

THE MEASURE OF A MAN

NOT A NOVICE

We are measuring a godly man by looking at the spiritual characteristics required of leaders in the church. Even if you do not aspire to a position, your practice should be the same if you want to be a maturing, godly man.

Our next characteristic is the subject of First Timothy 3:6,

1 Timothy 3:6 not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil.

The Greek word, our word *neophyte*, which occurs nowhere else in the New Testament, means that which is *newly planted*. It would describe a plant that was not strong, not able to bear the severity of storms; that had not as yet struck its roots deep; that could not withstand winter's frost.

The word does not refer so much to one who is young "in years," as one who is young "in faith." A novice could be very young or very old. It is a new convert of any physical age who has had little opportunity to test his own faith or to give evidence to others that he would be faithful to the trust of leadership committed to him.

It's interesting to note that on his first missionary journey Paul did not appoint elders in the churches until he revisited them (Acts 14:23). Need doesn't overrule this important principle.

The Life Application Study Bible notes:

New believers should become secure and strong in the faith before taking leadership roles in the church. Too often, in a church desperate for workers, new believers are placed in positions of responsibility prematurely. New faith needs time to mature. New believers should have a place of service, but they should not be put into leadership

positions until they are firmly grounded in their faith, with a solid Christian lifestyle and a knowledge of the Word of God.

After second service on Sunday one of the saints was reminded by something said of how we get excited when someone famous, a celebrity, gets saved. We immediately want to parade them out to give their testimony thinking that it will have a far-reaching influence. It usually does more harm than good!

As far as church leadership, gifting doesn't cancel out this principle either. Too often someone will have, or more often think that they have, some tremendous gifting. They want to push forward and lead. You must learn to serve before you can lead.

I've often heard the stories of Pastor Chuck Smith's assistant, Romaine, dealing with guys who wanted to serve the Lord. He handed them a broom and told them to start sweeping! Greg Laurie is especially fond of being one of those guys.

Now our perspective on these verses, on these characteristics, isn't really focusing on leadership in the church. We're wanting to glean from them how any Christian man can walk in maturity.

How, then, might we approach this characteristic of not being a novice in order to apply it?

For one thing it reminds me of something very basic and it is that we are called to serve the body of Christ. When I am joined to the body I leave behind any status or rank or position I've achieved in the world. We've seen this quite a bit over the years with the guys in the military. The officer and the enlisted man or woman often trade places, as it were, in the church in terms of who is overseeing ministry and who is subordinate.

On the subject of serving the body we might add that in most cases we want to get to know a person before we put them in charge of something. Maybe they are uber-Christians with a great testimony. Still we can't, and they can't, be sure they are going to really 'fit' in a particular body until they hang around a while. They can serve but not lead.

(There are always exceptions. After all, we are under grace and are not establishing 'laws.').

Another application of “not a novice” would be for us to encourage others to get involved and serve. I’ve known a lot of believers over the years who are waiting to serve until just the right situation develops. They say something like, “That’s not my gift,” or, “I don’t feel called.” But often the serving we’re talking about is something that requires no special gifting or calling. It only requires a roll-up-your-sleeves heart.

Yet another application for us of “not a novice” would be to remain mindful of the detrimental power of flattery - especially to those young in Christ but to every believer.

One problem with promoting novices to leadership, according to Paul, is that they will be “puffed-up with pride.” Jon Courson insightfully writes,

Novices tend to think that if anything good happens through them it's because they're a skilled speaker or a clever person. Only someone who has walked with the Lord awhile understands that if anything good happens through him it's not because of him, but rather in spite of him!

“Puffed-up with pride” is literally, “wrapt in smoke,” so that, inflated with self-conceit and exaggerated ideas of your own importance, you cannot see yourself or others in clarity. I’m reminded of a stage production where dry ice or some kind of smoke surrounds the star as he or she appears.

Pride is always a potential problem. It rears its head in those of us older in the faith in different ways.

- One is to think that some area of service or oversight belongs to us. I understand the concept of ‘ownership’ but I see that in terms of faithfulness not longevity. If you’re in a ministry and you love it and you are faithful, great. But if you are slacking off and just hanging on because it would embarrass you to step aside, that’s pride.
- Another way pride overtakes us who are older in the faith is that we overlook younger men and women until we are ready to step aside. We need to instead be raising them up to take our places.

Paul finished his warning about novices by saying “lest... he fall into the same condemnation as the devil.” This doesn’t mean you will be

condemned to the Lake of Fire for your pride! It isn't the judgment passed on the devil but, rather, that you put yourself in a precarious place where the devil can condemn, can accuse, you.

In the very next verse we will read,

1 Timothy 3:7 Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

Pride sets you up to fall into the devil's traps and snares.

I've always been intrigued by the cabinet of the president of our United States. They are described as "serving at the pleasure of the president." As long as they are on board with his policies, and want to further his agenda, they are giving him pleasure!

We are to serve at the pleasure of our Lord, Jesus Christ. There's no room for pride. We're to be about the business of furthering His agenda as we wait for Him to resurrect and rapture the church.