

# QUALIFICATIONS FOR A CHURCH MINISTER

By Adauto Rezende

**“This is a true saying, if a man desires the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.” I Timothy 3: 1**

Recently in my trip to Pakistan, a church leader had asked me to ordain<sup>1</sup> a young man for the ministry in a city close to the brickyard settlement. After some questions about the candidate, I trusted in his senior pastor's advices that he had tested and had found him approved to be the Christian leader in this town near Lahore. I shared a study based on the first letter of Paul to Timothy chapter three, where divine instructions were taught on the subject. During the ministration I asked few questions to the assembly:

What are the most important qualifications for someone to serve as leaders in Christ's Church?

What gives assurance to appoint a person as a minister, elder or deacon in a Christian assembly?

Is it theological knowledge, spiritual gifts or boldness to preach, I asked.

Of course, we would consider as normal requirement a theological training. A blind cannot help another blind otherwise, both will fall. We assumed when Paul gave Timothy instructions and guidelines by the Holy Spirit that the nominees had knowledge of God's words. He had mentioned this fact in his second letter to Timothy:

- *“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.” II Tim. 2: 15*

Therefore, a need for a correct theology is necessary. And it was something to exercise daily as he said: “Do your best.” It was not just to go to a Bible College and apply for a ministerial career in some denomination, but to have daily spiritual devotions such as reading, meditating and teaching the word of God, praying, and worshipping the Lord, as a divinely approved leader.

Let's read more of the text on the subject:

- *“Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task. Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?). He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good*

*reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.*  
*I Timothy 3: 1-7*

## **BE CAREFUL HOW YOU JUDGE**

It is important to say that these instructions were preceded by very clear statements that can't be neglect by any sincere Bible student in chapter one. It is a terrible mistake to judge someone in ministry; without considering the famous "Before and after" in the life of a Christian.

Let's reflect how Paul started in the same letter in the first chapter:

- *"And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." I Timothy 1: 12-15*

In these verses, the apostle made sure to tell the readers who he was before he met Christ. He pointed out that preceding his conversion, before being a great apostle he considered himself the greatest sinner of all. He mentioned in a letter addressed to Timothy's church these words: *"Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints ..."*<sup>2</sup> However, he understood the gospel and for that reason, he quoted: *"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."* If we would not understand this essential principle, we are ending to make the same mistakes as the Pharisees and Paul before his conversion. He mentioned in the book of Romans that the gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation<sup>3</sup> to every one that believeth; the power to change the most terrible sinner and evil blasphemer in a saint!

In the text, he used the words *"The grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant..."*, yes, we are saved by grace through faith. This is the Gospel! This is the *"Evangelion"* the Greek word which means good news. What the brothers John, Richard, and James or Sister Marie had done before they became Christians had been forgiven and forgotten. Scriptures tell us about that:

- *"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus," Romans 8: 1*
- *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." II Corinthians 5: 17*
- *"This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." I Timothy 1: 15*

I remembered two experiences I had during my before and after Christian life that taught me a lot in the subject. The first one happened when I was fourteen. At the time, I went to work in a

restaurant in my town in Brazil. There I met a tall black handsome cook named Dario, feared because of his criminal reputation. He was a cook during the day and a crook in the nights. He practiced witchcraft, was a dangerous criminal, a drug dealer, and in trouble with the law. After a few months there, Dario arrived in the kitchen for his daily shift with a smile that I had never seen on his face before. He was singing a song that mentioned God in its lyrics and carrying a thick black-covered book under his arm. Some of the other workers had told me that he threw 500 grams of marijuana on the kitchen BBQ brick grill and that he broke his four shotguns. Curious, I asked him why he was so different and what had happened to him. Something had changed profoundly in his personality, and I really wanted to know what it was. Answering my question, he peacefully told me the following words: "The Lord Jesus has changed my life". After hearing his statement I thought to myself: How could that be? From my religious concepts that would be impossible. How could God love such a sinner as him? How could God forgive this man for all his crimes? All these questions fomented inside me. And to make things worse for my religious mind, months after he was appointed as a deacon in his church. Of course, I had no clue about the power of the gospel to transform a criminal in a holy man of God. I was so impressed by the conversion and transformation of the man that I asked if he could lend me his Bible so that I could do a quick reading. When I opened the pages of the Holy Book and read a few paragraphs, I felt something burning in my heart. An inexplicable joy overflowed inside of me! I could not give him back his Bible. (I don't remember if I bought it or if he gave it to me.). I took it home, and there I began to have the greatest experiences of my life with the one true God. Prior to that, all I knew were my mother's prayer chants and the idols we worshiped from our religion. That experience had marked my life, even though I still did not know that I was a lost sinner. Almost two decades after, I realized like Paul, the apostle, how great sinner I was and finally I surrendered my life to Jesus Christ, receiving Him as my personal Saviour and Lord.

