

## A Biblical Examination of the Elder Qualification “able to teach”

*Adopted at CVC Elder’s Meeting, 05/24/2001*

To understand this qualification, one must also understand a related qualification found in the New Testament book of Titus.

*“Holding fast to sound doctrine” Titus 1:9*

This verse is worth quoting in full: *“He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.”*

Every word is important. “Hold firmly” means “constantly holding onto and not letting go.” The “trustworthy message” refers to the essential truths of the Christian faith--the fundamentals which must not be compromised. “Sound doctrine” is literally “healthy doctrine” or “wholesome teaching,” referring to the well-balanced teaching of God’s Word that produces healthy Christian living. To “refute” is to “correct” or “convince” those who “contradict” the truth.

An elder must cling firmly to, be devoted to, and adhere wholeheartedly to God’s word. This presupposes:

1. A settled body of Christian truth.
2. A knowledge of that truth.
3. A willingness to proclaim that truth.
4. A willingness to defend that truth.

The Christian message has never been universally popular; some have always opposed it. We need leaders who are so well grounded in the truth of the Bible that they can accurately teach it to others and courageously defend the truth when it is attacked. Unqualified elders who were (and are) uncertain and uncommitted to the Word have done incalculable damage to the church of Jesus Christ. Because they did not guard themselves or the flock, many churches that once stood for sound orthodox doctrine now reject nearly every major tenet of the faith. Refuting opponents of God’s truth demands courage, much effort, spiritual maturity, and knowledge of the truth. The church must be protected from those who speak against the Word, and the elders are called to do that job. (Acts 20:28-31).

With a proper understanding of Titus 1:9, we can now turn our attention to the qualification found in I Timothy 3:2.

*“Able to teach” I Timothy 3:2*

This is a more general statement of the same principle. *Interestingly, the ability to teach is the only character requirement related to the actual work of an elder--indicating that teaching and leading belong together.* Teachers are leaders and leaders are teachers. Elders must be able to open their Bibles and instruct others.

The phrase “able to teach” translates one Greek word which means both “having a teachable spirit” and “able to teach others.” This presupposes:

1. A teachable spirit--eager to learn.
2. A good working knowledge of the Bible.
3. A willingness to share spiritual truth with others.
4. A capability to communicate.
5. A willingness to confront false teaching when necessary.

Leaders must love the Word, must cling to the Word, must know the Word with no wavering, no doubting, no compromising. The failure of church leaders to know and teach the Bible is one of

the chief reasons why the biblical error floods our churches and drowns the life and power of the church. Therefore, the elders must be able to teach God's Word.

The church of Jesus Christ is built on the Word of God. Elders lead the church. *Therefore elders must be men of the Word.* This is non-negotiable. P.T. Forsyth said, "One man who truly knows his Bible is worth more to the church's real strength than a crowd of workers who do not." It doesn't matter how successful a man may be at his business, or how eloquently he may speak, or how much education he may have. If a man cannot instruct people in the Word, he does not qualify to be an elder.

#### *Practical implications for selecting CVCC Elders*

Though all the elders must have this ability to a certain degree, some have received greater or different talents than others. Therefore, even in the apostle Paul's day the work of the elders was divided, so that, while all took part in overseeing the church, some were entrusted with the responsibility of laboring in the word and in teaching. I Tim. 5:17 says, "*The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.*"

We recognize the distinction between those elders who are called to serve the church in a preaching/teaching capacity and those who are called to serve the church in less visible ways. We believe that the elders who serve CVCC from the pulpit must display that they have the spiritual gift of teaching. Those elders who serve CVCC in other ways may not necessarily have the spiritual gift of teaching.

Since teaching is also a spiritual gift that not all believers possess, how can this requirement be met by those without the spiritual gift? The answer is not hard to find. *Not all elders will be equally gifted in teaching.* Some will flourish in front of a congregation or a class, others will do better leading a small group or in one-on-one discipleship. Not all will teach in the same way. But all must be able to do it in some way.

The central issue is this: Have those under the influence and ministry of the elder candidate learned how to apply the Word of God to their life situation? If the answer is "yes," then true teaching has occurred whether it has come in the form of preaching from a pulpit, facilitating a small group with truths from the Bible, or counseling a member of the flock in a one-on-one setting.