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1

The Pastor's Character and Calling

A few months ago a young seminary graduate stood before an ordination council, defended his doctrinal statement, and was about to leave the room while the council decided his fate when from the back of the church auditorium the voice of an old man was heard to insist, "Just a minute, young man. I have one more question for you." The older pastor directed the younger to open his Bible to 1 Timothy 3 and read the passage concerning the character qualifications of an overseer. After the young man did so, the older man, now standing erect, looked intently at the candidate and said, "Young man, does this passage describe you?" Not wanting to sound conceited the young man hedged, trying not to answer the question directly.

"Young man," said the elderly saint, "does or does not this passage describe you?" "Well, I guess so," was the cautious reply. Once again the old man persisted, "Guessing is not good enough. Does this passage describe you or not?" Finally the reply rang out, "Yes, sir, this passage describes me." The old man's retort was immediate, "Mr. Moderator, I have no further questions. I am fully satisfied."

During the course of each school year dozens of inquiries come across my desk regarding men who are being considered by churches and mission boards. I am supposed to rate those individuals according to qualifications that are specified in the reference form. Without exception, each inquires as to the abilities of the person being considered, his personality traits, and the talents of his wife. Rarely does a questionnaire deal with character traits.

Despite the fact that we call ourselves "evangelicals" and claim to be biblical in our approach, we fall far short of the biblical standard in this matter. Although the Bible often states the kinds of things that elders, pastors, or overseers do, nowhere does it specify the talents we may expect in them. Nowhere does it state that they must be exceptional managers, visitors, pulpiteers, or teachers. Although they need those qualities to perform their duties, the Bible's major emphasis is in an entirely different direction; instead of insisting on how well a person is able to perform a certain function, it focuses instead on what kind of a person he is.

The Pastor's Character ' 1

Who is a pastor? He is an ordinary person who knows the Lord Jesus Christ as his personal Savior, has experienced the call of God in his life for full-time Christian service, and knows that he is fit for such service because he meets certain biblical character qualifications. Because the Bible makes this emphasis, I think that it is fitting for us to examine those qualifications prior to looking at the gifts that should be present in a person looking seriously at making the pastorate his lifelong ministry.

"ABOVE REPROACH" (1 TIM. 3:2; TITUS 1:6-7)

The person who will succeed in the pastorate is one who has no hidden agenda, no skeletons in his closet that eventually will come out and haunt him. In his classic *The Preacher and His Models*, James Stalker says:

The great purpose for which a minister is settled in a parish is not to cultivate scholarship, or to visit the people during the week, or even to preach to them on Sunday, but it is to live among them as a good man, whose mere presence is a demonstration which cannot be gainsaid that there is a life possible on earth which is fed from no earthly source, and that the things spoken of in church on Sabbath are realities.

In speaking of a man whom he knew who met those qualifications, Stalker relates:

We who laboured along with him in the ministry felt that his mere existence in the community was an irresistible demonstration of Christianity and a tower of strength to every good cause. Yet he had not gained this position of influence by brilliant talents or great achievements or the pursuing of ambition; for he was singularly modest, and would have been the last to credit himself with half the good he did. The

whole mystery lay in this, that he had lived in the town for forty years a blameless life, and was known by everybody to be a godly and prayerful man.

Stalker ends this appraisal by insisting that "the prime qualification for the ministry is goodness."¹

Such goodness demonstrates itself in a number of ways that will be illustrated as we consider some of the rest of the biblical qualifications.

"THE HUSBAND OF ONE WIFE" (1 TIM. 3:2; TITUS 1:6)

For centuries it has been debated whether or not the biblical injunction that an elder or overseer be the "husband of one wife" means that a divorced person may never have any place within the professional ministry. Personally, I do not think that is what the passages mean. Having stated that, however, let me assert what I say elsewhere in this book, that "divorce" isn't even a Christian word. I believe in the sanctity of marriage and that true Christian marriage is "til death do us part." A pastor, as a model for his people, should work the hardest of all people to keep his marriage intact and flourishing. Few things bring greater discredit to the church of Jesus Christ than pastors who divorce or are divorced by their wives.

Except in the most rare of cases, if divorce becomes a fact, a pastor should step down from his pastoral position and, if he intends to continue in professional Christian service, should plan to serve in some area other than the pastorate. In most cases, as a matter of fact, he will have no alternative. That decision will be made for him by his congregation. If by that time he has not faced his situation realistically, when he attempts to secure another pastorate the facts of the case will dawn on him. Very few congregations, including many of those who consider themselves members of "liberal" denominations, will agree to calling a pastor who has divorce in his background. The single exception to this may be if the divorce has occurred prior to his conversion.

