

A Scriptural Study of the Eligibility for Service in the High Office of the Holy Ministry

by the Nebraska District Commission of Review

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Our risen Savior Jesus, who has purchased and won us with his holy precious blood, has entrusted to his disciples the blessed gospel of salvation, so they may share in the joy of proclaiming it to the world. To that end Jesus has given to his church some to be pastors and teachers. By the power and assistance of the Holy Ghost, whom he sends, these pastors and teachers are enabled to speak in his name and to meet the qualifications set forth in sacred Scripture for the high office of the holy ministry.

Now a question has arisen in our midst in recent months concerning a man's eligibility to serve in that high office of the holy ministry. A former pastor, who had resigned for cause, requested that he be declared eligible once again for a call into the ministry. The Nebraska District Praesidium denied his request. For in its opinion the man had permanently disqualified himself; he was no longer eligible to serve in the ministry. However, the former pastor did not agree with the praesidium's ruling. Therefore, he appealed his case to the district president. In concurrence with the rest of the praesidium the district president then appointed a Commission of Review consisting of the pastors listed.

The commission soon grasped the significance of the appeal. To its knowledge this was the first such appeal for re-admittance into the ministry in the history of the Wisconsin Synod. Concerning the permanency of disqualification from the ministry it learned very little had been written and nothing had been documented by previous district or synodical boards or commissions. For those reasons the commission realized the far reaching impact its decision would have, not only upon the appellant himself, but upon the entire synod in any future cases of the same kind.

The commission therefore deemed it wise to search the Scriptures to determine what principles our gracious Lord set down for his church to follow, to document the findings of its study of the Scriptures for others to review, and to make its final ruling on the appeal only after such study and documentation had been concluded.

This paper on the eligibility for service in the holy ministry is the result of the commission's study. The commission hopes this paper may prove beneficial in the future to the district and to the synod when they are called upon to consider a person's eligibility to serve in the ministry or the permanency of a person's disqualification from the ministry.

This paper shall address itself to the following:

- I. The High Office of the Holy Ministry.
- II. The Qualifications for the Holy Ministry.
- III. Eligibility for the Holy Ministry.
- IV. Disqualification from the Holy Ministry.
- V. The Removal of a Disqualified Minister from the Holy Ministry.

VI. The Relocation of a Disqualified Minister.

I. The High Office of the Holy Ministry

Ministers of the gospel are ambassadors for Christ. That is the title given to them in Scripture; through them God entreats others to be reconciled to him, 2 Corinthians 5:20.

The holy ministry is a trust the Lord and his church gives to the minister of the gospel. In his goodness and wisdom the Lord gives some to be pastors and teachers for the equipping of the saints, Ephesians 4:11-12, and the Holy Ghost makes the pastors overseers and shepherds in the church, Acts 20:28. By virtue of their divine call the Lord and his church commit to them the Word of reconciliation, which they proclaim in the name of the Lord and in behalf of the congregations who have called them. Therefore, the Word of the Lord is to be entrusted only to faithful men who will be able to teach others, 2 Timothy 2:2.

Those who hold the ministerial office are to commend themselves as servants of God, 2 Corinthians 6:4; hold themselves above reproach as stewards of God, Titus 1:7; maintain the integrity of their office as blameless in the eyes of all, 2 Corinthians 6:3 and 1 Timothy 3:7; and carry out faithfully the trust of the high office given to them, 1 Corinthians 4:1-2. For good reason. For whatever offense they give as God's servants reflects unfavorably upon him and his name, as David did when he gave God's enemies the occasion to blaspheme him through his sin of adultery with Bathsheba, 2 Samuel 12:14.

II. The Qualifications for the Holy Ministry

Scripture sets forth the qualifications for the ministry, chiefly in 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-9. Chapters 2 and 3 of 1 Timothy form a unit of instruction on how Christians are to conduct themselves as God's people. Paul established that as a unit of instruction on Christian conduct in 1 Timothy 3:14-15. In that context of Christian conduct instruction is given on the life and character of the bishops and deacons. Therefore, 1 Timothy 3:1-13 has been recognized as setting forth the qualifications for the minister, along with its parallel passages, as Titus 1:5-9.

The first, chief qualification that encompasses all of the other particular qualifications is the man must be blameless. There are two Greek words that set forth this primary qualification. The one is *ἀνεπίλημpton* in 1 Timothy 3:2. It is usually translated "above reproach" or "blameless." The basic meaning for this adjective is, "One who cannot be laid hold of or apprehended." The derived meaning is, "One who is not open to attack or to censure"; consequently, Liddell-Scott defines it as "one who is not open to attack, to censure; blameless, perfect, unassailable."

The other Greek word is *ἀνέγκλητος* in Titus 1: 6-7 . This word is a verbal adjective with the meaning of a perfect passive participle. The verb is the prefix *ἀνά*, meaning "up" and "upwards," connected to the root *ἐγκαλέω*, meaning "to charge." The thrust of this adjective describes a man who up to the present is above being charged. He is one against whom no charges can be brought legitimately. He has been and continues to be above being charged, guiltless, and without stain. The KJV and NIV translate the word "blameless"; the NASB "above reproach." This paper shall use the translation "above being charged."

The qualification of above being charged and blameless pertains to both the candidate for the holy ministry and those ministers already holding that high office. That understanding is clear from the following: Paul told Titus he could ordain a candidate, "If any man be above being charged" (Gk). The reason Paul gave that the candidate must meet that qualification was the

bishop who served in the ministry “must be above being charged,” Titus 1:6-7. Candidate and pastor, both alike had to meet that qualification of being above charge.

What makes the “being above charge” as well as the other characteristics and conduct listed in 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-9 qualifications for the holy ministry is the word *δεῖ*. It means “it is necessary” or “must.” It states what follows is necessary or essential. Therefore, the above being charged and the other characteristics and conduct specified after *δεῖ* are essential qualifications both the candidate and the minister must meet in order for them to hold the ministerial office. Whoever is above being charged, etc., is qualified.

