

The Ordinary Pastor

¹ This *is* a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. ² A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; ³ not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; ⁴ one who rules his own house well, having *his* children in submission with all reverence ⁵ (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); ⁶ not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the *same* condemnation as the devil. ⁷ Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

What should the normal, ordinary pastor of a church be like? It is safe to say that, particularly in South Africa, the pastorate is looked down upon. Pastors are known for spraying Doom in people's faces, for giving people forehead slaps to the ground or hitting them with their Armani suits, for committing adultery and leaving their own spouses but then continuing in ministry. I went to the News24 site and searched "pastor" and here are some of the stories that came up:

"Bail denied for retired Pastor accused of attempting to kill his wife"

"Soweto pastor will plead guilty after being caught on camera viciously attacking ex-girlfriend"

"Eastern Cape church founder faces charges of sexual assault, human trafficking"

But the Bible warned us this would happen. When the stakes are high, and the spiritual battle is real, we should expect that for every biblically qualified pastor, there will be ten or twenty or a hundred charlatans, con-men or chancers using the ministry to gratify their flesh. The Bible does warn people as to what to expect in false teachers, particularly in the books of 2 Peter and Jude.

But the Bible doesn't only warn us about false pastors; it also describes what normal, faithful pastors ought to be and do. First Timothy, being a pastoral epistle, is full of the duties and responsibilities of a faithful pastor. It also gives us what we would recognise in our day as a kind of job advertisement: it tells us what qualities and skills a normal, ordinary, but faithful pastor should have. This passage allows a church to understand what to look for in a new or additional pastor, what to expect from their current pastor. It tells the man considering ministry what he should look for in his own life.

As we said last week, many people and churches sit under unbiblical leadership, but they are partly to blame themselves. Here God gives in fair detail what to expect, and also what to submit to.

So if you want an ordinary, normal pastor who does not spray Doom in your face, or punch you in the stomach, or speak about money 90% of the time he opens his mouth, then this passage will tell you what to look for.

This passage is a simple one to understand, being mostly a list. But within it we can see two aspects of how a man is to be chosen for ministry: the call to the pastorate and the qualifications for the pastorate.

I. The Call to the Pastorate

¹ This *is* a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work.

Paul tells us that there was a common remark or even saying in the early church, and Paul says it is accurate, true, faithful to life: If a man desires the office of a bishop, he desires a good thing.

The first mark of the man who becomes an elder-pastor-overseer is that he desires it. This is the heart of the call to ministry, though it also involves the qualifications and the giftedness, and the

confirmation by the church. But the call begins and continues with the desire for ministry. He is not forced into it. As 1 Peter 5 says, he does not do it under compulsion, but willingly. He should not be constrained to do it for financial reasons, because he cannot do anything else, and definitely not because he hopes to be wealthy through it. No, he should desire it. In fact, the Greek word for desire is a word that means a strong desire, striving for something, reaching out to get it.

But let's qualify what he desires about this. He does not desire the status of being an overseer or pastor. He is not ambitious in a carnal sense, wanting admiration, or to be looked upon as some kind of holy man or to use the term here in South Africa, "Man of God". He is not clambering up some ladder of prestige, or pursuing a career in which he can leapfrog from place to place, getting a better and better deal. He is not desiring what he thinks will be an easy job with a light schedule, because then he is desiring a false idea of what ministry is. Such a man should be, and usually is, quickly found out for the mercenary he is.

On a more honourable note, he does not merely desire to meet the need around us. Millions of people are without the gospel, and professing Christians are starving for good truth. The need is dire. When someone perceives the need acutely, he may feel he has the desire for ministry. He may, but a desire for ministry is more than a desire to meet the great need out there.

Instead, what is it he desires? Verse 1 tells us he desires a good work. Being a pastor is work, hard work, but work of eternal significance. It is the work of teaching God's inspired Word, the work of loving and leading God's people, the work of protecting and providing for God's church. Rightly understood, it is truly one of the highest callings one could aspire to: to handle God's message to man, to deal with immortal souls, to every day work with those things that will last into eternity. That is what the man desires: the good, beautiful, true work of God.

Now it is not merely a desire to teach. It may begin that way: with a love and an enthusiasm for truth, for doctrine, for apologetics. He might love ideas, books, systems of thought. But pastoring is not lecturing, nor is it scholarship. It is not an information dump from one brain to another. It is the desire to communicate truth and see it embodied in people's lives: in their marriages and families and speech and thought life and businesses. He wants to see truth fleshed out in the church, and that means more than teaching: it means one-on-one counselling, discipling others, training leaders, solving conflict, visiting the hospitalised, comforting the mourners, and trying to model the truth he preaches. This is the good work which a man should desire.