Therefore, if a man is intent on remaining in the pastoral ministry, he had better consider his marriage to be the most valuable asset he has and put as much effort into it as necessary to keep it alive and well. (Later, I will consider in greater detail the relationship a pastor should enjoy with his wife.)

There is, I feel, an even deeper, more important aspect of these verses than avoiding divorce. Many Bible scholars believe that the

1. James Stalker, *The Preacher and His Models* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967), p. 56.

passages often translated "husband of one wife" are more properly translated "a one-woman kind of man." That delves into the situation even more deeply.

In the past few years, the church has been rife with scandal concerning clergymen who are cheating on their wives. Many times they are individuals God has used mightily—men with charm, poise, talents, and ability. Because of their irregular schedules, the daily temptations they face, and a variety of other reasons, clergymen are in a position where temptations of that sort are abundant.

The best advice I can offer to any man in the ministry is that he should flee from those temptations. He should not allow himself even to be present in situations where they are present. He should never go unescorted to see a woman who is alone at home. When he visits a woman in the hospital, he should be absolutely discreet in his behavior, watching carefully where he touches her and then being careful not to hold on too long to what he touches. More than anything else, he should avoid those things that corrupt the mind and erode the conscience. He should be careful not to view films or television indiscriminately, and under no circumstances should he feed the prurient recesses of his mind with pornography. When the seamier aspects of life invade his mind no matter how careful he is to try to keep them out, he should go to the Lord immediately and ask Him to cleanse his mind and make it pure once again. When a woman makes obvious advances toward him, he should flee those advances and should also avoid that woman as much as possible, so that she does not confuse the care he shows for her with what she may view as assent to her advances.

The pastor should avoid all appearances of evil, and this is especially true in his dealings with women other than his wife. The slightest, most innocent gesture may be misinterpreted by a woman living out her fantasies in regard to the pastor. The pastor who encourages this in any way, especially in not-so-innocent gestures of flirtation, is placing himself in a position in which he is likely to experience great trouble.

The pastor must by all means establish and preserve his reputation as being a "one-woman kind of man." He does that by exerting great effort to become and remain extremely close to his wife. He enhances his good reputation by mentioning often in public how attached he is to his wife, how dependent he is on her, and what a marvelous wife she is. If she lacks many "marvelous" characteristics, perhaps he can dwell on the few she does have. If we look hard enough we are bound to find something for which we can praise a person.

"TEMPERATE" (1 TIM. 3:2)

The Greek word here means to be strong in a thing and self controlled, especially in the area of appetites. The key thought here is moderation. We are to avoid excesses whether those excesses consist of observing inordinately long work hours or practicing gluttony in our eating habits. The pastor who greedily pushes his way to the head of the potluck line and loads his plate with unreasonable quantities of food is not going to be a suitable model for anyone, nor is such action likely to endear him to his people. Likewise, a pastor may have sources of income other than his salary, but if he lives in a pretentious manner, dresses excessively well, or continually drives the most expensive cars, he is not being temperate in his behavior. The person who intends on staying in the pastoral office should establish a moderate life-style for himself and his family and stick by it. That does not mean that the pastor has to live in the slums while his parishioners live in mansions. He may live well without being extravagant and without appearing ostentacious.

"PRUDENT" (1 TIM. 3:2; TITUS 1:8)

The word *prudent* carries with it the connotation of sensibility. There are a number of things that may be permissible but not prudent. If a person does those things in certain settings, he is bound to offend or antagonize people. A prudent man is one who does not engage in behavior he knows will be offensive to others. He is not loud or rude or boisterous in places and situations where such behavior is not considered acceptable. He does not flaunt a "macho" image, attempting to convey exaggerated images of his manhood. He is not overly competitive in his activities. I have seen people exhibit imprudence even by playing Scrabble with a killer instinct. God does not need such dreadfully insecure individuals in His pastoral service.

"RESPECTABLE" (1 TIM. 3:2)

The King James translates this word "of good behaviour." Intrinsic to the meaning of the Greek word is the idea of orderliness of personality, modesty, and decorum. Recently I heard a lady say, "It is so nice to have a pastor who you know always will say the appropriate thing. He actually thinks before he speaks. We haven't always had pastors like that." God wants people who have a sense of dignity about them. I do not mean stuffy people. I mean people who know how to conduct themselves properly. It is sad when the people of a congregation are continually being embarrassed by the speech and

actions of their pastor, who should be a model for them. Coarseness, vulgarity, off-color jokes, offensive actions, lack of table manners—none have their place in a person who is going to occupy the position of pastor. Many pastors who are morally pure and have hearts right before the Lord will engage in some inappropriate action that repels others from accepting any ministry they would have been able to render.