Among those in the church and among those outside of the church the candidate and minister must be above being charged. Those in the church are responsible for upholding this qualification in their midst and for determining who indeed is above being charged. When the apostolic church had to select its first deacons to wait on tables, it was told to select seven men from its midst who were well spoken of or approved, Acts 6:3. Likewise, the candidate and minister must be well spoken of in the opinion of those in the church.

The candidate and minister must also have a good testimony from those outside of the church, 1 Timothy 3:7. If the man does not, he will fall into reproach, he will fall into the snare of the devil, his ministry to the unchurched will be impaired, and the ministerial office will be discredited.

The church is responsible for upholding this qualification of blamelessness in its midst. Therefore, the church dare not be influenced in its thinking or standards by the ways of the world nor by the liberal teachings of erring church bodies. The church would do well to remember that if the candidate and minister must maintain a good testimony among those outside of the church, how much more necessary is it they maintain a good testimony among those inside of the church?

Being blameless, as with the other qualifications, is to be understood in a double sense – before God and before men. Before God and in the mirror of the law, who among men born of sinful Adam can claim to be blameless? If there is such a man who make that claim, he is deceived and the truth is not in him; for to be blameless he would have to be perfect. That is impossible since God himself has testified all have sinned. In the sight of God no one is blameless, nor absolutely peaceable, gentle, righteous, patient, etc. to the degree of perfection God demands in his holy law. Outside of Christ only Adam before the fall into sin could have met these qualifications. The Old Testament priests did not meet this qualification of blamelessness before God either; for they daily had to make sacrifices for their own sins as well as for the sins of the people, Hebrews 5:3 and 7:37. As it is written, “For the law appoints men as high priests who are weak,” Hebrews 7:28. Of the candidates and ministers of Christ it must also be said, “There is no one righteous, not even one,” Romans 3:10; “There is no one who does good,” Romans 3:12; “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” Romans 3:23. Accordingly, the Lutheran Confessions state with regard to the ministry and the marriage of priests, “We judge indeed that the things which we maintain concerning human nature in general pertain also to priests” (Apology XXIII:15-16, *Triglot* 367-369).

Yet the qualification is repeated and clear – a man must be blameless. That is not in the first sense of before God and in the mirror of the law, but in the second sense of before men. Outwardly before the world, in the sight of his brethren and neighbors – the candidate and minister must be blameless. His reputation must be above being charged. He cannot be a man guilty of public sin and vice whose presence in the ministry causes a public outcry by either those inside the church or those outside of the church. For the Scriptures proclaim, “Now the

overseer must be above reproach,” 1 Timothy 3:2; “The bishop must be above being charged” (Gk), Titus 1:7; “They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacon,” 1 Timothy 3:10; “He must also have a good reputation with outsiders,” 1 Timothy 3:7.

It is clear blamelessness is to be understood in the second sense of before men; for first of all we must observe to whom this qualification is presented – to Christians. They are the ones who have to uphold this qualification of blamelessness. Secondly, we need to observe what is said in 1 Timothy 5:19, “Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses.” The question of a minister’s blamelessness or guilt of sin is to be settled by men – two or three witnesses. Finally, we need to observe what Paul told Titus on the island of Crete. In Titus 1:5-6, Paul told Titus he was to ordain ministers in every city *if* any man was above being charged. Titus, and surely those on Crete with him who knew the candidate, had to make that determination.

Clearly, then, it is men, the church, who must judge whether the candidate and minister is qualified to serve in the ministry. And the chief standard by which they must judge is blamelessness. The Lord has not said to the church that the man could almost be blameless, or that he could be charged with only one or two vices, but that he must be blameless. The word *δέϊ* makes blamelessness an absolute qualification before men. Blamelessness is absolutely essential as far as human judgment can determine, even though in the perfect sight of God and in the mirror of the law the man is still a sinner guilty of many transgressions.

Luther also understood and taught the candidate and minister must be blameless in this double sense of before God and before men. In his comments on Titus 1:6 he wrote,

“See to it that you do not appoint thieves and robbers, scoundrels.” Jerome thinks that only someone who has lived a pure and holy life since his baptism should become a bishop. Whoever is such a man, we shall commend him. He should be someone who cannot be accused. According to the list Paul makes, he should not have public guilt which causes people to stumble. Paul is referring to public vices which can be made the subject of an accusation. But this does not mean, does it, that they should be without any guilt at all, without any flesh and blood? “He himself is beset with weakness,” as Hebrews says (Hebrews 5:2). But Paul is speaking about public vices, where the state is obliged to say and to give testimony about him that he is doing me an injustice and that a detractor will find something to cavil at; that is, he should be the kind of person who cannot be accused openly and publicly. He must pray: “Forgive.” (*Luther’s Works*, Vol. 29, p. 17-18)

The candidate and the minister must be blameless; in every area of his life, in causing offense in anything to the discredit of the holy ministry, in commending himself as a servant of God, in the example of good works.

He must be blameless in every area of his life. As a Christian man living under Christ in this world he must be blameless – for Scripture says men may be ordained, “If any man be above being charged,” Titus 1:6. As a Christian husband and father he must be blameless – for Scripture says men may be ordained if they are, “the husband of one wife, having faithful children who are not being charged with dissipation and disobedience” (Gk), Titus 1:6; “He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect,” 1 Timothy

3:4. As a minister of Christ he must be blameless – for Scripture says, “Since an overseer is entrusted with God’s work, he must be above being charged,” Titus 1:7.

