

**The right stuff:
The Lord's qualifications for his public
ministers**

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The title of this paper was not my choice, but that of the program committee. It might lead us to believe that pastors and teachers must be latter day Chuck Yaegers or John Glenns, astronauts and test pilots whose abilities placed them among the small cadre of human beings capable of testing the limits of man's abilities. The ministry's qualifications are not that stringent, but neither is this a work that just anyone can do.

What are its qualifications? A writer to the editor of the "Northwestern Lutheran" recently spoke of choosing "individuals who exhibit pastoral characteristics, although not having the theological training we expect of pastors" in offering a solution to the synod's looming pastor shortage.¹ Some might ask whether it is possible to possess "pastoral characteristics" without having theological training. Are some people just "pastoral" by nature? Is not theological training the *sine qua non* of the pastor?

Lyle Schaller apparently sees pastors as critical to the "success" of the church in the 21st century. Churches need to have the right kind of pastor. According to a review by John Brug in the "Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly," Schaller suggests in his book *Tattered Trust: Is There Hope for Your Denomination?* that a pastor must be a "wagon master who can rally everyone to support mission causes and lead the denomination into the twenty-first century."² C. Peter Wagner suggests that today's pastor must be "focused on tomorrow, not yesterday. Setting goals comes naturally [to him]. . . [he is] a pastor with faith . . . [and he] knows in which direction God wants the church to move."³ Neither of these authors would appear to allow a lack of theological training to disqualify a person for the ministry.

Our own publications have suggested from time to time that the demands of the ministry have changed in the last 20 years, and may require special qualifications to meet them. The specter of recent call days at the Seminary comes to mind. Many were the years when the assignments were completed and yet both vacancies and unassigned candidates remained. This was a departure from the days when the author was assigned along with every other member of his class of 45 or so. Those unassigned candidates would seem to indicate that something has changed in the equation, something that has led the church of Christ to leave theologically trained workers standing idle while the souls of men are dying.

Meanwhile, our seminary also has apparently concluded that it cannot train men well enough in the "three years plus one" of the past. It has taken to recalling men after one year, then five years and now fifteen years. One is tempted to wonder whether we old guys still meet the qualifications for the public ministry.

On the other hand the synod has, at the same time, opened a practical seminary at our synod's school of ministry to train staff ministers. These men will need no instruction from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary to enter into the ministry of the synod, albeit in a limited sense at present.

Dare we suggest that these developments raise some interesting questions? Have churches added qualifications to the Lord's? Have they perhaps considered the Lord's qualifications to be secondary? Let us look to the Scriptures to answer them.

Dr. Luther includes two sections in the table of duties in the catechism which list the qualifications of a pastor, I Timothy 3:2-7 and Titus 1:7-9. These are also included in the Order

¹ Richard H. Engelmann, "Readers Forum." *The Northwestern Lutheran*, Vol. 85 Number 2 (February, 1998), 33.

² John Brug, "Reviewer's Desk." *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 95, Number 1 (Winter, 1998), 78.

³ C. Peter Wagner, *Leading your Church to Growth* (Ventura CA: Regal Books, 1984), p. 167.

for the Ordination of a Minister in the *Lutheran Agenda*.⁴ We will treat them together since there is much duplication.

Both sections speak of the office of επισκοπος. The word is used sparingly in the New Testament to denote the person who is in the office of overseer or visitor. Επισκοπος is perhaps more limited in its scope than the other words that denote the public ministry, but in Acts 20, Luke speaks of the πρεσβυτεροι first and then calls them επισκοποι. This seems to make these terms virtually interchangeable. Paul follows his instructions to επισκοποι with a second set of instructions directed toward διακονοι but he also uses the word διακονος to refer to Timothy in chapter 4:6. Apparently this indicates that these words are interchangeable as well. For these and other reasons, our exegetes (Triglot p. 520) have been reluctant to try to define too strictly the differences between these three words. It is argued by some that the term “elder” is the broadest term and that “bishops” and “deacons” are the two types of elder, bishops teaching and deacons not teaching. But this view is not shared by all because of the interchanging of the terms.

