

## Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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### Elder/Bishop: Qualifications

*?This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) Not a novice?, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. (1 Timothy 3:1-7)*

Every time I read this list of demanding qualifications for ministry, I am amazed at the first qualification, often not actually considered a qualification at all. He desires a good "work." Emphasize the word "work" and you get Paul's point. All too often men work at proving their calling till ordination. Then they begin to coast, and they coast for the rest of their lives. Ministry for them seems to be a hobby, something to be pursued when there is nothing else to do. If there is something else to do, rest assured that they will pursue it and neglect their ministry. If something in ministry costs money, they will find all sorts of excuses not to do it, but they will quickly announce their expectations for money. Any man who does not approach his calling to the ministry with the foundational premise that God has called him to "work" has missed his calling. An early definition for the word "ministry," used in the New Testament for both offices of minister and deacon, is to work in the dust. In an agrarian culture the idea was clear. You work in the field with such zeal and constancy that you stir up a dust, but continue to work in the dust. Here you also find the leading idea of work associated with both offices in the church.

Neither office includes the qualification that one who holds the office sits back and directs others to do his work. He leads by example, by working. Occasionally I encounter people who have become involved in "pyramid" selling schemes. Every one of these schemes works the same way. If you just talk to enough people and get them to work in your cell, you can make a fortune and not turn a hand, and you sell new people that they can do the same thing. But the scheme neglects the most basic premise. Somewhere someone has to work or no one makes money. The appeal of these schemes is that the other fellow is the one who always works. Have you ever seen officers in the church function in this way? They are great at delegating, at getting others to do their work, but they are not nearly so eager to work themselves.

Let's briefly examine the qualifications that Paul lists for the office of "bishop" or minister.

1. Blameless; not open to censure, irreproachable. "The qualification of being 'above reproach'

frames the other qualifications (3:2, 7); this was an ancient way of emphasizing that the qualifications focused on this issue. Political leaders were also expected to be “above reproach,” but a persecuted minority sect needed to protect itself against public slander even more than politicians did.”<sup>1</sup>

2. Husband of one wife. “‘Husband of one wife’ no doubt means a faithful husband and presupposes marriage; such a man would be helpful in standing against the false teachers who opposed marriage (4:3). (The injunction that married leaders be used would not apply to all situations; cf. comment on 1 Cor 7:8.) ‘Husband of one wife’ refers to one’s current marital status and behavior; validly divorced people who remarried were considered married to one spouse, the second one, not to two spouses.”<sup>2</sup>
3. Vigilant. Strong defines this word; “...sober, temperate; abstaining from wine, either entirely or at least from its immoderate use.”<sup>3</sup>
4. Sober. Strong defines the word as “...of a sound mind, sane, in one’s senses; curbing one’s desires and impulses, self-controlled, temperate.”<sup>4</sup>
5. Good behavior. Strong again; “well arranged, seemly, modest.”
6. Given to hospitality. And Strong again, “hospitable, generous to guests.”
7. Apt to teach. Strong; “apt and skilful in teaching.” A man who demonstrates no teaching skills or abilities fails the primary distinctive qualification for this office. Good intentions are not sufficient; he must demonstrate teaching ability, as well as skill in Biblical interpretation and application to the lives of the people to whom he preaches.
8. Not given to wine. “Drunken,” the word suggests addiction or dependency.
9. No striker. Strong; “A bruiser, ready for a blow; a pugnacious, contentious, quarrelsome person.”<sup>5</sup> Rather than exhibiting skills at reasoning and teaching, this person is ready to fight at the drop of a hat. Don’t overlook that this idea easily includes someone who enjoys verbal blows, not just physical. Verbal “strikes” are far more lasting and damaging than physical blows. Quarrelsomeness is not an asset to the ministry; it disqualifies a man.
10. Not greedy of money. Strong; “eager for base gain, greedy for money.” Motive seems to be the major problem here, as well as with several of these qualifications. It matters little whether the person has money and is greedy or doesn’t have it and is envious of those who do. There is an excessive emphasis on money.
11. Patient. Strong; “seemingly, suitable; equitable, fair, mild, gentle.”<sup>6</sup>
12. Not a brawler. Strong; “...not contentious; abstaining from fighting.”<sup>7</sup> Again motive seems to be central to this problem. You feel safe approaching this person with questions.
13. Not covetous. Strong; “Two occurrences; KJV translates as ‘not covetous’ once, and ‘without covetousness’ once; not loving money, not avaricious.”<sup>8</sup>
14. He rules his own house (home) well. Here Paul makes a pertinent point. Watch this man in his

home with family members, both wife and children. If you observe his interaction with them, you can predict how he will function in a leadership role in the church. If you don't approve of his role in his family, beware ordaining him. He will function much the same way in his church position. Strong's definition; "to set or place before; to set over; to be over, to superintend, preside over; to be a protector or guardian; to give aid; to care for, give attention to; profess honest occupations."<sup>9</sup>

