

Coach's Corner

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“Are You Called?”

One of the questions often asked of pastors during their ordination exam is this: “Would you please explain your sense of calling to pastoral ministry?” This is also often asked by search committees of prospective pastors. Many of us would think it strange or deficient if this question was not posed of a pastor. Yet, how many of us would think of offering this question to a prospective church board elder? I believe it should be. Let me explain.

Pastors=Elders

Keep in mind that the New Testament views pastors and elders as the same office, the same ministry. Since we have already looked at this, there is no need to belabor the point. We simply need to see that what applies to a pastor in this area applies to an elder.

Elders Should Aspire To The Office

In 1 Timothy 3:1 Paul says that “if anyone aspires to be an overseer, he desires a good work.” Though Paul does not explicitly say that one must aspire to be an overseer to fill this ministry (remember an overseer=elder=pastor), he does introduce the idea that he assumes that men going into this ministry will in fact aspire to/desire this ministry. In other words, he will want to shepherd people “willingly” (1 Peter 5:2). This desire is part of a call from God. In other words, it is part of the conviction that God wants me to do this, He has equipped me to do this, and He has qualified me to do this (cf. 1 Tim. 3:1-7).

What this strongly implies is that we should be careful not to coerce men to fill an elder position if they do not want to do it and/or they do not believe God has called them to do it. It would be better for a church to have the position empty than to have it filled with the wrong man.

Elders Are Put In Place By The Spirit

In Acts 20:28, as Paul said, “Goodbye” to the Ephesian elders and gave them last words of instruction, he said: “Pay careful attention to yourselves and unto all the flock, among whom the Holy Spirit placed you as overseers....” Paul understood and affirmed that overseers (aka pastors and elders) are brought into their places of leadership by means of the Holy Spirit equipping, giving desire to, qualifying men to be elders, and leading other elders and church members to the realization. This, coupled with the idea of aspiration in 1 Timothy 3:1, suggests two sides of the calling coin.

What this strongly implies is that we must be much in prayer about who should become an elder. We should seek wisdom from God, as well as look at the qualifications outlined in 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9f.

Elders, bottom-line, what these simple points encourage us to do is the following when it comes to the elder selection/nominating process: (1) Serve as a filter for the names placed on the ballot. (2) Teach the congregation about what to look for in an elder. (3) Bathe the whole process in prayer.

Joyfully pastoring and overseeing the flock with you,

Tom