He must be blameless in causing offense in anything to the discredit of the holy ministry; for it is written, “Giving no cause for offense in anything, in order that the ministry be not discredited,” 2 Corinthians 6:3. The minister must be careful he does not cause anyone to have a feeling of repugnance and disgust about anything he says or does, for it is necessary he keep the office of the ministry free from blame and accusation. He will be able to safeguard the ministerial office both among those inside of and outside of the church by continuing to exhibit the qualifications set forth in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

Discredit upon the office of the ministry prevents effective ministration to precious souls in and outside of the church. One commission member was prevented from ministering to a family because the husband despised the ministry in general. On two separate occasions during the husband’s life he had seen a minister defrocked for the sin of adultery. He concluded all ministers were no better than adulterers; for that reason he would have nothing to do with a church, nor would he permit his wife and children to. Those two ministers had brought discredit upon the whole ministry by their sin, at least in the eyes of that man. It was that kind of repugnance and disgust in a person’s heart that Paul referred to when he used the word *προσκοπήν*, which is an offense taken, 2 Corinthians 6:3.

But those two ministers also caused an offense in the sense of a *σκάνδαλον*, a trap or a stumbling block, which is anything that causes another person to be separated from God, Christ, and salvation through sin, unbelief, or false doctrine. Balaam put a stumbling block in front of the Israelites that caused them to stumble, Revelation 2:14. When Peter tried to stop Jesus from going to Jerusalem to be crucified, Jesus said Peter was a stumbling block to him, Matthew 16:23. Whatever causes a little one in Jesus to fall or causes one to sin is a stumbling block, Matthew 18:6f. An adiaphoron that causes a weaker brother to sin is a stumbling block, Romans 14:13. For good reason Paul wrote all Christians should mark and avoid those who caused such stumbling blocks, Romans 16:17. Those two ministers by their own sin of adultery surely put a stumbling block in front of that man. Therefore, ministers must be blameless, so they do not put stumbling blocks in front of people and cause them to feel disgust for the ministry, the church, and especially for God and the Lord Jesus Christ to the hardening of their heart and the loss of their salvation.

The holy ministry is a noble work in God’s service, as 1 Timothy 3:1 states. Therefore, no evil is to be attached to it through the sinful conduct of those performing it. A minister must be above being charged; his being in the ministry must not cause public outcry or disgust.

The minister of Christ must be blameless, so that in everything he is able to commend himself as a servant of God. Beginning at 2 Corinthians 6:4, Paul makes a long list of the situations in which he and the other ambassadors for Christ commended themselves as servants of God. The list is very long. Indeed, Paul could say, “As servants of God we commend ourselves in every way.” It would not be an overstatement of Paul’s words to say a minister is blameless when he is a “little” Christ.

With respect to all things the minister maintains his blamelessness when he continues to be an example of good works, Titus 2:7. That is true especially in regard to purity of doctrine, in dignified, sound, irreproachable speech, Titus 2:7-8. As in 2 Corinthians 6:3, so in Titus 2:7-8, the minister’s example of good works is for the sake of the ministerial office – to keep that office from discredit and blame. For Paul states, “So that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us” (meaning Titus, Paul, and the other ministers of

Christ like them). When the minister is an example of every good work (moral purity, love, patience, gentleness, contentment, etc.), then the high office of the holy ministry is commendable and without discredit.

Having looked into the significance of the first qualification, the other qualifications demand enumeration. They are as follows:

- He must be the husband of one wife, 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6. The emphasis is that the man must not be a bigamist or polygamist. However, this qualification also embraces everything the Sixth Commandment upholds; such as chastity, faithfulness to his wife, fulfillment of his role as a Christian husband, and the absence of an unscriptural divorce.
- He must be temperate, sober, and not addicted to wine, 1 Timothy 3:2,3,8; Titus 1:7.
- He must be prudent, sensible, and self-controlled, being of sound mind and thoughtful, curbing his impulses and desires, 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8.
- He must be respectable, upright, and righteous, 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8.
- He must be hospitable, 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8.
- He must be able to teach, 1 Timothy 3:2; 2 Timothy 2:2.
- He must be faithful to the Scriptures, upholding the mystery of the faith and serving as an example in upholding the purity of doctrine in dignified, sound preaching and teaching that he may encourage others and correct those who speak against it, 1 Timothy 3:9; Titus 1:9,2:7.
- He must not be quarrelsome, nor eager to fight, but rather peaceable, 1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7.
- He must be gentle, yielding, and kind, 1 Timothy 3:3. He must not be a lover of money, nor one who is fond of sordid gain or who gains shamefully, 1 Timothy 3:3,8; Titus 1:7; 1 Peter 5:2.
- He must manage his own house well, 1 Timothy 3:4.
- He must see that his children obey him with proper respect and that they are not given to dissipation, 1 Timothy 3:4; Titus 1:6.
- He must not be self-willed, stubborn, or arrogant, Titus 1:7.
- He must not “lord it over” his congregation, 1 Peter 5:3.
- He must not be quick tempered, and inclined to anger, Titus 1:7.
- He must love what is good, Titus 1:8.
- He must be devout, Titus 1:8.
- He must be an example in all things, especially to his congregation in speech, love, conduct, faith, and purity, Titus 2:6; 1 Timothy 4:12; 1 Peter 5:3.
- He must be worthy of respect and dignified, 1 Timothy 3:8.
- He must not be double-tongued, 1 Timothy 3:8.
- He must maintain a clear conscience, 1 Timothy 1:19,3:8.
- He must have passed a period of testing to prove himself and establish his reputation before entering the ministry, 1 Timothy 3:10.
- He must have a good reputation with those who are outside of the church, 1 Timothy 3:7.

III. Eligibility For The Holy Ministry

Only suitable men are to serve in the holy ministry – men who are called to serve in that office by the church. No one should teach or preach in the church without such a call from the church (cf. Augsburg Confession XIV, *Triglot* 49).

It has been the practice of the church to call only suitable men to serve since the days of the apostles. The first “call meeting” was held to call an apostle to replace Judas, Acts 1:15-26. To be eligible as a suitable man for that office of apostle, the man must have been one of the men who accompanied the other apostles with Jesus during the time from Jesus’ baptism to his ascension; and he must have been one who could serve as a witness. The congregation selected Joseph and Matthias; the Lord chose Matthias. The second “call meeting” was held to select the first deacons to serve the tables, Acts 6:1-6. To be eligible as suitable men for that office all seven of the men had to be well spoken of, and full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom. The congregation then chose seven such men who were installed into their office.