Respectability pertains not only to speech and actions but also to dress. The person who hopes to become and remain a pastor will be one who finds out what the standards of respectable dress are in his community and then observes those standards. Standards, of course, will differ with the community. In Hawaii it is often considered respectable for a pastor to conduct the morning worship service in a short-sleeved shirt, without tie or suit coat. In North America that would be considered inappropriate. There is a standard of dress considered respectable for any professional in each community. The pastor should observe that standard.

In the seminary in which I teach, as a part of a course in philosophy of ministry I regularly bring in our assistant librarian to teach a class in etiquette. Unfortunately it probably is one of the classes that is received the most poorly. I say unfortunately because it is the class that often is needed the most. Not many of our graduates fail in the ministry because they fall prey to doctrinal errors. Numbers, however, have made an improper impact on the ministry simply because they are "klutzes," are continually making themselves offensive to people—and they will not change. Simple things—such as practicing acceptable table manners, placing a mint in their mouths when dealing with people in close proximity, and refraining from picking the nose, ears, or teeth in public—would give those people substantial mileage in being more acceptable to others. If they learned a few social graces in addition and were able to remember to express gratitude to people for every kind action no matter how small, they would be making major progress toward becoming the type of respectable person the Bible demands for the position of pastor. The person who basks in his crudeness and considers it a necessary part of his "macho" image probably should seek another vocation besides the pastorate.

"HOSPITABLE" (1 TIM. 3:2; TITUS 1:8)

The Greek word here means to be a "lover of guests." The Bible indicates that the person aspiring to the ministry must be a hospitable person. That does not mean that a pastor and his wife do not

need privacy. It does mean that they will agree that their home is, in part, a tool for ministry to others. If they are hospitable, they will have a rich ministry themselves, and they will establish an appropriate model for others.

Some years ago my wife and I moved into a new community and began attending a nearby church. Although the program of the church was acceptable, we were chagrined to observe that in the four months we attended there, no one made any effort to invite us to their home or even to suggest that we join them at a restaurant for a snack following an evening service. After we had ceased attending the church, someone gave us a plausible explanation for its lack of hospitality. The pastor and his wife very seldom entertained in their home, and when they went out for a snack, they always did so with the same, small group of people. Because the pastor and his wife were not hospitable, the church lacked a positive model of hospitality and became known as an inhospitable church. Christians are to be hospitable people, and unless a prospective pastoral couple intend to serve as models of hospitality, they probably should consider some other area of Christian service.

There is the other extreme of course, where the pastoral couple is so hospitable they seldom have a moment of privacy. People seem always to be with them, and the pastor and his wife wear themselves out. There is a point where a person in public ministry needs to get away from people and retreat to the quiet confines of his home. That should not be carried to an extreme, however, to the extent that the pastor and his family live in virtual seclusion. The key is moderation, and the goal is a happy medium between the extremes. (More will be said concerning hospitality in the chapter concerning pastors' wives.)

"ABLE TO TEACH" (1 TIM. 3:2; 2 TIM. 2:24)

Elsewhere in this book I will speak to the dangers of those who are caught up in what I call the "pastor-teacher syndrome." That occurs when a pastor barricades himself in his study, spends forty-plus hours a week wrestling with the text, and refuses to be out among the people or to carry on the many so-called perfunctory duties of the ministry. God has room for very few of those types today, and if a person going into the ministry views himself as carrying on a "specialized practice" he had better reorient himself. In most cases, the person entering the pastorate is going to find himself called upon to assume the role of "general practitioner."

However, regardless of how broad and diversified he finds his

ministry, a major portion of that ministry must necessarily be centered upon teaching. He will be called upon as a teacher in several roles. First is his pulpit role. This is the most public expression of his teaching tasks, and he should place a great deal of effort into it making sure that his sermons are interesting, instructional, and well-delivered. A good clue as to whether or not a person will be a good preaching teacher can be found in whether or not he is an interesting person. Before a person aspires to the ministry, he should sit down with others who will rate him objectively in his communicative skills with people, his present pulpit abilities, and his pulpit potential.

Preaching, however, is not the sum total of his teaching responsibilities. He will be called upon to interact with parishioners in a number of small group settings where he will find other less didactic teaching methods more appropriate and effective.

Finally, a great deal of his teaching will be accomplished by modeling. If he aspires to be a teacher, he had better learn how to be a proper model. Sometimes teaching by this method—either negatively or positively—is the most powerful teaching of all. Again, it will require that he be an interesting person, someone who will be able to attract others to him for that type of discipleship training. In many instances, and especially in those areas in which we desire to see attitudinal changes in others, one-on-one discipleship training is potentially the most effective of all teaching methods. Not everyone can do it successfully, however, and a person should weigh carefully whether or not he has the ability before he aspires to the pastorate.

