

A Faithful Minister 2) Meets Qualifications

Titus 1:5-9 • 2021-07-18 • Series: A Faithful Minister



I still have a vivid picture in my mind of a college class from around twenty years ago. I was enrolled at Martin Luther College, our church body's worker training college. It was one of the first classes required for those studying to be pastors and teachers. I can still picture the teacher, the whiteboard, and the students around me. That's because the instructor said something that day which stuck in my mind. It was something on the lines of, "Look around you. According to the statistics, a fourth of those around you won't be in the ministry someday." That figure is even higher across all Christian denominations. A 2019 nationwide survey found that 50% of pastors don't last beyond five years. And only one in ten will continue until retirement. What stood out the most in my mind wasn't the fact that many might leave. It was the reason why. Our instructor said the reasons most would leave would be "money, sex, or false teaching." In other words, not because someone just quit the ministry, but because someone did something wrong which disqualified them.

Don't get me wrong. Not all who quit serving as pastors have committed some terrible sin. Some of my Seminary classmates have left the ministry. But they hadn't done anything wrong. They just had family concerns which had to come first. Others left the ministry for a different calling. They still faithfully serve the Lord in their new calling. Thankfully, none of those who graduated from Seminary with me have disqualified themselves yet. But I do have some peers who were no longer able to serve because of some terrible and damaging sin. And you'll see an occasional minister in our church body must resign for sinful reasons. Sometimes it's an older pastor who of all people ought to know better but committed a harmful and public offense. Sometimes it's a student a few years distant from my class who stumbled into a sin and ruined more than their own ministry. I sometimes wonder how many in that first classroom will still be in the ministry in the future. I pray we beat the statistics.

And once again, don't misunderstand. Not all who quit the ministry do it under some significant sin. But the fact that there are some who do should be troubling. It should alarm every Christian college professor. It should be great cause for care and concern to every Seminary professor. And it certainly is on the minds of many Christians in churches which are recovering from the damage done by an unfaithful minister. Maybe you've experienced the pains that come from a pastor who caused lasting damage by his sin and deception. Pastors sin. They sometimes do it in ways that hurt many people. They disqualify themselves from serving as pastors.

That is why the apostle Paul gave instructions to his fellow pastor, Titus. He had been sent to the island of Crete. There were Christians all across the island in every city. But Paul had to leave the island before he could finish his work. Leaders hadn't yet been appointed to serve the churches after Paul and his missionary companions left. That job fell to Titus. *"The reason I left you in Crete was so that you would set in order the things that were left unfinished and appoint elders in every city, as I directed you."* So, Paul writes with instructions about who should serve.

These instructions provide a list of qualifications for spiritual leaders. This list is not something that changes over time. And these qualifications aren't just meant for Christians on ancient Crete. They are meant for all Christians in all times. And we must note this list isn't simply good advice. The apostle shares these words as he is guided by the Holy Spirit. These are God-given qualifications for pastors today and always.

The list includes what I am going to break down into basically seven faults that a spiritual leader should be free from, and seven consistent character traits that should be evident. To be clear, avoiding these faults or maintaining these character traits do not make a man worthy of serving as a pastor. No one is worthy of serving the Lord because of their own worthiness or merit. Even Paul himself had to recognize that he may have been positioned as one of the greatest of the apostles, but he was the least worthy of such a calling. The same is true for anyone who serves in God's church. They don't serve because they have earned the right. They serve under God's grace.

Paul begins by listing what disqualifies someone from serving as a spiritual leader. 1) A minister is to be blameless. This means that he shouldn't be someone with a bad reputation. You don't want the man who is fighting in the bars and who has lost his driving license for driving under the influence to serve as a leader in the church. He should be without any major faults of blame. This is God's calling for all Christians. A pastor doesn't have any higher of a standard than others. But he is supposed to lead by example and cannot serve if he himself is trapped by sin.

What we will see in this list is that the pastor's character and life matter. There are many jobs where your character doesn't matter. A law firm isn't interested in your personal life and how you get along with your neighbors. It is interested in your credentials and ability to win. Even politicians can get by with a bad personal character record if they have a winning platform and big support base. But not so with pastors. Character counts. It always should.

