

Minister (Licensing)

1 Tim. 3:1-13

I spoke with a man this week who pastors a small church north of Carlisle. He said he was a dairy farmer when God called him to preach. He told God, "No way, I'm just a dumb dairy farmer. There's no way I'm gonna preach." Appo. 1½ years later his cows began to die. In two months he lost \$40,000 worth of livestock. One day he was walking through the barn when he cried out to God, "Why is this happening?"

He heard an audible voice which said to him, "Donald, I called you to preach. If you don't listen to me, I'll put you out of business." He fell to the concrete barn floor and surrendered to God's calling on his life.

God has marvelously provided for his needs. Reminds us of a first-century preacher who was knocked off his horse and struck with blindness before he yielded to Christ's leadership in his life.

God's call must never be taken lightly.

The calling of church leaders is one of the most important events in the life of the church. In partnership with God the Holy Spirit, you have called men and women who have the potential to influence this congregation for many years. Paul addresses the qualifications of church leaders in the text which Bro. () read. Paul talks about two separate offices in these verses—The office of bishop or overseer and deacon. The bishop would correspond to our minister. As you know, you have called Bro. () to the office of minister.

Paul gives us a list of qualifications for the offices which we would like to briefly comment on this (evening)(morning).

We believe the qualifications apply to both offices. It is important for us to realize that these qualifications also apply to each and every one of us who have named the name of Christ. Each of us are responsible to live up to these standards. The called out to special office and the laity both are responsible to conduct their lives according to the same high standards.

I. Think with me now about the qualifications for church leaders.

Paul starts with...

1. Blameless

This sets us back a bit when we realize that none of us are blameless in the sense of never having sinned.

The word is used to describe Zacharias/Elizabeth in Luke 1:6 where we read, "And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless."

They were not sinless but blameless.

Some other translations of blameless are:

above reproach

a man whose life cannot be spoken against

not open to attack

The Amplified Bible translates verse 2, "Now a bishop (superintendent, overseer) must give no grounds for accusation *but* must be above reproach..." The idea is that the church leaders must conduct their lives in such a way that if they are charged with false accusations people will say, "No!" "Not them!" "I don't believe they would do that." "Their life does not bear out that accusation."

Many years ago a very ambitious lady who wanted my job badly made a very serious charge against me. The charge was completely groundless but it hurt me deeply. Shortly after the charge was made people I worked with began coming to me and saying,

"I don't believe it." "Anybody but you." Not that I was so wonderful or that I had no faults, but these people recognized that the charge didn't make any sense because of the way they had seen me conducting myself while they worked with me.

That's the idea Paul is getting at in this text.

If we stand for the right, we will probably draw the wrath of Satan. Paul says, "Live your life so that none of those charges will stick."

John Maxwell writes:

Realize that good people get criticized. Jesus, whose motives were pure and character was spotless, was called a glutton...; a winebibber...; a Samaritan...; and a friend of sinners.... If our lives are Christlike we can expect criticism. In fact, there are times when we should see criticism from the world as verification that our lives have been changed. A person whose mind is polluted and whose vision is not clear cannot understand or interpret behavior based on obedience to God. So if you're living on a higher plane than the world, expect some criticism.

End of quotation

A 2nd qualification is:

Faithfulness in Marriage

The men/women who are called to church leadership, and all of us, must be absolutely faithful emotionally and sexually to our mates.

The NT clearly shows that marriage is not a serial affair.

Divorce and remarriage cannot be part of a church leader's life.

One of the reasons this is so important in the church leader's life is that the church is pictured in the NT as being the bride of Christ.

Unfaithfulness in the married lives of His servants is a poor reflection on that sacred image.

We all remember how scandalous it was several years ago when prominent radio/TV ministers experienced moral failures.

God's image is tarnished when His servants conduct their lives in an unholy way.

God's forgiveness extends to anyone who sincerely repents and asks for forgiveness.

Restoration is possible, but God desires His servants to live lives of faithfulness toward their marriage partners.

a 3rd qualification is:

Temperance

Temperance has been defined as the moderate use of all things and the complete absence of sinful things.

Paul lists some things we must be temperate in...

- Wine – A Christian leader must not be addicted to and controlled by alcohol. Christian leaders who are concerned about their testimony will completely abstain from the use of alcoholic beverages.

- Money – Our attitude toward money speaks volumes about our spiritual lives. If we see money as entrusted to us by God to be used in his service, we will be generous and open in sharing with those around us.

If we clutch and scrape and overwork simply for wealth, we will probably be stingy and selfish with the money God entrusts to our care.

The Christian leader should understand that it's God's money. We are only stewards of it.

A Christian leader who is enslaved by poor money management and excessive credit card debt will be distracted from the work of the church.

- Temperament
Christian leaders should not be given to fits of rage/anger. They should not be persons who try to control others. Paul says they should be gentle, not contentious, easy to be entreated, lovers of hospitality, quick to help. The root word for minister is servant. By temperament the minister should be one who is willing to serve.

The attitude of a minister should be the same as when we wash our brother's/sister's feet. "I love you. I will serve you if there is a need." The servant of Christ and others will be those who do not grasp for glory or position.

They will be those who humbly serve because they have been called by God.

The apostle Paul has some very insightful words on this subject in Phil. 2:3-8.
Reading from the New American Standard,

- 3 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves;
- 4 do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.
- 5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,
- 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,
- 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men.
- 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 1

What a challenge for each of us and what a great measuring stick to use in choosing church leaders.

