

*Editor's note: Elder Joe Holder publishes a weekly email devotional called "Gospel Gleanings." From August 15 through September 5 he directed his attention to 1 Timothy 3:1. 1 Timothy 3:1 reads, "This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work." The series name is "Ministerial Qualifications." When I first read these articles in 2010 I felt refreshed and convicted. It is easy for us to go to large meetings and compare ourselves with other ministers. A comparative ministry will always lead to either self-righteousness or complacency. Our ability and effectiveness as ministers can only be assessed in light of scripture itself. In this article Elder Holder beautifully articulates the call and qualifications of a gospel minister. In view of these articles, let us now examine ourselves. ~Josh Winslett*

## **Gospel Gleanings, August 15, 2010**

Dear Friends,

Every time I review Paul's list of qualifications for the office of minister, I end up examining my own life and qualifications. Do I ever conclude that I match up perfectly on every point? No, of course not. How I react to that assessment, however, will determine whether I end up feeding sheep or filling space ineffectively, in fact wasting it and wasting the people's time who come to hear me. If I realize that in certain points I fail the inspired list, I simply rationalize my failure and walk away, my failures shall multiply. Over time my life will drift farther and farther away from the qualities that Paul requires of me, and of every man who fills that office. If I take the qualifications to heart, realize that I need to make some adjustments in my life, not in the inspired list, so that I measure up to it, I am far more likely to move closer and closer to those qualifications. Whether in the office of minister or deacon, the man who refuses to fill the office with his feet, his consistent lifestyle, will fail the office and become ineffective in it. I have known a few men who confessed to their failure to live up to certain qualifications, rationalizing their failure and trying to remain in the office despite their admitted failure. Inevitably, these men eventually drifted away from the office altogether. If we occupy the office, we need to fill--and fulfill--it. If we do not intend to fulfill its requirements, we should step away from it and pray for the Lord to guide us to a work that we can fill with honor for His glory. In *No Little People* Francis A. Schaeffer observes that we must seek the position in the church and in our service to God that we can fill effectively, while retaining our own "quietness," our peaceful heart and joyful relationship with both God and His people. If the office I am trying to fill disrupts that peaceful quietness of my spirit, I am almost certainly trying to fill a position to which God has not called me. Honoring God requires each of us to seek and to fill the position to which God calls us, not try to force ourselves into a work to which we have not been called.

Every preacher--in fact, every Christian--should hang a sign over their life, "Don't be too hard on me. God isn't finished with me yet. I'm still a work in progress." Our task then should be to work every day to ensure that we are a work in progress, not a mess in digression. Lord, please help us to know and to remember our calling. Help us to work every day to fulfill that calling, fully respecting Your wisdom and never trying to force ourselves into a work to which You have not called us.

God bless,  
Joe Holder

### **The New Testament Church: Ministerial Qualifications**

*This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. (1 Timothy 3:1)*

Before we delve into the specific qualifications and qualities of a man to be ordained as a minister, we need to anchor our study in a foundational principle, the essential integrity and, to the extent we can perceive it, motive of the man. A man whose attitude and conduct suggest that he wants to be ordained so that he can wield influence over others, in effect, be the "head man," should never be ordained. In last week's Gleanings, I distinguished between the attitude of "demanding" respect and "commanding" it. The man who seeks the position for personal gain or to be viewed as an influential person in the church's culture will "demand" that people look up to him, regardless of whether he earns their respect or not. The man who fills the office because God called him to it, and he seeks to honor God's call by serving both God and His people, will take the responsibility so gravely that it will transform his personal attitudes and behaviors. His lifestyle itself will "command" the respect of the people. He will not need to demand that people look up to him. They will do so because of his personal conduct and spirituality.

An overarching principle of ministry in any form, either in the pulpit, the work of a deacon, or in the pew where the members sit each time the church gathers, appears in our study verse. "...he desireth a good work." He doesn't demand that people call him "Elder" or "Pastor." He doesn't expect to be elevated to a pedestal and have people defer to him because he is a minister. Paul defines the most fundamental principle of this man's motive and life. It has been said that we live in a culture where "work" is increasingly viewed as a vulgar, four-letter word, not something to be desired. People want to make a fortune, but many likely most of them simply are not willing to work and make wise decisions that are necessary to reach their goal. They want the million dollars, but they don't want to invest the work and wise planning necessary. I fear that occasionally men may enter or try to enter the ministry with the "million dollar" motive, but they soon demonstrate that they have no interest in "work." Work is something they tell others to do.

Still other men want to be the preacher, but they also want to continue their lifestyles and self-serving attitudes rather than make the admittedly painful transformation of self-denial, not self-promotion, that is necessary to put the sermon from the pulpit into the sermon in the shoes of life. As we examine the specific qualifications that Paul lists for a preacher, we should take conscious note of the focus on

personal lifestyle and personal conduct. Of all the qualifications that Paul lists in this chapter, only one relates to the man's ability in the pulpit, "...apt to teach." All the others relate to how consistently and effectively the man "preaches with his feet," with his life.

Having seen the wrong view of ministry briefly, let's look more in depth at the right view. *...If a man desire the office....*" The word translated "desire" in this verse is the same word translated "desire" in Hebrews 11:16, "...But now they desire a better country...." Our desire for heaven should never be a selfish ambition to parade heaven's streets to show off how large and lustrous our merited crown is. It should be to be with our Savior and to "...see him as he is...." (1 John 3:2)