For us to say that the office of επισκοπος corresponds to our form of the ministry known as the parish pastor is also saying too much. It cannot be proven that this particular form of the public ministry even existed in apostolic times. The term does, though, refer to the public ministry in the church of Christ. It designates those who are publicly administering the word and sacraments in the name of the congregation which has called them. This is evident from the fact that they are to **“keep watch over the flock”** (Acts 20:28) and **“take care of God’s church.”** 1 Timothy 3:5. How could one do this without using the precious gospel of forgiveness to assure the troubled that the blood of Jesus has washed away their sins? How could one care for the children of the congregation without administering the sacrament of Holy Baptism to impart faith and salvation to them? How could one keep watch over the flock without offering the Savior’s body and blood in the Sacrament of Holy Communion for the strengthening of faith?

Paul says one who οργεται “sets his heart on or stretches out for” such an office, desires a noble or excellent task. Note, it is the task that is noble. The desire for that task or office is also noble but only because the task itself is excellent or noble.

But because it is a noble task, “therefore” ουν “it is necessary” δει that the bishop be ανεπιλημπτος and ανεγκλητος, that is “blameless, or in such a way that no one can criticize him or accuse him of wrong doing. No one can take hold of him.” Since he represents the church, for him to be blamed or accused would be for the church to be blamed as well. Thereby its work would be hindered. This would not do, so the bishop must be blameless both in the eyes of the church and the eyes of the world. “Blamelessness and sinlessness dare not be confused. The former is demanded, the latter not even possible.”⁵ It is true that Paul requires the same characteristics of any Christian as he does of a bishop except that the latter must also be “able to teach others.” Yet the bishop is also to be **“an example to the flock.”** 1 Peter 5:3 He is to be **“a pattern of good works.”** Titus 2:7 The individual may be allowed more leeway, and behavior may be borne in individuals which could not be tolerated in the bishop. His character must be above reproach so that as Paul says, **“we put no stumbling block in anyone’s path.”** 2 Corinthians 6:3

Paul goes on to describe him as “the husband of but one wife,” μιας γυναικος ανδρα literally “a man of one woman.” It does not mean that he could not be single, since Paul himself was single and recommended the single life to those who could avoid temptation. It also does not mean that a widowed bishop could not remarry. Paul uses the same construction in referring to the widows in 5:9 where it is translated by the NIV “faithful to her husband.” He then goes on to counsel the younger widows to marry 5:14. If it was not wrong for the widows to remarry, it cer-

⁴ *Lutheran Agenda*, p. 104ff.

⁵ Theodore Laetsch (ed.), *The Abiding Word* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1958), Vol. I, p. 395.

tainly was not wrong for widowed bishops to remarry. What then does this mean? Lenski takes it to mean that he is a man who, "would have nothing to do with any other woman. He must be a man who cannot be taken hold of on the score of sexual promiscuity or laxity."⁶ In a time of temple prostitutes and morals that had not yet seen the influence of Christianity, the bishop was to be a man who was faithful to his wife. He was to be one who honored marriage and kept the marriage bed pure. In these latter days when our world is threatening to outstrip the heathen of Paul's day in moral depravity, this requirement means the same thing. Could a person serve in the ministry in spite of sins committed before he was called? Paul did. Moses did. Could he serve again after disqualifying himself by his action? He has violated the trust and he is no longer above reproach.

The bishop must also be "temperate" *νηφάλιον*. The word means sober or clear headed in all things, not just sober. He must be a man who possesses a soundness and balance in judgment, not one who is flighty or unstable.

He must be *σοφρονον* or "self-controlled." This word means that he must be thoughtful and prudent, not one of whom it might be said that he is "all speed and no direction." Though Lenski wrote over a generation ago he speaks of our times when he says, "We have all the fads, fancies and fictions of unstable minds. We need pastors who will conduct their own persons and then also their congregations with a sane, safe and steady mind in all matters of life and of faith."⁷

Κοσμιος is translated "respectable" in the *NIV*. It carries the sense of honorable and orderly.

