



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

## Missiology

### Lesson 21 – The Qualifications of a Missionary

Every Christian is qualified to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The apostle Peter wrote to all Christians: **“You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light”** (1 Peter 2:9). Everyone who is called out of darkness into the light of faith in Jesus Christ is qualified to proclaim His praises.

But Lord has also given to His believing people the special gifts of personnel who are particularly qualified to bring the Gospel to others. The Lord gave the apostle Paul to the early Christians as one who was gifted and qualified to serve as a missionary to the Gentiles. The Lord still supplies such gifts to His Church on earth today, and through His Church He calls such individuals to serve as missionaries to work in places near and far.

We Christians are to look for persons with the qualifications listed by the apostle Paul in his letters to Timothy and Titus. We need to train such persons as well as we can for their work and then send them out to proclaim the Gospel in the Savior’s name and in our name.

These are the qualification for the public ministry as listed by Paul in his first letter to Timothy: **“This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop** (spiritual overseer), **he desires a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife** (literally a one-woman man), **temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous, one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil”** (1 Timothy 3:1-7).

Notice that almost all of these qualifications are moral qualifications, that is, qualifications having to do with a man’s character rather than his ability. They are qualifications that all Christians should pray for and strive for, since it is God’s will for all Christians that they fit the above description. But there is one qualification that has to do with ability rather than character, and that is being **“able to teach”**. This is an ability that not all Christians have, even if they possess all the other moral qualifications. Ability to teach can be learned to some extent, but some Christians have been given this gift in greater measure than others.

Notice also that it is only men who are qualified to be spiritual overseers in Christ's Church. The apostle Paul made this very clear when he wrote to Timothy: **"I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve"** (1 Timothy 2:12-13). Women certainly may teach children and other women, but they are not to be put in a position that requires them to teach men or to exercise a supervisory function over men in Christ's Church.

In his letter to Titus Paul lists the same qualifications for pastors, missionaries, and other spiritual supervisors (overseers). **"I left you in Crete, that you should ... appoint elders in every city as I commanded you – if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict"** (Titus 1:5-9).

Notice that the ability to teach refers to the teaching of God's Word. Pastors, missionaries, and other overseers must know God's Word well enough to be able to point out the false teaching and the ungodly conduct of those who oppose God's Word as well as to encourage those who have begun to trust in Christ and walk in His ways. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: **"It is required in stewards that one be found faithful"** (1 Corinthians 4:2). He needs to be faithful in his teaching of God's Word, and he needs to be faithful in carrying out all his duties.

Shortly before he died, Paul wrote to Timothy once again and reminded him of how an ambassador of Christ should conduct himself: **"In a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work. Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will"** (2 Timothy 2:20-26).

Some of Paul's last words to Timothy give every missionary and would-be missionary something to consider very carefully: **"Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in**

**all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry”** (2 Timothy 4:2-5).

We should also mention that there may be some people, both men and women, who have the necessary qualifications to serve as assistants and helpers in the work of the church. These do not need the ability to teach, and they do not serve as overseers, but they can be very valuable workers in service to the Lord. The apostle Paul refers to them as **“deacons”** (servants or ministers) and lists their qualifications as well: **“Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless. ... Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well”** (1 Timothy 3:8-10, 12).

Many translations use the word **“wives”** in 1 Timothy 3:11, but the Greek word for women is the same as the word for wives. A better understanding of this verse, then is that Paul is talking about female deacons (deaconesses) rather than the wives of deacons, so a preferable translation would be: **“Likewise, the women** (that is, female deacons or deaconesses) **must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things.”** In his letters Paul refers to several women who helped him in his work, for example, Phoebe, whom he calls **“a servant of the church in Cenchrea”** and **“a helper of many and of myself also”** (Romans 16:1-2).

The Lord Jesus Himself called Paul to be a missionary to the Gentiles, even as He called all of His apostles personally and directly. But today the Holy Spirit calls pastors, teachers, and missionaries indirectly, that is, through Christians. The group of Christians who call may be a particular congregation, or a group of congregations such as a synod, or a committee appointed by a congregation or synod to issue a call in their name. Education and training alone do not make men pastors or missionaries. A qualified person is not a pastor or missionary until he has been called by the Church in one way or another and he has accepted that call. But since God’s word says: **“If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work”** (1 Timothy 3:1), it is good for young men and even for older men to desire to be called as pastors and missionaries and to prepare themselves by the study of Scripture and other special training for the possibility of receiving such a call into the ministry. But it is only a definite call from Christians that enables a person to serve as a pastor or missionary who then speaks on behalf of the Christians who called him.

