

The Qualifications of a Pastor (Part 1)

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[0:00] One of the books that I hope you will put on your summer reading list, and in September there will be a test, Baxter, and let me say a few things about the book, probably before you rush out and buy it.

First, when Reverend Baxter, and he was a giant of the faith out of the pilgrim, Puritan, sorry. He might have been a pilgrim, but Puritan.

But he uses that word reformed in the title. He's not talking about reformed theology or Calvinistic theology.

He's speaking about the personal lives of pastors and church leaders. They need to be reformed. They need a reformation in their heart.

He's talking about a spiritual reformation or a reviving of the pastor's personal life and heart. In that regard, let me read a few words out of the book to give you a little taste of Richard Baxter.

[1:29] When your minds are in a holy, heavenly frame, your people are likely to partake of the fruits of it. Your prayers and praises and doctrine will be sweet and heavenly to them.

They will likely feel when you have been much with God. That which is most on your hearts is likely to be most in their eyes. When I let my heart grow cold, my preaching is cold.

Observe also in the best of my hearers that when I have grown cold in preaching, they have grown cold too. And the next prayers I've heard from them have been too much like my preaching.

Oh, brethren, watch therefore over your own hearts. Keep out lusts and passions of worldly inclinations. Keep up the life of faith, of love, of zeal.

Be much at home and much with God. Take heed to yourselves, lest your example contradict your doctrine.

[2:40] Lest you unsay with your lives what you say with your tongues and be the greatest hinderers of the success of your own labors. One proud, surly, lordly word, one needless contention, one covetous action may cut the throat of many a sermon and blast the fruit of all that you've been doing.

Let your lives condemn sin and persuade men to duty. And the other thing I want to say is that Reverend Baxter is not an easy read.

That was the abridged version. His original book has when the S's were F's and all that. And I'm probably not smart enough to really grasp it, but I've got the books and I strongly urge, get an abridged version, Mardell's Lifeway.

Be good summer reading, The Reformed Pastor. Today we're going to look at the biblical qualifications of the pastor. And I'm going to apply this broadly to encompass what I believe are the leaders in the church.

I would suggest most and nearly all people in here are leaders in the church. Which leads me to a third comment.

[4:09] When I read these standards or qualifications for church leader, I ask myself, what am I doing serving as an elder? I'm no Don, Mike, Lee, James, or Paul.

And I actually, in the process of researching this and writing this, I did some time with the Lord in repentance of some things.

And God has set standards for leadership in the church. These standards are high. This is a truth that is being conveniently ignored or discarded by many churches and denominations today.

I was with my boss this morning, Ed Gordon, city manager and pastor of Trinity Baptist Church.

Told me that the liberal wing of the Protestant Church just in the last few days affirmed that homosexuality and lesbianism is a gift from God.

Now that's in their church doctrine. Some churches apply these standards unless they stand in the way of selecting the man or woman they desire a particular position.

[5:30] And then they'll sort of turn the other way and not look at these standards. It is then they are ignored so as not to hinder the selection process.

Now I'm going to be real frank with you this evening. When I see a woman preaching behind a pulpit with a group of men sitting out there, it doesn't take a Ph.D. in theology to know the standards have been discarded.

It's just that simple. Because this has been the approach of churches over the decades that encompass the 20th and now 21st century, there is an alarming scarcity of qualified leaders in the contemporary church.

In the latter days of the 20th century, we saw many churches destroyed by the failure to discipline and permanently disqualify pastors that had committed gross moral sins.

The names James Baker and Jimmy Swaggart come to mind, but there were others. Even when churches do deal with the problem scripturally, the offending pastor will often just merely change denominations and show up on television somewhere.

[6:57] Jimmy Swaggart is on TV to this day. He comes on about 3 o'clock in the morning. Jim Baker is in Branson. Yeah, he's in Branson. He lives in Branson. I'll send him down there. The truth is that churches can rarely survive a failure of leadership.

If the offending church leader is not dealt with, he will drag the church down with him. I remember when Jimmy Swaggart fell, the church suspended him for three months.

A larger body of the assemblies in Springfield said, no, that's not enough. We're going to suspend him for nine months. As MacArthur said, that's not like a vacation.

He got nine months off. I'd like to have nine months off. The conduct of these pastors, and I'm not just referring to those two.