“NOT ADDICTED TO WINE” (1 TIM. 3:3; TITUS 1:7)

The text here no doubt is referring to those who are such habitual users of wine that they are physically addicted to it. I do not think that there are many alcoholics in the pastorate, although the danger is as viable in that occupation as in any other. However, it is my conviction that there are a number of pastors and wives who are addicted to wine in the sense that they feel that they must continually use it both privately and publicly in order to demonstrate what they believe is their freedom in Christ. Note that when the text to which I referred was written, the consumption of alcoholic beverages had already become a serious enough problem that Paul had to warn against overindulgence. The problem has not diminished, but rather it has reached such huge proportions in our generation that had Paul lived today and had seen the carnage and heartbreak caused by alcohol abuse, I am convinced that the apostle would have advised the servant of God that a good rule of thumb was to avoid the use of alcoholic beverages entirely.

If anyone is to avoid being a stumbling block to those who are weak, surely it should be the pastor. How sad it would be for a pastor who has given his life to help others to find out that someone had become an alcoholic through following an adverse example he set. In addition to physical addiction, I believe that addiction may include being addicted to an idea or to the carrying out of a practice. Surely those types of addiction should be avoided so that we who are in the pastoral role may present a wholesome and exemplary image for our Lord.

"NOT PUGNACIOUS" (1 TIM. 3:3; TITUS 1:7)

The other day I was speaking with a Midwesterner concerning a pastor who was experiencing problems with the government over an issue involving the formation of a Christian school in his church building. Both of us had agreed that the pastor had received "poor press." Media had pictured him as an irrational, unreasonable, Bible-thumping fundamentalist living in the dark ages. My friend from the Midwest observed that he had been living close by when all of the action was going on. Unfortunately, the pastor in question had been so pugnacious in his actions that he had played right into the hands of reporters who wished to capitalize on the stereotype. It seems that the pastor enjoyed a good fight, was happy to engage in one as often as possible, and had brought on himself most of the adverse media coverage.

I have known many pastors who were continually bristling for a fight. They were ready to engage in such action almost anytime and in any place. There is a sense in which we who are Christian leaders always should be ready for a fight if we can identify clearly that our adversary the devil is the person we are fighting. However, I am firmly convinced that the devil sidetracks many Christians and diverts their efforts against him by convincing people that they are fighting him, when, in reality, they are really fighting other Christians. A feisty person with a perennial chip on his shoulder had better wait until he can gain better control of himself before attempting to pastor.

If we could get to the bottom of a majority of the church splits and incidents that resulted in pastors being asked to leave churches, we would probably find that the root cause was not a theological disagreement at all but was a case of people who just could not or who chose not to get along with each other. In many of those instances we could trace the difficulty to a pastor with a fiery spirit who did not control his temper but, instead, lashed out in anger at someone in the congregation.

People who have this problem and look forward to pastoral service would be wise to use whatever means necessary, including professional counseling, to overcome it before going into the pastorate. If a person already is in the pastorate and suffers from an easily-provoked temper, he should run, not walk, to a competent Christian counselor who can help him overcome his difficulty before disaster results. That does not mean, however, that the pastor should be a Casper Milquetoast who never stands up to anyone about anything. It does mean that before he agrees to engage in a fight he makes sure that he is fighting Satan and not some other Christian, and that he makes certain he is defending some biblical principle and not just his own ego or one of his pet methods.

"GENTLE" (1 TIM. 3:3; 2 TIM. 2:24)

How many unfortunate incidents in the church could be avoided if Christians could learn to be gentlemen and gentlewomen. I am reminded of the little girl who was heard to pray, "Lord, please make bad people good, and good people nice." Unfortunately some pastors have all the finesse of a steam roller, pushing their way through many obstacles, injuring the saints as they attempt to make changes in the church.

The world is hungry for someone who is genuinely kind and gentle. Such a person may find, at times, that people take unfair advantage of him, but that is their problem, not his. If they cannot understand what he has to offer, they are the unfortunate ones. Recently I heard a Christian lady say, "Not only does our pastor feed us well from the Scriptures, but he makes it plain in so many ways that he really loves us. When we make mistakes, he is so patient and understanding. Even when he has to correct us, he does so in such a gentle manner." The lady who said this was sure that her church had got an extraordinary pastor. However, if we look realistically at the criteria the Bible lays down, a spirit of courtesy should be the norm among pastors instead of the exception. Before some men enter the pastorate, they need to spend time with God, allowing Him to grind off some of the coarse, rough edges of their lives and asking Him to make them truly gentle and kind.

"UNCONTENTIOUS" (1 TIM. 3:3; 2 TIM. 2:24)

Even though some people could not be described as pugnacious, they certainly should be labeled contentious. These are the people who glory in a good argument. Since they often are bright and articulate, many times they will end up devastating their opponents with

words. The story is told of a certain theologian who was called to debate an atheist on a college campus. His logic was impeccable and his rhetoric impressive. In the course of the debate, he figuratively destroyed his opponent. Despite the fact that he won the debate, he was booed off the stage.

