

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Ministerial Qualifications: Part 3

Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous.... (1 Timothy 3:3)

Paul further advances the character qualities—and qualifications—of the ministry. Again, the point is clear. The man must preach his sermon with his feet before he can effectively preach it from the pulpit. Let's examine the qualities listed in this verse.

1. **Not given to wine....** A sure way to get Christians into disagreement is to bring up the question of alcohol. I have yet to meet a Christian who in any way justifies or rationalizes excessive drinking or drunkenness. Scripture leaves no question regarding this behavior. It is sinful and consistently, strongly forbidden. Just as it is impossible from Scripture to justify excessive indulgence, it seems equally difficult from Scripture to forbid any drinking at all. Jesus turned a rather large quantity of water into wine, His first miracle. (John 2:1-11) Paul instructed Timothy to add a "little" wine to his diet, apparently for health reasons. (1 Timothy 5:23) Whatever the prospective preacher's attitude toward limited intake, Paul clearly imposes a limit onto the quantity that he drinks. "...given to wine..." indicates a dependency, an addiction. He has given himself to it. The word translated "...given to wine..." is defined as follows: "...a person who habitually drinks too much and thus becomes a drunkard—'drunkard, heavy drinker.'"¹ Aside from excessive alcohol impairing a person's physical alertness and abilities (for example, driving a car), it also dulls his mind and his moral judgment. No one, especially a Christian, should ever do anything that dulls his/her moral judgments and thus begs for compromise. Paul makes this issue a qualification for the ministry.
2. **...no striker....** While this quality clearly disqualifies any man who would try to settle his disagreements with people by a

physical fight, it likely more directly applies to a man who fights with his words. He demands that everyone agree on every minor issue with him. If they do not agree with him, he goes after them with a fierce, hostile vengeance. Over the years some of our country's politicians embraced the idea that the president of our country, though not a despot or a dictator, may use the weight of his office as a "bully pulpit." The very thing they advocate for high politicians is the thing Paul condemns in the ministry.

3. **...not greedy of filthy lucre....** Wow! The fellows who "preach" on TBN need to look at this point. Never in over fifty years of preaching have I ever told a church what to give me or what I required financially before I would visit their church. In fact the thought never crosses my mind. Scripture teaches that a church should not only provide for its pastor, but that it has a responsibility for other needs and people in the church as well. Paul devotes almost a full chapter to the question of "widows indeed," indigent widows who were faithful members of a church, specifically, the church's obligation to them. On one occasion Paul sought contributions from multiple churches for the suffering saints in the Jerusalem Church. He indicates less directly that occasionally some of the churches where he labored heard of his needs and sent financial help, though he seems hesitant to ask for it. A preacher must pay his bills, feed his family, and live in the same world as the members of the church. However, when a man begins to respond to greed and to allow that greed for money to drive his ministry, he has failed the qualification and needs to "Get a job," not exploit churches for his appetite.
4. **...but patient....** It is subtle, but nonetheless present. Why would Paul associate patience with money? Notice he didn't simply add the next quality, but he rather connected this quality with the man's attitude toward money, the prior qualification, "...**but** patient...." Typically in the New Testament, when an inspired writer deals with our interaction with other people,

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., 772 (New York: United Bible societies, 1996).

people specifically who push our endurance to the limit, we see the word “longsuffering.” When inspired writers want us to consider our reaction to situations or circumstances, we see the word “patience” or “patient.” Paul uses “patient” here. He addresses our need to be patient in the management of our money. One of the most damaging habits among contemporary Christians in today’s culture is that they embrace nearly identical attitudes toward money as the pagan world around them. Sometimes Christians lose their jobs or face other unexpected setbacks. Paul is not dealing with these unforeseen problems, though a responsible, prudent believer should budget for long-term needs, regardless of how much or how little he/she earns. The irresponsible pagan world of our day ignores personal responsibility and will hold out his/her hand for any loan that a bank or lending institution is willing to extend, barely thinking for a moment about his/her ability to repay the loan. When a Christian’s credit report shows a long history of bad debts, the “Christian,” not really a true Christian at all, has forsaken one of the basic moral requirements of the faith, telling the truth and paying one’s debts. Early in my business career, I encountered a minister of a fairly popular denomination who had purchased a piece of equipment from the company that employed me. When he stopped making payments, our credit department started investigating the situation. They discovered that this man had moved from southern California to New York. When they finally obtained his new mailing address, they sent him a legal notice, demanding payment of the debt. He responded that, since he was a minister of the gospel, we should simply write off the debt, and forgive it. Our credit manager was an unbeliever and rather critical of Christians. You can imagine the earful of criticism I heard from this fellow about the self-serving arrogance of this “minister” of the gospel. To sign your name in agreement to pay a debt, and then not to do so, constitutes basic dishonesty. At the heart of the matter, it constitutes lying, a specific violation of one of God’s Ten Commandments. No man who claims a call to preach and expects to be recognized as a preacher can fill the office with any degree of credibility if he fails to pay his bills.