Φιλοξενος means hospitable, literally "a lover of the stranger." Homes are not built to accommodate guests anymore as they once were. Our forefathers seem to have taken this injunction seriously, though, judging by some of the older parsonages. The home in which the writer grew up had six large bedrooms upstairs in addition to a maid's room on the third floor. The writer's parents were often hosts to pastors from around the synod and the world, who happened to be in town for meetings. The times do affect how this requirement is applied, though. Luther comments, "We do not apply the requirement of hospitality to parish priests. They are forbidden to be hospitable. After all, they scarcely support themselves, so meanly and poorly are the ministers of the word fed. Whoever has the means should be hospitable."⁸ Luther is no doubt taking a shot at the nobility for the paltry sums they were paying the pastors, but this requirement has clearly changed as the times have changed. We can say, though, that those who visit at the parsonage ought to feel welcome.

Διδακτικος is the word Paul uses to describe the pastor as one who is able to teach others. It has been remarked that this and the fact that he is to be an example to the flock are the only requirements for the public ministry that are not also required of every other Christian. Lenski comments that, "the ability to teach means not merely a fair, natural aptitude but the qualification of having been taught . . . the more the faithful teacher teaches, the more will he feel the need of acquiring more and more knowledge of the blessed truth he is to teach."⁹ The bishop 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." Titus 1:9 He must be a "steward of the mysteries of God." 1 Corinthians 4:2. He must be capable of "rightly dividing the word of truth." 2 Timothy 2:15 "If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God." 1

⁶ R. C. H. Lenski, *Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and To Philemon*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1937), p. 580.

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 582.

⁸ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1973), Vol. 28, p. 285.

⁹ Lenski, *op. cit.* p. 584.

Peter 4:11 Luther says simply, "This is the chief responsibility and duty of the bishop: the ministry of the Word."¹⁰

Able to teach others, does not mean primarily that he be one who can distinguish between the cognitive and affective goals in education. It is not primarily a concern for choosing one who has mastered the taxonomy of questions. It is not a requirement that demands that he be able to teach interesting Bible Classes. It means primarily that he has gained knowledge of God's word through instruction and study and can convey that knowledge to others. He cannot teach ~~softly~~ who has not mastered his subject. And if he who has not been thoroughly taught in the word of God teaches in the church, he will not be teaching the word of God. No doubt Jim Jones, David Koresh and Applegate were highly effective teachers, but they were not able to teach in the sense that Paul had in mind.

Luther begins his treatment of this word with the question, "Does this mean he should be trained at the university?"¹¹ but he does not answer his question. In practice he was reluctant to allow the interim pastors of the congregations to preach without providing them a book of sermons.¹² Schwiebert says, "Luther would have preferred that all clergymen in the new Lutheran Church be seminary graduates of the University of Wittenberg."¹³ As soon as the university was able to produce the trained theologians that were needed by the reformation, it became the source of the pastors. Pieper says, "It is clear that when Scripture describes the true teacher, it describes the true theologian."¹⁴ Our experience in the early days of our synod ought to have taught us the importance of thoroughly training our pastors. The pastors trained at the practical schools of the mission societies often had enthusiasm but lacked confessional commitment. It was the university trained Hoenecke whom the Lord used to guide the synod to a truly Scriptural and confessional position. It was when we had established our own college and seminary for thoroughly training our own workers that the synod turned down the path of solid confessionalism.

This is hardly an elitist position. The fact that the Scriptures are written in Hebrew and Greek/essentially demands that the teachers of Scripture attend school long enough to learn these languages and then long enough to be able to study the Scriptures in the original. This is by no means a universally accepted position, though. The writer met a Baptist minister in Texas who had not graduated from high school and certainly had no knowledge of the biblical languages. Such is the approach of the reformed. This was Carlstadt's approach, not Luther's. Luther feared that, "if Carlstadt's plan prevailed, the outcome would assuredly be not that the peasant would know as much as the preacher but that the preacher would know no more than the peasant."¹⁵

Many people seem to downplay the need for theological training. Every generation in our synod's history has heard the complaint, "Why can't we ease the requirements for the ministry so that people who would make good pastors but can't handle the languages would not be lost along the way?" The writer has spoken to a man on an evangelism call who after hearing the message of forgiveness decided that he too wanted to be a pastor. After all, he was presently between jobs and needed to find work anyway. Even after this man made it clear during instruction class that he did not want to read aloud any of the passages because he had great difficulty reading, he still spoke of entering the ministry, as if it were an office open to anyone who felt moved by the Spirit, regardless of his qualifications. His attitude is hardly typical, but it seems that it is common for Christians to underestimate the training and qualifications required for the ministry.

