

A Student Desirable for the (Teaching) Ministry

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As I began to give some thought to the theme of this assigned essay and then to its development, the reign of King Saul came to mind. God had rejected him and now, when a successor was being selected, God said to Samuel: "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (I Samuel 16,7). The extraordinary truth of these words, as God called people for special purpose, is illustrated on many occasions throughout the Scriptures, so much that it gives one pause in addressing the essay's theme. Let's look at a few examples.

One such example would be Moses. A princess had seen to his education, the best available at the time. He had been raised in a palace and was accustomed to its comforts and pleasures. He became a murderer and fled. One would scarcely consider him a prime candidate for special service on behalf of the Lord's kingdom. His candidacy did not look any better when the Lord sought him out because he proved most reluctant and advanced all kinds of excuses. Nevertheless, the Lord did seek him out and used him, as unlikely a candidate as he was. He became a great man of God.

The words of God to Samuel take on even more significance when we look at our Lord's own immediate disciples. James and John were men who looked to their own advantage, willing to walk all over others in the process with a complete lack of concern. Yet God called them for special service. Thomas traveled with the Savior for three years, heard Him preach and teach, and witnessed his miracles. In history he is known as doubting Thomas. Yet the Lord called and used him in his service. Matthew, once known as Levi, was a tax gouger and a cheat. He seemed to love money more than anything. Yet the Lord called him and used him in extraordinary ways in his service. Peter, a somewhat opinionated, though uneducated fisherman, was given to cursing and swearing, among other things. Yet the Lord called and used him for special service.

Truly God looks on the inside, a fact we need to bear in mind as we consider this topic. There is another side to the coin, however. It is likewise true that the Lord is very specific regarding the qualities He expects in those preparing for and entering his service as overseers. The two portions of his Word which immediately come to mind in this connection are 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

I have no intention of treating these chapters exegetically. Nevertheless, they will serve as a kind of backdrop for the contents of this essay. For this reason, though they may have been quoted extensively in the previous presentation, no harm will be done in hearing again portions of the two chapters in question.

1 Timothy 3:1-7: "Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to much wine, 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. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) He must not be a recent convert, or he may be conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap."

Titus 1:6-9: "An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless – not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to much wine, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy, disciplined. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it."

Although the topic is being treated in two separate essays, one as it affects the pastoral ministry and the other as it affects the teaching ministry, the basic qualifications and basic characteristics desirable for

prospective pastors and teachers differ but little, if at all. In either case a few special gifts may be necessary, but in both cases the qualifications coincide more than they diverge. This needs to be emphasized far more than it usually is, if for no other reason than to develop as cooperative a spirit as possible among church workers of every walk. After all, the call of the pastor and the call of the teacher are identical. The calls differ only in scope.

As has been indicated with illustrations used earlier, in this area we are dealing with what can best be described as a number of imponderables. This is particularly true when we address matters concerning recruitment for the teaching ministry. St. Paul lays his finger on the chief stricture when he writes: "For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him?" (1 Co 2:11). Moreover, everyone is subject to change in respect to content of faith, breadth of judgment, intellectual acumen, fluctuations in general sanctification, and the like.

A remarkable testimony to the limitless, individualizing power of almighty God is the fact that no two blades of grass and no two snowflakes are the same. In recruiting and preparing teachers, we are dealing with thinking persons, made in the image of God, no two of which are identical in make-up, whether of face, of body, of soul, or of spirit. It is fortunate that this is the case because the teaching ministry needs the gifts, characteristics, and personalities that vary from person to person. We don't want our students and graduates to be conformed to an identical mold or cut from the same cloth, and our educational system needs to remember that. We need scholars, musicians, leaders, the venturesome, the inventive, the innovative, the boat-rocker, and the run-of-the-mill type. The big trouble is that we don't always see or recognize desirable gifts in a young person just beginning to mature, particularly one who is a little out of sync (synchronization). Furthermore, desirable characteristics that may appear weak or lacking altogether during the years of preparation may surface sharply once in the field. If nothing else, this suggests that God will find his Gideon and his Moses in spite of us. Certainly there was a time in the life of Paul when he could not have been endorsed as a likely candidate for the Christian ministry. Hence any evaluation of worker training prospects or of worker training graduates must begin with the fact that all servants of God are sinners who carry the Gospel in earthen vessels. It is said that Director Kraus of the old Addison Seminary wanted students who were "not too stupid, not too old, and not too wicked."

