

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Ministerial Qualifications: Part 6

Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. (1 Timothy 3:7)

Paul's last criterion for ministry addresses the man's reputation outside the church in the community where he lives and works. Why should a church concern itself with what people outside the church think of this man? If the church grows, it must grow from people outside its present membership, so if this man commands no respect among them, the church where he preaches will be the last place they want to go for answers to their spiritual questions and problems. Imagine, if you will, a man who is speaking in your church. You read in the morning paper that this man was arrested for getting involved in a drunken bar fight last night. How likely will your neighbor who has been talking to you about God and your beliefs want to attend your church services next Sunday to hear this man preach? You could substitute any number of morally scandalous behaviors, but the outcome would be the same. What if the man is convicted of income tax evasion? What if he is known in the financial/banking community where he lives for being a long-standing, consistent bad risk for credit because he habitually fails to pay his legal debts? What if he was fired by a leading employer in the community for stealing merchandise or some other sinful action? I would question whether people guilty of any of these sins should be allowed to hold membership in a New Testament church, but I strongly reject the idea that a man guilty of practicing any of the above, or other dishonorable practices should be allowed to say a word from a church's pulpit. How does the man's home church know some of these behaviors? Before considering the man for ordination, the church must in some reasonable way know the man's reputation fully.

Because my ministry has been in a small church, I had to work at a secular career for most of my adult life. In every place I worked, people regularly sought me out to talk with me and ask my counsel when they encountered personal problems. Quite often I have shut my office door and talked at length with fellow-employees, trying to help them gain a godly, wise perspective for their problems. A few years ago Sandra and I were talking about a particular situation in our church in which one of our members faced a significant problem. Despite the problem, when other members or I would approach this person to ask if we could help, this person defensively dismissed us with, "Oh, nothing is wrong. I'm just fine." In the conversation with

Sandra, I was complaining that sadly often church members try to hide their problems from people in their church, pastor included, but they will talk like a magpie to people outside the church, or else they will suffer the problem and talk to no one at all. As I drew the obvious contrast between church folks and the people who worked with me, the basis of my complaint, Sandra wisely observed, "Joe, you worked with children of God. They saw something in you that drew them to you, and you were able to help them. Was your help to them any less a part of your ministry than if they had been a member of the church?" She was correct. I was so focused on church people trying so hard to maintain a false front for their church friends that I was not considering the people whom I had helped on the job. In fact, for the last eighteen years of my secular work, I built a very successful business devoted to helping people solve their very personal problems with their medical insurance. The reputation I built gained clients for me when the employer could have hired large, prestigious firms instead of me. Having been retired for over five years now, I can look back on that time with a thankful heart that the Lord blessed me to provide any help I could give to people when they needed it.

A preacher who must work in a secular career should never try to isolate his ministry from his work. Doing so will block him from countless opportunities to minister to the hurting sheep that work with him.

Interestingly in our day the idea of a preacher working in a secular career seems out of place. In an ideal world it would be so, but we do not live in an ideal world. While Paul clearly taught that a church should work hard to provide full-time support for its pastor, at times he made and sold tents to supplement what he received from churches. No preacher should ever adopt the arrogant attitude that he is too good or too holy to spend time in secular work. Such an attitude disqualifies him for part-time, much less full-time, ministry. Before abandoning my soapbox to preachers, I offer one more point. If as Peter requires (1 Peter 5:3), the elder is to live as a godly example to the people to whom he preaches, a wise preacher will not simply go to the church with his hand extended to receive what the church gives to him. He will also serve as a Biblical, godly role model to the church by his personal giving to the church. Yes, that is correct.

Nothing in Scripture exempts any preacher from the obligation to give.

In addition to the positive features of this requirement, Paul adds two negative dangers that appear when a man fails to maintain a godly reputation outside his church.

