

What to look for in calling a Minister of the Gospel

by Rev. Tom Aicken

1. He must love the Lord, seek to be Christ-like, and be willing to suffer for righteousness' sake.

To him who believes, says Peter, Christ is precious. Yet loving the Lord requires that we be like Him as well, and that we be ready to suffer shame and disgrace for His sake. This is the first qualification of a minister; it's the foundation that holds all the others together, and is, at the same time, the driving force behind them.

2. He must have a low view of himself and a high view of his office; he must be humble and well aware that his sufficiency to serve is of God.

Too often today, though, we see quite the opposite, men who step into the pulpit having a high view of themselves and a low view of their office. Failing to get this priority right, however, has greatly hampered the work of the gospel ministry, revealing a focus on men and their ideas rather than a determined resolve to preach nothing but Christ and Him crucified.

3. He must not rely on strategies, or programs, or lean on any arm of flesh, but seek the blessing of the Lord and remember that it is He who gives the increase.

This is the other half of point no. 2. When men elevate themselves and their own ideas, they effectively turn away from the Lord, utterly undermining their reliance upon Him in doing so, choosing instead their own resources and pursuing what they think to be their best opportunities (by whatever means, and often by worldly methods) to do what they think needs to be done successfully.

4. He must be a man of prayer and one who promotes prayer in his ministry.

If points 2 and 3 are understood, and deemed to be important, this, too, will be embraced. It is not a matter of how long he will pray every day.

Nevertheless, he will be a man who brings everything to the Lord, praying fervently, persistently, and committing himself, his congregation, and all that they have together to Him who judges righteously. He will be eager to pray, and, at the same time, to encourage others in prayer.

5. He must be committed to the Bible as the Word of God, *tota scriptura* and *sola scriptura*.

Tota scriptura means 'all the Word of God'. It is essential that he be committed to it as something inspired (i.e. God-breathed), and therefore inerrant. *Sola scriptura* means 'only the Word of God'. It is equally essential that he be committed to it as the only infallible rule of faith and practice; simply put, there is no other standard of authority for what to believe or how to live.

6. He must demonstrate this commitment (i.e. his commitment to the Bible as the Word of God) in his public life, including the oversight of his home-life.

It is of special interest here to note the role of the minister's wife. It is imperative that she support his ministry, that she be seen to do so, and not work against it. Let them love each other, but, better yet, let them demonstrate that the love of each for Christ is even greater. Note also the role of the minister's children. Even if they never become believers, they must be taught the unsearchable riches of Christ, and must learn to show respect for all who are in authority.

7. He must demonstrate this same commitment also in his preaching and teaching, not shunning to declare the whole counsel of God.

It is a popular if regrettable trend today to preach from part of the Bible - from the N.T. but not from the O.T., from the gospel but not from the law, from the historical narratives and parables but not from poetic passages or darker prophecies - yet the effect of such truncated preaching is not to make men wise for salvation through faith in Christ, but to leave them ill-equipped for every good work.

8. He must demonstrate this commitment in being able to get along with other people, and yet never waver in matters of principle.

There may be at times a measure of tension here - on the one hand, being willing and able to work with other people who are sometimes disagreeable, and, on the other hand, being determined never to compromise biblical principles - yet a faithful pastor of souls is wise enough to recognize and respect the difference.

9. His preaching must be Christ-centred, discriminatory, and emphasizing the necessity of an experiential faith.

The whole Bible is about Jesus Christ, and any pastor who loses sight of that ceases to be a minister of the gospel. He should preach Christ to women as well as to men, to children as well as to adults, and, above all, to unbelievers as well as to believers. Let him preach Christ in a manner that commends Him, not only to the mind, but to the heart as well and demands the service of one's whole being.

10. He must be able to defend the faith both in and out of the pulpit, and to give a quiet and reverent answer to anyone who asks a reason for the hope that is within him.

Brownlow North noted in his day, 160 years ago, that many ministers are fully able to preach fine sermons in the pulpit, i.e. in season, but are quite incapable of preaching Christ at all when out of the pulpit, i.e. informally, or out of season. Sadly, this is still true in our generation.

11. He must love the church, be eager to give pastoral oversight to all who are under his care and set a worthy example for the children.

If a minister truly loves the Lord, he will also love His church, and it will be apparent to all. He will be committed to the people under his care, rejoicing with those who rejoice, grieving with those who grieve, and doing everything he can for those who need him most.

12. He must have a heart for lost souls and be prepared to engage in evangelistic outreach to the surrounding community.

Besides loving the Lord's church, a true minister will also long for the lost and perishing souls outside, for all who continue without hope and without God in the world. He will preach for conversion, but he will also rejoice with the angels of God over each and every sinner who repents.

No minister measures up to Jesus Christ, the true Shepherd and Overseer of our souls, but neither should any be carelessly lacking in any of these qualifications.