There is a vast distinction between our present state and heaven, but there should be a few similarities if we live a "heavenly" life in the here and now. Consider the perspective of the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration. After peering through the cloud of glory, they saw Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. Moses died about fifteen hundred years before this event. Some nine hundred years earlier, the chariots of God caught Elijah up to heaven without the experience of death. I believe and the passages dealing with this event affirm that Moses and Elijah truly, literally appeared with Jesus. Luke even tells us that they talked with Jesus about His eminent death, "...his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem." (Luke 9:31) Peter, rather predictably, thinks the wrong thing, and wants to erect three altars, one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. Don't be too hard on Peter. If you saw these two men literally standing before you and heard them talking with Jesus, would you not consider something equally silly? The voice from the Father in heaven set the record right, "This is my beloved Son: hear him." (Luke 9:35) Old Testament or New Testament, God commands worship only exclusively--of Himself alone. Notice the beginning of Luke 9:36, "And when the voice was past, Jesus was found alone." Paul echoes this same consuming truth to the most carnal, challenged church in the New Testament, "For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." (1 Corinthians 2:2) He further trumpets the point, "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake." (2 Corinthians 4:5) Paul, no less than a chosen apostle, and the chosen writer of some thirty per cent of the New Testament, did not play the "I'm an apostle. You owe me some respect" card. And he so deferred, not to the most spiritual and holy of churches, but to the most carnal of churches. Yes, there is such a thing as a "carnal Christian," for Paul referred to this church as being "...yet carnal...." (1 Corinthians 3:3) Paul didn't put the Corinthian church to the litmus test to see if they deserved his service, to see if they were worth his "serving" them or not. He knew their carnal state and, knowing it, yet proclaimed the Lord Jesus Christ as the centerpiece of his ministry and message, and himself as their "servant," not their lord, for Jesus' sake.

Preaching the gospel does not grow out of an attitude of entitlement or of personal merit. No man deserves pulpit privileges who has not "worked" and "served" in the most unselfish and sacrificial of ways for both God and for His people.

The man who "desires" this office, like those longing saints in Hebrews 11:16, is consumed with passion for his Lord and for his Lord's glory. There is no space, logically or ethically, for the man to seek credit,

honor, or attention to himself. If he is seeking something for himself, he has not yet seen "Jesus alone" as the object of his ministry and life. ***It is not all about the man. It is all about the Lord!*** The man who fills the office of minister, any form of ministry, must demonstrate this God-centric attitude, or he fails the position and will either vacate it, or God shall vacate it from him.

Words such as "work" and "servant" consistently define the ministry of the New Testament. If Jesus, our Lord and Savior, literally (no other-worldly, existential, out-of-time-and-space "event") washed His disciples' feet, if Paul required that "widows indeed," widowed women whom the church was to take under its care and support, must have "...washed the saints' feet..." (1 Timothy 5:10), can we give any respectful consideration to any man for the office of ministry who does not, both literally and in lifestyle, do the same thing? The self-serving "preacher" will get his feelings hurt and complain because the people did not listen to his preaching or otherwise look up to him. Did they always listen to Paul, or, for that matter, to Jesus' preaching? Because people didn't listen to their preaching, did Jesus or Paul get his feelings hurt and pout at or abandon his divine assignment? No, they remained faithful. They continued their "work" and remained faithful "servants" to their God. On a few occasions in my fifty plus years of ministry thank the Lord, only a few I have attended meetings where I got the sense that the men who preached were trying to out-preach each other. When time in the pulpit becomes a "preaching contest," there will be no edification of hungry sheep. Such attitudes ignore the "work" and "servant" foundation of godly New Testament ministry.

As we focus on the qualifications of ministry, some traits will be quite unique and specific to the man whom God has called to this position. However, many of the personal traits and attitudes that appear in this list are traits that every believer must embrace and live by them if he/she hopes in any constructive way to serve God by serving His people. As you read over the list of qualifications that Paul catalogs in this context, ask yourself how many qualities must govern the life of every credible believer who seeks to bear believable testimony of his/her faith. And do not overlook the central-most point. How many of these traits flourish in your life? If you or I were to die tomorrow, how would people remember us? What would they say to describe our influence in their lives? Would our impact on them reflect these traits? Sadly, those few preachers who seem more inclined to participate in the preaching or influence-peddling contest than preaching "Jesus alone," might be shocked at the people's reaction to their death. "The king is dead. Long live the king," is not the final word of a godly "servant" whose primary life-actions were invested in the "work" of a godly ministry. His message was "The King was dead but now He lives. Long live the King." For them, the position of King is adequately and exclusively occupied by the Lord of lords and King of kings. My uncle, Elder J. D. Holder, was a respected preacher among the Primitive Baptists who knew him for almost fifty years. I have been both amused and frustrated since his death at the men who praise him and claim him as their model and mentor. Some of these men, I recall, did not claim nearly as much of his respect as they pretend for him. At times he would quietly observe their self-serving attitudes and actions, and threaten to turn them over his knee and give them a symbolic spanking for their unworthy use of their ministry. At times he gave a few of them just such symbolic "spankings." They now claim him, but their doctrine he rejected, and their self-centered attitude toward ministry he despised. If they respect him so much, I'd like to see them imitate his ministry in action and soundness of faith. If we whitewash the graves of pious, godly men from our past, we must ethically imitate their godliness and their unselfish faith.

The passion for this work requires incredible sacrifice of self and of one's own desires. God encourages us that He shall stand by us and bless us as we serve Him faithfully, but He never promises health, wealth, and personal comforts. In fact, He promises that, as He suffered when He preached the truth, we shall also suffer, but that suffering must be endured with a grace-smile, and with grace-action, not with bitterness. The word translated "servant" in the New Testament apparently originated in agriculture. It was used to describe the devoted farmer who works long, hard hours in his field. He works so hard that he "stirs up the dust," but he just keeps working in the dust. Never embrace the "I just don't get that much out of church" attitude. Rather ask yourself regularly, "How much have I invested in the service of God and of His people?"

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church

16434 Woodruff

Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday 10:30 A. M.