My father used to say, "A man convinced against his will, is of the same opinion still." One of the serious mistakes some Christians still are making is trying to argue a person into the kingdom of God. Often by the time a person has gone through college and is into seminary, he has fine-tuned the art of arguing. By the time he finishes seminary he may have developed it into one of his greatest skills. Such individuals enjoy nothing better than a good argument. Yet the practice of habitually arguing has an adverse effect on unbelievers and a devastating effect on Christians. When asked to express his opinion on a subject, a pastor should express it in a clear, gentle, nonthreatening manner. He should avoid being drawn into an argument. Arguments are usually destructive, and if a person has tendencies toward being an arguer, he should work to curb those tendencies before he undertakes a pastorate.

"FREE FROM THE LOVE OF MONEY" (1 TIM. 3:3; TITUS 1:7)

In my many years in the pastorate I have never established a dollar amount as the basis for my coming to a church. When church leaders have asked what I thought I should receive, I have asked them to make a comparison between the salaries of other men in churches of similar size, take into consideration the cost of living in that particular community, and then compare the figure they have arrived at with the dollar amount the church believes it can raise. If I felt that I was genuinely called of God to that group of people, I knew that God would be faithful in meeting my needs. He never has let me down. Through the years, never have we lived lavishly, but God nevertheless has consistently supplied more than our needs.

I have used this personal illustration because I am becoming increasingly alarmed at the number of young men graduating from the seminary who have exaggerated ideas of their own worth to a church as a professional. Often these men state a minimum figure they believe is necessary for them to receive before they will agree to serve the church. Even though they are still an untested product, many demand a salary that exceeds by several thousands of dollars the salary received by many of their seminary professors. I am not opposed to God's servants living comfortably. What I am concerned about are those who make salary a major consideration and never seem happy no matter how much money comes their way. That, to me, is an unworthy motive to seek the pastorate.

MANAGING "HIS OWN HOUSEHOLD WELL" (1 TIM. 3:4)

It is not true that the "preacher's kids" should be expected to be brats. History proves that an inordinate amount of "P.K.'s" have turned out exceptionally well, even to the extent that a much higher percentage of them succeed in life than the children of people in almost any other profession. The words of the Scripture here read, "Keeping his children under control with all dignity." The statement presupposes an understanding relationship between the father and his children. It requires that he be consistent in his discipline and true to his word.

If the pastor is to do that, he will not be able to do it alone. The mother of his children will have to work in partnership with him. If the pastor is inconsistent in his discipline to the extent of ignoring the children when they need discipline in public, or if he continually flies off the handle at every little infringement of his rules, he has deep trouble on his hands.

Unless the pastoral family is willing to take steps to make theirs a model family, I do not believe that the father of the family should be in the pastorate. That does not mean that the children should be expected to be perfect in every way. Expecting perfection is an impossibly hard burden to place on any child. It does mean that the children, in general, should be kept under control, should not be allowed to be "rowdies," either in the neighborhood or in the church building, and, when they transgress, should be brought back into control promptly and in a dignified manner.

A pastor should be a model of loving discipline. He should love his children more than his job, be extravagant in his expressions of love for and praise to them, and should treat them as genuine human beings capable of profound thoughts that can contribute to this life if he will but listen to them. Treating children in a denigrating fashion certainly is not God's way. When they are treated with the dignity prescribed in the biblical account, they will have a far better chance of growing up as productive individuals.

A family with continuously uncontrollable children is not a suitable model for a congregation. Unless parents can manage the art of parenting, they should not engage in the pastoral ministry.

"NOT A NEW CONVERT" (1 TIM. 3:6)

In the Christian community we have emulated the culture around us in that often we are likely to create a religious "superstar" out of a new convert, especially if that person was a celebrity prior to his

conversion. The people we treat in this way begin to speak with authority on many subjects before they have had any biblical training. On the other hand, sometimes we postpone inordinately the process of their entering into Christian leadership, by requiring them to graduate from Bible college or seminary before assuming a pastorate. Yet during the course of their formal training, they may somehow bypass substantial on-the-job training or experience in a local church. The scenario may thus look something like this: The person is saved and immediately his potential gifts are recognized. He is urged to go on to seminary, which he does immediately. During seminary, in addition to working on his studies he finds it necessary to take a job in order to support his family. With the cumulative demands of family, seminary, and employment, he has little time left to get involved meaningfully in a local church. He graduates from seminary and, naturally, seeks to become the pastor of a church. *After all, he thinks, this is what everyone said my training was to accomplish.* Nevertheless, as far as training in an actual church is concerned, he is still a relatively new convert, an untried product. Often, when a church does call him, disaster is a result.

