

THE FAMILY SPOKESMAN

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QUALIFYING FOR THE MINISTRY

If you have been following the news over the past couple of months, you know about the scandal surrounding the resignation of Jim and Tammy Bakker from the *PTL Club*, a world-wide TV ministry built by the couple. Without going into details, Tammy has had a drug problem, Jim has had a sex problem, and *PTL* has a financial problem. I think that pretty well covers it.

Now, for ministers to have problems is nothing new to the ministry, except that the Bakker's happen to be pretty big fish in the pond. The scandal is making headline news, and it is not stopping there.

Gary North is concerned about the impact this is going to have on religious liberty in this country. As he puts it: "I see big problems ahead, such as IRS demands on churches. . . . Marriage covenant, church covenant, personal covenant: Bakker broke them all. His fall may topple church freedom in this country."

When I say there is nothing new about ministers having moral problems, I do not discount the fact that we face a crisis among the clergy today. Gross sin among the clergy is pervasive, and that is new for American Christianity. It is not a matter of merely removing the few rotten apples from the barrel; the whole barrel is rotten. If you are a minister who has never fornicated, swindled someone, or profaned your office in some way, you are almost an extinct species. No wonder the Spirit of God seems to have abandoned the churches of this country (we have had no nation-wide revival for almost four generations), and no wonder that some godly men (like David Wilkerson) are convinced God will wipe this nation off of the face of the earth.

I think the time is past-due for a re-evaluation of ministerial qualifications. Persecution will purge the ranks, but if we want to break the cycle of apostasy for future generations, I think we need to radically change the conditions of ministerial candidacy. Clerical reform will not

change the near future for us, but it will benefit our descendants.

Paul the Apostle sets forth the conditions for church office in 1 Timothy 3, which I quote at length:

Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer [bishop or elder: JS], he desires a noble task. Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to much wine, 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 with proper 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.

Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.

In the same way, their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.

A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well. Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus. [NIV]

The Apostle has introduced enough material here, that if developed, would fill a book. But I will focus on a few aspects of peculiar relevance to our time.

First is the matter of being sincere and respectable, even to the unbelievers of the community. Now, how do you earn respect? How do you prove your sincerity? *Time*. It takes a lot of time. Not a few weeks or months, but years. Mobile America is not yet ready to settle down and establish roots; neither are the clergy. The quality of one's integrity, the value of one's character, can only be demonstrated over time.

I get the impression that the church elder, in Paul's mind, was a man of age, perhaps a grandfather. The two sins which blacken the minister the most, at least in our day, are sexual impropriety and inordinate luxury. These are two sins an

old man has least susceptibility. Men do not respect a man who they cannot trust with their money and their women. And they deeply resent a minister who uses his position of public trust to enrich himself with material benefits or to obtain sexual favors.

An old man, having been loyal to his wife in his youth, will likely remain loyal when he is old. An old man, who has already spent his life in rearing his children and providing economic security for his family, is not likely to be taken in by the glitz of affluence. If he was going to fall into lust or covetousness, he would have done it when he was young, not when he is old.

Therefore, it is my position that leading church officers (pastors, elders, priests, etc.), even on the local level, should be aged, at least 50 years old. Deacons, who are leaders in training, should not be youths, but family men, at least 30 years old (the Levites could not begin their temple service before thirty years of age).

Second, there is the familial aspect of minister qualification, which further substantiates my position. The Apostle says the church officer must manage his household well, holding his children in subjection to the faith. In Titus 1:6, he is to be a man "whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient."

It is a simple matter to make a two-year old behave. The parent has total control. He can rule by sheer force, if necessary. But what do you do with a sixteen year-old PK that has suddenly grown stubborn and rebellious? What do you do for a minister's "perfect" household when he finds out his daughter is using drugs and his son is fornicating with the girls in the youth group? Paul is not just talking about infants, but grown children still at home. Should the minister be disqualified from the pulpit? Absolutely. Unless he is prepared to disinherit and excommunicate his reprobate offspring, he is through. His failure at home demonstrates his incompetence to rule the House of God.

"Don't the children have their own moral agency and accountability? We can't blame the minister, can we?" Paul offers no loop-holes. A man's wife can disqualify him for the ministry. So can his minor children. But a church would never know this if it hired a 25 year-old intern fresh out of seminary.