Joseph R. Holder Pastor

## **Gospel Gleanings, August 22, 2010**

Dear Friends,

When Paul lists the qualifications for ministry, he twice emphasizes the man's relationship with his family, in this week's study verse and in 1 Timothy 3:4-5. In our study verse for this week, the man's personal attitude toward his marriage is the focus. In the fourth and fifth verses, his leadership in his home becomes the question of the day. A leader cannot at all times lead all people under his care. Scripture describes God's children as sheep, often more inclined to do the wrong thing than the right thing, so a man's leadership must be gently managed. Peter (First Peter 5:1-4) indicates that leadership must be by example. He must lead, not follow, and that leadership is to be gentle so as to exhibit to the people who hear him in the pulpit how to apply what they hear in their own lives. He must lead, not drive, the people under his care. We shall thoroughly examine this quality in coming studies. In this week's study, the man's personal attitude toward his marriage commands our attention.

"blameless" seems to be a broad description of the man's personal life and character. Then Paul goes into specific details to name the traits that contribute to the man's "blameless" qualification. While the dominant traits in Paul's list deal with the man's character, Paul includes one requirement for his knowledge and ability to teach. He must be a skilled teacher of the gospel. On a few notable occasions I have heard sermons so hatefully delivered that, though I agreed with the man's exegesis of Scripture, his attitude in the sermon was so objectionable, I'd have been more comfortable disagreeing with him than agreeing. A man who occupies the pulpit in this manner fails the qualification to be "apt to teach." Paul tells Titus (2:1) that he is to speak things that "become" sound doctrine. His form of delivery, and his explanation of the doctrine, should present the doctrine as attractive, desirable, not odious.

The dominant form of ministerial qualification in our time and culture is to pack up the young ministerial candidate and send him off to seminary. He may learn many good things in seminary, as well as some questionable things and often pick up an arrogant attitude in the process. Sadly, statistics indicate that many of the most errant ideas preached in pulpits began in seminary. Several years ago I read a survey that alleged that most seminary graduates left seminary not believing in the virgin birth of Jesus, not believing in a literal resurrection, and other equally central Bible doctrines.

The Biblical form of ministerial qualification puts the young man in a local church and under the teaching and leadership of a mentor, "father in ministry." The young man is required to learn from his mentor just as Timothy and Titus learned from Paul. Second Timothy 2:2 leaves no doubt that this practice is to be institutionalized as a permanent part of the New Testament church's ongoing practice. In this setting, the young man speaks occasionally to the church. If he begins to entertain errant ideas, both the church and his pastor should immediately work with him to correct the problem, not allow him four to six or more years to imbed the errors into his mind. That we as a people do not require seminary training of a preacher should never be interpreted as a lack of requirement for the man's learning. The man is required to learn, but his learning must occur so as to keep him integrated in the culture of the church, not isolated in an ivory tower.

When I examine the full list of qualifications for ministry in the New Testament, I cannot ignore or downgrade the man's knowledge and God-given ability to communicate Bible truth so as to edify, but the commanding issue that I draw from these Biblical qualifications is the intense manner in which the man's lifestyle must be evaluated prior to ordination. We must never forget that the first and most important sermon a man must demonstrably preach is the sermon that he preaches with his feet. If that sermon is deficient, he should never be allowed in the pulpit.

God bless,  
Joe Holder

## Ministerial Qualifications: Part 2

*A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach. (1 Timothy 3:2)*

Occasionally, folks read over Bible words and lessons, more concluding meaning from their personal impressions than from the passage. In this case, someone might read this verse and conclude, quite inaccurately, that Paul requires sinless perfection from a man considered for ministry. As an old cliché states, "Don't hold your breath." That idea was as false in the first century as it is today. If you think that Paul had sinless perfection in mind by the word "blameless," try to reconcile this verse with John's point on claims of sinless perfection in the first chapter of First John. If we believe the Holy Spirit directed the writing of all Scripture and I do we cannot dismiss one passage written by one inspired writer as simply contradicting a passage written by another inspired writer.

What does the word "blameless" mean then?

**33.415 ἀκατάγνωστος, ον; ἀνεπίλημπτος, ον:** pertaining to what cannot be criticized `above criticism, beyond reproach.<sup>[1]</sup>

Louw-Nida is a combination New Testament Greek dictionary and thesaurus. This work provides a basic definition that New Testament scholars tend to respect, as well as a thesaurus, examples of the common usage of the word in first century culture.

How often have we preachers made comments from the pulpit with all good intentions and with no desire remotely in our minds to offend, but later we realize that someone in the congregation that day took high offense at our words? James 3:1-2, and for several verses following, makes this specific point regarding preachers. The preacher doesn't live who has not at some time and in some way offended without intending to do so. While we should never dilute or downgrade this requirement in Paul's list of qualifications, we must all confess that we have not perfectly complied. Our challenge when we realize that we have so offended one of the Lord's sheep should not be to defend our failure or to attack the sheep, but to work very hard at learning how to avoid a repetition of the problem. I can "cut a lot of slack" for a man in ministry who consistently demonstrates a heart for hungry sheep and a passion to improve in his own ministry. Perhaps a weakness perhaps a strength I can cut very little slack for any man in leadership in a church who is ever ready to defend himself and attack anyone who dares to question him about anything. If I conduct my ministry in a manner that attracts criticism or question, I have failed this test. Paul makes the point I have in mind with these words.

Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed: ( 2 Corinthians 6:3)

Tom Constable comments on this qualification.

irreproachable, means that he should possess no obvious flaw in his character or conduct. There should be no cause for justifiable criticism now or in his past (cf. v. 10) that anyone could use to discredit him and bring reproach on the name of Christ and the church. The Greek word means "not to be laid hold of."<sup>[2]</sup>

Constable's point resonates well with the passage. No man who claims or aspires to a calling to the ministry should ever dismiss or defend his idiosyncrasies, particularly behaviors that tend to offend the sheep he serves on the premise that the behaviors are his personal right or personality and none of the "sheep's" business. If he is that self-centered, he needs to run to the nearest exit door regarding any pretense of ministry.

*the husband of one wife.* Constable also offers instructive reflections on this qualification. After noting that four major views compete to explain this point, he names them.

