

Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. ² Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³ not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴ He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. ⁵ (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) ⁶ He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. ⁷ He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.

THE MINISTRY IS A NOBLE TASK

- I. A minister must be of noble character
- II. A minister must not be a disgrace to those around him

Dear Fellow Members of the Body of Christ,

There are several different concepts of the Christian ministry which are taught and followed in the various Christian denominations. Some have a full time ministers. Others have part time ministers in which the person is gainfully employed in a profession and carries on his ministry during off hours from his regular job. There are some who have no trained ministers, but are led by lay ministers. In our own synod we also have variety of different kinds of ministers. There are full time ministers such as I am. We have semi-retired ministers, such as Pastor Cross. There are staff ministers and there are teaching ministers.

Among us there are some constants which hold true for each of those serving in various ways. Each person has been trained to carry out the work of the ministry for which he or she has been called. Our church body maintains a three level system of education. At the present time we support two preparatory schools, that is, high schools, to train young people desiring to serve the Lord Jesus in full time ministry. We support one college of ministry which trains our teachers. The college also prepares young men for the work at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. This system provides 12 years of schooling after the elementary education and has a single focus of ministry.

A second constant we strive for among our workers in the church is a proper attitude toward the task of ministry. In the introductory words of our text the Apostle refers to the **trustworthy saying**. The trustworthy saying is that the office of the overseer or pastor is a noble task. If a congregation is to fight the good fight of faith, it needs in this office people who understand this noble task.

The theme of our study of these words is obvious. THE MINISTRY IS A NOBLE TASK. We will note first of all that a minister must be of noble character and secondly, that a minister must have a good reputation among all those around him.

In Paul's day the name 'overseer' was applied to those who were appointed or called by a gathering of Christians to preach and teach God's message. We speak of

this today as the public ministry. Local circumstances will determine the exact form a specific ministry may take. Regardless of the form the ministry is a noble task.

It follows that if the ministry is a noble task, the person occupying the office must be of noble character. Listen to how Paul explains this. **Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect.** When we hear the words, 'above reproach' we wonder if there is anyone who qualifies for the office of the ministry. Before God there is no one who is above reproach. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Sinlessness and perfection escapes every one of us. Obviously Paul is not calling for this in a minister of Christ. What is Paul referring to, then? He is talking about a consistent, mature, Christian living in such a way that gives no occasion for public reproach.

We are not left in the dark about what is involved in noble character. **The husband of but one wife** could be translated literally as a 'one-woman man.' Obviously this qualification would eliminate a polygamist from consideration even if the society allows for it. More commonly it is a reference to what is called a womanizer. Of course, if adultery is involved it must be recognized as disqualifying the person from office.

Numerous qualifications follow. A minister **must be temperate, self-controlled respectable.** Temperate here does not refer to the use of alcohol. That is mentioned later. Here temperate refers to being calm and collected in spirit. The minister of the Word does not become intoxicated by what is new and different. He is not influenced by every wind of doctrinal change that blows across the horizon. He will not be intrigued by change simply for the sake of change. To this is added **self-control.** The thought here is that of prudence and thoughtfulness. It involves not acting by impulse but thinking before speaking and thinking before action is taken. In addition the minister should be **respectable.** Of a pastor today we would say that he should be a gentleman. A minister should not be slovenly in his appearance. He should be a person of good sense, tact and civility.

Hospitable literally means a person who is kind to guests, a person who makes guests feel at home in his presence. A person of this quality will make visitors and strangers feel welcome in the congregational setting. As he would not leave guests standing at the door, but invite them in; so he would relate in the same way to those visiting worship. This will be contagious among the members and they will go out of their way to make strangers and visitors feel welcome.

When we look at these qualifications which describe a person of noble character, we will recognize them as qualities which should be found in every Christian. Because they are stated here shows that the minister is not set to a unique standard. What is done is make it clear that the presence of the qualities is significantly important to the office of the ministry.