The exception to this rule, of course, would be eunuchs, men who have committed themselves to celibacy and have taken a vow of poverty "for the kingdom of heaven's sake" (Matthew 19:12). They are the "angels" (messengers) of the church: the prophets, evangelists, and missionaries. They are the troops on the front-lines, the pathbreakers into the frontiers of heathendom.

There are some problems with my position, which require modification. First, there are many young men who are pastors and Christian leaders. I do not propose they resign their churches or commissions. If they are doing well enough now, they should continue. Haste can cause disruption to the Body of Christ.

Second, narrowing the qualifications would drastically lower the number of available ^{ministers} (perhaps two out of ten would make it). This would result in fewer, but larger churches. Such a consolidation is not practical under the current supply of structures, although spiritual services would remain constant (since younger pastors would become deacons in larger churches).

Third, rural areas would probably not have any churches at all. A remedy exists and will be discussed in future articles. It has something to do with the apparent bi-modal structure of society in Biblical law between city and country. The city requires institutions; the country relies on the extended family, where the leading male member is priest to his own household. But most men are unwilling to assume full responsibility for the complete spiritual nurture of their families.

So don't expect my position to be adopted, not for a hundred years. Instead, I see the churches headed for a statist solution. Churches are going to come under intense regulation by the government.

As for my ministry, I have eschewed the clerical robe to build my household. My visions for future ministry in the Far East are many years away. My books and newsletters are directed first to the spiritual needs of my family. But as an extension of hospitality, they are made available to you and to anyone who finds them a blessing.

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PURFEKSHUNISM

"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your father in heaven is perfect." (Matthew 5:48 KJV)

"Do not be overrighteous, neither be overwise - why destroy yourself? Do not be overwicked and do not be a fool - why die before your time? It is good to grasp the one and not let go of the other. The man who fears God will avoid all extremes." (Ecclesiastes 7:16-18 NIV)

"Let your moderation [lit., leniency] be known unto all men." (Philippians 4:5)

"The fire will test the quality of each man's work." (1 Corinthians 3:11-15)

Moral Government theologians teach that there are three levels of choice: ultimate, subordinate, and tertiary. Ultimate choice has to do with intentions or motives. This is the level of choice which makes one a saint or a sinner. On this level, the individual decides what the supreme source of authority is going to be for his life: God or Self.

The secondary level, subordinate choice, is concerned with the *application* of our supreme choice to the great issues of life. Subordinate choices are ones which reflect a person's purpose, for they employ the *means* which are calculated to accomplish the *end* or objective of the supreme choice.

Tertiary choices are the decisions which are incidental to motives, but are necessary for *implementation*. They are the decisions which involve the day-to-day routine of life.

During my stay at Minneapolis School of Theology (the highest concentration of Moral Government theologians in recent years), there arose an intense controversy over this division of choices, "subordinate philosophy" as it was called. Your position on this issue became a test of your Christianity.

One party tried to jam the tertiary choices into the subordinate realm. Comically (or perhaps, tragically), someone suggested your choice of toothpaste, even your underwear, could be traced to your ultimate intention, which affected your eternal destiny (salvation or damnation). Another group promoted the opposite viewpoint: they tried to lower subor-

dinate choices down to the tertiary level. They tried to make salvation purely a "heart" matter and relegated all other choices into the ambiguous category called "our humanity".

The issue was never resolved. I was somewhat confused by it all. Fortunately, soon afterward, I started reading Rushdoony's *Institutes of Biblical Law* and began finding my way out of the woods of theological terminology.

Eliminating M.G. jargon, what the issue really boiled down to was a fight between legalists and libertines. Some wanted strict "holiness" lifestyles. Because of my background, I leaned in that direction. Others wanted a less restricted lifestyle. What I soon discovered was that both were antinomian in terms of God's Word. They both relied upon a subjective standard of righteousness. The discipleship camp (or holiness camp) relied upon traditions from revival periods in church history and a logic which extracted things from the Bible that simply were not there. The "be happy" camp was not concerned with Biblical correctness. Feelings or common sense would lead the way.

Neither were Biblical in the sense of an authoritative source for their system of morals and values. Beyond the Ten Commandments and "willing the highest good", it was an ethical wilderness.

"The highest good" standard has been the anvil upon which Moral Government ethics have been formed. To my readers who are theologians, you will recognize its historical context in terms of its opposition to the "rightarian" ethics of hyper-Calvinists. "Do we choose the right or do we choose the good?"

