

What to Look for in a Missionary

By K. D. Habben

“Above all (the Japanese) would want to observe if I lived in conformity with what I said and believed. If I did those two things, answered the questions to their satisfaction, and so demeaned myself that they could not find anything to blame in my conduct, then, after knowing me six months... the people would become Christians.” Even though Yajiro, the fugitive samurai’s evaluation was much too simple, it was based on common sense. It so fired Francis Xavier’s imagination in December of 1547 that he dropped his plan for mission work in India and set out for Japan to try to evangelize such a people. Was the advice concerning what was necessary for mission work sound? The aspirations of Xavier were certainly commendable.

St. Paul himself writes under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, “If one aspires to the office of a bishop he desires a good work,” (1 Tim, 3:1) With these words St. Paul prefaces the qualifications for those in or seeking the public ministry, Paul commends that aspiration and thus gives tacit encouragement to the desire for service in the public ministry. Paul’s commendation also indicates that those seeking the public ministry ought to be doing so because they themselves sincerely desire to serve. In other words, the desire for the office of the public ministry will flow naturally from a heart with a living faith in the living Lord. Such a heart is described by Paul in Eph. 3:8, “Unto me who am less than the least of all saints is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.” Here we see a heart that has become acutely aware of its own sinfulness and thus realizes that unspeakable mercy of God who has called and then, in addition, given this high privilege of being God’s spokesman to the Gentiles, “Escape”, a change of address, the longing to travel, the adventure of living in another land, the “glamour” of being a missionary will not suffice as reasons or motives for desiring to be a missionary.

Since the qualifications set down in Scripture for the public ministry are the same whether that ministry is carried out at home or abroad, it is fitting that we look first to our Lord for guidance when seeking to determine the qualifications necessary for missionaries serving abroad. Such qualifications are recorded most fully in 1 Tim 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9.

1 Tim. 3:1, “This is a true saying, if a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.”

(2) “A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach,”

(3) “Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous;”

(4) “One that ruleth well his own house, having children in subjection with all gravity.”

(5) “For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?”

(6) “Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.”

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

Titus 1:6, “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.”

The qualifications recorded here in Timothy and Titus can easily be divided into two groups, positive and negative qualifications. Let us consider these positive and negative qualifications. Most of them are quite readily understandable, needing very little comment.

First, we consider the positive qualifications. “Blameless,” the NIV translates “without reproach,” that is, “not to be taken hold of with a charge of unfitness,” especially with regard to the qualifications which follow

in chapter three. St. Paul sheds more light on this when he adds verse 7. “He must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.” Blamelessness, of course, does not mean sinlessness but it does mean avoiding all appearance of evil so that no adversary can make a charge. In his second letter to Timothy, Paul cautions Timothy, “Watch in all things.” (4:5) Blamelessness is the result of constant watchfulness in word and deed.

Necessary for blamelessness is the quality of being “sober” in the sense of “sober-minded.” In II Tim. 4:5, Paul writes, “As for you, always be steady,” Timothy needed to keep his head, be self-disciplined, self-controlled and have good sound judgement in all matters of faith and life. A missionary who lacks these qualities, one who acts first and thinks later is going to be a real liability and even a danger on the mission field.

A kin to “sober” is “vigilant,” The NIV translates “temperate.” “Vigilant” stresses the quality of soberness “especially insofar as it does not allow a man to be carried away by outside influences.” Temperate not only in regard to intoxicants, not rash, excessive, passionate nor confused but self-possessed under all circumstances.

In Titus 1:8, we find a different Greek word which the KJV translates “temperate.” “Temperate” in the sense of having spiritual strength which makes one disciplined, self-controlled, especially in regard to the natural passions. “Temperate” means always having strength, literally, “in control of strength,” so as to check anything that would be unjust or break God’s holy will. Here Trench uses the case of Joseph as an example of one having this kind of strength to flee from sexual sin, etc.

“Of good behavior,” the NIV translates “respectable.” In 1 Tim, 2:9, Paul uses this word in the sense of respectable, modest apparel for women. The word is a broad term like our “orderly”. A pastor’s whole make-up should be “orderly”, spiritually, mentally, and in his habits. All slovenliness in behavior, in habits, in manner and bearing are not befitting a representative of the King of Kings.

In Titus 1:8, Paul uses a pair of words “holy and just” to outline further qualifications for the public ministry. The two are a pair. The one looking to the Lord’s verdict - “righteous”, (forensic). The NIV translates “upright”. The other word “holy” looks to the relationship to the Lord, that is conduct that observes the holy ordinances of the Lord. The opposite of “holy” would be “polluted,” Again, Joseph is a good example. When he fled in the face of sin his actions met God’s approval. He was “righteous”. He remained “holy” in the sense that he did not pollute himself with the sin of adultery.

In Titus 1:8, Paul adds “a lover of hospitality, lover of good men,” The NIV translates, “he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good.” In work in which personal relationships are of the utmost importance, anyone not able to make the stranger, the new inquirer, guests as well as members feel at ease, will be severely hampered as an ambassador of the Lord. “Hospitality” is a pair with “a lover of good men,” which more correctly translates “one who loves good.”

