

Whatever Happened to Simply Believing the Bible?

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I read the news, not generally from the newspapers, though that occasionally does happen, but on the internet. Most every link in my Bookmarks is to some news source, technical or religious site. The problem with reading the news is that the bias of the reporters must be accounted for, and the truth of the matter has to be carefully discerned. I wish it were the case with the following.

On Thursday, August 23, 2007, MSNBC ran a story of a megachurch in Tampa, Florida that is having some trouble. Specifically, the church's *pastors* are divorcing. Now, I know this is not something new to modern day America. But it does highlight a very real problem – one of claiming to follow God, all the while being totally disobedient to His word. It does not take the proverbial “rocket scientist” to see the very clear differences between what the pastors of this church were doing, and what the Bible plainly states.

In looking at the problem, let's begin at the obvious: the fact that the church's pastors are divorcing. In Scripture there are specific instructions given for pastors, including the requirements to be a pastor. Since there are requirements, it really is important to heed them since God gave them to be followed, not to be ignored or set aside as drivel.

First, the position of pastor is one of calling. What this means is that the LORD God calls a specific person to a specific task (a calling) and gifts (or enables and empowers) them to perform that task. This calling is always consistent

with everything that the Lord has stated and performed elsewhere. Moreover, it is fully consistent with what He has recorded in His word. As such, we should find an example of callings the Lord has done in Scripture. There are two (among many) that are clear and prominent in Scripture – one Old Testament, and one New Testament, that I will use.

In I Samuel, chapter 3, the calling of Samuel is detailed for all history. There are some things that are done differently in our time as opposed to the time of ancient Israel, particularly the working of signs (no longer done) and such like. But, the essence of the calling remains the same – the LORD plainly communicated to Samuel's heart what He wanted from Samuel, what He was displeased with in Eli and his house, and Samuel's response to the calling, which is encapsulated in the following verse:

And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground. (*I Samuel 3:19*)

In the New Testament there are examples of several callings that we can choose from, but the one most like the calling of a pastor today is found in the life of Timothy, who was disciplined by the apostle Paul and called of God to be a pastor.

Then came he to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek: Which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium. Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek. And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem. (*Acts 16:1-4*)

in the above passage we should take note that Timotheus

(Timothy) already had a good testimony before the brethren, and had plain and clear evidence of true faith in the Lord. This was evident enough that the apostle Paul took Timothy with him to be discipled and to assist in the work of preaching the gospel and establishing churches. In the following passages, the work of Timothy in assisting the apostle Paul is demonstrated, and Timothy's calling is validated. As an aside, please note the total lack of Bible college or seminary in the training of Timothy.

For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church. (*I Corinthians 4:17*)

After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome. So he sent into Macedonia two of them that ministered unto him, Timotheus and Erastus; but he himself stayed in Asia for a season. (*Acts 19:21-22*)

Now if Timotheus come, see that he may be with you without fear: for he worketh the work of the Lord, as I also *do*. Let no man therefore despise him: but conduct him forth in peace, that he may come unto me: for I look for him with the brethren. (*I Corinthians 16:10-11*)

But as God *is* true, our word toward you was not yea and nay. For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, *even* by me and Silvanus and Timotheus, was not yea and nay, but in him was yea. (*II Corinthians 1:18*)

But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort, when I know your state. For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's. But ye know the proof of him, that, as a

son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel. Him therefore I hope to send presently, so soon as I shall see how it will go with me. (Philippians 2:19-23)

Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone; And sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellowlabourer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith: That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto. (*I Thessalonians 3:1-3*)

Thus, when the apostle Paul wrote unto Timothy, as Timothy was pastor of the church at Ephesus, it was to remind and exhort Timothy to calling that the LORD had laid upon him. In writing, Paul reminded Timothy of his beginning and gifting for the work of the LORD. But he also reminded him of something else that the pastor's of modern America's churches seem to have utterly forgotten – the afflictions of the gospel.

. . . When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also. Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands. For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God; Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, . . . (II Timothy 1:5-9a)

Thus, Timothy's calling and proof of the ministry, though not identical to Samuel's, had some common features:

First, the service and discipleship under an established and proven man of God. In short, Samuel and Timothy both served

others for long periods of time prior to being established as the man of God. (As an aside, we should not take Eli's failure in service as proof that he was not a man of God, rather it demonstrates the ever present pressure to depart from the LORD's established criteria for service, particularly from a man's family.)