First, the elder must be married. Second, he must be married only once. Third, he must be monogamous. Fourth, he must be a moral husband.<sup>[3]</sup>

I tend to dismiss the first item. There is no Biblical indication of Paul's having been married, though we may claim circumstantial indications. First Corinthians 9:5 indicates that Paul defended his right to be married, though it does not give us any indication as to whether he was married or not.

What about the second view, married only once? Can we defend as Biblical the idea that a man whose wife becomes unfaithful and forsakes the marriage is thereby unqualified for ministry? I doubt it. While a man's relationship with his wife and children forms a significant part of Paul's list, the quality that Paul requires has to do with the man's conduct and leadership influence over his family, not with every act of every family member. I am more inclined to consider the last two explanations. The man is monogamous. He is not a "womanizer." He is a "one woman man." Further the idea of him being a "moral husband" is more comprehensive than his keeping a marriage vow. He approaches his marriage, not only from an emotional perspective, but he considers keeping his marriage vows faithfully to be a "moral" obligation. He takes it seriously and does not look for rationalizations to justify failing that vow.

*vigilant.* In defining this word Louw-Nida make the point quite clearly.



self-controlled, and orderly' 1 Tm 3:2. In a number of languages νηφάλιος may be idiomatically rendered as 'one who holds himself in' or 'one who always has a halter on himself.'[4]

The man considered qualified for ministry does not react with his emotions. He controls himself, keeps a halter on himself, thinking more about his impact on sheep than on his personal emotions of the moment. Any man who makes it past a presbytery and becomes ordained to the ministry who lacks this quality shall soon fall on his face, for he will often encounter unruly sheep who put his personal emotions to the test.

*sober.* In twenty first century culture and language, we typically associate this word with a person's blood alcohol. Has he had so much to drink that he has lost the edge in self-control, that he might face possible arrest for driving a vehicle under the influence? In first century culture, the word referred more to a person's general perspective and behavior. Did he approach his responsibilities and his life with moderation and balance? Was he sensible regarding issues and decisions that he made? Did he consistently avoid extremes? I like this practical definition, especially as it addresses a man's qualifications for ministry.

*of good behavior.* Is the man modest and other-considerate in his public conversation and behavior? Does he treat sensitive Bible topics with grace and skill, particularly those areas of moral conduct that touch on embarrassing issues for most people in the audience? Would any of those folks hear him present his teachings and consider restricting the message for small children? Paul indicates (Ephesians 5:12) that some behaviors are so heinous to sensitive, moral minds as to be carefully avoided in conversation. We should not speak, even guardedly, about things such people do in secret. If a man lacks in this quality, he shall not exercise his ministry long before he grievously offends by his insensitive manner of dealing with such matters. I highly recommend that any preacher who is considering the need to preach on such issues spend significant time with Proverbs before he preaches the sermon. The Holy Spirit gave Solomon a wealth of material, both in substance and in godly discussions that maintain a righteous balance. We know exactly what behaviors Solomon intends to forbid, but he deals with the issue so as never to offend our conscience or ears. He qualifies!

*given to hospitality.* No mystical word study necessary here, does the man open his heart and his home to the saints? Or does he carefully avoid inviting anyone to his home for whatever the reason? And when people do visit the man's home, do they stay with an abiding sense of tension, always wondering if they should be there, or do they feel comfortable and at home, heartily welcomed.

*apt to teach...*"means apt, qualified, and competent to explain and defend the truth of God. Some elders evidently gave more time to this ministry than others did (5:17), but all had to be competent in the Scriptures (cf. Titus 1:9). The style of communication undoubtedly varied according to individual gifts (mass communication, small group teaching, personal instruction, etc.). Nevertheless all would have been expected to teach only after prayerful meditation on the Word and practical application of the Word to their own lives."[5]

We might think this qualification is so basic to preaching that we need not mention it, but folks who occupy the pews for long periods will tell you that the qualification needs more emphasis than it receives. Be aware. Preaching is more than a respectable, sound, exegetical lecture. Scripture describes a spiritual connection between the man and the congregation, but, more importantly, between the people and God under the influence of Biblical preaching. If you hear a man over time, and that connection is missing, don't push him into a ministry that he likely has not been called of God to occupy. Help the man find the work for which he is qualified and where he will be able to serve and benefit others.

At the risk of repetition, I believe the point is worth the risk. Never consider ordaining a man who fails these qualifications, hoping that ordination will improve his self-confidence and thus move him to transform from unqualified to qualified. Calling and qualification to ministry has very little to do with self-confidence. In fact, self-confidence may well be a young preacher's worst enemy, not a quality that he needs to cultivate. Give him adequate opportunity before the church. If he edifies the church and reflects sound insights into the Scriptures, and if he consistently applies what he says from the pulpit to his personal conduct, consider him for this office. If he fails either of these tests, or any of the others in Paul's list, for that matter, by no means should you consider him for ordination.

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[1]Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, vol. 1, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament : Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., 435 (New York: United Bible societies, 1996).

[2] Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible*, 1 Ti 3:2 (Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003).

[3] Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible*, 1 Ti 3:2 (Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003).

[4] Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, vol. 1, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament : Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., 751 (New York: United Bible societies, 1996).

[5] Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible*, 1 Ti 3:2 (Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003).

## **Gospel Gleanings, August 29, 2010**

Dear Friends,

We often reduce important truths to clichés and thus diminish their weight, when we actually desire to increase their validity. Have you ever heard the quip, "A sermon is better felt than 'telt'"? I suggest a more fitting cliché, if we must reduce vital truth to clichés, would be that a sermon is better lived than spoken. Appropriately, we need to emphasize the personal, moral qualities of any man we may consider for ordination to ministry.

