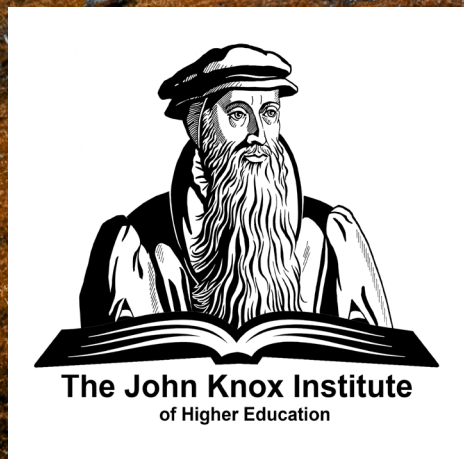


VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

PASTORAL THEOLOGY

by Rev. Harry Woods

LECTURE #3
The Call to the Ministry, part 2



John Knox Institute of Higher Education

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PASTORAL THEOLOGY

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Lecture #3

The Call to the Ministry, part 2

Well, we come to the second talk on *The Call to the Ministry*, and I want to consider with you the biblical qualifications that we have recorded for us in the Scriptures. We've got to be careful not to think of the qualification as being limited to a few specific texts from the pastoral epistles. All texts in the Scripture which speak of marks of a true Christian are basically details of qualifications for the ministry, because the preacher is firstly a Christian, and the marks of a Christian ought to characterize a student for the ministry. We may expect greater expression of those marks in a man called to the ministry, but we would certainly not expect less.

However, the three pastoral epistles give some specific qualifications for the gospel minister which have been conveniently summarized in the Puritan theological handbook¹ written by Joel Beeke,² which I have used with his permission, and I've slightly edited these as follows.

The first thing we should notice is that all the words that are studied below, or following this, are taken from 1 Timothy chapter 3, and Titus chapter 1 of the King James Version of the Bible, unless otherwise noted. To benefit more fully from this section, please open and read those portions of Scripture as you follow these brief Word studies. When we look at the qualifications given in these two locations, we will discover that there are no less than seventeen positive traits, and eight negative traits, and I want to just work through these and try and explain a few.

1. Seventeen Positive Qualifications

The first one is to be found in 1 Timothy 3, verse 1, *he that desires the work of the ministry*. And that word "desire" stresses a longing for the thing that is desired. And the focus is on the object that is desired—a desire for something. And the second reference in the same chapter, 1 Timothy 3:1, "he desireth" stresses the inward impulse of the soul. And thus, a call to the ministry involves both an inward desire and an outward object that is desirable. So we should think of the ministry as something that is to be desired, something that is to be sought after, something that is to be pursued, but also, we should seek by the Spirit to have that desire for these things. And so, we see that there *must be a desire for the ministry*.

And then, in 1 Timothy 3:2 and in Titus 1:6 and 7, you have the word "*blameless*." And this is an indicator to us that, in order to enter into the ministry, a man must be converted. Because

¹ *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life*, by Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones (Reformation Heritage Books, 2012).

² Joel Robert Beeke (born 1962) is an American Reformed theologian, author, and minister in the Heritage Reformed Congregations, and chancellor and professor of homiletics, systematic theology, and practical theology at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary.

“blameless,” whether it is as it is used in the first of these—1 Timothy or in the Titus passage—they necessitate true conversion. You cannot be blameless, you cannot be a believer or an office-bearer unless you are regarded as blameless in Christ. It is not that this man simply has a high moral character. It is not simply that he is held in high regard by those around him, but that he actually stands before God in Christ as one who is without condemnation.

Then again, we have this qualification, *the husband of one wife*. And it will be that we can understand this—1 Timothy 3:2—as referring to something that is stated as against polygamy. It is possible that in these places where Titus ministered, that there were men who had more than one wife. But in order to be called to the ministry, he had to be *the husband of one wife*. But it is more than simply that. It is a call to exhibit a moral blamelessness in his marriage conduct, such that he is dedicated solely to that one wife. In other words, this call to be the husband of one wife is a reminder that he is not to be flirtatious. He’s not to be seeking liaisons with others. He is to be dedicated to his one wife. You think of the model that we have in Ephesians chapter 5, where Christ loved the church and gave himself for it (verse 25). There was no other in his view. There is no other that he had a love for. So, he is to *be the husband of one wife*.

