

This saying is trustworthy: “If anyone aspires to be an overseer,¹ he desires a noble work.”² An overseer, therefore, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, self-controlled, sensible, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,³ not an excessive drinker, not a bully but gentle, not quarrelsome, not greedy.⁴ He must manage his own household competently and have his children under control with all dignity.⁵ (If anyone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of God’s church?)⁶ He must not be a new convert, or he might become conceited and incur the same condemnation as the devil.⁷ Furthermore, he must have a good reputation among outsiders, so that he does not fall into disgrace and the devil’s trap.

⁸ Deacons, likewise, should be worthy of respect, not hypocritical, not drinking a lot of wine, not greedy for money,⁹ holding the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.¹⁰ They must also be tested first; if they prove blameless, then they can serve as deacons.¹¹ Wives,¹² likewise, should be worthy of respect, not slanderers, self-controlled, faithful in everything.¹² Deacons are to be husbands of one wife, managing their children and their own households competently.¹³ For those who have served well as deacons acquire a good standing for themselves and great boldness in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

¹⁴ I write these things to you, hoping to come to you soon.¹⁵ But if I should be delayed, I have written so that you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.¹⁶ And most certainly, the mystery of godliness is great:

He¹⁷ was manifested in the flesh,
vindicated in the Spirit,
seen by angels,
preached among the nations,
believed on in the world,
taken up in glory.

True Servant

The job market has certainly changed since the last time I was interviewed for a position. My first job, I was a shoe in, Grandpa owned the hardware store and I was one of his favorite grandkids... My second interview only required that I did not wear a shirt and tie to the interview (that was unknown to me at the time.) But different employers look for different qualities and skills depending on the job that needed to be done, be it stocking the shelves or building cabinets.

The question comes up every now and then in the church, “What are the qualities needed in a pastor? What do you want on his resume?” Different skills and characteristics might come up. We want him to be a dynamic preacher, innovative (I hate that word), relate to students and elderly. A well rounded but not too round, people person. We don’t want someone that will put us to sleep in the pew. We want to hear the word. We want someone who is approachable, inspirational, and charismatic but not too charismatic.

More important than what we want, is what God wants of his servants. Before us stands a list of qualifications. Pastors often feel unqualified for what they are doing. The only thing that is necessary is what is on the call, “preach, teach, and administer the sacraments.” But there is comfort in these words. Paul writes to Timothy first about doctrine, then worship, and now those who serve over God’s house. And at first it looks like Paul misses the main qualities of a good pastor but God shows us a True Servant.

He starts with doctrine. “This is *a trustworthy saying*” – *whoever desires to be a pastor – desires a noble task.*” But why is it noble? Why is it a good work? They look out with love and concern for the eternal welfare of others. They bring the gifts of God in Christ to the saints, using the Word of God so that the Holy Spirit might work, strengthen, and grow faith. But desire is not enough. The church needs to be able to trust the pastor and know that he practices what he preaches and teaches. A living faith is necessary and it is evident in the list that comes next.

There are 14 or 15 qualifications depending on how you count them. 7 positive, 7 negative. *Above reproach*: does not mean that the pastor is sinless, but he is free from obvious sin. He’s not a murderer, adulterer, or cheat. *He is the husband of one wife*, this does not mean it is necessary that he have a wife but that he lead a chaste and decent life. Paul wasn’t married, neither was Jesus. So that means an overseer is either married to one woman or celibate. *Self-*

controlled and sensible: He is not driven by passions or impulsive desires. He does not fly off the handle. He is *respectable:* not indecent or crass but one highly regarded. *Hospitable:* receptive towards all people. *Able to teach:* he must hold firmly to the true doctrine that he has been taught and share that knowledge with others. *He is not an excessive drinker:* if he is known for drinking then there might be a problem. *Not a bully but gentle.* He does not drive by force, a little dictator but leads with God's Word without being a pushover. He is not *quarrelsome, not greedy, but able to manage his household competently.* He doesn't argue. He is not a lover of money but he uses it well. *Not a new convert* for he may fall into conceit and sinful pride. And he has a *good reputation among outsiders.*

Well now that I'm uncomfortable maybe you've noticed something about this list. Pastors are sinful people who fail but moreover, few of the Lord's qualifications have to do with his abilities. The qualities listed here are prescribed elsewhere for every Christian, including women. God's representatives are to be known by these characteristics. Their life is being watched 24/7. The deacon, likewise, has a long list but "able to teach" is missing. That's a distinction between overseer and deacon. An overseer is concerned with the spiritual needs of God's people. A deacon is concerned with the ministerial needs and business of the church. But even then the deacon must hold to the true Christian faith, so that he might serve according to the faith. These that Paul describes are true servants of the church: a gift from God to serve his people.

But there is technically only one skill needed and it can be learned. It's the ability to teach. Paul never says the pastor should be a good preacher, counselor, team-player, manager, vision-casting leader, conversationalist, dynamic, or inspirational. The emphasis is on the character of the overseer. If he can teach, then he can do his job, provided he is called. The reason we come to church is to learn about Jesus. Sadly even in the earliest times of the Christian Church, John Chrysostom, his name means "Golden Mouth" and he was quite the preacher, he lamented that people evaluated preachers on their ability to entertain rather than on their ability to teach. Our days are no different. Pastors are no longer given the luxury of simply being clay vessels for the distribution of God's gifts; rather they must be motivators, vision-casters, and inspirers. Pastors are not just to "*forgive you in the place and by the command of Jesus,*" they will "equip, train, and encourage." Rather than find value in their divine call we'd look to what is different, unique about this guy.