Let me give you an example, one that I introduce briefly in this week's study. Our country and culture--to a large extent, most of the world's culture--is suffering under a major economic "recession." People have lost their jobs, despite being model employees, not because they did something wrong, but because their employer simply did not have the funds to continue this person on the job. We occasionally read articles in the newspapers that, when a job is advertised, even a modest paying job, hundreds of people will apply for it. Godly Christian people may well find themselves in this financial crisis, not at all of their own making. We need to show compassion to such folks, and even help them if we can, during their setback. These folks have not committed some dreadful moral lapse. They have fallen prey to the prevailing bad economy. We need to show them compassion, and even help them if we can do so.

However, the more compelling point, and the point that I believe Paul makes in the list of qualifications for the ministry, has to do with a man's lifestyle, including his attitude toward, and his wise and prudent management of his budget. The question of qualification deals with the man's habitual attitude toward money, and especially his unwise and over-extended spending of what he in fact does not have in the bank. My wife and I use a credit card for simple convenience, but at the end of each month we pay the full balance due. For a Christian to so fail to manage his budget over time that he grows a credit card debt in the thousands of dollars reflects dreadfully bad judgment, the point that Paul confronts in our passage. For five years after my career retirement, I was truly blessed to teach a few business classes in

a local Christian university. The Dean of the School of Business asked me to teach the subject, but always to include Biblical teachings and Biblical ethics in my lectures. One of the classes that I taught, and one that I thoroughly enjoyed, had to do with a Christian's personal management of money, "Family Financial Management." During this time, I discovered that it is sadly common for professing Christians to run up \$50,000 or more in credit card debt! Other than in an extreme emergency, a one-time event, not a lingering and ongoing practice, such an enormous credit card balance reflects habitual failure to follow Biblical teaching in our personal management of our money.

I was recently criticized, mildly so, for suggesting that a man being considered for ordination to the ministry might on occasion be asked to provide the church with his credit history as part of the church's evaluation of his ordination. When I was ordained, my family lived in a small rural community. If a man did not pay his debts faithfully, the word spread and became common knowledge. In our increasingly suburban world, a man might abuse his credit, destroy his reputation in the business community, and truly disqualify himself for ministry, but no one in the church would ever know about it. My passion has nothing to do with increasing the business of the credit bureaus, but with ensuring that a man considered for ordination be truly qualified, something his home church has a Biblical obligation to verify and know prior to calling for his ordination. I have been writing my reflections on Biblical teaching for over twenty-five years. Periodically, people will read something I've written and ask me to publish it. I have published a number of these writings. I have always tried to set a price for these titles that barely covered my actual cost. I could not in good conscience price my writings to include a personal profit any more than I would require a church to guarantee a certain sum to me as a condition that I travel to their church and preach a meeting. Shame on any man who does so. Well, quite enlightening, in over twenty-five years of writing and "selling" my writings to folks who wanted them, only two people have "stiffed" me, not paying for what they requested, and I supplied to them. One of them is a "wannabe" preacher, not yet ordained, and the other, interestingly, is another member of his family. He doesn't live near me, but I must be honest. If he lived in my area, and his home church announced his ordination, and invited me to attend and participate, I'd definitely inform the church that they need to investigate this man's credit history before proceeding with his ordination. Both bad debts amount to less than \$50, so they created negligible personal pain for my bank account. However, the disappointment that these people caused me by their actions impacted me far more severely than their bad debt harmed my bank account.

Scripture requires--yes, it requires--that we pay our debts. When you sign a credit card authorization or a time-purchase contract with a bank or other lending institution, you give your word, your personal commitment as a measure of your integrity and honesty, that you will repay the debt. You enjoy the merchandise or service purchased by that transaction, so you have a moral obligation to pay it, and your failure to do so tells any and all who know about it that you are not a person of integrity, much less a true Christian.

The point of this example underscores the qualities that Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, names as prerequisites for ordination. We should no more ordain a man deficient in these qualities than we

should ordain a man who give public evidence that he believes in heretical doctrines. Back to the first article in this study, "And let these also first be proved." (1 Timothy 3:10)

Sobering reflections,  
Joe Holder

### Ministerial Qualifications: Part 3

*Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous.* (1 Timothy 3:3)

Paul further advances the character qualities and qualifications of the ministry. Again, the point is clear. The man must preach his sermon with his feet before he can effectively preach it from the pulpit. Let's examine the qualities listed in this verse.

1. **Not given to wine.** A sure way to get Christians into disagreement is to bring up the question of alcohol. I have yet to meet a Christian who in any way justifies or rationalizes excessive drinking or drunkenness. Scripture leaves no question regarding this behavior. It is sinful and consistently, strongly forbidden. Just as it is impossible from Scripture to justify excessive indulgence, it seems equally difficult from Scripture to forbid any drinking at all. Jesus turned a rather large quantity of water into wine, His first miracle. (John 2:1-11) Paul instructed Timothy to add a "little" wine to his diet, apparently for health reasons. (1 Timothy 5:23) Whatever the prospective preacher's attitude toward limited intake, Paul clearly imposes a limit onto the quantity that he drinks. "given to wine" indicates a dependency, an addiction. He has given himself to it. The word translated "given to wine" is defined as follows: "a person who habitually drinks too much and thus becomes a drunkard `drunkard, heavy drinker.'"<sup>[1]</sup> Aside from excessive alcohol impairing a person's physical alertness and abilities (for example, driving a car), it also dulls his mind and his moral judgment. No one, especially a Christian, should ever do anything that dulls his/her moral judgments and thus begs for compromise. Paul makes this issue a qualification for the ministry.
2. **no striker.** While this quality clearly disqualifies any man who would try to settle his disagreements with people by a physical fight, it likely more directly applies to a man who fights with his words. He demands that everyone agree on every minor issue with him. If they do not agree with him, he goes after them with a fierce, hostile vengeance. Over the years some of our country's politicians embraced the idea that the president of our country, though not a despot

or a dictator, may use the weight of his office as a "bully pulpit." The very thing they advocate for high politicians is the thing Paul condemns in the ministry.

