

Officer Qualifications

Jeremiah 1:1–10, 1 Timothy 3:1–13

This month, our congregation is receiving nominations for ruling elder and deacon. We do this, in part, out of obedience to our Lord's command, "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest." As we pray, we do well to reflect on the potential giftedness and fitness for office of the mature men of our congregation, whom the LORD may be calling to special office.

Our text this morning sets forth the qualifications for church officers. We will need to spend at least a couple weeks on this text. We'll go into the specific character traits more fully next week. But first, we need to take care of some introductory matters. First,

1. The church is *Christ's church*, and *he* designates the offices.

First, it is necessary to point out that the Lord Jesus is the only king and head of his church. It is *Christ's church*, *Christ's kingdom*! The reason Christ's church has ministers of the Word, elders and deacons is because Christ ordered it this way.

Now if you were listening closely you noticed that the NKJV has "If a man desires the position of a *bishop*" (v. 1); later, verse 8 begins, "Likewise *bishops*." Maybe the thought came to you, *well, then, shouldn't our church have bishops?*

The short answer is *no*. The biblical word translated "bishop" literally means *overseer* and refers to a person who, with the session, oversees the spiritual lives of the members of the church. But in our day the word *bishop* has come to mean *one who assumes sole authority over multiple churches*. That idea is unbiblical and repugnant to the Word of God. *Faithful ministers and elders* are "overseers."

The first instance of the word *overseer* is in Genesis 39:4, where Joseph, sold into slavery, was purchased by Potiphar. In spite of the indignity of being sold and bought like a piece of property, Joseph trusted in the LORD and maintained a good attitude. He worked hard and got along with his fellow slaves. Potiphar noticed. "Joseph found grace in his sight, and he served him: and he made him *overseer* over his house, and all that he had he put into his hand."

Jesus taught that a person who is faithful in little things will be promoted.¹ Some job-seekers won't take a job because they think it's beneath them. They would rather be idle, living off the generosity of others, than work a distasteful but God-honoring job. They do not realize that if they faithfully labor at menial job, they will be promoted. Jesus said so! Our Lord himself came not to *be served* but to *serve*, and to give his life a ransom for many. He promises to bless a man with a servant attitude. Potiphar saw that Joseph was a faithful servant, so he made him *overseer* of his house—he promoted him to better things.

¹ Prov. 22:29; Luke 16:10

Now God, in his perfect wisdom, knows that all of us need oversight. I remember my first job, planting petunias and cultivating flower beds at a high-end apartment complex. It was hard work. I was often on my knees in the dirt for hours at a time. Several times that summer I had been working diligently for several hours, then stood up to stretch and catch my breath. Invariably when I did this, the foreman would come around a corner and say, “Hey, Pribble, get to work!” I thought to myself, *can’t he see all the beautiful flower gardens I just created?* Life isn’t always fair! Joseph was made overseer by Potiphar, the owner of the estate.

In the church of Christ we are members of one another. We are to provoke one another to love and good works—to bring out the best in one another.² That is informal oversight. My wife and I watch over one another. Sometime she will come into my office and say, “How’s that sermon coming?” And sometimes I’ll come into her office and say, “How’s that Sunday school lesson coming?”

Christ calls some members of the body to be overseers in a *formal* sense, as pastors and ruling elders, to give spiritual oversight to the flock, encouraging the members to be true to the Lord, to faithfully keep their vows, to serve Christ and live a godly life. Deacons are overseers too; they oversee the church’s diaconal funds and service to the poor.

Those called to formal oversight are called to an *office*. The one ordained and installed in that office is responsible to exercise the duties of his office on behalf of *Christ—as Christ himself would, if he were physically present*. This means that he must have a competent knowledge of Christ, as he is revealed in the Scriptures. He must be self-consciously devoted to Christ and desirous of bringing into captivity all his thoughts and motives to the obedience of Christ. He must desire the glory of Christ above all else. He must *not seek* his own advancement or comfort or worldly glory, for love “seeketh not her own” (1 Cor. 13:5), but Christ.

The NKJV translates the underlying Greek in verse 1 of our text as “the *position* of a bishop,” but in Acts 1:20, which refers to Judas Iscariot, who, along with the Eleven, held the apostolic office but became unfaithful, betrayed Christ, and committed suicide, the NKJV has the apostle Peter saying, “For it is written in the Book of Psalms: ‘Let his dwelling place be desolate . . .’ and, ‘Let another take his *office*.’” The identical word is rendered “position” in 1 Timothy and “office” in Acts.³ “Office” is clearly the better rendering, for the elder—whether a teaching elder or ruling elder—is carrying out his *official* duties on behalf of the risen and glorified Christ. He is *officially* acting on behalf of King Jesus, doing not his own will, but Christ’s will. In our opening hymn this morning we sang, “Glory to the King of angels, glory to the church’s King, glory to the King of nations; heav’n and earth your praises bring! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! To the King of glory sing! . . .

