! Be mindful of how you treat others, and always strive

to act courteously and gently towards everyone. And such treatment should be evident in an elder. If we consider a man as a potential elder, we should reflect on how we have seen him treat others, both those in the church and outside the church. Is he rude or short with Christians or non-believers? If so, he should be rebuked as a Christian and not appointed as an elder.

## **Conclusion**

Every Christian should pursue every attribute in this study. As with other qualities listed in First Timothy 1 and Titus 3, elders are to be men who have proven through time and experience to be such men. As overseers and shepherds, it is the elder's task to lead, guide, counsel, protect, and correct. But an elder must do all these things the right way. An elder cannot resort to forcefulness, tyranny, or violence of any sort to lead the congregation. Instead, he must be gentle. He must avoid quarrels and pointless disputes and rather be a man who loves and will labor for peace. An elder should be known as a man who loves the people of his congregation and as a man who has their best interests at heart. That will be clear in the way he interacts and deals with them. A loving, caring, Christ-like elder will be patient, peaceful, forbearing, and gentle. That is the type of man or woman we should all strive to be. And it is the only type of person who is fit to lead the Lord's church as an elder.

*Sermon by: Nate Bibens*

## **Sources**

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