The next qualification is **able (or apt) to teach.** This certainly has special application to pastors and teachers. The concept of 'Able to teach' presupposes the ability to learn. We must learn before we can teach. It also conveys the ability to communicate. Since the minister is to **teach all things that God has commanded,** he must know the Bible. So should all Christians, but the pastor or teacher must be skillful

in communicating its saving message to others. Whoever cannot teach others lacks an essential qualification for the public ministry.

What is to be taught? Simply stated it is the law and the Gospel. The minister must not hesitate to call sinners to repentance. Why is this so important? Doesn't it run the risk of alienating people from the church and from Christ? Not at all! The clear preaching and teaching of the law will show people their need for Jesus as their Savior. It will show them that they have not living according to the will of God and therefore are deserving of God judgment. It leads them to cry out for mercy.

Such a person will rejoice to hear that Jesus has paid for all sins and that God has declared everyone holy in His sight on the basis of what Jesus has done as our substitute. There are many truths revealed to us in the Bible and they are all important, but these two – law and gospel – are essential for a right relationship with God.

What follow now are references to self-discipline. **Not given to wine, not violent, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.** It is not the use of wine that is a sin, but the abuse that is sinful. Paul encouraged Timothy to take wine for medicinal reasons. Jesus made wine from water for a wedding celebration at Cana. Jesus Himself obviously drank wine or the accusation that He was a wine bibber would have been pointless. But Jesus was very clear that drunkards will not inherit the kingdom of God. You need to ask yours if in the use of alcohol if you are able to distinguish between use and abuse. If you are not, then you should not expose yourself to the temptation asking God to bless such a decision.

Nest is the short tempered individual. He has a short fuse and quickly comes to the point of striking back with his tongue or his hands. He likes to throw his weight around. He feels a great need to be recognized as being on the top in every situation. Such a person has no concept of what having a servant heart means. The Christian and the Christian pastor are to be kind, gentle, reasonable and willing to yield when God's Truth is not in question.

Self disciplined also applies to our attitude toward material things in general and money in particular. Greed is the underlying sin here. Paul calls greed "idolatry." Ownership of material things is not a sin. Generating a substantial income is not a sin. The question remains a matter of the heart. If the gaining of material things is an end in itself, then there is something wrong, but when the gaining of material things or money is a means to an end and that end is support of the kingdom of God and to support one's family as well as a concern for the poor; then the heart and mind have captured the will of God.

The concluding qualifications deal with having a good reputation both within the congregation and outside of it. This is first reflected in the deportment of the family. The question is asked, if a minister cannot manage his own family, then how can he take care of God's church? The key to a well managed family and having obedient children is having an attitude of proper respect. Children will respond with respectful obedience when there is fair, firm and loving discipline in the home.

There is also the implication of a proper balance between time spent with the family and time spent in the congregation. This is a delicate balancing act which takes constant attention knowing that there will always be tension between the needs of family and the needs of the congregation. Each side will strive to not put undue stress on the

minister, who is standing in the middle. Let all the members remember that a good husband and father is also part of being a good pastor.

The apostle concludes by saying that the minister must have a good reputation whether it is within the congregation or in the community. It is similar to the expression “above reproach” with which he began. The minister who thinks that he can accommodate his own life style to that of the unbelievers in the community, the minister who becomes careless about his moral conduct or even his personal appearance and manners will soon lose the respect not only of his congregation but also of the “outsiders” whom he is trying to reach. He brings disgrace on himself and his congregation, upon his Lord and upon the saving message of the Gospel. Such a person becomes easy prey for the devil, who prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

What a list of qualifications! Who can measure up to them? No one will have them in equal measure. But the church cannot ignore God’s standards without serious results. For us in the ministry these standards serve as way for self-evaluation to be carried out. For you as a congregation they serve as a standard according to which you are guided by evaluating those you call to serve in your midst.

It is also important to note that both the minister and the congregation stand before the cross as the redeemed of God. We have all been purified of our sins, undeserving as we are. We will embrace each other as brothers and sisters in Christ grateful for the fact that Jesus has called some to serve in the noble task of the Gospel ministry. Amen.