

Qualifications for the Pastorate

The bishopric is the highest office to which a man can aspire in the New Testament dispensation. God has ordained the Church as the institution for the accomplishment of His work (1 Tim 3:15) in these final days between the first and second comings of His Anointed One, and consequently the godliness of the undershepherds who are to lead His assembled flock is of vital importance to the victorious advancement of the banner of the cross. A brutish, ungodly pastor means God's sheep will be scattered abroad as prey to the wolves waiting everywhere to devour. It is of the utmost importance that only godly, qualified men whose ministry the Holy One may bless enter into the pastoral service, for only these will be able to finish the course to obtain a crown unobtainable by the uttermost limits of human power to thank Christ as Paul did, and say "He hath enabled me, for that He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry" (1 Tim 1:12).

First Timothy chapter three, verses one through seven, and Titus chapter one, verses six to nine, give the qualifications of the bishop, a title referring to the same office as "elder" and "pastor" (Tit 1:5,7; Ac 20:17,28; 1 Pet 5:1-2)¹:

1 This [is] a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. 2 A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; 3 Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; 4 One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; 5 (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) 6 Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. 7 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)

6 If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly. 7 For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; 8 But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; 9 Holding fast the faithful

¹see the *Way of Life Encyclopedia of the Bible and Christianity*, ed. by David Cloud, article "Pastor," pg. 331

word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. (Titus 1:6-9)

We see from this that the man should “desire” the office of a bishop. “He that would lawfully enter upon this work must do it from a deep, abiding and unalterable conviction, wrought in his soul by the Holy Spirit, that such is the will of God concerning him; and that nothing else is, or can be, the work of his life... He that can follow any other pursuit or profession with a peaceful mind, and a conscience void of offense, should never enter the ministry.”² The word desire in this verse is not just a fond affection, but is the Greek word for “to lust after”— the same word appears in 1 Timothy 6:10, where it is translated “coveted.”³ Furthermore, he is to be “blameless.” This could be translated “not able to take hold upon” him; that is, he has no “handle” which would hinder his ministry.⁴ A Christian man who, for example, had ruined a girl or engaged in fraud would have disqualified himself from the pastorate— his sin would dog him the rest of his life and bring reproach upon the cause of Christ. Some assert that this qualification of blamelessness is an all-inclusive generalization which subsumes the others.⁵ While this statement may be accurate, it appears to be somewhat strained exegesis; “blamelessness,” or not having a handle, is simply one of the pastoral qualifications in the list found in first Timothy. To assert that it sums up the other requirements necessitates a definition of blamelessness here as “sinlessness,” rather than “handle-lessness”— in which case our great Shepherd would have no men qualified to call to feed His flock.

The qualification that a pastor is to be the “husband of one wife” has aroused a great deal of controversy in our day. Some who intellectually assent to the inspiration of the Bible believe that a woman may fill the pastorate— however, a lady who is the husband of one wife, and who can hold the bishopric while not teaching or usurping

²*Principles and Practices for Baptist Churches*, Edward T. Hiscox, p. 287

³from lecture notes on church officers in the Baptist Theological Distinctives class taught by Dr. Chris McNeilly of Fairhaven Baptist Church and College.

⁴Ibid.

⁵from lecture notes on 1 Timothy three in the Pastoral Epistles class taught by Pastor Randy Love of Fairhaven Baptist Church and College

authority over the man, but remaining in silence has yet to be born to assist her mother in her Scriptural calling of being saved in childbearing (1 Tim 2:11-15). Let the feminist who wants to wear the pants in the Church and be a prophet, or spiritual, acknowledge the plain commandment of the Lord (1 Cor 14:33-37), be under obedience to the man, and find an aged woman to teach her in shamefacedness to be discreet, chaste, a keeper at home, good, and obedient to her own husband, that the word of God be not blasphemed (Tit 2:3-5). A different question which, while it has a clear Scriptural answer, at least requires more thought than the matter of woman elders, is whether this declaration, along with the other qualifications that relate to the pastor's family (1 Tim 3:4-5, Tit 1:6), make a divorced man ineligible for ordination or continued overseership. A correct understanding of divorce, which God hates (Mark 10:2-12, Heb 13:4), alongside of principle set for in 1 Timothy 3:5 that if a man know not how to rule his own house, he cannot take care of the Church of God, forces a decisive negative answer. A man that must separate from his wife has clearly failed to rule his own house, and has no business leading the house of God. Remarriage while the spouse is living is an even greater sin than separation— in God's sight, it is adultery (Mark 10:1-12). While Jesus allows a couple to separate because of fornication (Matt 5:31-33, 19:3-9), His prohibitions against all remarriage while a spouse is living are very clear:⁶ "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." (Matt 19:6, Mark 10:9). "[W]hoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery." (Matt 19:9). "Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery." (Mark 10:11-12). Certainly, just as in the other sure declarations of God, "whosoever meaneth me." Thus, a man that has remarried with a living wife is absolutely disqualified from the pastoral office. Indeed, even if the specific declaration that the bishop must be, as the Greek