Those who are seeking to become pastors are called to *be vigilant*—1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 2:2, where it is rendered as “*sober*.” And this word signifies being free from intoxicants, that’s the most obvious. He is not to be a drunkard. He is to be someone who is sober. But this is also a word that is used with *watchfulness*. He is not only to be sober, that is, to be *sober-minded*; he is to be a man who *exercises self-control and self-denial*. It’s not enough for us simply not to be drunkards. We have to be those who take things, take life, take the ministry, take our study seriously, and to be watchful against anything that would interfere with that call to the ministry or our Christian life.

In 1 Timothy 3:2, Paul uses the word “*sober*,” and there again, he is speaking of being of a *sound mind*. Hence, a man who is *self-controlled, temperate, discrete, prudent, and sensible*. And that is a real necessary requirement in the ministry. It’s no good having a minister who blabs³ all the personal and intimate details you may have had to share with them. It’s no good having someone who cannot be trusted as you confide in them. He is to be *self-controlled*, and he is to be *discrete*.

Again, in 1 Timothy 3:2, *he is to be of good behavior*, and this signifies an orderly lifestyle, a decent lifestyle, a modest lifestyle. There are some men, and their lives are simply chaotic. They are disorganized, they are slovenly, they are immodest, but also, it’s not just a reference to the outward character of a man who is called to the ministry, but inwardly, he is to be a man who is honorable, he’s a man who is *virtuous and respectable*.

The seventh of those positive characteristics is that *he is to be given to hospitality*, 1 Timothy 3:2. And that means he is to be someone who loves and cares for strangers. When you think of what we have in the Scriptures, you remember how in the law, when it was given, there was a reminder to the children of Israel, that if they had strangers amongst them, you had to care for them. And even especially if they had Egyptians among them, they were to care for them. And so, there is, in Christian hospitality, it’s not simply an optional extra. It’s not if we feel that we can do it or not. We are to be given to hospitality. And so, the house of someone who’s called to the ministry should be a house where strangers are welcomed.

Again, the eighth characteristic, again from 1 Timothy 3:2, *they are to be apt to teach*. And this simply means they are to be skillful in teaching. It’s easy enough to teach, in some respects, in as much as we can rhyme off all of the facts and figures that we know, but we know from our own experience, there’s a world of difference between someone who is able not simply to unfold the

³ To blab means to reveal something by talking openly.

subject before us, but to make it something we can grasp, to bring it within our comprehension, to help us to understand better than perhaps someone else has done. We are to be *apt to teach the gospel*. We are to be *apt to teach the Scriptures*. We are to be *apt to teach*, both by word and practice, *the Christian living*.

Again, in 1 Timothy 3:3, *he is called to be patient*. And this word implies clemency. It's not just putting up with someone. It's not just, as it were, bearing somebody who is an irritant to us, but it is to deal with those we have in the flock with clemency, *a readiness to forgive*, with *gentleness*, *with equity*, *being fair*, and *not being bipartisan*. It calls for *a moderate and forbearing spirit*, not a legalistic spirit that insists on the letter of the law. Rather, it is looking at the spirit of the law, seeking to apply that law humanely and considerately as the facts of the case require.

We are told again, in 1 Timothy 3:4 and Titus 1:6, "*One that ruleth...his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity*," and in the Titus passage, "*Having...children not accused of riot or unruly*." And there we have the focus upon his rule in the household, as an evidence of his faithfulness to God and to the Word of God. That is not to say that the children of someone called to the ministry will, as they grow up and leave the home, not rebel against the teaching; that is, sadly, often the case. There is an unwillingness of the children to follow in the footsteps of the father and mother. But rather that, as he rules his own house, he seeks to do it with a Christ-like spirit. He seeks to lead his children to Christ. He seeks to love his wife as Christ loved the church. He is one who is seeking to rule his own house in the fear of the Lord.