A 4th qualification is:

Apt to Teach

The Christian leader should study God's Word and be so in tune with God the Holy Spirit that his teaching ministry is empowered by God.

This doesn't mean all leaders are polished speakers/teachers, but they should be filled with the Holy Spirit and empowered by him.

God the Holy Spirit is able to use a man with little apparent skill if he will yield to His leading.

The minister should be teachable, willing to learn.

He should be patient and winsome in his presentation of Bible doctrine and lessons.

He should not be dogmatic, overbearing or controlling.

The faithful presentation of the message God gives Him is his responsibility. The hearing and obeying is the responsibility of His listeners.

¹*The New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1996.

A 5th qualification is:

Integrity

Integrity covers all aspects of our lives:

Our honesty in dealing/speaking...

A man who drives hard or shady bargains or who is greedy for gain is a very poor testimony for Christ.

Our consistency in holy living...

No one can be 100% consistent, but each of us should strive for consistency in our lives.

The men/women you choose for leadership should have no obvious inconsistencies in the way they conduct their lives.

In verses 4-5 Paul talks about the family and the management of the household. The management and rearing of children is important. The man/woman of integrity will be consistent in the way he/she disciplines the children. He/she will not discipline in anger or treat different children differently.

He/she will be loving, kind, fair and just.

The family life of the couple is so important to the ministry of the church leader.

He will be distracted from the work of ministry if the home life is not godly.

We must remember that the wife is a very important part of the minister's office. She will support him, pray for him and love and respect him. She may be involved in certain kinds of visitation.

The NASB says in verse 11, Women *must* likewise *be* dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things.

Both the husband and wife vowed before God to be faithful until death...to love, honor and provide for the needs of each other.

There should never be the holding of grudges or bitterness...

The stubborn refusal to deal with issues that may come up in the marriage relationship are Satan's tools to hinder the ministry.

When we fail to respect and love each other and fail to fulfill legitimate marriage needs in our relationship, we open the door wide to Satan's attacks and we hinder the ministry of the wronged individual. Our prayers will be hindered. The spouse who is mistreated will be open to temptation and bitterness.

Children will be embittered by the inconsistency. Our family lives will be a very poor testimony to those outside. We can turn the unsaved away from the saving gospel of Jesus Christ.

No man or woman can minister effectively if his/her family situation is not godly and peaceful. None of us are perfect, but we must strive to honestly deal with issues and if necessary seek outside help.

All of us, men/women, need to examine our lives to see if they bear evidence of the Fruit of the Spirit. Do our lives exhibit...

Love

Joy

Peace

Patience

Kindness

Goodness

Faithfulness

Gentleness

Self-Control

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The church leaders should evidence the Fruit of the spirit in their family lives. Bro. John Shelly in a recent BRF article says it this way,

A man and a woman stand before God when they are married, and from that relationship comes a family. The man vows to love his wife through all that may happen to them, both good and bad. The wife does the same. Being a minister does not mean that he is any less accountable for the vows that he made. If anything, he is more accountable to his wife, to his family, and especially to God. He is married to his wife, not to the church, and not to the ministry. One thing that every church needs to see in a leader, is a strong family and a strong marriage. That can only happen if both husband and wife are totally committed to each other, and if both are committed to God.

A 6th qualification Paul lists in v. 6 is:

Not a Novice

The New American Standard translates this as "...not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil." 2

The men/women you choose should be seasoned in the faith, having been believers long enough to prove by their conduct and works that they are grounded in the faith.

It is a paradox, but part of that being seasoned in the faith is a sense of humility about one's own personal readiness to serve in the office.

William Barkley speaks of "a continual sense of awe, and wonder, that God would choose to use me in His service". That's a good attitude for any leader to have.

A final qualification not specifically listed here in the text is:

2 The New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1996.

Love

The church leaders must be men/women who deeply love the church and her members.

They must not be harsh and critical. They must be loving, kind, fair and ready to snatch straying souls from the fire.

Men/women who will be there. Serving, helping, loving, guiding, guarding and when it is necessary, to discipline, doing it with love and with a redemptive motive.

II. Think with me quickly now about the qualifications for the church.

First and most important, each of us must be open and sensitive to the leading of God the Holy Spirit.

We should pray for God's direction in our nurturing and support of the new leaders. In order for each of us to be open to the Holy Spirit's guidance, several things must be true in our lives.

- We must not have hidden or secret sin in our lives.
God simply will not guide us if we are deliberately hiding sin in our lives.
- There should be no selfish motive on our part.
An election for minister is never a popularity contest.
We must be completely yielded to God the Holy Spirit's control.

There is a second duty each of you have to your leaders.

That is simply to love and care for them. They will be your servants, but you all must:

Surround them with love.

Give them words of encouragement. Let them know you are praying for them (and then be sure you do). You can be like Aaron and Hur who stood under Moses' arms and held them up.

They will make mistakes. We all do.

Forgive them quickly when they do.

They may say or do something you could take offense at.

Be slow to take offense. If necessary, follow Matt. 18 in your dealings with them. Always tell them first and in private if there is a problem.

Remember that you hardly ever know all the facts. If you have a question, ask them. Never, never pass on information that you aren't 100% sure of and which you haven't checked out at the source and which isn't part of the solution of the problem.

As we work together in unity, God can use each one of us to advance the great cause of his kingdom. May God bless and guide you as you nurture and care for Joel and Rosene. May his kingdom be advanced and strengthened by their leadership in this congregation.