In considering a student desirable for the ministry, our tendency is to look at the finished product to determine characteristics we want in the entering student; but, be that as it may, what should be evident in young people if they are to be encouraged to prepare for the teaching ministry? First, they should certainly be interested in the Word of God, exhibiting also some desire and some aptitude for learning that Word. This would be demonstrated by faithful church and communion attendance and by an active interest in the over-all work of the Church. All in all, a kind of devotional life should be in evidence that is something more than casual and routine; in other words, there should be a personal commitment to Christ. If they don't have some concern for the Lord's business at this stage, what will they do when it becomes a "must"?

The desire to enroll in a worker training college should come from love for the Savior and not from such shallow motives as "My relatives went there," or, "The location is convenient," or, "It's cheaper to go to college there," or, "I'll attend until I really make up my mind what I want to do." The basic question with which they ought always to be confronted is this: Why are you enrolling? If this question were always directly posed, perhaps it would lead potential applicants to think and thereby probably uncover the real motivation. After all, motivation is an extremely important factor. If we didn't know it before, we learned it when teachers became a glut on the public school market and students from other colleges and universities all of a sudden became interested in transferring to Dr. Martin Luther College. However, motivation is important for another reason. Without it students will do a great deal of vacillating about their vocational choice. Vacillators make poor potential church leaders because they lack decisiveness.

Young people who do not have a balanced personality ought not be encouraged to prepare for the teaching ministry. As one pastor wrote me, the church should not be the dumping ground for every oddball who doesn't fit into other public vocations. He cited a veteran pastor years ago in Michigan who often recalled the

God-fearing parents who had six handsome, robust, gifted sons and a younger son who was stunted physically and intellectually. These parents always pointed to the misfit, saying: “*Der soil Lehrer oder Pastor sein.*” The pastor who wrote me added: “In the church, too, we should sell quality, not quantity.”

Dr. Martin Luther College will graduate capable, dedicated teachers in a steady flow if young people are encouraged to enroll who are healthy, happy, and normal, preferably with a good, balanced Christian home in the background although such homes are rapidly being eroded as a result of today’s social environment. On the other hand, it needs to be said that conspicuously pious or even pietistic parents often produce oddballs with extremely incompatible quirks of character and personality that later wreak havoc with children and congregations. The Lord’s work can well do without workers with phobias and hang-ups.

These spiritual characteristics which are absolutely basic naturally have to be coupled with desire because desire shapes attitude and because desire can be encouraged and built up by the faculty. Desire to prepare for and to enter the teaching ministry makes the individual willing to make the sacrifices that are associated with the training process and with church work itself. Yet inherent in this desire should also be a sense of humility, not the Uriah Heep type of humility, but the kind of humility which loses love for self in love for others and in a concern for others, the kind which is concerned about being a tool of the Lord, not the Lord himself. Such humility does not vitiate the need for inherent leadership qualities since humility and leadership qualities are not mutually exclusive. Neither is this kind of humility to be associated with a bland, colorless personality. Young people with the personality of a dead fish will have but little, if any, positive impact once they enter the teaching ministry.

It seems to me too that only those should be encouraged to prepare for the teaching ministry who already in their teens display some balance and common sense in grooming and dress. Our pulpits and classrooms suffer when those who finally enter them disregard physical grooming who consider appearance and civil behavior and courteous approaches of little or no importance. They’re going to be ambassadors for Christ and they should look and act the part.

Though they ought to know better, there are pastors and teachers who encourage young people to prepare for the teaching ministry just because they’re nice, wholesome kids with some interest in God’s Word and Christian morals. But there is another necessary ingredient aside from the basic spiritual qualities and that is scholastic aptitude. Young people recruited for service in the church should be average to good students who display some intellectual curiosity and who have some gift for communication, but let the church be spared the conceited, precocious “brains”, the know-it-alls and the gushy, gabby bores. Students who consistently do less than average work in high school will normally do less than average work in college and likely also in the ministry. The poor study habits, the procrastination, the wrong priorities, the concern with doing your own thing, all of which contribute to poor achievement in school, will likely contribute in the same way to poor achievement in the church—perhaps even more so since there is less supervision.

Those who are encouraged to prepare for service in Christian day schools should also have evidenced a pronounced love for children. Without that love there is no way that a successful teaching ministry can be conducted. In fact, without a warm love for children a person will not survive in this ministry anymore than he or she will without some semblance of a sense of humor.

The chances of those recruited for the teaching ministry to complete the required course of study will be greatly enhanced, of course, if there is parental endorsement of the decision. Parental endorsement implies support, not just financial, but support that reveals itself in the kind of encouragement which is enhanced by ardent prayers.

