

GO FOR THE GOLD

by Antonio M. Alfred

What would be the state of the American sense of pride if we only encouraged our Olympic teams to only go for the bronze medal? What would happen to the morale of the United States athlete's motivation and hope if the best they aimed for was 3rd place? Well, sad to say I believe this is what has happened in the church. Too many of the men of God who have been installed into the office of bishop have only had to maintain a "third rate" sense of qualification. In time past, the qualifications for under-shepherd were strictly adhered to as revealed in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. However, in recent years many local churches have lowered their standards. No longer are pastors-teachers expected to be "above reproach".

My fear for the local churches is that many have underestimated the importance of the qualifications for the office of elders. Many have lost their sense of high expectations of those who lead them and watch for their souls. Many have become accustomed to accepting men whose integrity for the office of overseer has been compromised. It is alarming to think of the state of many local churches who have left the doors and windows open for wolves in sheep's clothing to creep in.

We are told in the 2 Timothy 4 that a time will come when people will want to hear from those who are not qualified according to Scripture but to according to the selfish desires. The danger for the local church in this regard is that those that they choose to listen to will be out to fleece the flock for selfish ambitions. That is, they will not be holding the office of overseer willingly but for the love of money or fame. Therefore, in order to protect the local flock over which God has called us to, men qualified by God's grace must sound the alarm. Pastors, called and qualified by God's grace must hold one another accountable to Scripture.

Imagine what would happen to our economy should we allowed counterfeit currency to circulate unchecked. What would be our state of affairs if we simply accepted unauthentic tender because it was too hard to detect them in the system. Though it may appear difficult to find a man in our time who: *is above reproach (blameless,) self-controlled, hospitable, able to teach, husband of one wife, temperate, respectable, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money, not given to drunkenness, manages his own family well, seeing that his children obey him, not a recent convert, has a good reputation with outsiders, not overbearing, not quick-tempered, does not pursue dishonest gain, loves what is good, upright and holy, disciplined and holds to the truth*, it is still possible through Christ Jesus.

God has given the church the above qualifications for the office of bishop for initial entrance into ministry as under-shepherd. In keeping these qualifications are to be maintained for remaining in ministry by the grace of God. A man of God must be qualified to become a pastor and must maintain his qualifications to remain in the pastorate. It is ludicrous to assume that a man must be qualified only to be ordained as bishop over a flock and not maintain his qualification as bishop. He must be above reproach upon assuming the office and he must maintain his blameless status in order to remain in office.

With that said, I do believe restoration is possible for a man of God who has fallen. However, his restoration to the office of bishop should not come until there has been repentance and an expression of *godly sorrow* that leads to righteousness. Only then, and this may take years, can he be considered for office of overseer. Again, he must have reached the status of *blameless* according to Scripture.

By the grace of God men are still being qualified and called to serve as under-shepherds. The Lord is still giving the church pastors after His own heart to watch over His sheep until He returns. Therefore, it is the obligation of every local body of believers to hold to the standards of our faith. It is the responsibility of every Pastor to hold himself and his co-laborers in the faith accountable to the rule of Scripture. By upholding the standard God has set for the church in regards to the office of bishop, we

can contend for the faith once for all delivered to us. We can run the race and finish the course. We can be more than conquerors in Christ Jesus. We can once again go for the gold.