3. **not greedy of filthy lucre.** Wow! The fellows who "preach" on TBN need to look at this point. Never in over fifty years of preaching have I ever told a church what to give me or what I required financially before I would visit their church. In fact the thought never crosses my mind. Scripture teaches that a church should not only provide for its pastor, but that it has a responsibility for other needs and people in the church as well. Paul devotes almost a full chapter to the question of "widows indeed," indigent widows who were faithful members of a church, specifically, the church's obligation to them. On one occasion Paul sought contributions from multiple churches for the suffering saints in the Jerusalem Church. He indicates less directly that occasionally some of the churches where he labored heard of his needs and sent financial help, though he seems hesitant to ask for it. A preacher must pay his bills, feed his family, and live in the same world as the members of the church. However, when a man begins to respond to greed and to allow that greed for money to drive his ministry, he has failed the qualification and needs to "Get a job," not exploit churches for his appetite.
4. **but patient.** It is subtle, but nonetheless present. Why would Paul associate patience with money? Notice he didn't simply add the next quality, but he rather connected this quality with the man's attitude toward money, the prior qualification, "**but** patient." Typically in the New Testament, when an inspired writer deals with our interaction with other people, people specifically who push our endurance to the limit, we see the word "longsuffering." When inspired writers want us to consider our reaction to situations or circumstances, we see the word "patience" or "patient." Paul uses "patient" here. He addresses our need to be patient in the management of our money. One of the most damaging habits among contemporary Christians in today's culture is that they embrace nearly identical attitudes toward money as the pagan world around them. Sometimes Christians lose their jobs or face other unexpected setbacks. Paul is not dealing with these unforeseen problems, though a responsible, prudent believer should budget for long-term needs, regardless of how much or how little he/she earns. The irresponsible pagan world of our day ignores personal responsibility and will hold out his/her hand for any loan that a bank or lending institution is willing to extend, barely thinking for a moment about his/her ability to repay the loan. When a Christian's credit report shows a long history of bad debts, the "Christian," not really a true Christian at all, has forsaken one of the basic moral requirements of the faith, telling the truth and paying one's debts. Early in my business career, I encountered a minister of a fairly popular denomination who had purchased a piece of equipment from the company that employed me. When he stopped making payments, our credit department started investigating the situation. They discovered that this man had moved from southern California to New York. When they finally obtained his new mailing address, they sent him a legal notice, demanding payment of the debt. He responded that, since he was a minister of the gospel, we should simply write off the debt, and forgive it. Our credit manager was an unbeliever and rather critical of Christians. You can imagine the earful of criticism I heard from this fellow about the self-serving arrogance of this "minister" of the gospel. To sign your name in agreement to pay a debt, and then not to do so, constitutes basic dishonesty. At the heart of the matter, it constitutes lying, a specific violation of one of God's Ten Commandments. No man who claims a call to preach and expects to be recognized as a preacher can fill the office with any degree of credibility if he fails to pay his bills.
5. **not a brawler.** The qualified minister of the gospel is not a contentious, "always looking for a fight" kind of fellow. Consider the contrast between this verbal warrior and Paul's requirement for a minister of the gospel. "And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all *men*, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God

peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And *that* they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will." (2 Timothy 2:24-26)

6. **not covetous.** "greedy of filthy lucre" focuses on money. "Covetous" is much broader. Consider the Tenth Commandment that deals with the sin of covetousness. In spirit, it refers to wanting anything that belongs to someone else. The covetous person wants your house, your wife or husband, your career, your children. Anything that belongs to someone else, for this person, falls into the category of "The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence." In the case of a man who is considered to be a minister, think about the impact of this sinful, self-serving outlook on his ministry, and more especially on a church that he might serve at the moment. He serves a church with, say, fifty members. He visits a church with seventy five members, and some of them are obviously wealthier than the members of his present church. They voice a quiet disenchantment with their present pastor to him, along with a growing interest in him. He doesn't pray or seek the Lord's guidance in his decision. He immediately is "impressed of the Lord" to leave his present church and serve the other church. What happens a few years later, when a hundred-member church shows an interest in him? Or next the church with a hundred fifty members? Instead of serving where God wants him to serve, his service follows his covetous heart to greener pastures for him. Sometimes the story behind the hymn means more than the hymn itself. The author of "Blest be the Tie that Binds" beautifully illustrates the point of this quality in a qualified, godly minister. John Fawcett (1740-1817) was a faithful minister in a small village church in Great Britain. Because of his godly reputation and preaching power, a highly recognized church in the London area called him as its pastor when their long-standing pastor died. The prestige went to his head momentarily, and he quickly accepted their call. He announced his exit to his little village church and prepared to move to London. The village church members helped him pack and prepare for the move, though they were grieved at the thought of his departure. As he and his wife drove off from their home in the village, they waved goodbye to their church friends with many tears. They had not travelled far down the road, tears still flowing, till Fawcett turned to his wife and asked her if she was thinking the same thing he was thinking. With great relief and peace of heart, they turned their wagon around, went back to the village church, and informed the London church that he had decided to stay with this little village church. John Fawcett died as this little church's pastor. No sooner than they got settled back in their village home, but John Fawcett wrote the words to this amazing hymn, a true narrative of his personal experience with this little church.

Blest be the tie that binds

Our hearts in Christian love,

The fellowship of kindred minds

Is like to that above.

Before our Father's throne

We pour our ardent prayers,

Our fears, our hopes, our aims are one,  
Our comforts and our cares.

We share our mutual woes,  
Our mutual burdens bear,  
And often for each other flows,  
The sympathizing tear.

When we asunder part,  
It gives us inward pain,  
But we shall still be joined in heart,  
And hope to meet again.

On a few occasions over the years, I have become discouraged and disheartened with my present situation. While I must confess that "wanderlust" captured my interest momentarily, the love of a dear group of people in Bellflower, California, always brought my heart back to the place where I'd be thankful to die. Whether we are dealing with ministry or with an individual person's personal discipleship, we cannot long drink the intoxicating (far more so than alcohol) drink, "It is all about me," without destroying our true discipleship, our credible Christian witness, and the pervasive contentment that comes from God alone to those who wait for Him instead of stoking their own fire.