¹⁰ Luther, *op. cit.* p. 286

¹¹ Luther, *op. cit.* p. 285

¹² E. G. Schwiebert, *Luther and his times* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1950), p. 619

¹³ *Ibid.* p. 631

¹⁴ Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1950), Vol. 1, p. 46.

¹⁵ Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand: A life of Martin Luther* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1950), p. 201

Paul's words, "able to teach others," must be seriously considered by us as we make far-reaching decisions about the training of our ministerium. Speaking of the mental endowment and training of a pastor *The Shepherd under Christ* says, "these gifts need to be cultivated and exercised through academic training and channeled by means of a thorough theoretical and practical theological training."¹⁶ As pietism continues to lurk in our circles we ought to expect that such a statement will continue to be challenged. We will have to be ready to defend it.

Luther says, "We shall have a hard time preserving the Gospel without the languages. The languages are the sheath in which this sword of the Spirit is contained. They are the case in which we carry this jewel. They are the vessel in which we hold this wine. They are the larder in which this food is stored."¹⁷

Paul follows this requirement with two negative commands. The bishop must not be *παροινος*, that is "given to drunkenness." The word describes one who sits too long beside the wine. It does not mean he may never take a drink. In fact, given the high profile of the evangelicals in our day, so many of whom pietistically ban all alcohol in their rush to teach for commandments the laws of men, the pastor may well find himself having to defend moderate drinking. On the other hand for him to become known as a drunkard would bring shame on God's church, disqualify him for the ministry and give ammunition to the pietists as well.

Nor may he be *πληκτην*, a "violent person or a pugnacious bully." Instead, Paul says the very opposite. He must be *επιεικης*, "gentle, yielding," or as Luther translates, "*gelinde*." His strength must be seen in his patient willingness to bear the cross as his Savior has. He shows his strength in his willingness to suffer as Paul did because of his determination to preach the gospel no matter what the obstacles.

Two more negatives follow. *Αμαχον* means not quarrelsome. It is *μαχη* with *alpha privativum*. *Μαχη* is a fight without weapons, a quarrel. The pastor is not to be a quarrelsome person, but ought to possess the ability to settle differences without raising his voice. He ought to be oil on the water rather than gasoline on the fire.

Αφιλαργυρος is the second negative. It means literally that he must not be a lover of silver. Few today would accuse WELS pastors or teachers of going into the work because of the money. Occasionally you will run into a senior who can't, for the life of him, understand why the pastor can't live on \$12,000 a year. "After all he gets his house for free." He is usually one who has given his \$5.00 a week without fail for nigh on to 25 years. When congregations are swayed by such comments the ministry is harmed and work of the pastor is jeopardized because of his poverty.

But the problem is not usually that pastors in our midst are accused of going into the ministry for the money. The problem is more likely to be that the pastor finds it difficult to avoid becoming bitter over the lack of financial rewards to which his level of education would seem to entitle him. It can be a challenge to one's equanimity when he realizes that the man who drives the truck for Waste Management is pulling down an income and benefits that put his own to shame. In the mean time Madison Avenue is telling him constantly that he is worth it, he deserves it and he can't live another day without it. But it is not becoming of the ministry to give voice constantly to such dissatisfaction. Paul describes a person, therefore, who will use what God gives to him through his people and be satisfied with it. In our day he must be a person who is frugal because he will very likely have to make do with a smaller income than many of his neighbors. Plenty of men have had difficulty in the ministry because they could not live within their means. They had a champagne taste on a beer budget. The pastor must be one whose treasure is in heaven. His day

¹⁶ Armin Schuetze and Irwin Habeck, *The Shepherd under Christ* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1974), p. 12.

