

Noble People for a Noble Task

This saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to become an overseer, he desires a noble task. ²It is necessary, then, for the overseer to be above reproach, the husband of only one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³not a drunkard, not a violent man but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴It is necessary that he manage his own household well, with all dignity making sure that his children obey him. ⁵(If a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of God's church?) ⁶He must not be a recent convert, or he might become conceited and fall into the same condemnation as the Devil. ⁷In addition, he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he may not fall into disgrace and the Devil's trap. The Holy Bible, Evangelical Heritage Version®,

Let's say you belong to a church that is looking for a new pastor. Here is a list of a few candidates and tell me if you want any of them as your pastor. Here is the first candidate. A modest and meek man. A poor communicator, stutters at times. Lost his anger once. Left the country to flee a murder charge. How about this one. Emotionally unstable, an alarmist, negative. Reported to have buried his underwear on the bank of a river. How about this one. Refused God's call to the ministry the first time. Wasn't very happy when his former church repented! How about this one. He had a church as large as 5000 but after one sermon, all left but 12. All of those don't sound like good candidates, but this one has some promise. He knows the value of money, should be a good steward. He's a plodder and conservative. Maybe we should invite him to preach.

What should we look for in a pastor? Well, if we rejected the poor communicator who left the country to flee a murder charge, then we would have turned down Moses. If we turned down the alarmist who buried his underwear, then we rejected Jeremiah. If we rejected the one who was not happy his church repented, then we would reject Jonah. And the one whose congregation dwindled down to 12? If we rejected him, then we rejected Jesus. The only one who sounded promising, the good steward who was conservative, was actually Judas and I don't think many here would think he make a good pastor.

You see, we got to be careful of what we look for in our called workers. Do we look for handsome people or good talkers or type A personalities? Do we want one who is a wiz with youth or gentle and patient with the elderly? You know, it doesn't matter what we look for; what matters is what God is looking for. In our text we have God's qualifications for a pastor or Called worker. God is looking for noble people to do noble work. Before we look at those qualifications, we first must look at why they are needed. They are here because of God's Word.

I. God's Word is essential to us.

Parents want to go out for the evening, so they call in the babysitter. Before they leave, they give her all sorts of instructions: where they will be and how to reach them; bedtime for the kids; what they can eat and not eat; where their pajamas are; what to read before bed; when to turn off the TV.

The Lord does that for us only the babysitter is his Holy Word. That is why he so carefully inspired these human writers so every word they put down on paper is exactly what God wanted. This Word tells us where God is at and gives us his number so we can call him in prayer. He tells us what is good for us and what is bad. He tells us not to talk to strangers, that is false gods.

His Word also serves as a mirror. A mirror tells me if my hair needs combing or if someone played a joke and put a big green dot on my forehead. The Word shows us things we don't know are there. Paul didn't know that coveting was sinful until the Word told him that coveting is a sin. How can you tell the stuff you said in the narthex is gossip unless the Word tells you that it is gossip? How can you tell that you committed idolatry unless the Word told you that anything you love most in your heart is your god? We can easily forget or downplay our sins. The mirror of the Word shows us just how sinful and worthy of judgment we are.

But the Word also shows us our Savior from those sins. Like the exit sign tells us this is the way out, the Word alone tells us how to exit this world and the future judgment. It alone tells us how that Savior came into the world, who is both God and man, how he didn't need a mirror because he had no sin, but how he became sin for us. It shows us the hell, literally, he endured on the cross but told us the words, "It is finished," as he made a full and complete payment for our sins.

And that Word is not just a newspaper article or history book. It is the power of God that saves. Faith comes from the Word whether spoken, read, in the Sacrament.

So we need the Word. But how does get that Word to us? It is something known as the public ministry.

II. So God calls noble people to share his Word.

I write and receive many emails. I think texting has a purpose. But I still like letters. If I have a letter that I want someone to read, I would write it, put it in an envelope and mail it. I wonder how many hands touched it? It is first carried to the post office, sorted there, loaded on a truck and then an airplane, sorted some more at another post office and finally someone carries to the person I want to read it.

Listen to Romans 10, ***“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent?”*** Like the mail, God passes his Word to us through many hands. God used folks like Moses and David, John and Paul. He made sure his Word is preserved throughout the centuries.

But God also gives us public ministers, pastors and teachers. ***“This saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to become an overseer, he desires a noble task.”*** I admit it. Sometimes I get embarrassed. I get paid to do something that is noble and that I love. Look at a professional baseball player, or professional bowler, or that TV chef. I don’t think any of you gets paid to cook, yet chefs love to cook and get paid for it. Baseball is a game people play for the fun of it, and yet a professional gets paid tens of millions of dollars to play. Here is the pastor who is paid to study the Bible, talk about, share it, teach and preach it, really everything every Christian should be doing. The public ministry is a noble task. In fact, it is the greatest task on earth because the public minister’s job is to offer eternal life and forgiveness.

Because this is a noble task, God sets up qualifications for it. ***“It is necessary, then, for the overseer to be above reproach, the husband of only one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,³ not a drunkard, not a violent man but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.⁴ It is necessary that he manage his own household well, with all dignity making sure that his children obey him.⁵ (If a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of God’s church?)⁶ He must not be a recent convert, or he might become conceited and fall into the same condemnation as the Devil.⁷ In addition, he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he may not fall into disgrace and the Devil’s trap.”***

When you hear these words, you quickly realize that these really are virtues and good characteristics that is to be found in every Christian. But why are they listed here as qualifications for pastors and teachers? It is because God’s Word is so important, he doesn’t want anything to get in the way of someone hearing it. I mean, who will want to listen to a pastor if he is rude all the time or loses his temper easily or doesn’t even welcome you into his home or office? How well can he perform if he is given to drunkenness or is violent or is always arguing with you? What if he is distracted by other things, a womanizer and flirt instead of being dedicated to his one wife, or loves money so much that is all he can think about? He has to have some skills. He has to be able to manage his family so his kids respect him and obey him. If he can’t do that, how can he manage a congregation? He has to be able to take the Word and teach it so others can understand it. He can’t be proud because pride goes before the fall. Think of the many preachers out there who came crashing down because it was all about them and not Christ.

Like I said, these qualities are actually not peculiar only to Called workers. I mean, it isn’t that Called workers must live this way and your average Christian is free to love money and be a womanizer. Look at Jesus. He was always hospitable, self-controlled and temperate. The only qualification he didn’t meet was being the husband of one wife. He was not married. Christ shows us that this is what it means to live holy and loving lives. They are the things a believer does because of Christ.

God wants Called Workers, however, to be known for such things, to actually practice what they preach. I read over 8 sections in the Bible describing Called Workers as leaders. I found it interesting that in five of the eight, they are to lead by example. No human being can achieve all of this perfectly. Pastors or teachers have on occasion gotten angry. They may not have always been gentle. But what the Lord is impressing here is that the Word is so important that he doesn’t want anything we do get in the way. Sure any nitpicker can find something to criticize. But if one can generally follow these qualifications, the excuses people may raise will be few and far between, and if they don’t listen, then it is really their problem and not the Called Worker.

So what do we look for in pastors or teachers? That’s not the question. It is, “What is the Lord looking for?” His Word is important, in fact essential. It alone leads us to our Savior. That’s why he wants all of us to be in the Word daily, to let it dwell in us RICHLY, nor barely. That is also why he gives us the public ministry, people trained and motivated to lead us into that Word, noble people—made noble by the blood of Jesus Christ—for a noble task. INJ Amen.