



IF any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly. 7 For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; 8 But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; 9 Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. (Titus 1:6-9)

If any, one singular failure could be attributed to the moral decay of nations, it would be found in the failure of ministers to worthily execute their offices in preaching and church discipline. As Paul points out to Titus, the minister of God must be exemplary in character and Christian living. How has he evidenced that character in manhood, in training and study, and in his family relations?

It is no small wonder that Paul next lists the marital conditions of the minister as fundamentally important. As Paul avers, the minister must be the husband (male) of one wife (not another man), and only one wife. Why is this so extremely important? It is because the minister is an emissary of the Lord whose duty it is to represent the Gospel of Christ truthfully and powerfully. In that office, he is an under-shepherd of the Lord and must resemble the characteristics of the Lord and the Lord's coming marriage to the Church.. In the Garden at Eden, God created one man and one woman and united them in the institution of marriage. This estate was to be an example of that Holy Estate of the Wedding of the Lamb and His Bride, the Church. Unfortunately, many ministers and church bodies are playing the harlot in running after other bridegrooms and perverse marriages.

When anyone makes an application for a job, they are asked to present qualifications. One important part of the applicant's background is how well he is doing, or did, in his last position. If that applicant was a lousy performer in his last position, it is likely he will be no better in that position he is seeking. This relates to the

minister's marriage record. Is he a loyal and faithful husband to the wife whom the Lord has given him? The overriding requirement is that the man loves his wife more than his own life. This is an example of the love Christ has for the church and this will negate the possibility of divorce:

"25 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; 26 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, 27 That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. 28 So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. 29 For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: 30 For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. 31 For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. 32 This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. 33 Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband." (Ephesians 5:25-33)

The next qualification for a good minister is how he has managed those who have or will be, placed under his care – *"having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly."* If the candidate for ministry cannot train up his own children and demand righteous behavior of them, how can he execute sound management and discipline in the Church? Please recall the sorrows of David in his failure to raise a son of character in Absalom, or of Eli whose sons were tyrants and unworthy to be sons of a priest or prophet.

"7 For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre;" The office of bishop requires a man of proven track record. He is not only responsible for his own personal church ministry, but for the manner in which other church ministers under his charge execute their offices. He is responsible for the wise dispositions of the treasury of the church which is the fruit of many fruitful and selfless donors. He must be a thoughtful man who considers an issue carefully before reacting. But I do not claim that there is never a justification for anger, *"Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: 27 Neither give place to the devil."* There are some actions that justify anger, but be sure that your anger is measured and based on just cause. But never be one whose anger leads him to strike out in anger giving place to the devil.

The bishop must not be possessed by addictions to wine or other substances – even money! Any substance that is mind-altering leads us away from the Narrow Way. We partake of unleavened bread and wine at Holy Communion as tokens of the Real Spiritual Presence of our Lord, not to fill our souls with gluttony or excess spirits. Our Lord partook of wine with purpose and moderation but was falsely accused of being a wine-bibber. *"Not given to filthy lucre!"* I am sorry, but this one excess would disqualify 80-90% of all ministers and bishops today. They demand their parishioners give until they bleed while they themselves seek to live in opulence.

"But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate." The bishop, and his subordinates, must be men who are friendly and loving to their friends, neighbors and brothers and sisters in Christ. He must love to welcome, not only acquaintances but strangers, to his table. Those men who are good and God-fearing he must love. He must be noted for his sobriety in the decision-making and treatment of others. Justice is his mark of distinction. All men and women deserve to be treated justly. The bishop must practice worship at home as well as at church and involve his

family therein. He must be restrained in his treatment of others with whom he may share serious disagreements.

Now, the Church, too, must reflect those same values and characteristics of the good bishop since his leadership is reflected in that quality of his church.

"Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers." The bishop and the ministers must possess a fervent faith and be fervent defenders of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. He must believe only that faith that was first delivered to the saints without modern or social emendation. Such a faith will be manifested in the power of his preaching and the response of his congregants in their lives. Only sound and undiluted biblical doctrine has the power to change lives and save souls by means of the elective drawing of the Holy Ghost. The wise minister is able to give an account of his faith in the Gospel and defend it against the detractors – which is a growing lot in our day, perhaps greater than ever in the history of the church.

Any man seeking the office of bishop, priest or deacon must be a man whose word can be depended upon. The church must be able to depend upon his commitment to following through on all duties for which he has agreed to serve. The only question on the mind and heart of the prospective minister is simply this: "What would the Lord have me to do?" without consideration of lodging, benefits, or medical insurance package. The Lord will take care of that man who is willing to serve without qualifications or bargaining.

Sound doctrine is also a mark of distinction in the true Church of God. But knowledge of the truth alone is not enough. That knowledge must be united with the Spirit of Love which the Lord has commanded. When truth and spirit are joined together in the Church, nothing will be able to resist its message.