It is a false dualism, of course. But don't tell that to theologians who like to argue. Doing what is right is the highest good. And what God says is the highest good, is right. Simple enough? Not quite.

A lot of people are willing to say that "if you do wrong, it doesn't matter as long as your motive is pure." That means many ruthless communists are going to heaven because they are convinced that they are willing the highest good. Many communists are monogamous, kind, and considerate people. "By their fruits ye shall know them" does not just mean good manners. It means explicitly Christian conduct. It is confessional as well as possessional.

My years of Bible study have made me an anomaly to some people. In some areas of life, I am more lenient than most American fundamentalists. In other areas, I am more strict. This is because of my Biblicism. When the Bible identifies something as a moral issue, then for me, it is a moral issue. When it is silent, then it is not a moral issue.

For example, inter-racial marriage is not a moral issue. Disobedience to parents is. Drinking a cup of coffee is not a moral issue. Gluttony is.

Moral issues (things having to do with right and wrong) are what God says are the highest good in the Bible. Those are the things our subordinate choices are concerned with, for they reflect our moral character. The communist will say that the state redistribution of wealth is a moral necessity. The Bible says it is a moral crime. The humanist will refuse to execute the murderer, because of his ostensible love for humanity. The Bible insists that he had better, or else suffer God's wrath.

Non-moral issues are matters of value. Values are what man says are the highest good. A man has the right to decide whether it is best for his teeth to use toothpaste or baking soda; he does not have the right to decide whether adultery is good or not. Tertiary choices are concerned with values and tastes. Subordinate choices are concerned with morals. Tertiary choices will reflect the *strength* of our moral purpose, but not the *kind* of moral purpose.

A communist can be fanatically dedicated to his cause. His dedication will not save him; he is committed to the wrong cause. On certain key moral issues, his choices demonstrate that he is one of the damned.

Tertiary choices determine the extent of our fruitfulness, not our holiness. Some people build a life of gold, silver, and precious stones. Others build a life of sticks, hay, and stubble. If they are building on the foundation of Jesus Christ, the latter group are still saved (1 Corinthians 3:11-15). The Apostle Paul declares that such Christians are merely unwise and immature. They are spiritual teenagers, addicted to theo-pop and a life of non-sacrifice.

The builder of a lasting spiritual edifice is not content with the image of an image of an image of God's glory. He seeks God's very image. He is not content with the weekly Sunday sermon, from a pastor who learned it in a seminary, which got it from a tired, old theologian with an axe to grind.

He diligently studies the Holy Scriptures daily to receive his nurture directly from the Holy Spirit.

The castle-builder is not satisfied with a worship music on the level of nursery rhymes. Rather, he seeks a liturgy patterned after the celestial procession so richly manifested in the Psalms.

There are many things God has decided for us. They are in the Bible. We have no options. There are other things God lets us decide on our own. Here, we have options.

Divine perfection is perfect motive, perfect choice, and perfect execution at all times, forever. No mortal has attained that perfection. Perhaps, no one ever will. But we are not called to be gods, only the image of God. That, we can do, "from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

That image is made known to us throughout the length and breadth of the Holy Scriptures. Neglect of any portion of them obscures the image of God. In them we find God, the object of our supreme choice. In them we find His law-word (the Ten Commandments with their case law) to shape our moral character, the blueprint for our subordinate choices. And as a reference point for our tertiary choices, we find in the Bible a wealth of examples, illustrations, and proverbs—all which provide counsel for our tastes and habits.

No ethical system can be complete outside of the Bible or with only part of the Bible. Any attempt otherwise is humanistic and will ultimately lead to lawlessness or legalism.

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MINISTRY UPDATE

My book, The Seed of Cain and the Revival of Mystic Humanism is out and is being sent to those of you who have advanced payment. It is Volume One of Campus Action's Contemporary Issues Series. Price: \$10.00 postage paid. (Mail orders to 509 Valley Ave. NE, Puyallup, WA 98372). The next issue should be out next year.

Campus Action is also working on A Legacy Series on great Christian leaders that have been on the cutting edge of what God is doing in the earth. We plan the first one to be on the life and theology of Charles G. Finney, entitled Finney Speaks. Others in mind are John Wycliffe, and R. J. Rushdoony. If you have any suggestions, let us know. God bless you all.

James Stivers