There's many. It is not an issue of forgiveness. People say, oh, you're hard, you know, and you're unforgiving. It's not an issue of forgiveness. The Lord graciously promises forgiveness to all Christians if their repentance is genuine.

[8:12] And forgiveness is available. We learn this from John's first epistle. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive our sins and to cleanse us of all unrighteousness.

The issue is who does the erring pastor represent? He represents Christ. And therefore, the standard, and I'm thinking now, Swaggart, it's not how gifted he was, and he was very gifted, not how popular, effective, or even repentant he is.

The issue is we are to trust God and keep the biblical standard. One person said, well, but look how many people got saved under Jimmy Swaggart's ministries.

Now, let me say this, okay? The power is in the word. The power is not in the God that delivers it. God uses his word to get people saved.

You know how many people I've saved in my 35, 40 years as a believer? Same amount as you guys. Zero. I remember when Larry King asked Billy Graham, he said, Billy, how many people have been saved under your ministry?

[9:30] He said, one, probably two. I'm pretty sure Ruth saved two. You know, of course, she was already saved. But he understood that.

That's God. We're encroaching into God's area. There are actually some in our day that argue the man who has fallen into gross immorality will then be able to teach others how to avoid the pitfall. Now, the problem, though, is you have Romans 6, 1 jumping out at you, which says, are we to continue in sin so that grace might abound?

And Paul says, God forbid, a very strong, and Paul was very emphatic about it. God forbid that we would ever think that we could sin because we're under grace.

That's antinomianism against the law of Christ. Paul's theme in our passage today is that only men who meet the divine standards should be allowed in or to remain in ministry.

[10:35] And Paul, you will recall, had commissioned Titus to go the length and breadth of Crete to find such men to serve in the churches of Crete.

That's what this letter is all about. Just three chapters long. Paul had left Titus in Crete for two reasons. He says, first of all, he was there to set in order what remains.

Titus set in order was an ancient medical term meaning to set broken bones. We get actually, interestingly, we get our modern term orthodontist from the Greek word, meaning one that aligns

crooked teeth.

It was the role of Titus to straighten out certain doctrines and practices in the churches on Crete. And the problems on Crete may have involved church leaders that were deficient not only theologically but morally.

[11:43] And we need Paul today to come back and send Titus across America. Of course, it would take him a while and do some straightening.

Do some straightening. Titus was also instructed to seek out and appoint qualified elders across the island.

The word elder in the New Testament usage included overseers, pastors, bishops. The appointment of these men was the primary duty of Titus, but it was not to be based on human judgment.

And that's crucial. He was to seek the direction and will of the Spirit of God in these appointments. You know, how often do churches fail to do that?

The selection of the elders is a divine prerogative. So God establishes through the inspired writings of Paul the divinely revealed, non-negotiable qualifications for pastors, elders, or overseers.

[12:59] And he will deal with them in five areas. He's going to touch on five areas. He's going to talk about their public reputation, their sexual morality, their ability to lead their family, their general character, and their teaching skill.

That's the five things that I got out of this by reading John MacArthur. And the first thing I'll mention is public reputation. Namely, if any man be above reproach.

That's the first chapter of Titus, verse 6. The words above reproach, which is one word in the Greek language, carries with it the idea of being blameless.

According to Vine's Expository Dictionary of the New Testament words, it implies not merely acquittal, but the absence of even a charge or accusation against a person.

Such a person is not subject to indictment, much less a trial. Much less a trial. I think back in the book of Acts when Paul was arrested and finally made it before the Roman judge, you know, he said, He hadn't done anything wrong.

[14:16] Let him go. What's he done wrong? And boy, the Jewish leaders were going, Well, you know, well, maybe we can find something. He said, No, let him go. He hadn't done anything wrong. He was in and out of jail all the time.

Now, we need to be clear on this concept. Paul is not talking about sinless perfection. If he is, I'm in deep trouble. He's not talking about sinless perfection.

Who would be qualified to serve the church? You know, if that's the standard. But he does set the divine standard for leaders as virtuous and at a level of godliness that does not bring their conduct into question.

They must teach and preach rightly while at the same time live rightly. These should be men that God wants the congregation to follow.

And sadly, I'm aware of a church right now where the pastor lost the pulpit, but it turns out he's been having multiple affairs with women in the church for years.

[15:27] Now, he's destitute. He's out of work. He can't get work. And his wife's filed for divorce. What are the responsibilities of an effective church leader?

I'll give credit where credit's due. MacArthur lists several. Winning the lost. Discipling and nourishing believers. I hope we're doing a little of that in here.

I hope. Preaching and teaching sound doctrine. Organizing. Wise decision making. Careful stewardship of funds.

Consistent and earnest prayer. Discipline of sinning members. And the ordination of other qualified leaders.

Now, having said all of this, we must also point out that the pastor is not to be placed at the top of the church's aristocracy or hierarchy.

[16:29] And let me tell you what I mean by that. And I certainly do not intend to step on any toes in here. If I have, just pick your feet up.

But I can actually get a little queasy when I see some... I have a word for it. It slipped my mind.

But when you see the cardinals come together in Rome with the Pope. Conclave. And the ornate. I mean, these hats that go...

You know, I used to have to wear one of those and sit in the corner, you know. I see that ornate and the gold chains and all this. Man, that turns me off.

God didn't call church leaders to do that. God did not call church leaders to do that. The Pope and the cardinals parade in wearing these exorbitant clothing and people bow and kiss their rings and so forth.

[17 : 35] That is not the biblical model. The last words of Jesus to Peter was, take care of my sheep. Tend my sheep.

Care for my flock. And Christ is still calling men to care for the sheep of his flock. And I've been around sheep a lot, trust me.

Here and in Scotland. And they need taken care of. They need taken care of. Interestingly, the shepherds never really enjoyed high status when you look in the Old and New Testament.

The shepherds in Israel were at the lowest rung of the socioeconomic ladder. They were one step from being the outcasts.

And the ministers were outcasts. They smelled. They smelled like sheep. Wet sheep, even worse. Now, their work was important and filled a necessary function.

[18 : 41] But it also consisted of mundane and unglamorous work. Most people shunned it. The shepherd was shunned because of the smell. And I always find it interesting that the first persons the angels announced the birth of the Savior to was a group of shepherds tending their flocks in the fields around Bethlehem.

That's just like God. That is just like God. If I was going to write the Bible, he wouldn't be coming to shepherds and he wouldn't be born in a stable and rest in a food trough, which is what a manger is. If men wrote that book, he'd be in a palace with gold and servants. That's why it is a divine authorship. The pastor is to be a shepherd, the shepherd of the flock.

Don is our shepherd of the local flock here. In the area of sexual morality, he is to be the husband of one wife. Now, literally, that means be a one-woman man or a one-woman husband.

And I told Jonathan at lunch today that I'm quaking about this section because I didn't have enough time to talk to Don about how he feels about it.

[20 : 02] But I'm going to give you some things that I believe or at least consider and some other things, a variety of what I would call misinterpretations of that passage.

Now, there was in Paul's day widespread polygamy. A guy had more than one wife. First of all, why would anyone want to do that?

I mean, boys, just have one. Your dad will tell you. And that was clearly forbidden in the New Testament.

But it is not what Paul has in mind here. Marriage to one person at a time is a biblical standard for all believers. We can't be married to two people. It does not apply merely to church leaders.

That passage is for everybody in the church. The passage is not referring to a widower who has remarried.

[21 : 11] A man is in the church. He lost his wife. You mean he can't serve? And of course he can. Of course he can. That's permitted in Scripture. Neither is Paul saying that the elder must be married.

We have two single elders in this room right now. And serve well. I'll tell you. Single men meet the qualifications.

Paul was apparently single. And we've got James and Lee here. Both single men. Now, here's where I'm going to go with thin ice. I struggle as to whether or not Paul was referring to every divorced man.

And I know that's un-Baptist. It really is. We've had that prohibition here for, well, I joined 1980. Am I the longest member in here? I guess I am.

Maybe something else. John, you grew up in the church. He may have had un-biblical divorce in mind.

[22 : 22] But there is a biblical standard for divorce that the Lord Jesus laid down. Now, I haven't had a chance to talk to Don. Dr. McBride disagreed with me vehemently.

He said, that's to protect the family. God wants the family protected. And he believed in that, fourthly. And I didn't want to debate him publicly or Don.

I don't know how you feel. I've always found it curious, though, in Baptist circles, we draw the line on all divorced men, including those scripted divorce, from ever serving in high church leadership.