My only surprise in all of this is that more of those people do not end up as disasters. The grace of God must be generous indeed! The solution for this? Every person who is relatively young in Christ and who has not had a great deal of experience working in a church should seek as his first job the position of assistant pastor under an experienced pastor who will counsel and train him. When the senior pastor believes the man is ready, he should recommend him for pastoral service. Since assistant pastor positions are not always readily available, it may be that a seminary graduate who is still a rather recent convert may have to pursue secular employment while he completes his training in this manner.

ENJOYING A "GOOD REPUTATION WITH THOSE OUTSIDE THE CHURCH"
(1 TIM. 3:7)

It should be standard procedure that a church considering a person to be their pastor go into the community where the man is presently living and talk to the non-Christians with whom he has contact to see what kind of a reputation he has among them. What sort of a neighbor has he been? Has he exemplified the Lord Jesus Christ among those in his neighborhood? How has he reacted when a neighbor's child beat up his child? What about those people with whom he has carried on business? Was he always looking for a special "deal" because he was a clergyman? Did he pay his debts promptly? Was he

honest and straightforward in his business dealings with members of the community?

If he was in a business other than pastoring, what kind of a business reputation did he enjoy? Did he treat people honestly and squarely? Did he back up the product he was representing with service to his customers? If he was employed, what did his boss and his fellow workers think of him? By now the reader is discovering on the basis of this list of characteristics that many people already in the pastorate should not be there. Conversely, at least on the basis of those characteristics, there may be many fine Christians who are missing out on the thrill of serving God in the pastorate because they are not aware that they already meet all the character requirements.

"NOT RESENTFUL" (2 TIM. 2:24)

The words of Scripture here read "patient when wronged." The world's culture is so paranoid that many Christian leaders fall into the trap of that paranoia and imagine that everyone is out to get them. When someone does wrong them, it just confirms their suspicions. As a result, they become bitter and resentful, not remembering that the person who wronged them may have done so inadvertently, may have mistaken the leaders' motivation in a certain action, or may have responded rashly out of a set of frustrations he had experienced that particular day. If the Christian leader goes about piling up statistics against people he suspects have wronged him, he is going to become a bitter, disillusioned man of questionable value to the kingdom of God. A rule that I have found helpful is to expect the best of everyone. If a person does not live up to that expectation, forgive him, because he is human. If he persists in offensive action toward you, take him out to dinner and see what is bothering him. If he still persists, stay out of his way. Concentrate your efforts on other people, but, at all cost, never speak disparagingly of him.

"HAVING BELIEVING CHILDREN" (TITUS 1:6)

The Scripture here further elaborates on the attitude of children, saying that they should not be "accused of dissipation or rebellion." The crowning success of every ministry is for the pastor's children to grow up to know, to love, and to live for the Lord Jesus. Yet salvation is by individual choice. No matter how we live our lives before our children, there is no guarantee that they will make that choice.

If a majority of a person's children live for Christ, then we may

conclude that the one or perhaps two who do not are guilty of rebelling against God and their parents. If a majority of the children go wrong, then serious questions need to be asked as to the effectiveness of the parents' witness. Most of those who are just going into the pastorate do not know, of course, how their children will turn out. However, they are obligated to take every step possible to see that their children are exposed to the gospel and are encouraged to receive Christ as Savior and Lord.

When the children do rebel when they grow older, the parents must come to the point where they realize that their children are going to have to sink or swim according to the decisions that they themselves have made. The parents cannot bail them out forever. During that transition period between childhood and adulthood, however, it is the responsibility of a Christian parent to require that as long as the child lives in his parents' home or receives financial support from them, he live up to the expectations of their life-style. If he chooses not to do that, he must suffer the consequences of his choice. He should be required to find another place to live at once, or his financial support should be cut off. If a person intends to make what he believes are adult decisions, then he should experience the consequences of his decisions and the responsibilities of an adult. When a child's parents have done all they can for him, that child must be judged on the basis of his own decisions, not those of his parents.

"NOT SELF-WILLED" (TITUS 1:7)

What we are urged to avoid in this passage is being selfish and arrogant in the choices we make. Unfortunately, some pastors are so self-oriented that they believe the sun rises and sets on the things they accomplish. A person need only talk with them to find that their conversation is dominated by a recital of their activities and concerns. The pastor is called primarily to be a servant, to give of himself as did his Lord before him. The person who is continually concerned about his satisfaction, the accomplishment of his goals, the forwarding of his career is not a servant.