Every mission call requires certain additional qualifications, depending on the nature of the call. People working in a foreign country need to know how to adapt to strange surroundings. They may need language skills to enable them to learn and speak other languages. It is good for a missionary to have good health, emotional stability, the ability to cope with emergency situations. It is helpful if they have had some pastoral experience, if possible. The Christians who issue calls to mission work need to keep all these things in mind and choose the most qualified men for this work.

Someone with chronic health problems – either himself or in his families – should most likely not be considered for mission work in foreign countries. But sometimes the Lord calls the least likely and blesses their work. One of the first Lutheran missionaries to a foreign country was Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg. It was said that he was “deeply intense, zealous almost in the extreme, yet suffering from a chronic physical ailment and bouts of mental depression – one wonders how many mission experts today would consider him a likely candidate for pioneering a world mission field” (*Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Summer 1985, p. 189).

Another author has written: “Persons who are given to introspection, who have an inferiority complex, or who are afflicted with phobias and frustrations of various kinds usually have a difficult time adjusting to the kind of communal life found in some parts of the mission field. Poor mental health and emotional immaturity account for almost 11% of all the dropouts in missionary work” (J. Herbert Kane).

Men who are set in their ways and have strong opinions about minor matters may not be the best candidates for mission work in foreign countries. Missionaries must be adaptable – not in Christian doctrine, but only in non-doctrinal matters. They need to be able to get along with associates and fellow-Christians who are quite different from themselves in matters of everyday living.

One publication that advertised for missionaries gave these qualifications: “Ability to mix with people, mix concrete, wade rivers, write articles, love one’s neighbor, deliver babies, sit cross-legged, conduct meetings, drain swamps, digest questionable dishes, patch human weaknesses, suffer as fools gladly, and burn the midnight oil. ... Persons allergic to ants, babies, beggars, chop suey, cockroaches, curried crabs, duplicators, guitars, humidity, indifference, itches, jungles, mildew, minority groups, mud, poverty, sweat, and unmarried mothers had better think twice before applying.”

Confessional Lutherans were slow to become active in attempting mission work in countries and cultures other than their own. Some of their leaders believed that the Great Commission of Matthew 28 applied only to Jesus’ apostles. The English missionary William Carey countered this mistaken view with the following three arguments:

“First, if the command of Christ to teach all nations be restricted to the apostles, or those under the immediate inspiration of the Holy Ghost, then that of baptizing should be so too; and every denomination of Christians, except the Quakers, do wrong in baptizing with water at all.

“Secondly, if the command of Christ to teach all nations be confined to the apostles, then all such ordinary ministers who have endeavored to carry the gospel to the heathens, have acted without a warrant, and run before they were sent.

“Thirdly, if the command of Christ to teach all nations extend only to the apostles, then, doubtless, the promise of the divine presence in this world must be so limited; but this is

worded in such a manner as expressly precludes such an idea. **‘Lo, I am with you always, to the end of the world’** (Mt. 28:20)” (*Christian History*, Issue 36).

Nevertheless, some of the first missionaries to bring the Gospel of Christ to countries other than their own were Lutherans. They may not all have been orthodox in all their teachings, but they were genuinely interested in sharing the true Gospel of Christ with those who had little or no knowledge of Him.

### Questions

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1. Where in the Bible do we find lists of qualifications for missionaries?
2. What do these lists have in common?
3. Which qualification refers to an ability rather than a man’s character?
4. Why should only men be pastors and supervisors of men in church work?
5. Who is eligible to be helpers and assistants in church work?
6. What position did the woman Phoebe have among the early Christians?
7. What special qualifications are desirable in those working in a foreign land?
8. Why does special education or special training in and of itself not make a person a missionary in Christ’s Church?
9. Prove that God can use some men even though they lack some qualifications.
10. How did William Carey show that Matthew 28:18-20 still applies today?
11. What are some of the things ordinary Christians can do to promote the preaching and teaching of the Gospel in foreign lands?
12. How can we encourage talented men and women to train for mission work?