Up to this point this essay has concerned itself with the characteristics which ought to be associated with those who are recruited to prepare for the teaching ministry. The other side of the coin, of course, is what we look for in the graduate as he or she now enters and serves in this vocation.

In today’s world it is safe to say that much more is required of Christian teachers in all areas, if they are to be effective, than has been required in previous decades. Today’s Christian day school teacher not only has to cope with a knowledge explosion, but with a society dedicated to self, to self-indulgence, to self-glorification,

and a host of other soul destroying philosophies. Today's Christian day school teacher more than ever works with children whose thought patterns have been conditioned by television and who are directly affected by the drug culture and rock morality. Furthermore, today's Christian day school teacher deals in increasing numbers with children from broken homes and from homes that have the two parents working full-time. The Christian teacher's academic qualifications, personal characteristics, and attitudes, therefore, take on growing importance. Yet a candidate for the teaching ministry can possess the desired qualifications, characteristics, and attitudes in full measure, but the fact always remains that if the undergirding spiritual qualities are lacking, the candidate will be ineffective, if not a complete failure.

What do we look for in a candidate for the teaching ministry? Assuming a knowledge and understanding of God's Word and the doctrinal soundness that goes with them, a prime requisite is faithfulness. This is so often referred to in services of installation that it tends to become a trite expression. Yet it needs emphasizing, not as an antidote for laziness, but as characteristic of the steward of the mysteries of God. In God's eyes faithfulness is the criterion. His measurement is not how many youngsters the teacher will have taught or how near perfect the lesson plans will have been. The simple question will be: How faithful were you? This kind of faithfulness is two-pronged: faithfulness to the Lord's will as revealed in Scriptures and faithfulness in the use of God-given talents, doing no more and certainly no less than these talents allow.

Hand in hand with faithfulness and almost synonymous is dedication. A faithful servant of the Lord will have that as well. The church and its all-important work has no place for loafers or featherbedders. A "punch-in, punch-out" approach may be characteristic of unions, including teachers' unions, but it is foreign to the full-time servant of Christ. Dedication is always a grateful response to Christ's self-sacrificing work of redemption, so pronounced in the life of Paul, for he practiced what he preached: "Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (1 Co 15,58). Faithfulness and dedication often cover up a multitude of other weaknesses and the lack of some Christian graces. They will not cover up for tactlessness and contentiousness, however, since faithfulness and dedication cannot live together with tactlessness and contentiousness.

Generally speaking, those in our teaching ministry are highly regarded for their dedication, probably because they are a bit ahead of the public parade in this respect. However, as the public parade slows down, so do we. As the public school teacher becomes more conscious of the clock on the wall, more re-active to additional responsibilities, and more concerned with salary and rights, so do we. Sometimes it seems that we are just enough ahead of the public parade to garner the regard and approbation of the majority of church members. We need to remind ourselves that God's views don't change with each new contract in the public sector.

Those who will serve the Lord by teaching in the church must realize that they are in the public ministry, in the public eye, where lack of dedication to all facets of church work will undo every bit of teaching they do. Not only with words but also by example they are to lead children. These children are precious, entrusted to teachers in the church by concerned Christian parents. This very fact plays no small part in dictating the entire attitude and behavior of those in the teaching ministry.

Faithfulness and dedication should also reflect themselves in this aspect of the ministry, an aspect that needs considerable emphasis, and that is in knowing the importance of understanding community mores and attitudes, and the impact the violating of these has upon the individual members of the congregation and others in the community. This is so important, particularly in smaller communities. Christian teachers cannot insist on doing their own thing and fly in the face of community standards. Church workers do live in glass houses. Christian liberty permits many things, but those in the teaching ministry will not always exercise that liberty, especially if it affects the church, its work, and its members adversely. Our Old Adam likes to confuse liberty with license, therefore it is necessary to read and re-read Romans 14 and similar passages from God's Word.

Faithfulness and dedication cannot be stressed too much, for they are the prime qualities. On the other hand, God thinks that there are some other important requirements which he caused to be emphasized in 1 Timothy 3: above reproach, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, apt to teach, not a heavy drinker, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not greedy or materialistic or a lover of money, able to follow Scriptural

guidelines in home management, not a poorly indoctrinated novice and, therefore, able to assume a church position with humility and confidence and needed spiritual resources, and possessing a good reputation outside of the church.