We may even refuse to let God speak to us through the man he has chosen for his church. Why? We want to be master of my destiny, captain of my soul, god over my life. We want to be master of our church. We may even subject pastors to performance reviews based on criteria that are not God's and then rather than urge them to stay and do their duty according to the 9th and 10th commandment – "Be gone, take the next call."

But the devil wants to attack and divide the church. If he can discredit the public preacher then the world shouts, "Another hypocrite!" If Satan able to get a minister to fall or fail – think of the damage that can be done, the church is discredited. God is dishonored before the eyes of the world. And pastors come under attack not only from within the church but from within themselves. They fall prey to the same sins and temptations as you. They're lazy. They're depressed. They see that list of qualifications and think, "I've fallen far too short to be considered qualified." Just look at the number of pastors who resign after the first year or within 10 years. Look at the shortage of called workers. Much of the time I don't feel like I know what I'm doing. I want to do more for the church but mostly I want to do what God has called me to do, "Preach, teach, and administer the sacraments." That's what you should want too.

But I've been in heated debates; one even wanted me to sacrifice my family on the altar of the church. But if I am not a faithful husband and father, then I cannot be a pastor. God called me to these vocations in this order, husband, father, and pastor. God has given these qualifications not only to protect you but also his called servants. God challenges us not to be like our culture. Rather he calls to us in his word which does not change and he serves us through his servant called by his Church.

That is the mystery of faith. That Christ would die for a world of sinners, those underserving of grace and mercy: Jesus serves us. This is what is of utmost importance to Paul. *“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.”* and we are the worst of them. But in his service to us he was not only crucified, dead, and buried; he also rose from the dead. Jesus still cares for his church. We can have confidence that he cares for your soul because he not only shed his blood for you, he also calls pastors and sets standards so that you might receive their care. These qualifications aren’t left for the church to determine, they are set by God who created and redeemed you.

Why standards? So that you might trust the message they proclaim and to protect the messenger. It’s not an accident when a pastor is called to serve where he is at. It’s not dumb luck, chance, or fate. It’s God’s will and a tremendous comfort to the pastor. That means I don’t have to worry about where to serve God or maybe I should be somewhere else. This is exactly where God wants me to be. Unless he calls me through his church again and then there will be two places where God wants me to be, but I can’t be in two places and must return one.

God in his wisdom has led his servant to be here at this time and this place for your benefit. *“This is how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.”* You are not part of some earthly organization – you were brought into his household by baptism. There you were made a member of his family. And God has entrusted you with the truth and he wants you to proclaim it. In so doing God makes the church *“the pillar and foundation of the truth.”* We’re the family of God gathered around his Word given through God’s servants and this causes Paul to break out in praise.

Paul uses a word which means, “most certainly, undeniably, beyond question.” but in that word is, “One confession,” The one confession of the church is, *“The mystery of godliness is great.”* It’s not a mystery to the church, but it cannot be known apart from faith. It is not found or sustained through the thoughts or desires, the skills and abilities, charisma or otherwise of any person. It is the work of God in Christ. God came down to earth in Christ. He was *Manifested in the flesh.* That God confined himself to a box. He placed himself in a manger as the incarnate Christ, “Lord Jesus Christ, they manger is, my paradise at which my soul reclineth for there O Lord doth lie thy word made flesh for us.” Though he was consigned with sinners in death he was vindicated, justified in Spirit. When God raised Jesus from the dead, Jesus was justified. His resurrection proved that he was not a blasphemer but indeed the Son of God as he claimed. Seen by the angels could either be God’s holy angels or simply messengers, human sent as messengers who were designated as his witnesses. Preached among the nations, that means God’s word not only came to the chosen nation but also to us, with the result that Jesus is *believed on in the world and taken up in glory.*

God still looks out for his church. He forgives our sin even our attacks on him, his church, and his called servants. It’s beyond reason. But he comes bearing gifts, the forgiveness of sins bound in Word and Sacrament. I, a called and ordained servant of Christ forgive you all your sins, in the stead and by the command of Christ, “You are forgiven.” Then we are reminded of these same truths at the font and on the altar where God’s servants give these very gifts to you. We may be tempted in times of failure to look elsewhere than God’s Word but the church lives and grows only by this confession of the Gospel.

Thank God that your preacher isn’t innovative (I have a strong dislike for this word). In fact the preachers in our circles promise that they will not teach anything new but only the truth. So pray for pastors, encourage pastors, for if they excel in these qualities then you will be served all the more. Then confess together these words of scripture. For God not only calls on the pastor to preach but for the people to respond and to confess, which means to agree with the truth, and respond by joining together with God’s household, which is the church of the living God.

1 Timothy 3:1-16

16th Sunday after Pentecost

September 25, 2022

We are called together. And yes God has a number of qualifications for us. There is no application or interview process. It doesn't matter how you dress or what skills you offer. You get the job because he owns the house and you are his child in Christ. Amen.