5. ...**not a brawler**.... The qualified minister of the gospel is not a contentious, “always looking for a fight” kind of fellow. Consider the contrast between this verbal warrior and Paul’s requirement for a minister of the

gospel. “And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all *men*, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And *that* they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.” (2 Timothy 2:24–26)

6. ...**not covetous**. “...greedy of filthy lucre...” focuses on money. “Covetous” is much broader. Consider the Tenth Commandment that deals with the sin of covetousness. In spirit, it refers to wanting anything that belongs to someone else. The covetous person wants your house, your wife or husband, your career, your children. Anything that belongs to someone else, for this person, falls into the category of “The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence.” In the case of a man who is considered to be a minister, think about the impact of this sinful, self-serving outlook on his ministry, and more especially on a church that he might serve at the moment. He serves a church with, say, fifty members. He visits a church with seventy five members, and some of them are obviously wealthier than the members of his present church. They voice a quiet disenchantment with their present pastor to him, along with a growing interest in him. He doesn’t pray or seek the Lord’s guidance in his decision. He immediately is “impressed of the Lord” to leave his present church and serve the other church. What happens a few years later, when a hundred-member church shows an interest in him? Or next the church with a hundred fifty members? Instead of serving where God wants him to serve, his service follows his covetous heart to greener pastures for him. Sometimes the story behind the hymn means more than the hymn itself. The author of “Blest be the Tie that Binds” beautifully illustrates the point of this quality in a qualified, godly minister. John Fawcett (1740-1817) was a faithful minister in a small village church in Great Britain. Because of his godly reputation and preaching power, a highly recognized church in the London area called him as its pastor when their long-standing pastor died. The prestige went to his head momentarily, and he quickly accepted their call. He announced his exit to his little village church and prepared to move to London. The village church members helped him pack and prepare for the move, though they were grieved at the thought of his departure. As he and his wife drove off from their home in the village, they waved

goodbye to their church friends with many tears. They had not travelled far down the road, tears still flowing, till Fawcett turned to his wife and asked her if she was thinking the same thing he was thinking. With great relief and peace of heart, they turned their wagon around, went back to the village church, and informed the London church that he had decided to stay with this little village church. John Fawcett died as this little church's pastor. No sooner than they got settled back in their village home, but John Fawcett wrote the words to this amazing hymn, a true narrative of his personal experience with this little church.

Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love,
The fellowship of kindred minds
Is like to that above.

Before our Father's throne
We pour our ardent prayers,
Our fears, our hopes, our aims are one,
Our comforts and our cares.

We share our mutual woes,
Our mutual burdens bear,
And often for each other flows,
The sympathizing tear.

When we asunder part,
It gives us inward pain,
But we shall still be joined in heart,
And hope to meet again.

On a few occasions over the years, I have become discouraged and disheartened with my present situation. While I must confess that "wanderlust" captured my interest momentarily, the love of a dear group of people in Bellflower, California, always brought my heart back to the place where I'd be thankful to die. Whether we are dealing with ministry or with an individual person's personal discipleship, we cannot long drink the intoxicating (far more so than alcohol) drink, "It is all about me," without destroying our true discipleship, our credible Christian witness, and the pervasive contentment that comes from God alone to those who wait for Him instead of stoking their own fire.

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church
16434 Woodruff
Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor