

The Basic Qualifications for Church Office-Bearers – by Rev. Tom Aicken

“Seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom ...” Acts 6:3

This text lays out the most basic qualifications for a deacon, what members of any congregation ought to look for in electing one of their number to that office. Upon careful inspection of other Scriptures, it's very clear that these are the same basic qualifications – the minimum standard, if you like – for any office-bearer, whether teaching elder (pastor), ruling elder or deacon, and that no member should elect someone to any of these offices unless he clearly exhibits all four of these traits. Expanded lists are given to us in 1 Timothy 2 and Titus 1, and we need to study them as well, but this text in Acts focuses our attention on the most essential points, what is required without reservation or compromise of anyone who is to be considered eligible to hold office in the church. Let's examine these four traits carefully, and we'll do so in the order that they are given to us.

(1) He must be a man. Many churches today have opted to elect women to holy office, and some have even chosen to elect “transgendered” people (this is a gender which exists only in the perverse imagination of woke mythology), but the Bible is clear in this matter and allows nothing other than what God Himself has ordained for prospective candidates (1 Cor. 11:3; 14:34,35; 1 Tim. 2:11,12).

(2) He must be of good reputation. If the elected representatives of any church are to fulfill their ministry and be regarded as honest guardians of truth, it's imperative that they be above reproach (blameless, 1 Tim. 3:2) and have a good testimony, not only in the church, but even before the eyes of a watching world (1 Tim. 3:7). It's only by such an untarnished witness that they are able to exhort and convict those who oppose the truth (Tit. 1:5-14).

(3) He must be full of the Holy Spirit. Every Christian is instructed to be filled with the Holy Spirit and to make diligent use of the means of grace, the public as well as private means, in order to maintain that spiritual progress (Eph. 5:18-21). The Christian cannot lose the Spirit (Eph. 1:13,14), but he can through carelessness quench the Spirit (1 Thess. 5:19), which is to be unresponsive to Him, and so let the believer take every precaution not to do that. We can see from this why it is

that the office-bearers, in turn, as an example and encouragement to others, must be those who are full of the Spirit, who have reached some maturity of faith (not a novice, 1 Tim. 3:6), who continue to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ (2 Pet. 3:18). This is not to say that they must already have attained perfect sanctification – none of us has – but, like Paul, they’re to be leaders who actively seek such attainment, who keep pressing “toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:14).

(4) He must be full of wisdom. It is the Holy Spirit who gives wisdom, not a worldly wisdom, but that godly wisdom which begins with the fear of the Lord (Ps. 111:10), and it’s this wisdom which is evident in those who are full of the Spirit, who submit to the Word of God and commit everything to Him, their faithful Creator, who judges righteously. We need to ask ourselves, then, concerning every potential candidate for church office: “Do I see this wisdom in him? Is he familiar with the Scriptures of both the Old and New Testament? Is it clear that Christ is pre-eminent to him? Has he made good decisions in his own life? Does he counsel others from the Bible? Is he patient with other people? Does he esteem others better than himself and give them preference?” (See 1 Pet. 5:1-4.)

It’s surely clear that different gifts are needed for the different offices. A pastor, for instance, must be able to preach (2 Tim. 4:1-5), an elder (also called a bishop or overseer) must be able to teach (1 Tim. 3:2), and a deacon must have the compassion to relate to and identify with those needy souls whom he is sent to help (Acts 6:1,2). Moreover, each one should be tested beforehand (1 Tim. 3:10). Gifts demonstrated in practice speak louder and tell more than any list of gifts described on paper.

Acts 6:3, you’ll notice, doesn’t give us a complete list of qualifications for any office-bearer, but it does give us as a condensed list what is minimally required, and no one should be considered for any holy office without his adequately exhibiting that he possesses all four of them. It is a shame to overlook someone who has the gifts and graces to serve in some official capacity, but it’s far worse to elect and ordain someone to office who is lacking any of these required traits. The testimony of church history is that this is a person who can cause great harm to the life and witness of that body of believers.