These examples of the practice of the apostolic church shows us that men were called by the church and the Holy Ghost as the need arose (cf. also the calling of Paul and Barnabas to be missionaries, Acts 13:1-3); that to be eligible for the call the men had to meet certain qualifications.

Today the church continues to call qualified men to serve in the holy ministry. For the Lord has given some to be pastors and teachers for the equipping of the saints for works of service. The sacred Scriptures, especially the pastoral epistles, instruct the church to ordain faithful men who are able to teach others. So it is that the church follows the practice set forth by Paul for Titus to ordain bishops in every city where there is a congregation. Accordingly our Lutheran Confessions state, “Therefore, as the ancient examples of the church and the Fathers teach us, we ourselves will and ought to ordain suitable persons to this office” (Smalcald Articles X:3, *Triglot*, 497). But as for the practice in the Catholic church of ordaining unsuitable men, the reformers had only words of criticism. “To the priesthood they admit all kinds of persons indiscriminately. They ordain rude asses; thus the Christian doctrine perished, because the church was not supplied with efficient preachers” (Apology XXVIII:3, *Triglot*, 443,445).

Scripture gives specific instructions to the church about which men are eligible to be ordained into the holy ministry. There are, first of all, Paul’s instructions to Titus on the island of Crete, Titus 1:5-9. Bishops needed to be ordained on Crete. Paul left Titus there to ordain those bishops in every city where a congregation had been established. But Titus, as the one left in charge of the work on Crete, was not to ordain just anyone. There were certain conditions the man had to meet before Titus could ordain him; for Paul wrote to him that he may ordain a man as a bishop, “If any man be above being charged, a husband of one wife, having faithful children who are not accused of dissipation and disobedience” (Gk). Such were those primary conditions the prospective candidate had to meet in order to serve in the holy ministry.

There was a good reason why a candidate for the holy ministry had to meet those primary conditions or qualifications. The reason was that the man who held the office of bishop must be above being charged, and meet a number of other qualifications in addition. Because the bishop had to meet those qualifications, the candidate did too. Paul wrote, “You may ordain bishops... as I directed you; if anyone is above being charged, a husband... Because it is necessary the bishop be above being charged as steward; not self-willed...” (Gk).

From Paul’s instructions to Titus, then, we learn that to be eligible the candidate’s Christian life up to his ordination had to be above being charged with fault as a Christian man, husband, and father. When in his office as a bishop it was necessary he then maintain those

qualities; he could not be a man who was subject to charge, self-willed, quick-tempered, a drunkard, and so forth.

As for which men are eligible to be ordained into the ministry, there is also Paul's instruction to Timothy, who was in Ephesus. In selecting men for the office of deacon Paul told Timothy in 1 Timothy 3:10, "Let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach" (NASB). Whatever is required of the deacons is also required of the bishops. The verbs in this passage are all in the present tense; the action is a continuous action throughout. The thrust of Paul's instruction, then, is, "Let these men continue to be approved by testing first; then let them continue to serve while continuing to be above charge." The present participle *ὄντες* is a circumstantial participle. It could be interpreted as a temporal, causal, or conditional participle. Whichever interpretation is preferred, the meaning remains essentially the same. The candidate upon successful completion of his period of testing could continue to serve while he was, because he was, or if he was, beyond reproach.

From Paul's instruction to Timothy, then, we learn that to be eligible to serve in the ministry the candidate must first be tested and found to be above reproach. The candidate could then be installed and continue to serve as long as he continued to be above reproach. But if the candidate was found not to be above reproach, either before his installation or after, he could not serve. He was then ineligible.

An important aspect of a man's suitability and eligibility for the ministry that the church can ill afford to overlook is this: A man must meet all of the qualifications listed in Scripture. The *δεῖ εἶναι* in Titus 1:7 and 1 Timothy 3:2 applies to all of the qualifications listed afterwards. The lack, or the loss, of any one of the qualifications render the man ineligible. For he must be every one of them in the judgment of the church. That is an absolute requirement set by the Lord for his church to maintain. That does not mean, as stated previously, the man will be without sin or minor faults, and that he will fulfill those qualifications perfectly in the sight of God. But before men, and in the judgment of the church, he must be all of them; he must be above being charged. There must be no public outcry or offense caused by his being in the ministry.

A man's reputation is a key factor to his being eligible for the office of the ministry. This is evident from the Scriptures. The conditional clause of Titus 1:6 clearly shows that the candidates were considered for ordination on the basis of what their Christian life had been like up to that present time. From 1 Timothy 3:10 it is seen the candidates' eligibility was determined by their first passing a period of testing. Through that period of testing they proved they were above reproach and established such a reputation for themselves among their brothers in the church. Then they could serve, so long as they maintained that reputation in the church. In 1 Timothy 3:5 it is to be noted that a man's eligibility to serve in the ministry was determined in part by the reputation he had in managing his own household. A man who was known to be incapable of managing his own household well was ineligible, for he would not be able to manage the household of God either. Then in 1 Timothy 3:7 it is stated the man's eligibility is dependent upon him having a good reputation with those outside of the church.

Luther also taught a man's eligibility was based upon his reputation with others who knew him. Luther wrote,

First deacons should be tested. All the more should bishops and professors be tested. How should they be tested; and with what test? According to what they are, can do, and actually do... The acid test is that a recommendation be required from those who know them... But how do I know that they are blameless? How

do I know which are not of bad reputation or which only care for useless things? So one may be able to gather from the testimony of his neighboring brethren who is a good and faithful man...we try to find out from testimony whether he is good, serious, diligent, and the kind of man who gladly pursues piety and is happy to listen to preaching, then we are testing him. One will be able to determine this from the testimony of his brothers and neighbors. We must not take people into the ministry unless they have this testimony. When the apostles were sending out the brethren, they did not send them out without letters of recommendation, as we do in the case of our monks and bishops. This is an apostolic ritual. (*Luther's Works*, American Edition, vol. 28, 297-298)

A general truth worth remembering was pointed out by Luther – no one will listen to a preacher who does not have a reputation. He wrote,

If someone is appointed as bishop, it is necessary that he be in honor and good reputation. Otherwise the Word would be despised. For who would listen to someone with a bad reputation, especially among those over whom he is in charge? (*Luther's Works*, American Edition, vol. 29, 25-26)

To summarize briefly: A man is eligible to serve in the ministry when, in the opinion of his fellow Christians who know him, he has established over a period of time a reputation that is above reproach and that he has all the qualifications set forth in Scripture.