You cannot get this desire alone on a desert island. You gain the desire as you do these kinds of work: preaching the Word, counselling others, solving problems, serving. You get in the trenches and serve. They should already be involved in their local churches, taking up ministry wherever they find it. Here is where an idealised or even sentimentalised view of the ministry will be tested, challenged, and buffeted back into reality. If you still desire it after that, then you desire the good work.

Here is what differentiates a man who sees pastoring as a vocation, a calling, a station in life, and a man who enjoys certain aspects of pastoring. A man called to ministry is one who sees the whole package, sees the good work, and desires to devote his life to it. He is eventually restless with spending his time any other way, and has a growing sense that he will best serve his generation by being in vocational, full-time ministry.

But having the desire is not enough. The next thing that Paul gives is a list of qualifications that will verify if the man's desire is now going to translate into actual ministry.

II. The Qualifications For the Pastorate

It was actually a practice in Paul's day to list out the moral qualities of kings and rulers. There are sixteen items listed out, some of them are very similar to each other.

But the most extraordinary thing about this list is how un-extraordinary it is. There are only two items which require special ability; the rest are normal, attainable Christian characteristics. This is not elite, super-Christianity. He does not call for feats of amazing piety: three-hour-a-day prayer times, memorisation of the entire psalter, 25 hours of visitation in every 24 hour-period. No, you will see that this is a list that represents normal, stable, Christianity. Every Christian should strive for these qualifications. An elder is not a super-Christian; he is a stable Christian. He does not represent Herculean spirituality; he represents mature spirituality. This is the ordinary pastor, not the extraordinary pastor.

It is a long list, but not an intimidating list. Many words, but the sum total is attainable for the normal Christian life.

They are not in order of importance, and we can perhaps group them as seems most logical. To group these qualifications into five logical categories, we can speak of his reputational qualifications, moral qualifications, mental qualifications, domestic qualifications, and maturity qualification.

1. *Reputational Qualifications*

Beginning and ending this list are qualities that have to do with reputation:

2 A bishop then must be blameless

7 Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

A pastor must be blameless. This word means *irreproachable, not deserving rebuke, beyond reasonable accusation*. It does not mean perfect; the word is blameless, not sinless. It does not mean he is beyond criticism or can never be rebuked. The word is blameless, not faultless. Critical people can always find something in him they don't like; there is no great skill in finding out that a man has faults. And perverse people will find faults, even where there are none; people criticised Jesus and he was literally sinless and faultless.

That is, there is nothing outstandingly, obviously wrong with his life: morally, personally, domestically. He does not have a criminal record, he isn't being hunted by debt-collectors, people from his work are not shocked that he is in ministry. SARS isn't after him for tax evasion, there are no restraining orders lodged against him by former girlfriends. He isn't a trouble-maker, isn't into shady deals, doesn't operate illegal businesses on his property. He hasn't damaged another's car through road-rage, or someone's reputation through social media. By a normal standard, he has a clean-sheet. Verse seven extends this to the unsaved. People outside the church may not necessarily agree with him; they may not all like him, but he should be known in his neighbourhood, or among the non-Christians he mixes with as a reliable, stable, honourable citizen. Because of his evangelism or doctrine, some unbelievers may hate him. But no one should be able to lay at his feet the charge of being a bad neighbour, a dishonest man.

Without this reputational qualification, Paul says he can fall into the trap of the devil. What is that trap? It is to lure a man into a state of reproach, where the name of Christ suffers because of the

man's own foolishness. The man himself becomes dishonourable, and that dishonour then smears the name of the church. I could spend the rest of the sermon giving you examples of pastors who do this, and you can tell the glee with which some journalists record the outrageous acts of men claiming to be pastors.

2. *Moral Qualifications*

In the man's character, he should not be defeated by the 4Ws: women, wine, wealth, and wrath. In each case, the issue is excess: the inability to put these things in their place, and submit to God's limits.

a) *Women*

the husband of one wife

Now this qualification has been debated by many over the years, with some strange interpretations. In the early church some taught it meant a widower could not remarry and be in ministry, which is not what the passage is teaching. Does it mean he is not a polygamist? Certainly it must mean that at a minimum, and in countries, like ours where polygamy is still practised, a man with multiple wives is disqualified from ministry. Does it mean he cannot be divorced and remarried? My answer would be that depends on the nature of his divorce and remarriage, but likely in most cases, it would limit his ministry severely enough to be disqualifying.