What is here said in God's Word takes on full significance only if the entrance into the teaching ministry is fully understood as a call from the Lord, a divine call, and not as a job offer for gainful employment. Associated with it will be a thorough comprehension of the mission of the church with all that that implies. When both pastor and teacher understand and practice what the call means—when pastor and teacher comprehend the mission of the church and their roles in it, they will stand shoulder to shoulder as leaders and examples to the whole flock. Then professional jealousies will no longer be the disturbing factor in the church's life they so often are today. Understanding of the call and appreciation and concern for the mission of the church also create the kind of atmosphere in which emotional stability thrives, an ingredient so important in the teaching ministry. Today when increasing numbers of children are experiencing emotional problems, it is all the more important that the teachers of these children possess it. If not at home, then certainly at least in a Christian school, the impressionable young should be developing in a stable environment. Generally speaking, all of the qualities sought in one who aspires to teach others the love of God in Jesus are to be found in 2 Timothy 2. For our purpose we'll merely quote verse 24 since so much is packed into it: "And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful."

The Christian teacher is also expected to know how to make a distinction between Scripture and custom. An easy trap to fall into is taking the position that what is customary or traditional somehow is associated with the will of God. The result then is that any changes are looked upon as violating Scripture, especially if the teacher does not like the changes. What that is is a cop-out, as is the position that every cockeyed theory of teaching and/or way of life automatically falls into the category of "a matter of conscience." Furthermore, the Christian teacher should have enough understanding of God's Word that he or she does not make matters of conscience out of things which are not, for example, "tricks or treats" at Halloween. It is far better to heed the Lord's admonition in 2 Timothy 2,23: "Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels." Instead, as verse 15 states: "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth."

We could, of course, go into greater detail about the spiritual characteristics which are desirable in a student ready for the Christian ministry, but, perhaps, what has been said will suffice for this assignment. We may profit now at this point by taking a look at desirable attitudes.

An extremely dangerous attitude is to be found in thinking that a Christian day school can accomplish more than it actually can—that the Christian day school is a sort of cure-all for the ills of church and society—that the Christian day school is the only unfailing vehicle for making children the future pillars of the church. This attitude leads to having the school stand apart as a separate agency of the church. The fact of the matter is that church and school are not separate corporations. The school is an arm of the church. The congregation does not revolve around the school. The school revolves around the congregation and seeks to integrate the children into the church. Thus the Christian teacher's approach will be one of broad perspective rather than one which is narrow and selfish. After all, Christian teachers are church workers, not just educational specialists. They serve as staff members and are components of a team ministry, taking part in the building of the total kingdom and not devoting themselves to building a personal kingdom out of either school or classroom as opposed to the church.

Candidates for the teaching ministry need to understand and appreciate the self-denial, the work, the sacrifice, the prayer that have gone into the school before their arrival on the scene. If they do, they will see to it that the school is never in adversary position to the other work of the congregation but that it enhances it. They will realize likewise that the teaching ministry extends far beyond the immediate environment of the classroom. The work of the church is not blessed by candidates who concentrate on their own thing and who forget about the total program. Education, evangelism, music, stewardship, youth work, Sunday school, athletics, polemics, apologetics, world missions, home missions, charities are all a part of Christ's work, The church and its work

suffer serious damage if candidates are turned out who lack balance and regularly put their emphasis on one facet of the total program, rarely functioning outside of the classroom. The church and its work are blessed when its called servants have a sensitivity and concern for the whole program of the congregation, serving the Lord in any way possible with whatever gifts the Lord has seen fit to endow them. Such candidates for the teaching ministry will lead in congregational life, setting the pace in the stewardship of time, effort, and money. They will in the process exercise deep concern for the training of all the children in the congregation, including those from without who can be gained by their witness and example, namely those who attend only Sunday school. All of this presupposes a “team” mentality which only those possess who have a vision of the whole picture, not just a piece of it, and who view their service from the focus of faithfulness.

Another important attitude is the one that relates to continuing education. The candidates for the teaching ministry who feel that they have all the answers and that there is little more to learn can be a drag on the work of the church. They will wind up in a complete rut or, at best, be satisfied with mediocrity, ignoring the fact that the Lord’s work is worthy of the very best we have to offer. How can the candidates for the teaching ministry or, for that matter, those already in it, stand up and meet the educational challenges of the day if there is very little, if any, concern for self-improvement through disciplined self-study and formal graduate study? Disciplined self-study and formal graduate study should have a much higher priority than second jobs or other pursuits for the sake of financial gain. In isolated instances a church worker may be forced into taking a job during so-called free time because of a meager salary and unusual legitimate expenses. On the other hand, that practice easily becomes a vicious circle, detracting from the primary responsibility of the Christian teacher and militating against the development of the school and other aspects of congregational life. The work of the Christian teacher does not begin and end with the school sessions, but involves a full-time call to build up the school and the congregation. Thus steady growth and development in the profession into which they have been called is imperative. The growth and development involves both the spiritual and the academic. To take the position that exposure to academic growth in a secular setting is dangerous, if not destructive, is another one of those cop-outs. If those in the teaching ministry are not able to separate the wheat from the chaff, then we had better close our schools. If those in the teaching ministry, or ready to enter it, are afraid to learn about and to try different methods and if they are leery of keeping abreast of educational changes and developments, they are not exercising the kind of professionalism the Lord has a right to expect of those whom he called into his service. Neither should they take the position that this kind of professionalism interferes with their primary work which concerns itself with the feeding and caring of souls, for they are not and need not be mutually exclusive. They can and should be mutually supportive.

