

The Pastor Search Process: Do You Know How to Pick a Pastor?

Steve Burchett

In many churches, the process of finding a pastor first involves securing a large number of resumes and sifting through each man's credentials. Once a few have been selected, the "search committee" checks references, makes necessary phone calls, conducts interviews, and eventually recommends a candidate to the church. Next, this man and his family come to the church for a weekend to meet with existing leadership and preach. Finally, and often *on the same weekend*, the church decides if they will extend an invitation to this man to pastor their church.



What is perhaps most astounding in this fairly typical present-day process is the assumption that a church could be ready to appoint a man to function as a pastor after such a brief time of interaction. And when we consider Paul's words to Titus in Titus 1:6-9 about the kind of men we are to appoint, hasty decision-making concerning who would serve as pastors in our churches seems unwarranted and potentially dangerous.

We should carefully observe Paul's words to Titus. At some point in the first century, Paul and Titus traveled around the island of Crete preaching the gospel and starting churches, but eventually Paul left the island, leaving Titus behind to appoint elders (pastors, overseers) in each church (Titus 1:5). What kind of men were to serve as pastors in these churches, and consequently what kind of men should serve in ours?¹ Primarily, they are to be men who are "above reproach" (vv. 6-7). This does not mean "sinless," but "blameless." They are to be known as men of unquestionable integrity. Paul then gives the specifics of how a man is determined "above reproach."

He first addresses the man's *family* (v. 6). Specifically, the one appointed a pastor must be a "one woman man" (the literal translation). He must be perceived as faithful to his one wife. Therefore, if a man is known for a pattern of rudeness toward his wife, or if he is famous for negative talk about his bride when she is not around, he must not be a pastor. Also, the children within his home must be not be rebellious, for Paul states in 1 Timothy 3:4, "If a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he

take care of the church of God?" A man may be a slick preacher, but a poor leader. We need compassionate shepherds (cf. Acts 20:28), not great orators.

Next, Paul focuses on the *character* of the men we select as pastors. In Titus 1:7, he lists five negative character qualities to watch out for, and then in verse 8 he highlights six positive characteristics which must be present. All together he points to *eleven* character qualities, and this list is only representative, not exhaustive. How, then, can a church member, with a clear conscience, vote "yes" or "no" for a man he only met a few hours ago? And do we really think the references he put on his resume will say anything but nice things about him? That's why he put them on there!

Finally, Paul speaks about the *doctrinal precision* that should mark men who serve as pastors. An overseer must have a firm grip on "the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict" (Titus 1:9). How is a church to really know if a man is committed to the true gospel of Jesus Christ from only a couple of sermons?

Here is my plea: If you are looking for another spiritual leader, Paul's words in Titus 1 (and First Timothy 3) should cause us to be extremely careful and prayerful about whom we chose. In the New Testament, these pastors were chosen from within the church. They knew them well already. To arrive at a similar knowledge for men you are choosing from outside your church, you must *slow down*. You do not have to make a decision the first or even the second time he visits with you. You need to see if this man leads his family, gauge his character, and probe him extensively about his theological beliefs, philosophy of ministry and values.² He could still fool you, but the likelihood of being mistaken is greatly reduced if you patiently get to know him.

I was once on a ministry's website, and they advertised another site on the internet about perfect pastors. I clicked on that particular website link, and it led me to a page that said something like the following: FILE NOT FOUND. The joke was on me! I got their point, though: There will never be a "perfect pastor." However, according to Paul, there is such a thing as a "qualified pastor." Let's determine to appoint those men, and *only* those men, as pastors of our churches.

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¹ This principle applies whether your church holds to a "single pastor" or "multiple pastors" form of church government.

² See Jim Elliff's and Don Whitney's article "Questions for a Prospective Pastor" at www.CCWtoday.org.