But the heart of this, and perhaps the best translation of the Greek, is that he is to be a one-woman man. It is not required that he be married to be a pastor, but if he is, he must be utterly devoted to that one woman, as long as he and she live. He must be devoted to her emotionally, mentally, and physically. Physical adultery disqualifies him from ministry permanently. But he should not be fooling around with emotional entanglements with other women, cultivating friendships that lead him away from singular devotion to his wife. He should not be a skirt-watcher, and never a flirt. Nor should he be using Hollywood or the Internet to ogle other women visually, and stare at bodies and faces other than his wife's. He is sexually and emotionally a one-woman man.

b) *Wine*

3 not given to wine.

In the original, the meaning is, the one who lingers next to wine. He is a close companion of alcohol, and returns to it frequently for comfort. He cannot be a drunkard and be in ministry. But even if he is not a drunkard, he cannot be dependent on intoxicating substances. If he says, "I need a drink to relax" - well then, in ministry you will need a lot of wine, because there will be plenty to drive up your blood pressure. Whether it is alcohol, or tobacco, or sleeping pills, or legalised cannabis, or hallucinogens, he is not given to them, addicted to them, trusting in them.

Of course, Timothy himself was a total abstainer as evidenced by 5:23.

²³ No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities. (1 Timothy 5:23) Paul had to tell Timothy to use alcohol for medicinal purposes, because Timothy obviously didn't drink alcohol in any form. Though this is a conscience issue, I ask those who serve in this church as pastors or deacons to practise abstinence as a protection, and also for the consciences of others.

c) *Wealth*

³ not greedy for money,...not covetous;

Greedy for money means a man so desirous of acquiring wealth that it brings disgrace and shame. He veers into a consuming lust for wealth, he starts to do questionable things to get money. The word for covetous is literally, "not loving money". The old saying is that the world uses people and loves things; a Christian is supposed to love people and use things. Money is a thing to be used, a necessary thing which we must labour to get. But when the man loves it for itself, when he begins

to not just use money but lust for it, love it, long for it, then his heart has been captured by an idol. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The pastorate is sadly tainted by lovers of money, prosperity gospel preachers who lust for luxury, and yearn for wealth, and so subvert the Word of God so as to become wealthy.

d) Wrath

³ not violent...but gentle, not quarrelsome,

The man in ministry is not to be a bully, a brawler, a striker. He is not looking for fights. Not quarrelsome means he is disposed to peace. He isn't looking to fight with people in his church, or online, or in traffic, or in the shops, or in the corporate space. He doesn't go looking for disagreements and ways to quarrel with others. Short tempers do not make for long ministries. Instead, he is gentle. This is a beautiful word which means he is tolerant of small differences, merciful, courteous, kind. He does not mark every transgression, hammer every fault, he does not insist that people do it his way or agree with him on every jot and tittle. He is diplomatic, not in the compromising sense, but in the way that tries to smooth out the small differences, irritations and annoyances that come with life in a fallen world. ¹⁷ But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. (James 3:17)

His moral qualifications are that he lives with restraint when it comes to those things that destroy lives and ministries: sexuality, money, alcohol or drugs, and anger. To put it another way, he does not live out of his glands or his appetites. Proverbs describes the state of the man who is manipulated by his passions. ²⁸ Whoever *has* no rule over his own spirit *is like* a city broken down, without walls. (Proverbs 25:28) You are a sitting duck, a soft target for the Evil One, if you obey every urge and whim and appetite.

That kind of self-control leads us to the mental qualifications.

3. Mental Qualifications

² temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior...

These three words in verse 2 really overlap. He thinks in a serious, disciplined way. He is a self-controlled man in his thoughts, not given to extremes, sober, restrained. His judgement is prudent and sound, so he lives with moderation.

Good behaviour means his whole way of thinking and acting is orderly, modest, proper. As a man thinks in his heart so is he, so he thinks in a way that leads to outward behaviour that is respectable, appropriate, honourable, it evokes admiration or delight.

You shouldn't hear him talk or reason, and think, "He's wild! He's all over the map! He believes weird and crazy things" You shouldn't hear him talk or reason, and think, "He's on this extreme this week, and that extreme next week." You shouldn't hear him talk or reason, and think, "This man is frivolous, trivial, a joker, an entertainer." You should sense that he thinks seriously about serious things and reasons in serious ways. Disciplined thinking leads to disciplined living.

There are two more qualifications that have to do with the mind, and they are the only qualifications that really have to do with giftedness or natural ability.