My second experience came a few years after my conversion. It happened when God called me to the ministry. I had served in my local church for three years while attending a Bible College. When I finished the theological course and was ordained, I had the most terrible time as a Christian. For many days I heard voices telling me that I was not fit to serve in the ministry because of my past life. I heard the devil reminding me of my former sins and how evil a person I was. Without much maturity, I had several sleepless nights and terrible days. It is not by chance that Scriptures call the devil our adversary and the accuser of Christians.<sup>4</sup> However, the Lord intervened in the midst of the turmoil and spoke to me through His words:

- *"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness...and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin."* (I John 1: 8-9-7b).

I stopped listening to the devil, and I claimed my forgiveness and victory that Jesus conquered on the cross on my behalf.

Therefore, we have to understand that if the greatest of the apostles was such a major sinner before his conversion, then all church leaders in every generation were all great sinners as well until they surrendered their lives to Jesus Christ, became God's child and called to the ministry. It is impossible to serve Christ without being a Christian. You can serve a charity. You can serve the poor in your city, you can send aid to poor nations, all these are valid reasons however, to serve Jesus Christ you must be born again. You have to acknowledge that you are a sinner, that you need Jesus's blood to forgive your past, present and future sins. Jesus had told his disciples that without him they could do nothing.<sup>5</sup>

Like Paul, I learned not to hide my past. I even wrote a book telling my biography. There are stories of victories and failures, of virtues and sins and how Jesus Christ had redeemed my soul.

### **ORDINATION, NOT ABOUT POWER, BUT ABOUT INTEGRITY**

Paul instructed Timothy, the pastor of the church in Ephesus how to find and to ordain bishops and deacons in the church<sup>6</sup>.

- *"Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task." "Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus."*

Concerning the subject, the first thing Paul mentioned was the disciple's desire to serve God. This can't be imposed; it must come from the person's own will respond to the call of God in his/her life. Then, the Apostle praised the choice and the rewards that would come when someone moves on to serve in the church.

He said that it was a noble task or good work. Why it is noble? Because of whom they are serving: the King Jesus Christ and his kingdom. That is why it is noble.

Then, Paul starts to describe the qualifications of the leader. And it is notable that is almost 100% about integrity. It is mostly about the fruit of the Spirit<sup>7</sup>. It is about godly behaviour towards family members, believers and unbelievers.

It was and has been always about integrity. It is the divine pattern of appointing people in the Scriptures since the beginning of mankind:

Abel was a godly man, while his brother Cain was an evil one:

- *"Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous." I John 3: 12*

Noah's godly personality is emphasized in Scriptures:

- *“This is the account of Noah and his family. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God. Gen. 6: 9*

Jesus confronted some Jewish leaders telling them about Abraham’s character:

- *““Abraham is our father,” they answered. “If you were Abraham’s children,” said Jesus, “then you would do what Abraham did. As it is, you are looking for a way to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.” John 8: 39-44*

Moses spoke to the Lord against some Israeli leaders with these words:

- *“Then Moses became very angry and said to the LORD, “Do not accept their offering. I have not taken so much as a donkey from them, nor have I wronged any of them.” Numbers 16: 15*

God described Job’s character to Satan with these words:

- *“Then the LORD said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.” Job 1: 8*

The prophet Samuel challenged the Israelites about his conduct:

- *“Here I stand. Testify against me in the presence of the LORD and his anointed. Whose ox have I taken? Whose donkey have I taken? Whom have I cheated? Whom have I oppressed? From whose hand have I accepted a bribe to make me shut my eyes? If I have done any of these things, I will make it right.” “You have not cheated or oppressed us,” they replied. “You have not taken anything from anyone’s hand.” (I Samuel 12: 4)*

There is a narrative in the second book of Kings about a wise woman from Shunem. During her lifetime, Elisha, the prophet ministered in different cities in Israel and her city was also included in his schedule. Apparently, this woman watched the prophet whatever he appeared in the city. It seemed by her words that she was not looking at his divine power to perform miracles, but rather his conduct. She investigated his integrity, she asked questions to learn about his behaviour and then, she decided to invite him for supper. As the days went by, she

came to the following conclusion about Elisha's personality: *"I know that this man who often comes our way is a holy man of God."* II Kings 4: 9

The next action she took was to convince her husband to build a flat in their home to accommodate the prophet and his helper. Certainly, she would not "have gone to all this trouble for us", as quoted by Elisha, if she had found any evil activities in his life. Integrity was the greatest virtue in the prophet's life.

In the next chapter, in another event, Elisha had told the leprous Syrian Naaman to dip in the river Jordan seven times that he would be healed. Once he obeyed the prophet, the Lord restored his flesh. Elisha sent him back to his country without accepting anything as payment for his healing. However, Gehazi Elisha's helper who supposed to be the next in line to replace the prophet lied to the Syrian General to get some silver and clothes for himself. In contrast to his master, Gehazi loved money and as punishment, he got to himself, not just the Syrian's silver, but his leprosy as well and disqualified for the ministry.