One in the public ministry must be able to recognize what is good on the purely human plane, identifying the good in other people, other cultures. A missionary must be motivated by a love of doing good to others. Such a love of good and doing good goes naturally with hospitality.

In 2 Tim, 2:24, 25, Paul writes, “the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing...” “Patient”, “gentle” and “meekness” are three qualities that are usually in short supply when the going gets tough, the work hot and dirty and not very rewarding. The Lord has not called any in the public ministry to a bed of roses, but even though the opposition is abusive and the problems thorny, He wants His ambassadors to be gentle, patient, and meek. However, meekness does not mean weak and wishy-washy, willing to yield his Word for the sake of avoiding confrontation.

In this same chapter Paul mentions “apt to teach”, “in meekness instruction”, as qualities necessary for the public ministry. This is one of the qualities not required of all Christians but is required of those in the public ministry. The other is in Titus 1:5, “having faithful children, not accused of riot or unruly,” “Apt to teach” is best defined by Paul himself. In Titus 1:6, he writes, “able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayer;” in 2 Tim. 3:15, “a workman that needeth not to be ashamed rightly dividing the word of truth.”; in 2 Tim. 2:2, “able to teach others.” We might sum up by saying, able to communicate the Word,

“his, of course, implies a certain amount of ability to remember, to think and to present clearly, also a certain amount of training to develop such skills.

A fitting requirement with which to close this section of positive qualities is “faithfulness”. “It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful.” (1 Cor. 4:2) Thayer’s Lexicon has this note regarding “faithfulness”. The word is used “of persons who show themselves faithful in the transaction of business, the execution of commands or the discharge of official duties.” Faithfulness covers every area of faith and life of those in the public ministry. Of all the qualities, none rank as more important than faithfulness.

Most of the positive qualifications can, of course, be stated negatively and vice-versa. Paul lists the negative qualities as follows; “not covetous, not given to filthy lucre, not given to wine, not a brawler, no striker, not soon angry, not self-willed.” It is easily understandable that these are undesirable in one in the mission field, and do not require a lot of comment. “Not covetous, not given to filthy lucre”, is a warning against loving money more than our neighbor and more than the Lord and His work. One might add that any financial irresponsibility would be a severe handicap. That is self-evident, but the sinful heart is always full of temptation.

Paul mentions “not a brawler, not soon angry and no striker,” This area has already been covered from the positive side by such words as “sober-minded, patient, gentle, meek,” etc. Easily flaring up in anger would be one of the worst qualities one could have in Japan. Paul adds “not given to wine.” One who loves to sit long beside the wine barrel or sake bottle, etc. will not do for a missionary.

We close the list of negative qualities with “not self-willed.” Of course, God’s word is the only rule for faith and life but there are ever so many areas in temporal affairs in which God requires us to use our sanctified common sense. Anyone who is stubborn or arrogant is going to be a problem on the mission field. By the way, the NIV translates “not overbearing”. Anyone set on having his own way in disregard of others can not be used on the mission field.

Lastly, one comes to the family. In I Tim. 3:4,5, Paul writes, “one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God.” Titus 1:5, “having faithful children not accused of riot and unruly.” Any Christian man should be able to function and function well as household head and anyone who fails in so basic a task and requirement is not fit, indeed, will not be able to attend to the far greater task of “shepherding” all those in God’s assembly, especially those of another culture, language and nationality. Unruly children reflect on a pastor, on his work and teaching; are harmful to and may hinder the progress of mission work.

Last but by no means least, we come to the wife. She is one of the most important people involved in overseas mission work. In the two chief Scriptural references with regard to qualifications for the public ministry, it is understood that the pastor will be married, “the husband of one wife.” It is significant that no requirements are spelled out, other than the general qualifications necessary for any Christian women. We might refer to Titus 2:3-5 where such general qualifications are given.

Titus 2:3, “The aged women likewise, that they be in behavior as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things,”

(4) “That they may teach the young women to be sober to love their husbands, to love their children,”

(5) “To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed. “

While no specific requirements are given for a missionary’s wife, she is undoubtedly one of the key personalities needed for success. Her character and qualities will determine much with regard to the ability of a man to stay and work successfully on a foreign mission field. Not enough can be said as to the wife’s importance nor in the praise of so many who have served so long with so much distinction. Not enough can be said for the need for care in this area too, when considering men for a list of candidates for a call to a foreign field.

Suppose a man fulfills the qualifications outlined by St. Paul, in a practical way, what or which qualities set a man apart or mark a man as material for the foreign mission field? It is the call, of course, which sets a

man apart for this service. Without a call a pastor would not be a pastor nor a missionary a pastor (missionary) on the mission field.

One would think that it would be quite easy to spot mission field material, but I believe that it is quite difficult and that therefore every bit of care and wisdom is needed and should be used in drawing up a call list for the mission field. I believe that a lot of heartache and a great many problems are prevented when extra care is taken at this initial stage. The record shows that enough care can never be taken, nor enough wisdom used and prayed for in searching out and calling men to the mission field.

