

PETER

How do you become *qualified* for the Lord's work? That is not the same as asking how you become a minister. Nowadays qualification for the ministry usually requires studying at college and university. ... Fair enough, a formal training is profitable and beneficial but no amount of educational qualifications qualifies you for the Lord's work.

In fact, there is a higher threshold required. When I first considered entering the pastorate I had to meet the pastor and deacons of my home church to be recommended for entrance into college. I also had to receive the recommendation from my work, at that time. I was then interviewed by the college and the principal. Along with having the stipulated A levels and testimony I was accepted. Following my formal studies, there was yet another period of probationary studies, and further interviews etc. Finally, you make it ... and you might even go on to do more studies ☺

It's good and it's important ... and you don't even mind how rigorous and stringent each parts of the process is ... But you could be *qualified* as a pastor/minister and *not* be suitably equipped for the Lord's work. Some of the greatest servants of God were ordinary men and women who God made ready simply by the burden He laid upon their hearts. I think of men like Spurgeon and women like Mary Slessor.

God's standards for service are greater than any university requirements ... whether they be from Cambridge, Oxford, Harvard, Yale or anywhere else for what He expects of His people is no less than His own perfection. He does not have any other criteria for He has one benchmark for Himself and it is the same quality of excellence He wants from His people ... Those who are called into His work, - every born-again believer, - have equal responsibility for the measure of the work He entrusts them to do. That is the reason for the highest of spiritual qualities in such passages as I Tim. 3:1-13 and Titus 1.

However, they are of *such* high quality that ... really ... nobody qualifies! We cannot match up to God ... and yet, He expects such excellence! ... It is not possible, - of course, it is not possible ... Humanly speaking, just as nobody, - by their own means, - qualifies for salvation, nobody qualifies to be in God's Kingdom, and nobody qualifies to be in God's service. It is nothing less than a mystery of God's sovereign grace that anyone is called, and it is because of the same grace His ministry is carried out through the likes of you and me, - the unworthy and the unqualified. So the issue is not what I can do of myself

for God, but what God can do *of Himself* through me to bring about His eternal purposes.

When we explore the Scriptures we discover God always uses the most unlikely and implausible men and women, - those who would not even have considered themselves for the task. Before God called him, it never crossed Abram's mind in Ur to follow Him. Samuel and David, Gideon and Samson, Elijah and Elisha, Isaiah and Jeremiah ... out of all of God's servants in the Old Testament, there was not one of them who considered themselves worthy of His service. Moses protested, **Ex. 3:11** Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt? ... **4:10** O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue. **11** And the LORD said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the LORD? **12** Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say. ... Isaiah was amazed, **Is. 6:5** Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips ... And King David, **II Sam. 7:18** Who am I, O Lord GOD? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?

On the other hand, there were many who did consider themselves worthy. For example, the temple officers, - the priests, the high priest and his entourage, - and they *did* consider themselves worthy. In the New Testament also there were those who entered some of the assemblies and caused havoc and disruption. ... God didn't choose them, and because they were not called of God, confusion and apostasy had 'free rein'! ... And that is what happens when men, - and women, - deem themselves worthy of a task God has never called them into.

So, it is not the 'worthies' He calls, but the 'unworthies', **Rom. 7:24** O wretched man that I am! said Paul, **Eph. 3:8** Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ ... He chooses us to choose to serve Him for He picks out the kind of person the world would pass over, and He changes and shapes them to fulfil His purposes. ... It is not academic qualifications, but it is the truth and power of God in the individual that qualifies us.

Jesus, the Son of God, took the unworthy and the unqualified and transformed them. The twelve disciples/apostles were the foundation of the New Testament church, the agents of Divine revelation, and the teachers of true doctrine. They

were the examples of Godliness. During those formative years of the church, they did many signs and wonders ... and yet the twelve were very plain and very ordinary men who God chose for His service.

Of the four lists of the disciples in Mt. 10, Mk. 3, Lk. 6, and Acts 1, the first name is always Peter. You will also notice there are three 'groups' of four ... Peter, Andrew, James, and John ... Philip, Bartholomew (sometimes called Nathanael), Matthew, and Thomas ... James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot (Ἰσκαριώτης, from Kerioth).

I think it would be a fair assessment that the names are in a particular order for a reason ... Peter was the leader of the first group, Philip was the leader of the second group, and James the son of Alphaeus was the leader of the third group ... and that is consistently throughout the order of the four lists of the disciples.

Also, the first four was closer to Jesus than the second four, who were closer than the third four. It follows on from this that not all the twelve would have been equally close to Jesus. For example, Peter, James, and John (and sometimes Andrew) were more 'attached' to Him than the others. And that is one reason why we know more about them. ... You can trace it from Peter to Judas Iscariot, - from the most faithful to the one who had no true faith.

The first group Jesus called to be His disciples/apostles was Peter, James, John, and Andrew, **Jn. 1:35** Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; **36** And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God! **37** And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. **38** Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou? **39** He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day: for it was about the tenth hour. **40** One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. **41** He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. **42** And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone.

Initially, Peter's name was Simon ... meaning "He [God] had heard" ... harking back to Gen. 29 **33** And she [*Leah*] conceived again, and bare a son; and said, Because the LORD hath heard that I was hated, he hath therefore given me this son also: and she called his name Simeon. ... Simon was a very popular name, -

the disciple Simon the Zealot (also known as Simon the Canaanite, Mt. 10:4), Simon the brother of Jesus (Mt. 13:55), Simon the leper from Bethany (Mt. 26:6), Simon of Cyrene (Mt. 27:32), Simon the Pharisee (Lk. 7:40), Simon the father of Judas Iscariot (Jn. 6:71), Simon Magus the sorcerer (Acts 8), and Simon the tanner (Acts 9:43).