Second, and extremely important, is the fact that neither Samuel nor Timothy ever departed from the express, literal word of God. If ever there were an imperative, this is it. The man of God, called unto a work, must not ever depart from the solid foundation of Jesus Christ and His teaching. To do so is to preach and teach another gospel. It does not matter how subtle the change or changes may be, any change at all will not accurately represent the truth of the Word of God. I am convinced by the testimonies of both men that, by the LORD, they knew and understood this.

Thus, we come to the point of examining what the Scripture states plainly about the requirements for a pastor or bishop. In the following passage from Ephesians, chapter 4, instruction is given to the church at Ephesus, and recorded for us all, how that God, through Christ, gifts everyone in the church for some work, and for the express purpose of the believer's growth in Christ

But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the

measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we *henceforth* be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, *and* cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, *even* Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love. (*Ephesians 4:7-16*)

Now, it should be plain that it is the LORD who does the calling, as was clearly seen in the case of Samuel and by testimony of Paul concerning Timothy. It should also be clear that it is the LORD who gives the gift to perform the calling as evidenced in the foregoing passage. It is more succinctly put in another place:

Faithful *is* he that calleth you, who also will do *it*. (*I Thessalonians 5:24*)

So then, it is the LORD's calling, and the LORD's equipping for the ministry. Will the LORD then call someone contrary to a criteria He has plainly laid out? As part of his admonition and instruction to Timothy, the apostle Paul set forth the criteria for a pastor in the following passage. Plainly, this was not to establish to Timothy that he was called of God to pastor, rather it was to give a brief listing of criteria that could and would quickly establish whether or not a man was qualified for the calling he claimed to have. We can see this in the very first sentence of the passage, wherein it is stated "This *is* a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work." indicating clearly that there were individuals who desired to be pastors then even as now. And, that some of those individuals were not and could not be qualified for the office of pastorate. Thus, the list:

This *is* a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop,

he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. (*I Timothy 3:1-7*)

Now, we can order this as a list, because that is what it is. As such, to quickly determine whether a man is qualified or not, we can simply check off the list to eliminate the would-be pretenders:

- A bishop then must be blameless
- the husband of one wife
- vigilant
- sober
- of good behaviour
- given to hospitality
- apt to teach
- not given to wine
- no striker
- not greedy of filthy lucre
- patient
- not a brawler
- not covetous
- one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity
- he must have a good report of them which are without

Beyond doubt, the second item and last items on the list eliminate the “ministry” of Paula White as a pastor of anything relating to God. Quite clearly, the first word of the last item is “he”, in addressing this particular qualification

of the pastoral candidate. However, if we carefully note in the reading of the article, it eliminates Randy White as well as it is quite clear in the article that this was his second marriage, and thus he is not “the husband of one wife”.

Worse yet, the article is very plain that they (the pastors) preached a prosperity theology that is condemned both in the above passage and in other passages of Scripture as well. Suffice to say that both Randy and Paula White have let the word of God fall to the ground, if indeed they ever held it in the first place. In this, there is a fundamental difference between the Whites and their testimony, and Samuel and Timothy and theirs. From what I perceive, that difference is expressed in the LORD’s statement in John 14:

If ye love me, keep my commandments. (*John 14:15*)

Which raises the question posed by Christ:

And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? (*Luke 6:46*)

This is the problem in America, but it is by no means unique to America, nor to this period of time. There have always been those who claim a calling from God – so that they could use the influence and power they gain for their own ends. However, there is a relatively easy way to thwart the efforts of such individuals – by strict adherence to the word of God. If someone had made it plain to the Whites that they were engaging in something that obviously could not be of God, and hindered their efforts, they themselves might have repented and not led so many people astray.

Nonetheless, what does this state about so many in this nation, particularly those who attend churches such as the “Without Walls International Church,” claim to know the LORD, yet will not be obedient to His express and plain word? I think the LORD stated it precisely when He had Isaiah pen the following words about Israel:

Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near *me* with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men: Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise *men* shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent *men* shall be hid. (*Isaiah 29:13-14*)

Is it any wonder that America has totally lost her way? America's churches, like Israel, have forsaken the true way of God in favor of having the label, but no substance behind it.

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