² Heb. 10:24

³ Both texts use ἐπισκοπή (*episkopē*) meaning *office of an overseer*.

Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Praise the mighty King of kings!” The Lord Jesus holds the office of King! He is indeed the only King and Head of his church! Amen!

If Christ is the only King and Head of his church, then the church *must* obey Christ. Obedience to Christ is not optional, but mandatory. If a church does not obey Christ, it is not a faithful church.

Many churches fail to ordain and install ruling elders and deacons. For a church to have such is not optional. To fail to have the biblically-revealed church offices is disobedience to Christ. It is not enough for a church to say, “This is the way we’ve always done it, and that’s good enough.” It is *not* good for a church to fail to ordain and install the biblically-prescribed officers. Christ instituted a perfect form of government for his church. Such a government enhances the glory of Christ and protects his vulnerable sheep and lambs. To have some other form of government other than the biblically-mandated plurality of elders is tyranny.

Some denominations have whole hierarchies: priests, bishops with sole authority over many churches, archbishops, cardinals, popes. Some independent evangelical churches have pastors with near-dictatorial powers, accountable to no one.

The Bible says, “Obey them that *have the oversight of you*, and submit yourselves” (Heb. 13:17, Geneva Bible⁴). This is the duty of every Christian. God does not send out independent preachers—an unbiblical notion. Ministers, ruling elders and deacons are accountable to human courts. If your minister were charged with teaching false doctrine, the presbytery, after determining guilt, could take disciplinary action, and even depose the unfaithful minister from his office. Having ministers, ruling elders and deacons who are accountable to the courts of the church is a great safeguard and protection for Christ’s sheep. If an “independent” minister is unfaithful to his calling and has led people astray, it will be too late. God people are called Christ’s “*sheep*.”⁵ That terminology is not accidental. Sheep are defenseless and need protection from ravenous wolves. In the same way, Christ’s sheep need protection from unfaithful ministers who seek to make merchandise of them. If a minister of the word does not want accountability, that is a serious problem. If a minister, previously ordained, declares himself independent, he is trying to avoid accountability. Christ’s sheep deserve to be under the oversight of lawfully-ordained ministers and elders who themselves are under the oversight of church courts—the presbytery (regional church) and general assembly.

Consider point two,

2. Who may be a minister or elder?

⁴ [https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews 13:17&version=GNV](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews%2013:17&version=GNV), accessed 10-4-25

⁵ John 10:27

Our text begins: “This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife”

Notice the *masculine* pronouns: “man,” “he,” “husband.” The word “man” is not explicit in the Greek, and the word “he” is supplied—it could be translated “she,” but it would be the wrong translation, as the word “husband” is clearly masculine (the Bible is not “woke”). Not only does the word “husband” clearly establish that the Holy Spirit of God has a biological man in mind, but consider our Lord’s practice, as well. Out of his many disciples, which included both men and women, he chose twelve *male* apostles. We read in Luke 6, “Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, He called His disciples to Himself; *and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles*: Simon, whom He also named Peter, and Andrew his brother; James and John; Philip and Bartholomew; Matthew and Thomas; James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon called the Zealot; Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot who also became a traitor.”

Now, in case you didn’t notice, Christ chose twelve *men*. This is really not in dispute. This was a deliberate choice on his part, the result of spending a whole night in communion with his heavenly Father, seeking the Father’s will. This was not a concession to the (supposedly) benighted age in which he lived; it was a deliberate, self-conscious choice on Christ’s part. Scripture clearly declares, “All things were made by him [Christ]; and without him was not anything made that was made” (John 1:3). The choice of male apostles was made by him who at the beginning made man male and female.⁶ This does *not* mean that Jesus considers women second class—far from it! Our wise Heavenly Father made men and women *different*, having complementary, interdependent roles for his people’s happiness and the orderly propagation of the human race. Though woke idiocy has infected academia and entertainment and the courts—all the way up to the Supreme Court—it is more than apparent to any thinking person that only men are capable of being fathers, and only women are capable of being mothers. The job of fathers is to provide for and protect their families, and bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. The job of mothers is to bare children and nurture and comfort them—a full-time, God-glorifying occupation!

Likewise in the church, ministers and elders are to be *fathers in the faith*, representing Christ and teaching his doctrine to their people. Women (and unordained men) are to be *silent* in the church, meekly and submissively receiving Christ’s true, life-giving doctrine from their spiritual shepherds.

⁶ Matt. 19:4, Mark 10:6

The Bible does not permit the ordination of women to the offices of minister, elder, and deacon. “Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence” (1 Tim. 2:11–12). “Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says” (1 Cor. 14:34).