15. Not a novice, one young in the faith. Strong; "newly planted; a new convert, neophyte (one who has recently become a Christian)."<sup>10</sup> I would add to Strong's idea that the man to be ordained must not be new in ministry any more than new in the faith. He must be seasoned in his work and demonstrate maturity that will not allow occasional success or blessing to "go to his head."

16. People outside the church must respect him. Otherwise he will fall into reproach and bring reproach on the church as well. Strong notes that the Greek word translated "witness" here comes from the root for our English word "martyr." The martyrs were willing to give their lives to testify or witness to their faith. Rather than compromise their faith, they were willing to give their life for the truth of the gospel; "a testifying; the office committed to the prophets of testifying concerning future events; what one testifies, testimony, i.e. before a judge."<sup>11</sup> People who know the man outside his church must respect his character and personal integrity.

Any one of these qualifications challenges our conduct, but all of them combined seem quite intimidating. I understand the intimidation of those who seek to compromise the qualifications and settle for ordaining men who fall short in various particulars of the list. However, to compromise any portion of this list is no less a spiritual problem than to compromise a thoroughgoing doctrinal passage. Those who are willing, and at times eager, to compromise this list would join the first rank to oppose error in doctrine.

I am convinced that some form of compromise regarding these qualifications framed a major part of the problem in Ephesus that Paul sent Timothy to confront and correct. If Paul were to encounter those of our time who openly advocate compromising these qualifications, he would no doubt confront and oppose them as well. We must stand with or against Scripture. We must hold the offices of the church high in our regard and expect—no, demand—that those who fill the office live up to the qualifications or step down. What value is there in a man occupying the office when he and others in the church know that he does not meet the qualifications?

The posture that I advocate here is incredibly difficult, but I believe it is equally requisite for our survival as a faithful witness to Biblical Christianity. Convenience Christianity needs no more supporters; it is already overrun with its cheering section. In the process of maintaining these qualifications, and especially of confronting those who hold the office but fail the qualifications, the church should demonstrate incredible tenderness. If a man is in an office that he does not qualify to hold, he is by definition not filling an office that he could fill in the church. Thus the health of the church suffers two handicaps. First, it suffers for his failure in the office. Secondly, it suffers for his absence in the position that he could fill with benefit to the church and blessing to him. In administering its offices the church must put its most tender and compassionate "foot" forward. However, to neglect administration of its two Biblical offices and to allow men in the office who do not qualify, the church compromises its claim to Biblical authority and example in all things. Some might raise the idea that the offices are not really under the church's supervision, so the church has no right or

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authority to supervise or administer the minister's function in office. I reject this idea outright. In the most extensive lesson in the New Testament on spiritual gifts Paul specifically stated that the Lord set spiritual gifts, even the office of apostle, "in the church" (1 Corinthians 12:27). The whole church culture is to function harmoniously as a unit, as a healthy body in which all parts perform their assigned role with due consideration and regard for all other parts of the body. Paul used this specific analogy in 1 Corinthians 12. For one member of the body to refuse to fill its role and seek a role for which it is not qualified infuses confusion into a human body. It equally confuses the spiritual body of the church. Imagine in your physical body if the ear tried to function as the big toe.

The perspective that Paul develops in this lesson, as in others, requires that we take our faith, and our church, far more seriously than we typically do. Our American culture fears anyone who "takes his/her faith seriously." It is altogether respectable to go to church on Sunday morning and live with the superficial trappings of faith, but our culture considers it dangerous for anyone to really view faith as a serious matter. We will either join this superficial relativistic trend, or we will set ourselves apart as New Testament believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. The question before us, whether it relates to qualifications for office or the way we live—or don't live—our faith in every aspect of our life, will determine our future as a church. Which will it be? How committed are we to what we say on Sunday morning?

1Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary : New Testament* (1 Ti 3:2). Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary : New Testament* (1 Ti 3:2). Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

Strong, J. (1996). *The exhaustive concordance of the Bible : Showing every word of the text of the common English version of the canonical books, and every occurrence of each word in regular order.* (electronic ed.) (G269). Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship.

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