### **POWER AND MIRACLES ARE NOT CREDENTIALS FOR THE MINISTRY**

- *"He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap."* I Timothy 3: 7

It is important to mention that power comes from the Lord. The devil has a lot of power, and who gave it to him was God (before his fall), yet he is evil and there is nothing good in him and his demons.

Years ago one of my nephews asked me some questions: "Uncle, I have watched many scandals involving Christian leaders. How can this be? Would not these people representing Christ?" I heard him expressing his frustration, and I answered him with God's words:

- *"Then said he unto the disciples, It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe unto him, through whom they come! It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones."* Luke 17: 1-2

Jesus said about the judgment day: *"Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name? And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"* Mathew 7: 22-23 Reading the previous verses we must conclude that these false-disciples were deceiving themselves. They were serving not the true Christ, but a false one.



- *“For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.” Matthew 24: 24*

## **UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT**

- *“A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife,” I Tim. 3: 2*

This is not about the marital status the apostle is talking. Paul and Barnabas were both singles. It is the rebuke against polygamy and in some cases divorce<sup>8</sup>:

- *“Do **we** have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working?” I Corinthians 9: 5-6 (emphasis mine)*

It is also important to point out that what Paul is saying next is not about the age of the candidate, but about his Christian maturity:

*“Not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil.” I Timothy 3: 6*

A new believer (even being a senior) shouldn't take a position of authority in the church: immaturity gives way to pride and pride bring ruin as the quote in Scriptures:

- *“Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall. Better to be lowly in spirit along with the oppressed than to share plunder with the proud.” Proverbs 16 18-19*

The prophets Samuel and Jeremiah were very young when called by God:

- *“The boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli.” I Samuel 3: 1*
- *“Alas, Sovereign LORD,” I said, “I do not know how to speak; I am too young.” But the LORD said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am too young.’ You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you.” Jeremiah 1: 6-7*

Even Timothy, to whom the letter was sent, was a young minister as mentioned in the next chapter:

- *“Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity. I Tim, 4: 12*

## **THE CHURCH'S IDENTITY**

- *“These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.” I Timothy 3: 14-15 KJV*
- *“Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, <sup>15</sup> if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.” I Timothy 3: 14-15 NIV*

Paul concluded the instructions to Timothy and to the Christians in all generations reminding what the church really is: It is thousands of assembly of believers and followers of Jesus Christ in all the earth, where the living God dwells in the person of the Holy Spirit and His words proclaimed, obeyed and loved by his saints. And the divine secret exposed in Scriptures should be announced to all nations by Christ’s servants:

- *And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory. I Timothy 3: 16*

To God be the glory!

#### Notes:

<sup>1</sup>Some evangelical denomination would not use the term ordination, but “Appointed or elected ministers or deacons.”

<sup>2</sup>Ephesians 3: 8

<sup>3</sup>Romans 1: 16

<sup>4</sup>“for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.” Revelation 12: 10

<sup>5</sup>John 15: 4

<sup>6</sup>Bishop (ἐπισκοπῆς episkopēs, *the office of a bishop*) The episcopate, lit. ‘overseership,’ which Alford would retain as the translation, to avoid the later limitations suggested by ‘the office of a bishop.’ Deacons Διακόνους, Diakonous) The office of Deacon appears in the Pastorals, but not in Paul’s letters, with the single exception of Philippians 1:1, where the Deacons do not represent an ecclesiastical office, though they remark an advance toward it. Clement of Rome (ad 1 Corinthians 42. xlv.) asserts their apostolic appointment. But the evidence at our command does not bear out the view that the institution of the diaconate is described in Acts 6:1-6. The terms διάκονος and διακονία are, in the Pauline writings, common expressions of servants and service either to Christ or to others. Paul applies these terms to his own ministry and to that of his associates. Διακονία is used of the service of the apostles, Acts 1:25; Acts 6:4. Διάκονος is used of Paul and Apollos (1 Corinthians 3:5); of Christ (Galatians 2:17; Romans 15:8); of the civil ruler (Romans 13:4); of ministers of Satan (2 Corinthians 11:15). The appointment of the seven grew out of a special emergency, and was made for a particular service; and the resemblance is not



close between the duties and qualifications of deacons in the Pastorals and those of the seven. The word δῆκονος does not appear in Acts; and when Paul and Barnabas brought to Jerusalem the collection for the poor saints, they handed it over to the elders. ((Bible hub - Vincent's word studies)

<sup>7</sup>“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” Galatians 5: 22-23

<sup>8</sup>“And He answered and said to them, “Have you not read that He who [a]made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.” Matthew 19: 4-6

A.C. MINISTRY