2) His family life should be in order. That means he loves his wife and is faithful to her. It means he is a good father to his children and instructs them in God's Word. It means he disciplines his children, but he always does it in love. Once again, most jobs will hire you even if your family life is in shambles. But if a spiritual leader fails his family, he disqualifies himself from serving God's family. 3) "Not arrogant." There is no room for a big head in the ministry of the

gospel. If a pastor starts to think highly of himself and displays himself as more important than others, he has disqualified himself. Watch out for pastors who hold everyone else accountable and scrutinize others but will go through many loopholes to avoid any level of accountability for themselves because “they are too important.” That’s how much of the business world operates with its leaders. But that’s not how God’s church operates. There have sadly been many pastors who have abused their position and fallen into terrible immorality, sexual scandals, and abuse. Yet they don’t confess or quit. Instead, they reason, “I’m too important to stop doing my job.” But no one is more important than the Word of God. 4) “Not quick tempered.” I think these last two are often related. Find a pastor who thinks too highly of himself, and you’ll find a pastor who is quick to bursts of anger. If he is easily angered, he disqualifies himself. 5) “Not a drunkard.” Notice he doesn’t say that a minister can’t drink any alcohol. But the man who is mastered by his Miller Lite has disqualified himself. The man who must have a beer to have a good time or who can’t go without it has disqualified himself. Often related to over-drinking is the next disqualification 6) “Not violent.” How can a man who seeks to harm others ever hope to serve with healing? 7) “Not eager for dishonest gain.” Some have disqualified themselves because of their love of money or their mishandling of it. If a pastor can’t be content with honest gain and a fair wage, watch out. He will not be content with all of God’s other blessings.

The list switches at this point to seven positive traits. 1 -6) *“Instead, he must be hospitable, loving what is good, self-controlled, upright, devout, and disciplined.”* Does a minister show he welcomes people with his time? Or does he only pay attention to those who can pay him back? A faithful minister welcomes the greatest and least from all walks of life. He loves what is good -namely his home, his church family, and everything God calls good. He is self-controlled. He knows when it is time to say no to the next best purchase, pleasure, drink, or drug. He is upright and strives to follow God’s law and the laws of his nation. He is devout and dedicates his time to serving the Lord. He is able to take on tasks that require discipline, planning, and hard work.

What strikes me about all these qualifications so far is that they don’t include any of the things you might see in most positions of leadership. Notice that God isn’t primarily concerned with abilities and skills. He is more concerned with character and godliness. A congregation might be tempted to overlook character with an interest in getting worldly results. It might turn a blind-eye to a pastor who is arrogant or who displays a lack of self-control. It might care more about persona and persuasive speaking. It might care more about intelligence and stature.

But our standard of what a qualified leader should be like is different from God’s standard. Would Christ have ever made the list of those who serve in the most prestigious churches? He was basically a homeless man with a poor family and lowly origins. Would John the baptizer have made the list while wearing camel’s hair and having locust breath? And how about those fishermen Jesus sent as missionaries? The world’s qualifications don’t matter. That’s because God uses the lowly things of this world, the despised, the things that are not, to shame the things that are. He chooses to use men the world regards as “foolish”, like your pastor, to share his gospel and feed his flock.

I think Paul saved the most important qualification for last. The pastor who fails in this area will fail in all the rest. *“He must cling to the trustworthy message as it has been taught.”* This doesn’t mean a pastor goes around quoting their seminary professor or Dr. Martin Luther all the time. It means they must tightly grasp the “trustworthy message.”

In the trustworthy gospel message, we find a man who perfectly met every qualification to lead God’s Church. He’s a man who was entirely blameless. He wasn’t married, but he had honored marriage and his parents perfectly. He was never arrogant, but always humble. He was patient beyond all our ability. He was wrongly accused by his enemies of being a drunkard, but he always remained sober. He was perfectly gentle. He never sought his own personal gain. No one was ever more self-controlled, welcoming, and holy. His name was Jesus. He was perfect in all his character because he is the eternal Son of the Father. He came to be our faithful minister. God chose him to lead his church and be head over all his church.

I’m sure every pastor would have to examine this list and confess, “Lord, forgive me for my failures and my faults.” But the perfect and holy Son of God spoke regarding us sinners, “Father, forgive them.” Now every faithful pastor can also say with confidence, “He does forgive. He forgives me. And he has forgiven you.” This is the trustworthy message every faithful minister must hold to. Christ has died for sin. Christ rose and forgives. It is what drives a minister’s character and life. It empowers new life in him. As he holds tightly to his message, he is able to encourage all who have failed in godly living. He shares the forgiveness won by Christ. And he is able to correct all who oppose the truth as he points to the Word of God and the work of Jesus as the only way to salvation.

Paul makes it clear later on why he would want faithful ministers on Crete. It is because many self-appointed unfaithful ministers had started to take over. These men were working for selfish gain and were destroying the congregations on Crete. But a faithful and qualified minister builds up the church. *“He will be able both to encourage people by the sound teaching and also to correct those who oppose him.”* God give us ministers qualified to do this!

Who holds an unfaithful pastor accountable? God holds him accountable to the Word. A minister’s life and teaching must be in-line with God’s Word. If they are, he will faithfully lead others to Christ. Faithful ministers know, live by, and share the message of Jesus. He beats more than the statistics! He is forever faithful and true -our faithful minister.