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church

16434 Woodruff

Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday      10:30 A. M.

Joseph R. Holder      Pastor



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Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, vol. 1, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament : Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., 772 (New York: United Bible societies, 1996).

## **Gospel Gleanings, September 5, 2010**

Dear Friends,

Our study passage this week attracts a multitude of attitudes and reactions. From outright rejection to despotic preacher rationalizations, you'll see them all. When we encounter passages that attract lightning bolts of controversy, we are most challenged to turn from the lightning and thunder, seeking the Holy Spirit's intended meaning, not the controversial ideas that people impose onto the passage. I never review this list apart from a rather grave self-assessment. How closely do I measure up? In what areas do I need to improve my own behaviors? And I never leave this list without a new list of tasks that I hope to work on to improve my personal qualifications and ministry.

When God calls a man to preach, the man's objective must be God's calling and work, not his own ego or his personal accomplishments. Paul consistently describes himself as both the servant of God and of God's people. When a young man aspires to ministry, and his attitude mirrors the self-promoting attitude of a recent college of Business Administration, he exhibits the wrong motives and the wrong attitude. He shall fail, not succeed. Until we as preachers wholly embrace that God called us to serve, not be served, we are not qualified to preach to, or to lead God's sheep.

The first time I gave serious study to this list of qualifications I was quite young and not yet ordained. Nor was I yet married. I do not believe that the list requires a man to be married to be ordained, but rather that, if he is married, his marriage and family must exhibit the qualities of pastoral service that flow out of this list and related Scriptures. I have been amazed for over fifty years as I observed a rather large number of preachers. In every case the man's position in his family will predict his position in the church and in his ministry. Looking back over these observations, I marvel at God's amazing wisdom and at His clear communication of that wisdom to His people, to His church, and to His ministers. How simple. Do you want to know how a man will interact with church folks if you ordain him? Simple; watch him interact with people now. Watch him quite closely as he interacts with his family. God uses this dynamic to give you an insightful revelation of precisely how the man will function if you ordain him. If his present interaction with people, particularly his family, the people most intimately associated

with him, is not healthy and driven by a loving servant's heart, you cannot expect his ministry to be at all different. It will in fact mirror his personal interactions with amazing precision.

In few areas of qualification do we need to heed the Holy Spirit's instructions more than on this point. "And let these also first be proved." (1 Timothy 3:10)

Blessings,  
Joe Holder

#### **Ministerial Qualifications: Part 4**

*One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity. (1 Timothy 3:4)*

Any discussion of Paul's qualifications for ministry or for deacon typically spend a lot of time on this characteristic, but often these discussions seem to generate more heat than light. One side of the discussion outright rejects that the man's family should enter into his qualifications, a clear rejection of this verse's inspired purpose and authority. Another view requires the man to demonstrate near despotic, iron-fisted domination of his family. What did Paul intend with this verse? What should a church look for in a man regarding this quality as they consider him for ordination? Where is reality versus pretense? I am amused and frustrated at the logical disconnect that occasionally appears in this area of qualification. I recall one situation involving a man who taught a rather hard line on this question, but his wife occasionally would quietly remind the women around her that she gladly filled the submissive role in her family. Her husband was the head, and she was the sweet, submissive neck, but she would gleefully remind these women that the neck can turn the head any way it wishes, and she had a way of controlling her husband without his even knowing she did it. I cannot erase from my mind the subdued smirks on the women's faces when this preacher delivers a sermon on this question to his church.

On the other side of the unbiblical extreme, you will occasionally observe the wife who claims to accept her role, but she somehow misses the simple word "ruleth" in this verse, for she will be sure that everyone knows that she, not God, is in charge of her husband's ministry. They will live where she decides. He will preach where she decides, and most likely *what* she decides.

The simple word, "ruleth," establishes a central truth to this qualification. The man who fulfills this qualification is the leader, not the follower, in his home. No pretense, no cute games about who is the neck and who is the head.

The real issue at the heart of this question is not whether the man is the leader of the home, but **how** he leads it. If he doesn't lead it, he doesn't qualify; period. Thus the operative word in the verse is "well." **How** does he lead his family?

I have observed over more than fifty years of preaching that a man's role in his family will clearly and accurately predict how he will behave in the church. If he "leads" his family with an iron fist, buckle up. He'll be a tyrant of a preacher and pastor. If he "leads" his family in something of a passive-aggressive manner, you'll see the same behavior in church. No, I am not a trained psychologist, so I do not intend this term in any clinical way. The point is simple. If the man passively holds himself aloof from the activities in the home, but occasionally explodes and reacts with excessive emotion, you will see that same behavior in the church. If he resents being reminded by a wise and loving wife of things that need his attention, he will also resent any form of authority or reminder that he is anything less than perfect from the members of his congregation.

The examples of failed leadership and failed qualifications are sadly endless. Let's turn to the positive side of the question. What does a godly man's family look like? How does his family view him? How do they respect him? Why do they respect him?