¹⁷ Ewald Plass (ed.), *What Luther Says* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), Vol. 2, p. 731.

cannot be made or broken by the direction of the NASDAQ. This qualification will need to be seriously considered in our day.

Paul adds to Titus and Peter also states in 1 Peter 5:2 that the pastor must not be *αἰσχροκερδῆς* from *αἰσχρός* “ugly or shameful or base” and *κερδῶς* meaning “gain.” He must not be pursuing dishonest gain. Of course that would be sinful, akin to a pastor selling nickel bags of hash out of the trunk of his car. That would be a disgrace for every Christian. Paul therefore also uses the same word in his instructions to deacons in Timothy. Fuerbringer takes this occasion to say, “he shall not carry on a business outside of his ministerial office.”¹⁸ He cites 1 Corinthians 9:14 “those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel,” and 2 Timothy 2:4, “no one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs.” Paul held down a job as a tent maker, but he did so in the interest of the gospel. If a pastor holds a job for a reason other than the gospel, his interest will be divided between the gospel and his outside interest. This Paul does not approve of.

The bishop must also manage his own family well and see to it that his children obey him with the proper respect. I must confess that there have been times when an unruly two year old has made me wonder whether I could continue to serve in the ministry. They often do not show the proper respect for the man of the cloth. Lenski lets us off the hook, though, when he points out that the proper respect refers to the father not the child. The father acts with proper respect when he secures due obedience from his children.¹⁹ Might a person be disqualified for the ministry because of unruly and perhaps even unbelieving children? Eli, the priest, is roundly criticized for the behavior of his sons, but because he had not taught them properly when they were young and could not change their behavior when he was old. Samuel’s sons too were wicked, but apparently that was not the fault of their father’s training and management of his own household. There would need to be a demonstrable pattern of inability to rule in both the management of his family and in his work in the Lord’s house for a man to be disqualified on this account. But he whose word is not respected in his own home will not be able to command respect in his church.²⁰

Paul adds in Timothy that the pastor, “must not be a recent convert,” *νεοφύτος*, “or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil.” Satan’s position of authority was exaggerated in his mind and being “puffed up or bloated” *τυφῶω* with his own importance he rebelled against God. Lenski points out that Paul does not include this requirement in his letter to Titus. The congregation in Crete, being new, would have only recent converts. They would, however, be less likely to become conceited by having risen more quickly than usual to a responsible position in the church or by having been chosen ahead of someone who had been in the church a longer time. Our synod has learned from experience that time is an important ally in choosing men for the office of pastor. Those who come to us from other denominations by colloquy are asked to spend time at the seminary partly because of unhappy situations in the past. Then too, the work of the ministry will require patience and perseverance that cannot have been learned or demonstrated by a neophyte.

Paul concludes his words to Timothy by underscoring the fact that the pastor must have a good reputation *μαρτυριαν καλην* with outsiders so that he won’t fall into disgrace and the devil’s trap. Obviously this is a very important requirement, since he mentions it twice, giving it the place of emphasis at beginning and end. “If a person has committed a grievous sin . . . he can . . . be a member of a Christian congregation and will be able to serve God in another calling; but he can no longer serve as a pastor or teacher of a Christian congregation. For in doing so, he would

¹⁸ Ludwig Fuerbringer, *The Pastoral Epistles discussed on the Basis of the Epistle to Titus* (Mequon: Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library Essay File), p. 6.

¹⁹ Lenski, *op. cit.*, p. 586.

²⁰ Fuerbringer, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

cause his office to be defamed and would give the adversaries occasion to look with scorn upon the church.”²¹ This same article in *The Abiding Word* states, “It does not rest with a congregation to decide whether or not a pastor who has lost his good name shall be permitted to remain in office. The Lord himself says such a man may no longer be a pastor.”²²

In his words to Titus, Paul adds these qualification which are not found in Timothy. He must not be *αυθαδης* which means “arrogant or overbearing.” On matters of *adiaphora* he must not insist that all things be done his way, but must be willing to listen to the opinions of others. This can be a challenge to a pastor. He must carefully distinguish between disputable matters and matters of doctrine, and must also help his congregation to keep a clear distinction between them. Congregations tend to differ widely in this regard. Some look to the pastor to decide every issue that arises, from which disposal company to use to which wine should be used in the sacrament. Others are reluctant to take the pastor’s word in any matter, especially if he is relatively young. The pastor must have the quality of being able to choose his battles carefully so he does not make enemies over matters of no consequence. He must be careful not to invest too much of himself in matters that are not doctrinal lest he lose his zeal and good judgment as well as the good will of his people when decisions don’t go his way.

