

# Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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## Ministerial Qualifications: Part 2

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

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

What does the word "blameless" mean then?

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

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

How often have we preachers made comments from the pulpit with all good intentions and with no desire remotely in our minds to offend, but later we realize that someone in the congregation that day took high offense at our words? James 3:1-2, and for several verses following, makes this specific point regarding preachers. The preacher doesn't live who has not at some time and in some way offended without intending to do so. While we should never dilute or downgrade this requirement in Paul's list of qualifications, we must all confess that we have not perfectly complied. Our challenge when we realize that we have so offended one of the Lord's sheep should not be to defend our failure or to attack the sheep, but to work very hard at learning how to avoid a repetition of the problem. I

can "cut a lot of slack" for a man in ministry who consistently demonstrates a heart for hungry sheep and a passion to improve in his own ministry. Perhaps a weakness—perhaps a strength—I can cut very little slack for any man in leadership in a church who is ever ready to defend himself and attack anyone who dares to question him about anything. If I conduct my ministry in a manner that attracts criticism or question, I have failed this test. Paul makes the point I have in mind with these words.

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

Tom Constable comments on this qualification.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

is qualified and where he will be able to serve and benefit others.

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

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church  
16434 Woodruff  
Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday	10:30 A. M.
Joseph R. Holder	Pastor