Family members submit to his leadership out of respect for him (cf. Prov. 24:34; 27:23; Eph. 6:4). The elder's responsibilities in the church are quite parental, so he should have proved his ability in the home before he receives larger responsibility in the church. The home is the proving ground for church leadership (v. 5). Again, Paul assumed children in the home but did not require them, I believe.<sup>124[1]</sup>

Focus on the simple idea, "out of respect for him." His family submits to him gladly, not out of fear. Ah, and they do submit to him; they do not politely ignore him. Earlier in this study we reflected on the distinction between a man "demanding" respect from people and "commanding" it. "I'm the elder, presbyter, bishop. I know more about what the Bible teaches than you. You must submit to my authority." This is the attitude of the unworthy man who demands respect, merely because he has gained the title and position. I recall many years ago an experience that illustrates the incredible parallel between a man's behavior in his family and his behavior in his church. I was preaching a meeting at a church in another part of the country. On this particular morning the pastor and his wife planned to drive two cars to church because of their individual duties and the press of time. She was to drive separately and start doing some things at church. He, with me tagging along in the car, was to drive by a senior citizen's home to pick up his mother-in-law. When we arrived at the home, his mother-in-law didn't immediately run out the front door of the complex. She was old enough that she very likely wasn't physically able to stand at the window looking out to know precisely when her son-in-law arrived. The longer we sat in the car waiting for the mother-in-law the more the pastor steamed and fumed, so much so that I felt rather uncomfortable just being in the car with him. When his aged mother-in-law finally got situated in the car, he scolded her for making him late to church. That

afternoon after church the pastor severely scolded his wife because she was some way responsible for her mother's slowness in walking out to get in the car. No surprise, this man also built a reputation for similar impatient and demanding interactions with the members of the church he served. For several years my wife and I drove by a senior citizen's home to pick up my mother-in-law. Sometime, when the weather was pleasant, she'd get ready and sit on a bench in front of the facility, waiting for us. Other times we'd park and walk up to her apartment and help her down to the car. Did her slowness ever inconvenience us? Yes, it did. Did we fight or fuss about it? No, we did not. We understood that she was old and had to work hard just to be able to attend church at all. I recall one particular Sunday. When we drove into the parking area of the facility, my mother-in-law was seated on the front bench. Although she saw us drive into the parking area, it took her several seconds to process the information and start to stand up and meet us. It dawned on me at that moment what a significant effort this lady exerted, just to go to church on a Sunday morning. She's home in glory now, enjoying a far better "church." My wife and I are thankful for every time we were able to help her mother attend our church and participate in its worship and fellowship, however long we needed to wait for her or assist her to the car.

Peter adds a simple and quite powerful insight into just what Paul intends by his term "ruleth well."

*Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. (1 Peter 5:3)*

No mystery words here; "ensample" is KJV spelling for our contemporary word "example." The worthy and qualified minister leads, not by coercion, intimidation, or by a "bully pulpit" kind of overbearing force. He leads by example. He preaches his sermon with his feet before he preaches it with words in the pulpit. Whether in a simple act, such as picking up a senior citizen so that he/she may attend the church's worship and fellowship, or in the most demanding of tasks, the preacher/pastor must lead by example.

The "How to" of this qualification defines its intent and necessity. No Biblical church models a dictatorship or a despotic government. The New Testament church, as described in Scripture, is far more like a home. People must submit voluntarily, or they will not submit at all in this New Testament model. A friend once told me about a comment that his uncle, a preacher in the prior generation, often made. A loving and very effective pastor, this man quietly observed that people tend to do what they want to do, and you can't force them to do otherwise. The effective preacher/pastor so graciously models Christian conduct that his very action encourages people to want to follow his example.

The second facet of this verse shifts to the children. They are "in subjection with all gravity." What does "gravity" describe in this setting?

behavior which is befitting, implying a measure of dignity leading to respect `propriety, befitting behavior.'<sup>[2]</sup>

This man's home cannot be a storm of defiance and confusion. His leadership must impact it with a sense of dignity and respect.

In the first century culture, children transitioned from childhood and their position in the home into adulthood at a surprisingly early age to our minds, likely around age sixteen. Some Bible scholars suggest that Mary was fourteen to sixteen years of age when Jesus was born. The cultural norms of our industrial, high-tech society require that children delay their entrance into full adulthood. College or other career training replaces the typical vocational training of first century Judaism in which young men began quite young as apprentices in their father's trade. The extended delay of transition from childhood to adulthood imposes demanding strains on both children and parents. However, contemporary culture does not void the teachings of Scripture. Rather it requires that the faithful seek wise, "dignified and respectful" ways to apply Scripture's teachings to their culture, whether they are the parent or the child. In recent years, I have encountered several adults, who allowed their adolescent age to justify open rebellion against their parents and their parents' lifestyle, including early and excessive use of alcohol or illegal drugs of some kind. I have observed a consistent and quite alarming pattern in every one of these people. At the precise age when they began to use these drugs, their emotional development ceased, dead in its tracks. As a consequence, you see a forty or fifty year old body with a fifteen year old set of emotions. A friend with a Ph. D. in psychology from UCLA tells me that numerous studies verify this pattern, something that he often encountered in his practice. However, long before any psychological studies, Scripture verified the dangers of childhood rebellion, as well as the blessings of godly parents and godly children.

The Biblical pattern requires certain behaviors and attitudes in both the father and in the children. Specifically, Paul lays the responsibility on the father to help the child mature in a "befitting," "dignified," "respectful" manner. A despotic father will drive his children to controlling, destructive anger. (Ephesians 6:4) A passive father will leave his children with no moral compass when they most need it.

It is altogether possible that a father may exemplify godly leadership, but his children choose to ignore his example and follow a sinful course. Paul does not reject this possibility. Nor does he use this potential to disqualify the man. His emphasis is on the father's model of leadership and influence. Does the father model the kind of example and leadership in the home that most predicts a good outcome from his influence on his children?

Likewise, a pastor/preacher cannot control how the members of his congregation will respond to Scripture's teachings. He may preach a balanced and complete gospel, but, being sheep as they are, they will make bad decisions and shipwreck their lives. Some folks, even within Paul's sphere of ministry, did just that, but their choice was not due to Paul's failure.

When we examine a man's qualifications for ministry, his example, his role in leading his family, either qualifies him or disqualifies him. In every case the man's attitude toward his family and theirs toward him will predict his success or failure as a minister. This qualification may be the very best predictor available to a church considering a man for ordination. Never ignore it.

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<sup>124</sup> 124. Cf. Lea, p. 112.

Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible*, 1 Ti 3:2 (Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003).

Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, vol. 1, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament : Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., 746 (New York: United Bible societies, 1996).