He must not be *οργιλον* “inclined to anger or easily angered.” According to Fuerbringer, Calov remarks that a pastor is not forbidden to become angry, but he shall not be prone to anger. The Savior himself became angry at those who had turned the temple into a house of robbers. But anger in sinful people tends to be at odds with so many other qualities a pastor must have, such as gentleness and self-control. If the pastor is accustomed to becoming angry his decisions are not likely to be reasoned and thoughtful as they must be.

The pastor must also be *φιλαγαθος* that is, “a lover of what is good.” He will be alert to what is good and not be pessimistic. Luther says, “Let him be prepared to advance such causes as piety, sacred letters, peace, harmony and friendship among neighbors . . . let him be zealous to help good persons and good issues.”²³

When Paul says he must be righteous *δικαιον* and holy *οσιον* he is speaking not of his status before God through the atonement of Christ, but of his dealings in this world. He must be just in his dealings so that he may not be swayed from the truth in cases where he must judge. He must be upright in his dealings, as well, one who acts and speaks in a pious way. *Εγκρατης* speaks of “self-control and moderation” in all things, as Luther says, “food, drink and sex.”²⁴

Finally he says, **“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.”** Luther says,

This is the most important of all. The virtues are beautiful. A bishop is appointed in the midst of the nation but especially in the midst of heretics. If someone becomes a pastor, especially in a prominent place, and presents the Word, he will have them. Therefore he admonishes that a bishop be ready for both, that he have a trowel in one hand and a weapon in the other, as in Nehemiah. There are not many such; many teach, but few fight. A certain tenacity is signified here, that is, that he not put the Bible aside, but that he give attention to reading, as the Epistle to Timothy says, adding: “Practice these duties”. The reason he ought to be provided for by the church is that he ought to tend to reading and stay with it not only

²¹ Laetsch, *op. cit.*, p. 397.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1968), Vol. 29, p. 29.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

for others, but that he ought to meditate constantly for himself, that is, ought to immerse himself completely in Scripture. Such study will enable him to fight back. It is impossible for someone who reads Scripture studiously to meddle in worldly matters, but he should have the strength to be the kind of man Paul has described here. If he does not diligently study Holy Scripture, which he knows, the result will be a kind of rust, and a neglect of and contempt for the Word will arise. Even though you know Holy Scripture, nevertheless it must be read over and over again, because this Word has the power to stimulate you at all times.²⁵

One need hardly add that such men are sorely needed today who will hold to the πιστου λογου the “faithful or trustworthy word,” κατα την διδαχην “according to the teaching of Christ.” Everywhere this teaching is “opposed or spoken against” αντιλεγοντας. The pastor must be able through his instruction in the word to refute those who are in error. Pieper says, “The popular demand that the preacher refrain from polemics is not supported by Scripture,” and adds, “there must be the willingness and strength to suffer for the Christian doctrine.”²⁶

Habeck reminds us that there is an additional requirement of pastors.²⁷ He cites I Peter 5:3, “**not lording it over those entrusted to you,**” to show that a pastor must also be evangelical and not a legalist. Paul makes the same point in 2 Corinthians 3:6 pointing out that we are, “**ministers of a new covenant--not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.**” Only the Spirit can teach a pastor this through the gospel he learns in his faithful study of Scripture. But if a man has not an evangelical spirit, if he continues to want to coerce his flock with the law, he is not qualified to shepherd the flock of Jesus Christ which he has purchased with his blood.