⁶For a more detailed discussion on the subject, please see "Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage" by Ronald Williams, director of Hephzibah House (508 School St., Winona Lake, IN 46590).

declares, “a one woman man,”⁷ were not found in the Bible, divorce would constitute grounds for disqualification— a divorced man has a handle, and is consequently less than “blameless.” Furthermore, if he were not selfwilled, but his life was one of good behaviour, patience, sobriety, gravity, temperance, justice, and holiness, and his wife was grave, not a slanderer, sober, and faithful in all things (1 Tim 3:11)— surely if a deacon is required to have this sort of wife, so must a pastor— they would not need to get a divorce, but would be able to get along together and serve the LORD. Divorce is consequently a violation of a specifically mandated command for the bishop, a violation of the command for blamelessness, and shows a violation of the requirements of moral character demanded of the pastor and his wife.

The other familial requirement for the office of bishop is that the man have “faithful children not accused of riot or unruly.” Obviously his children must be saved, or he has no right to be in the ministry— if those who are in his own family are not even born again, he can hardly be a successful soul-winner and “do the work of an evangelist” (2 Tim 4:5) elsewhere. Disobedient children within the home mean that he should step down, for his kids are then not “in subjection with all gravity,” and, as the requirements found in Titus last as long as his children are still his children— that is, for all time— sexual immorality or other overt wickedness upon the part of a pastor’s sons or daughters mean he is disqualified from the office. This would necessarily include adultery, including that as committed in divorce and remarriage, and at least in the overwhelming majority of cases, would include simple divorce on the part of his children. If he raises his children correctly (Prov 22:6) and he leads them in the selection of a mate the way that he should, his children will have good families, as he must have.

The principles set forth here for the bishop are certainly applicable to the evangelist as well, as well as what we would call a “missionary” today (an office which is not found in Scripture, but whose functions are mainly subsumed under that of the

⁷see footnote #3.

evangelist)— indeed, the requirements are relevant to any “apostolos” or “sent one” of Jesus Christ. The title of “preacher,” is one that crosses the line of simply the bishopric to other “sent one” offices (1 Tim 2:7, 2Tim 1:11, 4:2). The same requirements for eligibility would apply to all such official preachers. Furthermore, it is very hard to justify holding the pastor-teacher who is to perfect the saints, do the work of the ministry, and edify the body of Christ to a higher standard than the apostle, forth-teller of the Word, or evangelist who is to do the same (Eph 4:10-14). The man whose sacred duty it is to watch for the souls of God’s flock and speak to them the Word of God must be the kind of example that can justify the exhortation “whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation (conduct)” (Heb 13:7, 17)— whatever place of service to the Church he has. Finally, it requires a wicked act of isegesis to twist the requirements for the office into pre-ordination requirements, rather than God-given dictates for the course of a man’s ministry. This is seen in the selectivity of those who wish to do this; while they often attempt to set aside “blameless, the husband of one wife,” very few, at least among those who would claim to be Baptist and fundamentalist, and thus Biblical, would leave a murderer or a man that committed robberies, one who was guilty of filthy lucre, in the office. It is perfectly obvious to anyone who applies reasonable exegesis and is willing to obey God that the declarations of 1 Timothy and Titus are good as long as one is a bishop. God has inspired “A bishop then must be...” (1 Tim 3:2), not “One who hopes to become a bishop must be, but after that it doesn’t matter...” Honest hermeneutics makes the matter plain.

Most of the other requirements for the bishopric are less controversial than the familial declarations. A pastor is to be “vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach,” as well as not being a striker, greedy of financial gain, a brawler, covetous, or a novice. Furthermore, he must be patient, have a good report of them that are without, be not selfwilled but a lover of good men, just, holy, and temperate, with sound doctrine. The significance of all of these requirements is relatively

plain,⁸ and most evangelicals and fundamentalists give them at least a token acknowledgment. The only possible controversy arises over “not given to wine” and the associated requirement “not given to much wine” for the deacons, from which many argue that the moderate use of fermented beverages is acceptable in Scripture. However, the pastoral requirement can signify that the bishop must not be “alongside” wine, or in the presence of drunks at their drinking parties⁹ and the deacon is not to “give heed to” it.¹⁰ Alternatively, the declaration for deacons can refer to use of God’s good gifts, like unfermented wine, in moderation.¹¹

The Bible demands high standards for the pastoral office, as does the very nature of the office. If the overseer of the congregation goes astray, he will likely lead the people away from the truth with him (Jer 12:10, 23:1-3, 50:6, Ac 20:29-30, 1Tim 4). Here, as in all areas, acceptance and conformity to God’s standards is best, and necessary to effective service and fruit that will remain.

⁸for exposition of these requirements, see, e.g., Matthew Henry’s commentary on the relevant passages or footnote #3.

⁹see *Wine: The Biblical Imperative, Total Abstinence*, Robert P. Teachout, p. 68-71

¹⁰see footnote #3.

¹¹see footnote #9.

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