"NOT QUICK-TEMPERED" (TITUS 1:7)

We talked some of the point made here in Titus when we considered the pugnacious person, the one looking for a good fight who continually walks around with a chip on his shoulder. There are

other persons, however, who though not actually pugnacious by nature, go through life with their springs so tightly wound that any little problem sets them off. They have a hard time controlling their tempers. Generally they are sorry after the incident has passed, but by then the damage is irreparable. Jesus does not condemn anger *per se*. But he does call misdirected anger "sin." We are to be angry and "sin not."

Sometimes a person's temper fluctuates with his blood sugar. A person who can control himself quite well most of the time will find himself flying off the handle at other times. Often he can trace those unfortunate times to periods when he was excessively tired, hungry, or both. A person who is quick-tempered all of the time probably needs to see a counselor and stay out of the pastorate until he is able to resolve the problem. A person who is periodically quick-tempered should examine his life-style, his sleep pattern, and the kind and quantity of food he consumes. It may be advisable for him to schedule a short nap on the days he faces a stressful agenda. He may learn to carry nutritious snacks with him and use them to revive a low blood sugar level. (In a following chapter about the pastor's wife, there is a section dealing with how the wife may keep her husband on a more even keel and not provoke him.)

A LOVER OF "WHAT IS GOOD" (TITUS 1:8)

Earlier in this chapter I quoted James Stalker's remark that the principle role of a pastor in any community is to exemplify goodness. As a further elaboration of that remark, I would like to assert that not only is the pastor to practice goodness, he is to love that which is good. When we love something, we devote time and energy to it. Those who are to serve Jesus Christ in the pastoral ministry will be those people who already have proved themselves to be pursuers of the good. They choose to benefit from the companionship of other good people. They do not waste their time and energies pursuing things that are bad or that pollute the mind and body.

I have had students at the seminary tell me they have watched so-called adult movies in order to get a perspective on what the world faces. That same person would not wade through a garbage can to find his dinner. If he did, he would come up a mess, smelling from garbage. A good man fills his mind with what is good so that increasingly he can think more good things. It is better for a person to be considered naive in the eyes of the world as long as he is considered a good man by God.

"JUST" (TITUS 1:8)

This characteristic is close to the last. A pastor is to be just in the sense that he is to be innocent, holy, and righteous in his character and actions.

"DEVOUT" (TITUS 1:8)

The King James translates this word "holy." The pastoral servant of God is to be a pious man and one whose piety stretches to more than outward symbols. His devotion should spring from intense love for God. His attitude of devotion to God will be contagious among his people.

"SELF-CONTROLLED" (TITUS 1:8)

I wonder why the Holy Spirit listed so many synonyms for this quality in the life of a pastor. Could it be that He knew where a great deal of the trouble might lie? Probably a majority of the characteristics we have considered could be lumped together under the one broad heading of self-control. The person who with the help of the Holy Spirit can control himself certainly will have no problem succeeding in any task that God had in mind for him to do.²

Thus far we have considered many of the biblical characteristics necessary for a person to succeed in the pastoral ministry. There are some practical considerations as well, and these will be dealt with in the next section of the chapter as we consider what constitutes a "call" to the ministry.

Call to the Ministry

The sixth chapter of Isaiah records a unique call to ministry, in which the prospective prophet is caught up in an ecstatic vision and the Lord commissions him for the work. It would be very helpful if God planned a similar experience for all who showed an interest in the ministry. The fact is that He does not.

On almost every ordination council on which I have ever sat, inevitably the question has arisen, "Will you share with us your call to the ministry?" On most occasions the candidate fumbles for a bit

2. W. Robert Cook, paper, "Biblical Concepts of the Discipline of Church Leaders." I am indebted to Dr. Cook for the list of biblical qualifications discussed in this chapter.

and then tells how during the ministry of Brother So-and-So at his home church, an invitation was extended and the candidate "felt" the call of God on his life for the pastoral ministry. Is a call like that good enough? Is a subjective "call" the way God leads men to the ministry today in lieu of experiences such as Isaiah went through?

SUBJECTIVE CRITERIA

There is indeed a subjective side to a call to the ministry. People do go into the pastorate because they feel what they consider to be God's claim in their lives toward pastoral ministry. I would not try to negate either the authenticity of their feelings or their claim that the feeling comes from God. Accompanying that feeling, however, is often another, slightly different feeling, one that is not praiseworthy. The person who has this feeling wants so badly to be a pastor, that he will sacrifice almost anything in order to accomplish his goal, including the comfort and welfare of his family. If God is really in the call, I have no doubt that He can supply his needs and bless his efforts. However, if the desire the man has is purely subjective, and he is living out an unrealistic fantasy, then disaster may be the result.

OBJECTIVE CRITERIA

Along with subjective criteria, a person also must consider in a calm, cool manner objective criteria that are sometimes distressing. First, he must ask himself if he is fit for the ministry. In order to determine that, he must examine himself in light of the characteristics listed earlier in this chapter. If he does not meet those criteria or cannot foresee his being able to mature to the point where he does, he should abandon plans for the ministry, at least until he is able to observe a great deal more maturity in his life than he yet possesses.