In view of what has been learned from Scripture on a man's suitability and eligibility for the office of the ministry a number of practical considerations need to be taken up at this time.

The occasion could arise that a man considers himself qualified to serve in the ministry. He would be aspiring to do a noble work; but that is not enough. For as with the Old Testament priests, "No one takes this honor upon himself; he must be called by God, just as Aaron was." He must be considered above reproach and qualified by those brother who know him. They may then consider him eligible to serve in the ministry, give him a call, and ordain him.

The occasion could also arise that a man has all the gifts to serve in the ministry, however, he has a bad reputation among his brothers who know him. Even if he should have more talents than anyone then serving in the ministry, he is still not eligible. For he is not above being charged. His presence in the ministry will cause offense, public outcry, and bring discredit upon the ministry. Permitting such a man as that to serve in the ministry is the very practice the Lutheran reformers criticized – that of admitting all kinds of persons indiscriminately.

The occasion may arise that a man meets all of the qualifications but one. Perhaps he is not apt to teach, or he has a quick temper that lashes out at the least provocation, or he is so stubborn and arrogant he will never listen to good advice or the views of others, or he acts rashly on impulse without thinking through what he is about to do or without following good order and Christian common sense. Though he is a suitable man fulfilling every other qualification, that one he does not fulfill renders him ineligible. It will cause outrage in the church.

Hopefully, such men as the above, who fail to qualify for the ministry for one reason or another, will not be lost to the Lord's service in the church altogether. They are Christians with certain talents they could use in other areas of service outside of the ministry. Our church and pastors need to watch for areas of service in which these men may utilize their gifts in joyful service, and to direct them to those areas.

Our church would do well to consider its college and seminary students who have embarked upon a course of study in preparation for the ministry as the candidates of tomorrow.

As such they should also be required to maintain a good Christian reputation according to the qualifications for the ministry. Those years represent their time of testing, during which they may establish their reputation. Upon the completion of their period of testing those who know them may testify they are above being charged and they meet the qualifications set forth in Scripture. But if their behavior, words, and actions during those years of testing should render them subject to reproach to the degree that offense would be given and the ministry discredited if they were ordained, then they are ineligible to serve in the ministry, since testimony to their being above charge cannot be given.

Whenever a Christian preparing for the preaching or teaching ministry is known to have violated the Sixth Commandment, he or she gives offense to others, either to some on campus or to others off campus. By that act his or her reputation is ruined, and that individual can no longer be said to be above charge. That person has failed in his being tested; he has made himself ineligible. Whether a young man commits fornication with a girl he then marries, or whether he commits adultery with another man's wife, or whether he commits adultery with or without intercourse after he himself is married is a distinction without a difference. All are a sin against the Sixth Commandment. The person has rendered himself ineligible, for the person's entry into the ministry will give offense to those who know of his sin and thereby bring discredit in their eyes upon the ministry as well.

Eligibility is not determined on the basis of repentance and forgiveness; but upon meeting the scriptural qualifications. For Scripture states the man must be what the qualifications specify; blameless, sober, etc. There is nothing stated in Scripture that repentance and the Lord's forgiveness of a past vice or chargeable offense makes the person eligible and qualified.

Repeatedly the examples of David and Peter have been raised as an argument for qualifying and reinstating a minister who has repented of a past public sin and received assurance of the Lord's forgiveness. But we need to remember that the Lord can judge the heart, so he can act accordingly; while we can judge only by the Word and are bound to act according to it. The examples of David and Peter do not establish doctrine. The Lord is above any and all prescriptions he has given us to follow. He may make exception to what is clear biblical teaching if he chooses to. He did so with Enoch and Elijah; he took them to heaven even though Scripture states the wages of sin is death. Therefore, we need to be careful that we do not use "exceptional" cases or examples from Scripture to set aside clear biblical doctrine. He requires us to abide in his Word – in this case to uphold the qualifications for the holy ministry. The Lord's handling of David and Peter's case does not change or set aside the qualifications for the ministry he has set down in Scripture.

IV. Disqualification from the Holy Ministry

The qualifications for the holy ministry as set down in Scripture are absolute before men, that is, to the degree the church can judge. When in the judgment of the church a person fails to meet any one of those qualifications, that person is disqualified and ineligible to serve in the ministry.

A man is disqualified when he is no longer blameless, but he has obtained a bad reputation with those inside of or outside of the church which causes offense, outcry, or outrage. His ability to minister has been severely impaired, if not made impossible. Who will listen to a man with a bad reputation?

A man is disqualified when he no longer meets all of the qualifications stipulated in Scripture for the ministry. For the $\delta\epsilon\acute{\iota}\ \epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu\alpha\iota$ plies to all of the qualifications listed in 1 Timothy 3

and Titus 1. Every qualification is equally important and “bears the same weight.” It cannot be said this qualification is essential, this one is not quite as essential, and that one is not essential at all. Therefore, the loss of any one qualification carries the same weight in disqualifying the minister. The minister that becomes a lover of silver and fond of sordid gain is just as much disqualified as the minister who become an adulterer. The teacher who becomes an arrogant, stubborn hot-head is just as much disqualified as the teacher who is not apt to teach.

A man is disqualified when Christians can no longer look up to him as an example in everything, for he is to be an example in everything to the flock, Titus 2:7,8; 1 Peter 5:3. Because he is not a good example in everything, the flock will disregard his instruction from the Word of God. The members will accuse a him of being a hypocrite – for he does not practice what he preaches. He tells them to take the speck out of their eye while, he does not remove the log from his own eye.