But technically, a truly repentant mass murderer might meet the church standard. If repentance is genuine. I'm not saying we would do that. But that kind of bothers me a little bit.

We have a personal example. By the way, I'll just tell you up front. We've had three divorce men serve as deacons in this church. You have to go back 30 years or more.

[23:21] And essentially, the church, I don't think, even knew it. I think that's why they got in. I wouldn't hear them, but I knew who the three men were. They're all three dead now. And let me add this.

I may be wrong on all this, okay? It may mean, if you've ever been married and divorced, you're out. It may mean that. We had a guy here, though, really good guy. I don't know if you guys remember or not.

Dr. James? You're a kid. James, do you remember him? Are you here yet? I was in 81 when I came. Yeah, okay. Dr. James was the neatest guy. He was an M.D., young guy.

When he was 18, he married his high school sweetheart. At 19, caught her with another man. Divorced. Dropped out of school.

Joined the Army. Went into the infantry. Fought in Vietnam. Got radically saved. Came out of Vietnam.

[24:24] Went on a GI Bill to college. Got his degrees, including a medical degree. Became a doctor. Met a nice Christian girl. They married. Had a child.

Boy, we would not even consider him for deacon. And his name would come up repeatedly. He said, no way. Been divorced. And it troubled me. I'm sorry.

It just did. Given that set of circumstances. Maybe the husband of one wife refers to that man's faithfulness to that woman.

That he is above all reproach of having anything to do with another woman. Physically. Emotionally. Maybe. There's room here. You guys are about to read this and decide for yourselves. And then the Lord will straighten us all out. Maybe it's referring to a man who has sexual purity toward his wife that is both inward and outward.

[25:32] Outwardly, he has not and will not engage in any type of extramarital affair or conduct. Inwardly, he only has eyes for his wife.

When a man looks at a woman and lusts after her, he's committed adultery with her. We know that. Jesus said that. And let's be honest, guys. That's probably our chief area of weakness for men.

It's tough. And you know who understands that? Satan at Madison Avenue. They understand that. That's why you see women selling hammers for Ace Hardware in bikinis.

My wife asked me, why you got all these hammers around here? I don't know. I don't know. I just felt compelled to buy them. We all battle.

We all battle us. We all battle it. You battle it. I battle it. So what kind of life must a church leader have? It must be unsullied. A lifelong devotion to his wife.

[26:35] Now, some of you guys say, you don't know my wife. No, I don't. Maybe I don't. But I do know the Lord. An elder must be sexually pure.

He must be free from fornication, adultery, divorce, and remarriage, except in the case of his wife dying. He must not have a mistress, illegitimate children, and any moral stain that tarnishes not his reputation, tarnishes the reputation of Christ and his church.

See, there's the issue. When I saw Jimmy Swaggart in the pulpit following his situation, what did I see?

What did you guys see? To this day, what do I see? See a man caught in adultery. And he's representing Christ behind that pulpit. Again, it's not an issue of forgiveness.

Not even an issue of being used in some capacity somewhere. But the pulpit, it's a whole different deal. David is a great example.

[27:49] David repented. You know, I mean, you read all the things David did. It's astonishing. There were about 11 sins in there that led up to the murder of Bathsheba's husband.

And you know what it started with? It said, in the spring when kings went off to war, David stayed in Jerusalem. Do we have a problem with him disobeying God's word? That was his first sin.

He's a great example. Did he repent? Yes. Read Psalm 51. But let me tell you something. Never forget, David paid a high price for being with Bathsheba.

Not the least of which it cost him the life of his son. Paul understood just how fragile Christian service was in this area.

Listen to some comments Paul made to the sinning church located at Corinth on this matter. In 1 Corinthians 9.27, I buffet my body and make it my slave.

[28 : 55] Less possibly, after I've preached to others, I myself should be disqualified. In 1 Corinthians 6, verses 18 and 19.

Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body. But the immoral man sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?

I'm going to tell you something about Paul. His greatest fear, I think starting when he got up off the ground at the road to Damascus, was that he would do something to be disqualified.

Disqualified from preaching the gospel to the lost, of the founding, of establishing churches, of doing mission work. He, I think Paul, lived in fear of being disqualified.

One can only imagine the prayers, the prayer life of Paul. And let me suggest, guys, I pray that prayer.

[30 : 11] Sometimes more fervently than others. Don't let me do anything to be disqualified. And I've had some real skeletons in the closet that the Lord Jesus took away from me.