1. *...lest he fall into reproach....* In an earlier study on this theme, I mentioned a preacher from a major denomination who abandoned his legal debt, and, when we sent the demand letter for payment, he responded that in some backdoor way we owed him cancellation of the debt because he was a minister. He didn't plead immunity from payment when he signed the legal contract to purchase the appliance. He agreed to pay it. Romans 13:8, among many other passages, including one of the Ten Commandments ("Thou shalt not lie") requires believers to pay what they owe. Agreeing to pay a debt, and then refusing to pay it, constitutes flagrant lying. Our company's non-Christian credit manager certainly demonstrated the reproach of this verse when he reported the event to me. He literally sneered at the man's sinful and self-serving attitude, observing that he had frequently encountered this same attitude among professing preachers. A man can't preach to people with any influence for good, if they view him with reproach because of his own sinful actions.
2. *...and the snare of the devil.* How enlightening! In this simple statement Paul sounds a screaming alarm in our ears. The devil consciously lays snares for preachers so that he can discredit them. I suspect one of his favorite snares appears in his expert cultivation of pride in the preacher, a sin that can wear about as many wardrobes as hours in the day, but all its clothes reveal one thing in common. The man's motives and actions serve his personal interest far more than they minister to God's children or honor God. Another snare that the devil regularly uses to bring a preacher down is money. Just turn your television to "TBN" for a few minutes. The "money-hungry" preachers seem to line up in this network's programming. If many of the men who broadcast on this network spent as much time talking to their audience about God and the finished work of Jesus as they talk about how much money they "need" for you to send them, the whole climate and message of TBN would be transformed. On more than one occasion secular news investigators have put some of these men under the spotlight. While claiming to personally read every letter that the donors include with their checks, and to pray for

every request donors mention, in fact these men had a staff of office employees who efficiently opened the mail, processed the checks for deposit, and threw the letters directly into the waste basket. The snare worked, did it not? While the number of potential snares that Satan may use to capture and neutralize a preacher is endless, let's focus on just one more significant snare, women. A careful reading of the first chapter of Proverbs will reveal that Solomon wrote Proverbs, primarily as wise, fatherly counsel to his young son. The naïve youth is easy prey for the worldly woman. Notice how she uses her wiles to ensnare this young man, "I have peace offerings with me; this day have I payed my vows." (Proverbs 7:14) In effect this ensnaring woman protests to the naïve youth, "I've been to church. I'm a Christian. Doesn't God want you to enjoy life? Join me and let's enjoy life the way God wants for us." Can you imagine the utter dumbness of anyone who allows himself to be snared by such moral insanity? Yet many a young man has found himself caught in that trap. For a man who deserves any consideration as a minister, such naiveté is inexcusable. Satan has brought down many a preacher with just such beguiling words from a pretty face.

A few days ago I visited the pest control section of a local home improvement store. No, my visit wasn't for mousetraps. However, during my visit, I happened to notice the newest version of mousetraps. I was accustomed to the old fashioned mousetrap that is about as transparent as anything could be, unless you are a dumb, hungry mouse. The newest version looks, at least to the imagined eyes of a mouse, like a luxury condo, the perfect little spot to build his nest and raise his family. The minute this poor mouse walks over the threshold the door slams shut, and his luxury condo becomes his death row cell. Goodbye. That is the way of snares. The one who lays the snare works to make it look like something attractive, enticing. That is how he gets you interested. Reality often comes rapidly to the unsuspecting soul who "bites the bait." Read the full context of Solomon's counsel to his son in Proverbs the seventh chapter. While this lady sings her siren song to mesmerize this young man, the reality he shall face quite shortly is different from her song. Paul makes his point obvious. Any man whom the church should consider seriously for ordination must be a wise man who knows a snare when he sees one, and knows how to avoid it. A wise preacher friend, not a Primitive Baptist, told me of his experience while away from home on a preaching trip. The lady of the house where he was staying tried to entice him. He immediately

responded in two ways. First of all, he spoke to her, "Madam, I must apologize to you for any action on my part that remotely gave you the impression that I was in any way interested." His next immediate action was to grab his hat and coat, and walk out the door. He walked the streets of the village till the husband came home from work that night. God bless such integrity!

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Worship service each Sunday 10:30 A. M.
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