The eleventh characteristic, 1 Timothy 3:7, "*A good report of them that are without*," implies that his private life gives proof to the good reputation that he has with the world. And the other way about, it is no use a man being considered having good report in his family, and yet being considered as a brute and a bully outside his family. Nor is it good enough that a man who may be considered by the world as fair, and gentle, and loving, if he is someone who abuses his wife and family. They two are to match. He is to have good report with them that are without, but that good report is to be a reflection of what is going on in his own home.

He is to be faithful, 2 Timothy 2:2. In other words, he is somebody who is worthy to be believed. What is the good of having someone who tells you about the Scriptures if you simply don't trust them because of the reputation of your past experience with them. No, we are to seek to be worthy to be believed. In other words, we are to be reliable. But also, it is faithfulness to the gospel. We are to be believers of the good news of Jesus Christ.

Again, carrying on with these positive qualifying traits, he is to be *a lover of good men*, Titus 1:8. In other words, he is to promote virtue, loving that which is good. He is to recommend what is good in others. He is to note what is good in others. And he is to have fellowship with those who are likeminded, seeking to be those who follow the Lord.

Again, Titus 1:8, *he is to be just*. Here we have the call that *he is to be fair* and *having right conduct*, just, but also justified. He is dealing with others with fairness and justice, because God himself has justified him, even although he is undeserving. There is the pattern. We are to forgive the sins of others as we have been forgiven our sins. We are to demonstrate the readiness to pardon and forgive, even as God has dealt with us. Titus 1:8 again, this is very similar to what has just been said.

Titus 1:8, *he is to be holy*, consecrated to God and pure from defilement. And this is something that is not simply, again, a high moral standing. It is holiness that stems from a right relationship to God. You remember that great command, "Be ye holy, for I am holy, saith the Lord" (1 Peter 1:16). That is to be our standard. That is to be our pattern. And that is to be how we deal with, not

only others, but with all the tasks that are set before us, as we seek to serve the Lord.

Titus 1:8 again, *he is to be temperate*, just like sober. He is to *be self-controlled*. He is to *be chaste*. He is not to be loose in his morals. He is not to be somebody who is chaotic or rash. He is to be temperate.

And then, lastly, in the positive traits, he is to be one “*Holding fast the faithful Word*”—the Logos—“*as he has been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.*” That’s Titus 1:9. In other words, this man is to be true to God’s Word. He is to be able to call, to exhort and to admonish, to convict and to convince, and reprove those who oppose the truth. He is to be one who is not belligerent, and yet as *holding fast the faithful Word*, he is to seek to persuade men to embrace Christ as he is freely offered in the gospel.

So much, then, for the seventeen positive characteristics.

2. Eight Negative Disqualifying Traits

There are now eight negative, disqualifying traits, and of course, these are often simply the other side, the reverse side of what we see in those positive traits.

He is, 1 Timothy 3:3, *not to be given to wine*. Now you might think, now surely someone going into the ministry would not be addicted to wine, but the fact is that many men who go into the ministry can become addicted to wine, and become secret drunkards. And that is a tragedy that has befallen many a man who has come into the ministry. You might ask, “Why is this so?”—because of pressure of work, because of discouragements, because of depression. There are a hundred and one different reasons why someone might fall victim to alcohol, and he is to be careful. It is better for us, even although we may not hold to a teetotaling⁴ doctrine, nevertheless, it is better for us to avoid alcohol if we are given to a liking for its taste, because there is the great danger that, in a time of discouragement or low spirituality, we will find ourselves falling into drunkenness.

Again, *he is to be no striker*, 1 Timothy 3:3. He is not to be a quarrelsome person. He is not to be someone who is so volatile that given an unfortunate argument or disagreement, is likely to strike out and hit those he is arguing with. And that is particularly so in respect to family life. He is to be no striker in his own home. He is not to abuse his wife. He is not to abuse his children. And to do so is something that would disqualify this man from the ministry.

Again, one well-known trait, 1 Timothy 3:3 again, *he is not to be greedy of filthy lucre*. It’s not that he is not to have wealth. That is not what’s being spoken of here. It is that he is not to be greedy of gain. Even a poor man can fall into the sin of coveting money. And a rich man can fall into exactly the same thing. How many rich people have always wanted more, more than they could ever spend in their own lifetime. And so, the servant of God is *not to be greedy of gain*. He’s *not to be looking for money, not to be looking for kudos*,⁵ *not to be looking for a status, he is not to be greedy of filthy lucre*.