Second, if he truly can say yes to all of the biblical requirements, he must ask himself certain practical questions. Does he really like people enough to give himself in service to them unselfishly? Is he comfortable with people, or do they threaten him? Would he be able to relate meaningfully to people in all kinds of situations, including those that may not be considered especially pleasant? Is he able to confront people lovingly? Is he an organizer, a motivator who is able to inspire people to undertake even greater and more exciting tasks? Is he an interesting person himself, or do people yawn at the very thought of his arriving? Even if he has a high degree of piety, if he is not a "people person," or is incapable of becoming one, he probably is not called to the pastorate.

Third, he must ask himself if he is able to communicate well with people. Is he capable of organizing his thoughts in logical fashion and presenting a sermon or lesson in such a way that people will follow his thoughts and do something about what they hear? Is he fluent of speech? I have heard cases where God has taken stutterers, given them great fluency, and overcome the problem for His glory. However, it would be better for the stutterer and for the church if he received that marvelous deliverance before he entered the pastorate, instead of becoming a pastor first and subjecting his people to the problem while he waited on God for healing.

I have known persons with speech defects who were effective speakers. Yet in every case they also possessed extraordinary gifts such as a strong and engaging personality or the ability to make content so captivating that the listener soon forgot about the impediment. Unless a person is extraordinary in ways such as those, and that fact is confirmed by the church, he probably should look for another avenue besides the pastoral ministry to serve the Lord.

Does the person have good physical stamina? Will he be able to hold up under the long hours demanded of him in the pastorate? How does he perform under stress? He most certainly will experience that in the pastorate.

Does the prospective pastor have administrative and leadership abilities? He may not be aware that those areas will consume a great deal of his time and will tax his talents, but they will, and he should be prepared for it.

Is he an attractive person? I am not referring necessarily to his appearance, although he should do everything he can to enhance the way he looks. People are attracted to others for many other qualities than appearance. How does he interact with children? Is he comfortable with the aged? Does he have a nice way about him when he deals with people?

Is he a disciplined person? Will he be able to manage his time wisely so that he can accomplish the many tasks required of a pastor? A person who continually wastes time and procrastinates to the extent of avoiding unpleasant duties probably should procrastinate before responding to what he feels is a call.

Is he a realistic person who is cognizant of what life is all about, one who will neither have unrealistic expectations of people nor try to impose unrealistic demands on them?

Before accepting any call to the ministry, the prospective pastor is wise to ask himself two additional questions. First, has he experienced sufficient training to prepare him for this challenge? Second, if he is married, is his wife biblically qualified to take on the role of a

pastor's wife, sympathetic with his role as pastor, and willing to enter into partnership with him in the ministry to which he has been called? These matters will be covered in greater detail in subsequent chapters, but they need to be mentioned in this chapter, because they are crucial to a decision a person makes about becoming a pastor.

The pastorate is a demanding job and has unique requirements as its prerequisites. Not everybody can be a pastor—only those who meet the biblical requirements, sense the call of God on their lives, and have the appropriate gifts needed to make the office a success. Those who lack any of those may find that the pastorate is distasteful and disastrous for them. However, those who heed a genuine call from God, examine their lives, and find that they meet the biblical, subjective, and objective criteria that I have listed may step forward boldly. When they do so they will find the pastorate the most rewarding and satisfying job they have ever tackled. There is no higher calling than the pastorate. No wonder that the prerequisites of the call are so specific and demanding.

Questions for Discussion

To determine whether or not you are really fit for the ministry, you may want to answer these questions for yourself:

1. Do you like people enough to give yourself in service to them unselfishly?
2. Are you comfortable with people, or are you easily threatened by them?
3. Are you able to confront people lovingly?
4. Are you an organizer, a motivator, a person who can inspire people to undertake ever greater and more exciting tasks?
5. Do you have the capability of being an interesting person, or do people yawn at the very thought of your appearance?
6. Are you able to communicate? Can you organize your thoughts in logical fashion and present them in such a way that you will provoke attention?
7. Do you have physical stamina? Will you be able to hold up under long hours and during times of stress?
8. Do you have administrative and leadership abilities?
9. Are you an attractive person? Are you comfortable with children? with the aged?
10. Are you a disciplined person? Are you able to manage your time wisely?

11. Are you able to project realistic expectations upon people and thus solicit their support and encouragement?

12. Are you sufficiently trained for the challenge of the pastorate?

13. If you are married, is your wife biblically qualified to take on the role of a pastor's wife? Is she sympathetic with your role as pastor? Is she willing to enter into a partnership with you in the ministry to which you have been called?

Helpful Resources

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