A man is disqualified when his continued presence in the ministry will be a cause for giving offense to others and will bring discredit upon the ministry, 2 Corinthians 6:3. When members know a pastor has been guilty of adultery, child abuse, drunkenness, screaming at members in anger, etc., they are offended. Not only are they made to feel disgust for the man and the ministry, but a number of them will find it impossible to concentrate on the Word when he preaches or to go to him for counseling. Furthermore, if the members know the pastor has committed adultery with a young woman, what parent will trust leaving his daughter with the pastor for instruction or youth meeting? What woman will feel secure and at ease with him? If the members know their teacher has been guilty of child abuse in his own home, will they be willing to entrust the children of the congregation to his care and supervision? Whatever the pastor or teacher’s misdeed, when it causes a public outcry against him and the ministry, he has disqualified himself.

An unscriptural divorce disqualifies a man from the ministry. If he felt compelled to divorce his wife because she was guilty of adultery or desertion, then his divorce need not necessarily disqualify him, for the scriptural principles governing marriage and divorce pertain to the minister just as they pertain to the members of his congregation. There should not be a double standard on the estate of marriage – one for the minister, one for the membership. However, consideration needs to be given to what extent he was responsible for, or contributed to, his wife’s adultery or desertions and his eligibility to continue serving determined accordingly.

Otherwise divorce disqualifies him, because it is contrary to the Sixth Commandment; he is one who does not manage his own household well; he is no longer the husband of his one wife; he is no longer an example in all things for the rest of the church. How can the minister preach to a congregation about marriage and the responsibilities of a husband and wife when his own marriage was a failure and ended in divorce? How can he uphold God’s Word on divorce in the pulpit and classroom when he has forsaken that Word in his own personal life? How can he counsel others in marriage when he needs counseling himself?

But, the cause for disqualification must be evident in the church and among his brethren – before the man is disqualified from the ministry. No charge of disqualification should be considered until it can be established by at least two or three witnesses. For Scripture states, “Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses,” 1 Timothy 5:19.

Christian love and Christian common sense governed by the Word and the Spirit will forgive the minor faults of ministers as well as recognize that not every failure to uphold a

qualification causes the same kind or degree of public outcry. There is a difference between a minister committing one act of adultery and another minister in one instance treating his wife in less than a loving and honorable way. There is a difference between a minister not being apt to teach and another minister failing on occasion to preach a clear sermon. There is a difference between one minister showing bad judgment by spending all of his congregation's treasury on new carpeting without their prior approval and another minister showing bad judgment by selecting an inconvenient time for a voters meeting. Therefore, a congregation needs to overlook and forgive a minister's occasional minor faults without accusing him of being unfit for the ministry. Such hasty judgment on the part of the congregation will, surely cause much strife. The Lutheran reformers wrote with due regard to the rise of strife in the church:

For just as in all families and in all states concord should be nourished by mutual offices, and tranquility cannot be retained unless men overlook and forgive certain mistakes among themselves; so Paul commands that there should be love in the church in order that it may preserve concord, bear with the harsher manners of brethren as there is need, overlook certain less serious mistakes, lest the church fly apart into various schisms, and enmities and factions and heresies arise from the schisms.

For concord must necessarily be rent asunder whenever either the bishops impose (without cause) upon the people heavier burdens, or have no respect to weakness in the people. And dissensions arise when the people judge too severely (quickly censure and criticize) concerning the conduct (walk and life) of teachers (bishops or preachers), or despise the teachers because of certain less serious faults; for then both another kind of doctrine and other teachers are sought after. On the other hand, perfection, i.e., the integrity of the church, is preserved, when the strong bear with the weak, when the people take in good part some faults in the conduct of their teachers (have patience also with their preachers), when the bishops make some allowances for the weaknesses of the people (know how to exercise forbearance to the people, according to circumstances, with respect to all kinds of weaknesses and faults). Of these precepts of equity the books of all the wise are full, namely, that in every-day life we should make allowances mutually for the sake of common tranquility. (Apology III:111-114, *Triglott*, 185)

Disqualification from the holy ministry is permanent. The qualifications for the ministry are absolute before men and to be upheld in the church. But by absolute we do not mean the minister is without sin before God, and without minor faults such as preaching one poor sermon, showing one instance of anger, and the like. No, we mean the minister's work, behavior, or character has been recognized in the church to give offense, contradict the Word of God, and discredit the ministry. In saying the qualifications are absolute we mean a minister has become disqualified when he has exhibited, and when it has become public knowledge that he does not have one of the qualifications or that his personal reputation is no longer blameless. When a minister has so disqualified himself that he is compelled to resign from the ministry for cause, or when he is justly removed from the ministry for cause by the church, such disqualification is permanent. When student/candidate preparing for the ministry has made himself subject to legitimate charge because of unchristian conduct or character which would cause offense to others or bring discredit upon the ministry if he was to be given a call, then he has disqualified himself and his disqualification is permanent.

There are a number of reasons for maintaining disqualification is permanent. First, we are compelled to recognize the power of Paul's words in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. The candidate and minister alike must be blameless and above being charged. The $\delta\epsilon\acute{\iota}\ \delta\acute{\iota}\nu\alpha\iota$ makes that an absolute necessity in the eyes of others; once a man has lost that blamelessness before others he cannot be said to be blameless again. The $\epsilon\acute{\iota}$ of Titus 1:6 makes "above being charged" a condition for ordination and eligibility; when a man has become justly subject to charge he no longer can fulfill that condition. The $\delta\acute{\upsilon}\nu\tau\epsilon\varsigma$ of 1 Timothy 3:10 makes the "above being charged" the condition, the cause, or the duration of his ministry – he may serve if, because, or while he is such; the man who has become subject to charge cannot serve anymore because a he is no longer above charge.