Professor Wendland writes so much to the point. "A faithful pastor at home will be faithful away from home. Failure at home could become even a greater failure abroad. In a foreign more isolated environment personal weaknesses have a way of becoming aggravated." In those words we have a hint of both what to look for and what to look out for.

No one with personal or personality problems or one who has a history of troubles with his congregation, in his family or with his fellow pastors should be put on the call list. "He was having problems, I thought a change would be good, so I put his name on the call list for missionary." These are words and thoughts which cause mission supervisors to pull their hair when they hear them and again when they have to deal with the problems a move to the mission field was suppose to solve. The mission field is absolutely no place to try to iron out problems or get one's ministry straightened out. The field is just not equipped for that kind of ministry. "A good rule of thumb might be that if a man wouldn't be considered for a dual pastorate in the U.S., he certainly should not be considered for a mission call."

It may be difficult with any degree of certainty for you or me to spot a candidate for the mission field. The average Japanese may not even be able "to explain what a Christian is but he thinks he knows one when he sees one. Especially is this true in regard to the missionary who lives near him. No matter how unobtrusive he might be, the missionary still sticks out like a sore thumb. Among other things the Japanese expects of the missionary absolute honesty; prompt, and complete payment of bills; openness to visitors; willingness to answer questions including personal ones; personal integrity; a sense of humor; a true sense of humility; the ability to control visible and verbal expressions of anger.... The point is that a Christian missionary is or ought to be, a man who is completely trustworthy. He remembers appointments, he arrives on time, he does what he promises, he keeps the law, and he pays his taxes. He can even act like he enjoys it while being fingerprinted for his alien registration, knowing full well that near him in the city hall every eye is fixed on him wondering how he will react to this procedure reserved otherwise only for criminals."

Yes, tact, forbearance, perseverance, patient, versatile compatibility are qualities a mission candidate must have and men with such qualities in life and character should be actively sought out. Perhaps a rule of thumb would be to look for a man who is a soul-winner because soul-winners usually have these qualities. Look for a man who is a seelsorger because a seelsorger usually has these qualities, would it not be wise to speak with the visiting elder of the man being considered when the list of men has begin narrowed down to two or three names? That is the subject of the next paper.

All things being equal, I believe another key to finding a man for the mission field is in the Greek word *σώφρων* which translated, "sober-minded", "self-controlled", "well-balanced", "level-headed", Paul uses the word again and again when writing to Timothy and Titus; where he writes about the qualifications necessary for old men and young men, old women and young women, elders and deacons and, of course, pastors. In practical terms, unless a man is "well balanced", "level-headed" in every facet of faith and life he is going to run into problems that otherwise might slide by in the States and that goes for the wife in equal measure. Lapses which might pass or be excused in America will undermine a man's effectiveness in a foreign field.

Being "well-balanced" in every facet of life is of the utmost importance and should be one of the first qualities on the check list when considering candidates. If a man and his wife are not "well-balanced", no amount of language ability or "smarts" etc. is going to save him or his wife from real trouble and grief on the mission field. The new missionary in Japan will find very little to feed his ego. He must rather be able to play the role of a fool with grace and humor as he wrestles with speaking like a kindergarten student. It is one thing

to be a whiz at Greek and Hebrew in the classroom but quite another to learn to speak a living language, literally making a fool out of yourself. That takes a measure of courage and real humility.

Whether a man has experience in the ministry and the length of that experience, I believe is relative. While experience may be desirable and can be extremely useful, in some respects, it can be a hindrance to a smooth adjustment. To me much more important is whether the man who is coming on to the field is a man “well-balanced”, emotionally, mentally and spiritually.

We need to add a word about health. The Scripture mentions no physical requirements but it is common sense that if one has any physical ailments, they had better be taken care of before one accepts a call. We might add to physical ailments, mental, and spiritual ailments. The mission field is no place to fool around with any of these things. It is common sense that good health is necessary for service abroad. The calling body certainly ought to be aware of the state of the health of these on any call list.

Another problem which should not be overlooked is the education of the children. This is a problem which can be very difficult to solve and the calling Board needs to be aware of what the educational needs of a family will actually be and when such educational problems will develop. In other words accurate information regarding the family of those on any call list is essential.

One may well cry out as does the Apostle, “And who is sufficient for these things?” (2 Cor. 2:15.) We rejoice to be able to answer with Paul: “Our sufficiency is of God. No man ever yet was sent out to the foreign field fully equipped. Even St. Paul, the greatest of all foreign missionaries experienced much spiritual growth.

It is altogether in agreement with the will of the Lord that one may “desire the office of a bishop.” (1 Tim. 3:1) It is no less proper for one to desire the office of foreign missionary. But let those who are charged by God to call and send out laborers, do it with the conviction and determination that only the very best, well-balanced men available should be sent out as ambassadors of the King of Kings. Let us look to the Holy Spirit for guidance for we must pray, “If thou Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.” Ps. 130:3,4.