Those candidates for the teaching ministry will fare best that have the attitude of wanting to project an acceptable image of the ministry and what it stands for. This would seem self-evident, but unfortunately there are those who are more interested in their own comfort than they are in the image they project as called workers in a holy profession. The latter know little and care less about the setting of goals and the effort that needs to be expended to meet them. The former will be a credit to the teaching ministry because theirs will likely be a wholesome outlook wrapped in a pleasant personality. They are not likely to fall prey to the most common cause for failure and that is inability to understand and get along with people. They realize that in the church we are dealing with sinners, otherwise there would be no need for the church and its work.

If the candidates for the teaching ministry were going to be in this calling all by themselves, all of this could be said to be pretty idealistic. In fact, it could be said that too much is being expected of mere human beings. And this would be true if we were to forget that guidance is God’s responsibility. He Himself states categorically in Psalm 32,8: “I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you.” This is easy to forget. Moses forgot it and was overwhelmed with his inadequacies, but God simply said: “I will be with you” (Exodus 3,12) Gideon also forgot it when he was called for special service and, like Moses, cited his inadequacies. To him God also simply said: “I will be with you” (Judges 6,16). Even the great Prophet Jeremiah showed a remarkable lack of faith and enthusiasm when the Lord called him, for he, like the others, fished for excuses by recounting inadequacies. To him also the Lord simply said: “Do not be

afraid ... for I am with you and will rescue you” (Jeremiah 1,8). In effect God said to all three men: “The point is *not* who or what you are, but that I will be with you.” What is so very important is that these men came to believe God to be sufficient for the tasks to which He had called them, and they accomplished great things as a result.

It is no different in the New Testament era. Our Savior’s last great command at the time of His ascension was: “Go teach.” Because He knew that we also would be overwhelmed with a sense of inadequacies, He encased His command with the promise: “And surely I will be with you always” (Matthew 28, 20). With that promise the candidates for the teaching ministry can and will accomplish great things, for, as a result of this promise, they can say with Paul: “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Philippians 4,13 King James).

While the foregoing is of tremendous comfort, it in no way minimizes the fact that the Lord places great emphasis on qualifications for the ministry. So that we do not lose sight of that emphasis, a few quotations from *The Pulpit Commentary’s* Treatment of Titus 1 will provide the conclusion.

“In describing ... qualifications the apostle lays so much stress upon the personal character of (those serving in the Church), as to make us feel that the Christian ministry of which he speaks is a ministry of character as much as of preaching, or teaching, or any other ministrations. Looking at this side of the ministry, we learn that it is the purpose of the great Head of the Church, Jesus Christ our Lord, that his doctrine and the truth which he brought down from heaven should be presented to the world in the lives and characters of his accredited servants and ambassadors.... People were not only to hear from their lips, but were to see in their lives, the nature and practical effect of the doctrine delivered to them. And, in truth, the eloquence of holy, loving, and self-denying lives is more persuasive than that of any words, however good and however beautiful.... While we see the importance of learned (church workers), of eloquent (church workers), of orthodox (church workers), we shall do well to keep steadily in view the commanding and essential quality of high and consistent Christian character, showing itself in all the details of the daily intercourse of life. (Those in the ministry) of the Church should be the epistle of Christ, known and read (by) all ... in every place where they are located.... In their manner of life and whole conversation should be seen worked out in practice what the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is intended to effect in the renewal of human nature. Their conduct and character should be a living commentary on the Word of God which they teach.... Let every (church worker) remember that the interests of the Christian faith are bound up with his (or her) own manner of life and that of his (or her) household, and (to) do ... (the) utmost ... that that life may be a faithful reflection of the grace of God which teaches (all) to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, while we wait for the appearing of the glory of our Savior Jesus Christ.”