In Mt. 10:2 Matthew, - the disciple who wrote the Gospel, - emphasised the point, **Mt. 10:2** Now the names of the twelve apostles are these; **The first, Simon, who is called Peter.** In other words, Simon *was* seen to be their leader. It did not imply there were two leaders, - Jesus and Peter, - but as far as the men were concerned, Peter was a leader ... on their level. And that is how he came to be described as πρῶτος, first in line, first in rank, the principal, - in authority, he was next to Jesus. ... If you had something to say, but you were too shy, you would go to Peter and *he* would bring it to the Lord ... We also see an example of how they looked up to him after the resurrection in Jn. 21 **1** After these things Jesus shewed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias; and on this wise shewed he himself. **2** There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two other of his disciples. **3** Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee.

So, he was a fisherman by trade and he lived along with and worked with his brother Andrew on the Sea of Galilee. They were originally from Bethsaida (Jn. 1:44), - a short distance inland, - but later moved to Capernaum, on the northern shore of the lake. They must have gotten on very well because their two families lived together (Mk. 1:29). Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law (Lk. 4:38) ... and sometimes, - later on in his ministry, - he brought his wife with him, to which Paul specifically referred, **1 Cor. 9:5** *Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas?*

He was known as Simon Bar-Jona (Mt. 16:17; Jn. 1:42; 21:15) ... Simon, son of Jonah/John ('dove'). ... And when Jesus gave him another name, it is interesting to notice how Luke recorded it, **Lk. 6:14** *Simon, (whom he also named Peter).* In other words, he did not stop being called Simon ... but he was now also known as Peter. Is there any significance in how these names were used?

...

Yes, there is. When Jesus first met Peter, He said, **Jn. 1:42** *Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas* ... He began with 'Simon', and Simon is the

Aramaic of the Hebrew Simeon, from the Old Testament. From now on, said Jesus, I am giving you *another* name for you will not only be called Simon, but you will also be called Cephas. Cephas is the Aramaic word for ‘rock’, and ‘Petros’ is its Greek translation for the Greek language was also widely used throughout the whole region. ... And both Cephas and Petros mean ‘rock’.

When you explore this further you will notice how Jesus uses these two names. He uses Simon within the more secular and mundane context, for example, Simon’s house (Mk. 1:29, Lk. 4:38), Simon’s wife and mother-in-law (Mk. 1:30; Lk. 4:38), and Simon’s fishing business (Lk. 5:10). Jesus also called him Simon to emphasise his inadequacies and sin, for example, when Simon was ‘short’ with Him and answered, **Lk. 5:5** *Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing.* And, in the garden of Gethsemane, **Mk. 14:37** *And he [Jesus] cometh, and findeth them [the disciples] sleeping, and saith unto Peter, Simon, sleepest thou?*

And Peter would have noticed the significance in how Jesus spoke to him. Jesus called him Peter when he was being the ‘rock’ Jesus had called and set him apart to be ... but Jesus called him Simon when the worldly attitudes were showing themselves, **Lk. 22:31** *And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat*

In this way Peter was like all of us ... Sometimes he managed to live in a manner that pleased the Lord, and then there were those other times when he did not. ... He was undoubtedly called of the Lord, but often his old nature seeped through. He didn’t mean it to, or want it to ... but it did. Sometimes he was too fiery ... and it went against him in the Lord’s work. Sometimes, he spoke when he should have kept quiet. He often acted on impulse, rather than giving due thought. There was the time Jesus told the disciples He was going up to Jerusalem to die ... and Peter told him he would never allow it, - he was as much as telling Jesus, You’ve got it wrong ... You don’t know what You are talking about! ... **Mt. 16:21** *From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. 22 Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee. 23 But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men. ... And that was shortly after the Lord had warmly commended him, 17 Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.*

Imagine the Lord choosing someone like Peter to be a leader! Imagine the Lord working on, refining, shaping, and training someone as ‘all-over-the-place’ like Peter! ... And yet it is ordinary people *like Simon Peter* God moulds into the kind of person He wants, and that is the purpose for our salvation, **II Cor. 5:17** if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new ... **Rom. 8:29** ... to be conformed to the image of his Son.

... And it was an intense and an ongoing process because Peter’s name was mentioned in the Gospels more than any other name, except Jesus. None other speaks as often as Peter, and none other is spoken to by the Lord as often as Peter. No other disciple is reprimanded by the Lord as much as Peter was, and no disciple reproved the Lord other than Peter. No disciple so boldly confessed Christ as Peter, but also ... no other disciple denied Jesus as brazenly as Peter. None of the disciples was as praised and blessed as Peter, but neither was any of the rest of them called Satan, except Peter.

Yet, through it all, the Lord took this very impulsive and sometimes argumentative man and He shaped him into the leader of the twelve, - Peter was the πρῶτος. He became the greatest preacher among them, and he surely was the founding father of the founding fathers of the early church, during the opening twelve chapters of Acts.

That is why it is important to look at these men the Lord called ... and to see how, - even in someone like Peter, - God builds up and shapes us. We shall continue our study by looking further into how the Lord’s grace was applied to his life. Amen.