Churches that ordain women ministers, elders and deacons congratulate themselves that they are being broadminded and egalitarian, but the problem is that they are disobeying Christ. Christ’s sheep must separate themselves from unfaithful churches that are not in submission to Jesus Christ, they only King and head of his church. If a church says, “We ordain women only as deacons, but we do not ordain women as ministers or elders,” that is not good enough. What Christ requires is *absolute submission* to his revealed will. If we do not obey him, we are in rebellion against Christ. Christians should separate from churches that are in rebellion against Christ and join faithful churches. That is our moral duty. If professing Christians are warned but do not leave unfaithful churches, then they are in rebellion against Christ.

If you identify as a Christian, then Christ must be your Lord! That means that you render him unconditional obedience. You do not bargain with Jesus; you do not say to him, “I will obey your commandments that I agree with, but not your commandments that I disagree with.” To have such an attitude is to be in disobedience to Jesus Christ. You may win the applause of men. You may win the approval of churches that are broadminded and egalitarian but unfaithful, but you will not win the approval of Christ at the final day, when he sits on his judgment seat as Lord, and every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that he is indeed Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Do not trade the eternal approval of Christ at the final day for the short-lived approval of this evil generation. At the final judgment, nobody is going to be able to say to Christ, “Lord, you don’t understand, I was popular in the court of human opinion.” The court of human opinion does not have power to give anyone eternal life! Christ alone can grant eternal life. It is best to be on his good side! If you have been disobedient in the past, then confess your sin and ask his forgiveness. The Son of man has power to forgive sins! *Today* is the day of salvation. The gospel promise is still in effect: “whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

Just this past week it was announced that a woman, one Sarah Mullally, will be the next archbishop of Canterbury, which will make her the first female leader of the Anglican Communion.⁷ Mullally is a self-described feminist However, she also supports the inclusion in the Church of England of those who reject the

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sarah_Mullally, accessed 10-4-25

ordination of women, stating, “I am very respectful of those who, for theological reasons, cannot accept my role as a priest or a bishop.” That is another way of saying: “We want your tithes and offerings, conservatives, but shut up and keep your opinions to yourself!” She favors what she calls “abortion rights,” a euphemism for *murdering* “the least of these” (Matt. 25:40). This woman is *not* a true minister of Christ but a wolf in sheep’s clothing. Scripture does not leave us in the dark about what to do: “Wherefore *come out* from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord” (2 Cor. 6:17). Come the new year, when the new archbishop of Canterbury is consecrated, you can bet that the event will be fully covered in the mainstream news: *look how woke and inclusive the Anglicans have become; you evangelical Christians better get with the program!* It is time for Christ’s true sheep to leave the apostate Anglican Communion!

Third,

3. Church officers are called to teach God’s people.

Ministers and elders must be “apt to teach.” Deacons must “[hold] the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience”—more on this next week. Church officers are called to live in accord with the doctrine that they teach. They must teach by example, as well as by spoken word.

In our Old Testament text the LORD calls Jeremiah and says to him, “‘Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; *I ordained you a prophet* to the nations.’” Then said I: ‘Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a youth.’ But the LORD said to me: ‘Do not say, “I am a youth,” for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and *whatever I command you, you shall speak*. Do not be afraid of their faces, for I am with you to deliver you,’ says the LORD. Then the LORD put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and the LORD said to me: ‘Behold, *I have put My words in your mouth*. See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant.’”

Notice particularly the words, “I ordained you a prophet . . . whatever I command you, you shall speak . . . Behold, I have put My words in your mouth.” As with Jeremiah of old, God’s call comes to the elders of the church today: “I ordained you a prophet.” A “prophet” is one who is ordained to speak God’s words—*God’s* thoughts. The message of the church is not self-help. It does not direct people to look within, to inner resources, to draw upon their own strength; it directs people to look to God, who strengthens them for every good work: “Whatever *I command you, you shall speak* . . . Behold, I have put *My words* in your mouth.” Pastors and elders are to be *ministers of the Word*; their primary business is to point people to *God’s* Word, not their own. Note particularly: God’s Word is to be *in their mouths*. They should be so full of God’s word that when they open their mouths, they speak the Word of God—quotations, allusions, scriptural

arguments. Ultimately, it is the Word of God—the Gospel—that helps people. When pastors and elders encounter human problems—and there are many in this vale of tears—they point to *God's* solution: *you cannot clean up the mess that is your life by willpower that is your own; you must look to Christ, the only Savior.*

We will look more particularly at the Christlike character and aptness to teach required of church officers next week.

Let's all be in prayer that the Lord of the church will raise up godly officers within our midst, to the glory of Christ. Amen.