The fourth negative disqualifying trait, again, 1 Timothy 3:3, he is *not to be a brawler*. And that, you might think, is covered in *no striker*. But he is *not to be a brawler*. In other words, he’s not to have the spirit of contention within him. He’s not to be one of those people, and you know from the word go,⁶ they’re looking for a fight. He is to be somebody who pursues peace and pursues it earnestly. He is someone who tries to bring peace where there is contention, *not a brawler*.

Not covetous, again, similar to *not greed of filthy lucre; not a lover of money*, but free from the

⁴ Teetotaling means complete abstinence from alcoholic drinks.

⁵ Kudo is an award, an honor, a compliment, or a tribute.

⁶ “From the word go” is an American idiom that means from the start. Most contests start with the word “go.”

love of money. And that is something that is harder for many in a materialistic society to cope with than we might imagine.

Not a novice—the man who is seeking to enter into the ministry is not to be a man who has just begun his Christian pilgrimage. There needs to be a degree of maturity. And *not a novice* means, literally, a newly planted, a new convert, inexperienced. He needs to be someone with some experience of the Christian life under his belt.⁷ He, ideally, should be someone who knows something of what it is to live amongst those of the world, and deal with those of the world, so *he is not to be a novice*.

Not selfwilled—Titus 1:7—again, here, the challenge is *not to be egotistical, not to be selfish*, not to be domineering or inconsiderate of others. This is what the Scripture is speaking about when it says you are not to lord it over the flock (1 Peter 5:3). You're not to bully them. You're not to bring your maturity, or your learning, or your greater experience in like a cudgel, like a weapon to batter people into submission. You are not to seek to always get your own way. You are to be open and ready to hear what others have to say.

And then the last disqualifying trait given in Titus 1:7, *not soon angry*. We've all known people with what we call a hair-trigger⁸ temper. When you're in their company, it's like walking on eggshells. You just expect them to explode at any moment. You have no idea if you are likely to trigger off some violent reaction. That shouldn't be found amongst someone who is called to be a shepherd of the flock of God.

3. Cautionary Notes

Now, in all, the seventeen positive and the eight negative, these twenty-five qualifications form a formidable and humbling list of qualifications. I want to just add two cautionary notes here before we conclude.

The first is that the sum of this list is something every minister should strive to live up to by the grace of God. We should seek, by the Spirit's enabling, to live up to those seventeen positive, and those eight negative traits; that we should strive after these things. Now, it's not intended that all ministers must have all these qualities perfectly, or equally strong in each of them. We'll never find a man like that. But these are the things that the church is to consider as they are considering an applicant for the ministry. Again, we must recognize that not all of these characteristics are of equal weight. Because we don't expect to find perfect men. Every man will have faults and weaknesses, but it is clear that the Scriptural guide of the qualities that a called man must have, they either must be possessed or the man must be pursuing after them. In other words, yes, we are to have them all. Some will have more than others in a greater degree. But we all should be pursuing after these things.

I conclude with a note that is important too, is that to enter the ministry without a call is unmistakably a sin. We've been looking at the call to the ministry, what it is; and we've been looking at the characteristics, the traits that are expected in the minister, or in the candidate for the ministry. If we enter the ministry without that call, that divine call from God, and that will happen, if we ignore the Spirit's leading, if we ignore the Scriptural teaching, if we, through sinful motives or means, impose ourselves into the ministry, then we are heading for disaster. But on the other hand, to stay out of the ministry, to stay out of preaching the gospel when called to enter into the preaching of the gospel, is also a sin, and a sin which can only proceed from sinful motives.

⁷ "Under his belt" is an American idiom meaning someone who has experience, skills, or accomplishments.

⁸ "Hair-trigger" means something disposed to react quickly; named after a delicate trigger on a trap or a gun.

And so, as we examine ourselves, we have to ask ourselves, “Do I have a call from God that corresponds to the Scriptural and biblical qualifications? Does the church, in its examination of me, find that I am fit and ready to be included in a course of study for the ministry?” If we are called, then woe betide us if we do not respond. If we run without being called, then woe betide us. Thank you.