

The Bishop #1

"Faithful is the saying, If a man seeketh the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work" (1 Tim. 3:1).

In Paul's letters to young preachers (Timothy, Titus) he includes a list of qualifications which are very similar. The list to Timothy (1 Tim. 3:1-7) is intended to be for those who *"seek the office of a bishop;"* the list to Titus (1:5-9) is designed for elders, but obviously also relates to those who are bishops. Titus was left in Crete to *"ordain elders in every city"* yet the identifying qualities for those men begin: *"... the bishop must be blameless, as God's steward"* (Tit. 1:7). It is evident that just as Titus had been left in Crete to *"ordain elders,"* so Timothy was left in Ephesus for the same purpose (1 Tim. 1:8)! That *"elders"* and *"bishops"* are different terms for the same men is evident from the instructions given to Titus. Titus was to appoint elders in every city, then Paul adds, *"For the bishop must be blameless."*

From the scriptures we learn that it was God's will that there be elders in every church (Tit. 1:8). We further see that Paul and Barnabas set the examples for those who follow when on their journey together they *"ordained elders in every church"* (Acts 14:23).

There are two significant words in our text from 1 Timothy 3:1: *"seeketh,"* *"work."* Let us consider each considering first the term, *"work."* The word *"office"* is found in our text but it denotes much more than some think it does. Many are interested in a title, but little interested in the work which the *"office"* brings. It is an honor imposed on a man that he should be chosen to be an elder of the church of God. That office, however, is not just a title, it is a work, a work which must not be taken lightly. Elders are over the flock; they oversee the work the flock does, but elders have a sober, sacred responsibility: they *"watch"* in behalf of the souls of those of the flock in which they are over (Heb. 13:17). It is not *"their"* flock, it is God's flock. They are simply *"under-shepherds"* who are stewards; carefully watching the souls of those entrusted to their care (1 Pet. 5:1-4).

Furthermore, they will give account of those under their watch. We must conclude that should elders not give proper attention to the flock so that one should be lost through their unconcern or neglect, they will lose their own soul. What a frightful thought! Ezekiel spoke of the shameful neglect of ancient shepherds in Israel when he wrote, *"Woe unto the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the sheep? Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill the fatlings; but ye feed*

not the sheep. The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought back that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with rigor have ye ruled over them...My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill: yea, my sheep were scattered upon all the face of the earth; and there was none that did search or seek after them" (Ezek. 34:2-6).

True elders must guard against wolves, men who are a danger to the flock because of their corrupt doctrine. But, there are other wolves just as vicious and destructive. Some wolves are divisive; tearing the flock asunder. Some are danger to the sheep by diluting the moral fiber of the congregation. Some seek such a spirit of tolerance among brethren that an indignant, intolerant spirit rules should compromise be spoken against! The second word of interest in our text is the word "seeketh." We think of politicians and their vying for office saying, "I am the best choice for the job, vote for me." Most assuredly, that is not the way men seek the office of an elder: men seek the office by showing care and concern for the flock; manifesting soundness of doctrine and faith and by setting forth proper examples of life.

He who desires the office of a bishop desires a good work. How blessed are congregations which have mature, godly and caring men over them in the Lord!

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