The minister, who was compelled to leave the ministry for cause, has proven publicly he is not blameless. Indeed guilt, blame, and disqualification have become attached to his reputation. His reinstatement into the ministry once again can cause offense and bring discredit upon the ministry, even long years afterwards. In this sense the reputation of ministers who had to leave their high office is not unlike public officials who had to resign from their office. Though it is now years later, what chance is there that Spiro Agnew or Richard Nixon could be accepted by the public as a vice president or president today? None. There would be an outcry from one end of this country to the other. What congregation that had to remove its treasurer for embezzling its funds would later reinstate that man into the same office? How then can a congregation, or another congregation, reinstate a minister who is not blameless and had to leave the ministry for cause?

The minister may not cause offense and put a stumbling block before others by having a bad reputation. So once a minister has disqualified himself by some chargeable offense, the question arises in considering his reinstatement into the ministry: "How could it ever be certain or clear that all offense has been removed in every place, for every person, even with those outside of the church?" It is highly doubtful to impossible that a minister forced to leave the ministry for cause could ever regain the reputation he has lost, so as to remove all offense in the eyes of all. With that doubt overshadowing him he cannot be considered qualified.

Therefore, we say disqualification is permanent so long as offense is taken by individuals and the ministry is subject to discredit. We do not see how an offense can be removed in the eyes of a every person in every place within and without the church. How can it be certain all offense has been removed from within the church unless every man, woman and child is polled? Yet to do that the offense has to be raised again before the membership, which will bring about offense and discredit to the ministry all over again. Furthermore, how can it ever be certain all offense has been removed from those outside of the church? We would like to be shown from Scripture what reasons would justify exception to the permanency of disqualification if any should be made. What is the criterion for making an exception for some and not for others? Let it be explained how it is possible to be sure all offense is removed from the minds of all people inside and outside of the church; for that has to be established before the man can be declared eligible. It must be ascertained with certainty that the man gives no cause for offense in anything, in order that the ministry be not discredited, cf. 2 Corinthians 6:3.

The minister must be tested, 1 Timothy 3:10. The test is that the man has established a good reputation with his brothers who know him, and that they can testify to his being blameless, a faithful Christian, etc. He may serve only so long as he has such a reputation. After a minister has disqualified himself from the ministry for some offense, it is impossible for his brothers who

know him to honestly testify to his good qualities and reputation. From then on they must honestly point out, when the occasion demands their testimony, “But he was guilty of this or that.”

This passage, 1 Timothy 3:10, makes it necessary for those making up call lists to continue to provide honest and full reports on the men and women whose names come up for consideration of a call. If there were some offense in the person’s past, they are duty bound to inform the calling congregation of it. To do less than that would create the suspicion our church officials withhold information and are less than honest, which also casts discredit upon the ministry.

The minister compelled to leave the holy ministry for cause must bear the consequence of what he did. He has disqualified himself from further service in that office; he will have to serve the Lord in the future in other ways. The Lord himself reflected that principle that the ministry should not be blamed. With regard to Levitical priests who became an offense in the eyes of Israel the Lord said they could perform other services, but they could no longer serve him nor come near his holy things. The Lord said those priests were to bear their shame; their disqualification was permanent. Ezekiel 44:10-14 states,

The Levites who went far from me when Israel went astray and who wandered from me after their idols must bear the consequences of their sin. They may serve in my sanctuary, having charge of the gates of the temple and serving in it; they may slaughter the burnt offerings and sacrifices for the people and stand before the people and serve them. But because they served them in the presence of their idols and made the house of Israel fall into sin, therefore I have sworn with uplifted hand that they must bear the consequence of their sin, declares the Sovereign Lord. They are not to come near to serve me as priests or come near any of my holy things or my most holy offerings; they must bear the shame of their detestable practices, yet I will put them in charge of the duties of the temple and all the work that is to be done in it.

The Old Testament priests who became guilty of some offense were not given a second chance to serve again in their ministry; they were killed, so the question of their reinstatement never arose. By the law a priest guilty of adultery would have been stoned to death. When Nadab and Abihu offered strange fire before God, he killed them on the spot. When Korah and other Levites rebelled, God opened the mouth of the earth and swallowed them up with their households. When Eli did not act to stop the dishonoring of God’s offerings, he was removed from the office of priest and killed along with his two wicked sons. If Aaron and his sons did not prohibit unauthorized men from going near the holy furnishings of God, their punishment was to be death.

In the letters to the seven churches, Christ censured the churches of Pergamum and Thyatira for not removing the immoral and false teachers from their midst. But Christ commended the church at Ephesus for not being able to put up with evil men, and for testing those who called themselves apostles with the conclusion they were not. This censure on the one hand, and commendation on the other, clearly shows Christ does want his congregations to mark and avoid those who are unqualified to serve in the ministry.

The New Testament does not set down any guidelines for reinstating a minister after he has disqualified himself and was compelled to leave the ministry. The Scriptures only set forth the qualification for candidates not in the ministry and for the men who hold that high office. Only on the basis of the Lord’s reinstatement of Peter is there any scriptural reason for pondering

reinstatement. But we are not bound to follow the Lord's exceptional examples; we are bound to follow his Word. Since that exceptional example does not establish doctrine nor set aside the qualifications for the ministry, there is no basis for considering reinstatement. Scripture does not even concern itself with the matter. Like the Levitical priests the disqualified minister must bear the consequences of his sin – he can no longer serve in that office.

V. The Removal of a Disqualified Minister from the Holy Ministry

The church of necessity must dismiss from its ministry unqualified and unfaithful men. Jesus said, "Beware of false prophets." A false prophet is one whose teaching does not agree with the Word of God – the very thing the minister must do as one holding fast the faithful Word. Beware means nothing else in this case than the church should take note of such false teachers and stay away from them. When a stranger sees a sign, "Beware of Vicious Dog," he does not say "How nice!" and then venture into the yard. He takes note of that yard and stays away for his own personal safety. That is what Jesus tells his church to do with erring ministers.