The first is that end of verse 2: able to teach. The second is verse 4 ⁴ one who rules his own house well. He must be a good teacher, and he must be a good manager.

A pastor must teach the Word and the Word is a collection of ancient books. It takes a significant investment of time to teach it, and to learn to teach it skillfully. For that reason, a call to pastor is a call to prepare: to spend time learning the original languages, exegesis, preaching, counseling with

Scripture, pastoring through the application of Scripture. A pastor's authority is vested in the Word, and therefore everything he does comes back to expounding and explaining the Word, whether it is from the pulpit or for decisions the church makes, or for application one on one.

He must also be a good manager, and the first proving ground for his management skills is his own home. Church life requires a huge amount of planning, organising, implementing, supervising, correcting, evaluating and administering. It involves leading people, managing finances, organising events, solving conflict, developing leadership. If a man lacks the initiative, drive and discipline to manage a home, with its relatively small amount of people, he will not be able to manage the complexity of a church.

Teaching and management are the only two items on this list that have to do with skill, ability and giftedness.

But even this matter of managing the home is connected to character. And that leads us to

4. Domestic Qualifications

⁴ one who rules his own house well, having *his* children in submission with all reverence ⁵ (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?);

He must lead, direct, manage, guide his own home, beginning with his wife and extending to his children. This does not mean he must be married or must have children; it means that if he does, his home is a litmus test for his ministry. Because the home and the church have many parallels. The church is called the family of God. It is not the pastor's personal family; it is God's family, but he is responsible to lead and manage it with the same care he does for his own. And it is safe to say that when a man's leadership is not working at home, it won't work at church. If he cannot manage time, money and relationships in a group of 3-10 people, then his lack of faithfulness in little will translate to a disaster over much. If a man can just barely keep his head above water with his own home, don't expect him to help others to swim, because he has nothing left over. The man who says I have no time, and no money, and no freedom to help others outside my home is not called to ministry.

His children are supposed to be in submission. While they are under his roof, they are obedient. He has their obedience in by parenting them in a dignified manner. He does not bribe them, scream at them, manipulate them, threaten them, bully them, belittle them, intimidate them, beg them. He parents with God's principles, and his children give him their loving respect. Because if he intimidates and bullies his children, he will do something equivalent with God's people. If he is permissive and neglectful with his children, he will be that way with the church. If he is manipulative and scheming with his children, he will be that way with the church.

God allows, within appropriate limits, for the church to look into a pastor's home and see if it is working there.

Linked to the way he runs his home is the qualification that he opens his home. At the end of verse 2, we read he must be hospitable. This means he is disposed to treat guests and strangers with generosity and cordiality. Whether at church, or in his own home, he tries to put newcomers at ease, he wants to bless others with his own home, food and comforts. His home might be his castle, but it is not shut with the drawbridge raised. It is open and used to bless the church, its members, attendees, newcomers and missionaries.

Lastly, there is the

5. Maturity Qualification

⁶ not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil.

A novice refers to a new believer. It is literally, “newly planted”. He is a fresh young shoot in the Christian field. To place the responsibility of eldership, pastoring, overseeing on a new believer is to load that man with responsibility, pressure, and attention that he is not yet equipped to handle. He has not yet suffered, not yet faced enough humbling trials, not yet stabilised in his disciplines, not learned faithfulness in the dry seasons, not yet gained wisdom through mistakes.

A meteoric rise usually leads to a shooting star. Few are people who can become millionaires in their twenties and not ruin their lives: just look at Hollywood celebrities. Fame, power, wealth that comes too quickly tempts people to become conceited, haughty, enamoured with themselves. So the person who is new believer, but elevated to leading much older believers is greatly tempted to feel pride in his abilities, his giftedness. As pride enters his heart, so a fall is coming. He will fall in one of the areas we've seen: morally, or mentally, or domestically. As he leans on his own strengths, and glories in self, a fall into disgrace and shame is certainly coming.

Instead, the man should have some years behind him. We can't prescribe a number, but we can say it should be enough time for him to gained enough wisdom, experience and insight to lead other believers.

Now, with that list in hand, you can tell again that this is not super-Christianity. It is what ought to be normal Christianity. We should all seek the reputation of being blameless and having a good testimony. We should all seek the moral qualities of being pure in the areas of sexuality, substances, finances and temperament. We should all seek the mental qualities of being self-disciplined, sober, serious-minded, self-controlled. We should all seek to have homes that are properly ordered, parenting in dignified ways, with proper authority and proper submission. A mature Christian man who has those qualities, who is also a skilled teacher and manager, and who desires the good work of ministry is both called and qualified.