St. Peter states also that God’s shepherds must do their work, “**not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be.**” 1 Peter 5:2. Man looks at the outward appearance but God looks at the heart. He says to us, “**Give me your heart.**” This is not to say that there are not times in a sinful world when the sinful nature of a pastor rears up and prevents him from delighting in the glorious privilege he has of proclaiming the gospel. None of us could claim such an unblemished record. But it is a fruit of our faith to say that we delight to do his will, unworthy though we all are.

While a persistent failure to exhibit any of these qualities would disqualify a person for the office of the pastor or the public ministry, many of them need not do so permanently. A recent convert could certainly become eligible for the office of the ministry through study and the passage of time. One who is not able to teach others because he has not learned the word of God, could remove that obstacle through faithful study of the word. It is possible that a person might learn to overcome certain other traits as well.

Joel Frank points out, though, that certain Scriptural qualifications may lead to the conclusion that ineligibility for the public ministry in some cases is permanent. Those qualifications are that a person be “above reproach,” have a “good reputation” and be “blameless.” He says, “His reputation must have nothing negative, like a stigma, still clinging to him from the past. There should be nothing in his reputation that could be ‘taken hold of’ by others and used to bring discredit upon the ministry.”²⁸ This would apply to a person’s reputation in the eyes of the general

²⁵ *Ibid.* p. 30.

²⁶ Pieper, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

²⁷ Irwin J. Habeck, “*What disqualifies a pastor or teacher for the ministry*” (Mequon: Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library Essay File, 1980) p. 5.

²⁸ Joel Frank, “*Eligibility for reinstatement into the public ministry*” (Unpublished Essay distributed to WELS Conference of Presidents, 1994) p. 3

public as well as the church. Even if the sins are in the past and have been repented and forgiven, the reputation lives in the present and if it has been soiled by something in the past, may continue to disqualify a person for the ministry.

Frank goes on to state that it is particularly sins against the sixth commandment that surface from the past to discredit a person as being of unfit moral character. He cites Proverbs 6:30-35. Solomon shows that sins against both the 6th and the 7th commandment bear earthly consequences, but of adultery he says it, “**destroys his life . . . his shame will never be wiped away.**” Paul too warns against, “**even a hint of sexual immorality,**” Ephesians 5:3. He points out that, “**all other sins**” are different, being outside the body but the sin of adultery is a sin against one’s own body, the temple of the Holy Spirit. 1 Corinthians 6:18ff.

We must not conclude without mentioning Paul’s requirement that, “**those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.**” 1 Corinthians 4:2 Carleton Toppe says,

“Preach my word faithfully,” God directs his servants.

Faithfulness is the number one qualification for the Christian minister. The Corinthians wanted their pastors to be strong leaders, men who asserted themselves, who were influences in the community. The Corinthians wanted pastors who were “shakers and movers.” Faithfulness did not have a high priority on their list of qualifications for preachers.

But faithfulness is God’s top priority. Dependability, consistency, integrity--that’s what God wants above all. It is willing obedient, diligent service that he requires. Faithfulness counts for more than talents, or personality, or efficiency, or “leadership,” or even success. “Well done, thou good and *faithful* servant (KJV) is the highest grade God gives.”²⁹

The problem is, of course, that Paul also tells us one last requirement of the public ministry is that, “**we have this treasure in jars of clay.**” 2 Corinthians 4:7 God has no longer allowed his angels to speak the message of the gospel. He has directed that those who go for him must be human beings all of whom are also frail and sinful. Having reviewed all these requirements and then evaluated the severe limitations of what we have to work with, perhaps we were too hasty at the outset of the paper to state that the “ministry’s qualifications are not that stringent.” They are in fact so stringent that no one is equal to them. Paul himself says, “**not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves.**” 2 Corinthians 3:5 But in the next breath he points out, “**but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant.**” So even though Paul does not specifically list humility as a requirement for the ministry, the pastor will be humble as a redeemed child of God. And his work will constantly keep him humble as he sees the marvelous miracles God works through his preaching of the gospel of forgiveness and administration of the sacraments.

²⁹ Carleton Toppe, *The people’s Bible: 1 Corinthians* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1987), p. 43f.

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