Peter wrote, "Be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position," 2 Peter 3:17. In the previous chapter he had described those unprincipled men. They were unfit because they were false teachers who introduced destructive heresies and denied the Lord. They were also unfit because they were sensual, greedy revilers. The Christians were to be on their guard against such men. What did that mean for them? It meant that they were to take note of those unqualified teachers in their midst, to refuse to follow them, and to have nothing to do with them.

The church is taught to guard itself against unfaithful and unprincipled ministers and teachers, for they give offense to Christians, they bring discredit upon the ministry, and they mislead souls into hell.

The only way the church can guard itself against unqualified ministers who are in its midst is to remove them from their office, to forbid them to preach and teach, and to excommunicate them if they still do not repent. Luther also taught a minister may be removed from his office. "A minister may be deposed if he ceases to be faithful... In fact, the minister of matters spiritual is more subject to removal than any civil servant, because if he turns unfaithful he becomes more unbearable than any civil servant, who can work harm in matters of this life only" (*What Luther Says*, vol. 3, 1143). The chargeable offense bringing disqualification must be established by two or three witnesses, otherwise it should not be considered, 1 Timothy 5:19. When two or three witnesses can testify to the offense the minister has caused, he is no longer blameless.

This requirement of at least two witnesses is in the best interest of the minister. For then he cannot be dismissed because one person falsely slandered him. Having two or three witnesses also spares the church from the impossible task of trying to determine when there is only one witness who is telling the truth – the accuser or the minister who denies the accusation. Our church would do well to follow this principle of requiring two or three witnesses in each case.

In an instance in which the minister's offense is only known to those in authority in the district and synod, it behooves those officers to give witness to the offense and to take action to have him removed from his office in the congregation.

A minister is to be publicly rebuked for his public offense. When an accusation has been established by two or three witnesses, he is to be publicly rebuked for it, 1 Timothy 5:20. "Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also may be fearful of sinning" (NASB). Literally he is to be exposed, or convicted, before all. Paul exposed Peter in front of all

those involved when Peter wrongly separated himself from the Gentile Christians in Antioch, Galatians 2:11-14. In the case where the minister has actually disqualified himself through some sin, as in adultery, then that man is to be rebuked to the knowledge of all and removed from the ministry so the offense and the discredit to the ministry can be removed. If a church is to remain faithful and solid, earnest discipline is required.

Christian love requires the man be disciplined to save his own soul. But there is another benefit of such discipline – it causes others to fear. If there is no discipline, the sin of the one minister can spread like a little yeast that eventually leavens the whole lump. Therefore, the minister who has disqualified himself needs to be made an example for the benefit of the rest, 1 Timothy 5:20.

Such discipline of ministers needs to be carried out without partiality (1 Timothy 5:21) – from the seminary or teacher graduate to the district and synodical officers.

Some practical considerations in view of this instruction demand some attention. A resignation from the ministry because of some offense needs to be reported as a “resignation for cause.” Such was the practice of our synod in the past. When a minister is removed from the ministry for some offense, it needs to be reported as “dismissed for cause.” Such reporting needs to be done so all will benefit, so especially the pastors and teachers will be “caused to fear,” so the blamelessness of the ministry will be preserved. On the other hand, when a minister resigns for a personal reason, as for health, and he is eligible for a call in the future, then his resignation should be carefully noted “for personal reasons.”

Concern for adhering to the spirit of the Eighth Commandment will surely move us in the church to refrain from unnecessarily publicizing the details of the offense or from scandalizing the man. However, the Eighth Commandment is not to be used as justification for withholding the report that a minister’s resignation or dismissal was for cause. For if such information is withheld, how can the offense be removed from within our church, and how can others be led to fear?

VI. Relocation of a Disqualified Minister

A man’s disqualification from the ministry should be recognized and upheld in every part of the church. If a man has disqualified himself from the ministry in one place or congregation, he should not be given a call to another place or congregation – within the district or synod, or within its mission fields or specialized ministries. A man who is no longer qualified to serve in one congregation or call because of an offense is not qualified to serve in other congregations or calls. The man’s eligibility must be determined solely by the qualifications set down in Scripture, not by the locality or calling where his past reputation and offense is unknown to the members and people.

Such relocation of a disqualified minister is harmful to the church and its officials. Not to remove the man from the ministry and to permit him to continue to serve (though it be elsewhere) in contrary to Scripture – Matthew 7:15; 2 Peter 3:17; Romans 16:17; Revelation 2:2, 14-16, 20; 1 Timothy 3:10 (Gk). The sins of some men go before them; the sins of other men follow after them, 1 Timothy 5:24. If a disqualified minister is relocated the members and outsiders of that new area could hear about his previous offense – much to their offense; not to mention the offense given to the members where he had been when they learn of his continued presence in the ministry. The members of both congregations may then question the integrity of those church officials who put him on a call list and permit him to remain in the ministry. Either they may think those officials are failing to uphold the high office of the ministry, those officials

are withholding information, or those officials have given false testimony about the man's past reputation – much to the discredit of those officials and the ministry they represent. When the disqualified minister's offense becomes known anew, then more offense is given and more discredit is heaped upon the ministry, when one instance of offense and discredit was more than enough in the first place.

As the congregations and districts of our synod respect one another's authority and decision in cases of excommunication, so far as it is scripturally valid, so our congregations and districts should recognize one another's authority and resolution in determining a minister has disqualified himself from the ministry and is ineligible for a call in the future.

By the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Ghost we have enjoyed years of unity in one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one hope of salvation, and one objective – to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to all people. Our Lord Jesus Christ in his graciousness has redeemed us all for eternity, and for here in time he has entrusted to our care both his Word of reconciliation and his flock of precious, blood-bought souls. Out of love for him, his Word, and his flock, let us uphold the high office of the holy ministry in his church. By his continuing grace may this paper serve that end in setting forth the scriptural teaching on the eligibility for the holy ministry and the permanency of disqualification from the holy ministry. Such is our prayer. Amen.