I didn't get saved unless 30. I hope the clock started running then. But Paul lived in fear of being disqualified. And then, when we say that he lived in fear of being disqualified, we should have that same fear.

And then family leadership. Boy, this is a tough one. Having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion.

The next qualification for eldership or church leader that Paul mentions has to do with family life. The man who is incapable of leading his own family spiritually and morally is not qualified to lead an entire congregation.

When we are considering men for leadership in the church, look at their families. And let me say this.

[31 : 47] And you probably notice this some Sunday morning. We'll have a family come up. And we've never met them before. And what will Don do? Probably because I'm the closest, he'll look over at me.

And that's my signal to go up there and I take them out. And the first thing I tell them is, you're welcome. We're glad you came. We're excited about this. The pastor wants to do a home visit. He wants to come to your home and visit with you. And you can learn a lot about a person by doing a home visit.

Even an announced home visit. You don't have to surprise them. But we, Don does, Pastor, am I right there? You want to do a home visit and really get to know them.

Look at the godly influence that that man has over his children. And from the Greek construction here, Paul may mean a child regardless of age.

[32 : 54] He may not just be talking about little shavers. The word believe here is from pistus or pistuo, meaning trust or faithful.

Having children who believe. This may not happen overnight. Many of us have rebellious children. And in some cases, they may have learned it from us.

You know, who knows? Maybe that's where they got it. Having children, though, that are rebellious distracts from a man's ministry. I worked with a guy, Phillips, a good guy, Tom Estes, Assembly of God guy.

His dad was an Assembly of God pastor, evangelist. And he said, he went with him to a tent revival one time. His dad's up there preaching. He said, man, I was misbehaving.

I was about eight years old. And he said, I was misbehaving. And all of a sudden, I noticed my dad wasn't preaching anymore. And he called the music minister up there and said, come up and lead us in a hymn.

[33 : 59] I'll be right back. And Tom's home. He said, I knew what that meant. And he said, he's going down the aisle. He was pulling his belt out. And it was popping at every belt loop.

He called him Wyatt Earp. Because it would go, pow, pow, pow, pow, pow, pow. And Tom said, boy, he took me outside that tent. And he wore me out. He wore me out.

That happened in this church. Not with a belt, but in a Sunday school class one time. It happened in this church. A kid named Justin. My wife brought him to me.

My class was still going on. I said, deal with him when the class is over. Okay. I dealt with him. It is important to lead a flock that you lead your children to faith.

And, again, it doesn't necessarily happen overnight. It really boils down to allowing our light to shine in front of our children. That's what we're talking about.

[35 : 03] Because that's really one of the majors. Now, you know, there's a lot of rebellious kids out there. I remember when Ed Saucier went to the College of the Prophets at First Dallas.

And the last day they always had a deal. It was like, have you ever been there? It was like an, you picture in medical school where the guys that are going to school are sitting up looking down into the amphitheater.

And Dr. Kruzzo was down there dressed in white. He said, look like Colonel Sanders. And the final two questions of a two or three hour, one question was, what's the best advice you can give us as we're leaving to go back to our churches?

He said, never touch the glory of God. That's reserved for God alone. Don't you touch his glory. And you see guys on TV trying to do that all the time.

But then the last question read by a moderator there was, if you could do anything differently, what would you do? And Ed told me, he said, Dr. Kruzzo sat there for about two minutes.

[36 : 26] That is a long time. That's a long time. And then he said his lips started to quiver and tears started to come down. And he said, I have failed as a father.

He said, I failed. And he did. He had a problem daughter. She got into all kinds of trouble with other men, with drugs. I remember that era. And he said, I failed.

And he said, where I failed is I did not keep the proper order of things being God, family, church. For me, it was God, church. And then if I had time in a church of 10,000, then I would worry about family.

Family life is very important to God. It's the first thing he established in the garden. It was the first thing Satan attacked in the garden.

[37 : 35] Half God said. Keep your behavior before your wife, your children, your church, your friends in the world.

Let them see your behavior. Have good character. And what is character? Character is what we do when we're all alone.

That's really who we are. That's really who we are. And I've had to deal with some things before the Lord. I'll just tell you right now. Character is what you are when you're all alone.

And letting you out here a little early. But next time, we're going to continue because there's more qualifications to do. Thank you.