

# Who Should Become God's Ministers?

How does God select His ministers? Who should they be? Can one volunteer to be a minister? Can a minister be elected by a pulpit committee? The Bible shows that becoming a true minister of God is a process that He guides!

**S**UCH CONFUSION over who are or should be God's ministers! Many thousands of "men of the cloth" claim to represent God. But do they? How can you know? You can!

In the world's churches, people decide for themselves if they should join the ministry. Many claim to be led by God through some sentimental "feeling" in their hearts. In most cases, they will attend Bible colleges and seminaries, where they are methodically drilled to accept their school's beliefs. Upon graduating, they have been thoroughly trained to twist Scripture in order to legitimize their own doctrines (II Peter 3:15-16). They are now ready to (mis)lead a congregation of their own.

But is this how God selects His ministers?

## A Minister's Mission

The supposed Christian religions of this world are not in the business of helping their followers overcome sin. Their ministers do not teach people to extract spiritual leavening—sin—from their lives (I Cor. 5:6-7).

Although many well-intentioned, zealous people worship within these worldly religions, the average worshiper has no intention of humbling himself before God. He has no desire to purge carnal hatred, prejudices and greed from his life.

Why? "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. 8:7-8).

To most, religion is merely a social tradition or a consuming hobby. In contrast to the one true Church founded by Jesus Christ, false Christianity does not lead its followers from sin. It does not teach the way to obey God's laws or develop His holy, righteous character.

Only God's *true* ministers guide His people—in His Church—to come out of the world and overcome sin. God uses His ministry to help Christians build godly character and qualify to rule nations in His soon-coming kingdom.

## Serve God or Please Men?

The ministers of this world must conform to the traditions and beliefs of their church's brand of Christianity. Where their church's beliefs divert from Scripture, the ministers must embrace and defend them—even to the extent of ignoring or intentionally explaining away Scripture.

Why? Because they have never understood the true meaning of God's Word. They have been trained to accept—without question—whatever their church or denomination teaches.

Notice the human reasoning that guided the priests and prophets who turned away from God in order to follow the dictates of the "congregation" of ancient Israel: "Now go, write it before them in a table, and note it in

a book, that it may be for the time to come for ever and ever [a prophetic and timeless truth]: that this is a *rebellious people* [specifically ancient Israel, but humanity in general], lying children, children that *will not hear the law of the LORD*: which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us *smooth things*, prophesy *deceits*: get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us" (Isa. 30:8-11).

Notice that the verses say that the people are rebellious and lying, and will not listen to God's Law. Instead, they tell the seers and the prophets to ignore visions from God: "Prophecy *not* unto us *right* things, speak unto us *smooth* things, prophesy *deceits*." To carnal minds, God's truth—the way to right living—is irrelevant. (To better understand the workings of the carnal mind, read our booklet *Did God Create Human Nature?*)

This world's ministers must follow the dictates of their flock—or face unemployment. Only ministers who preach smooth, non-condemning sermons keep their positions. They quote secular sources to gently admonish their congregation about acquiring some admirable character trait. But correction from God's Word is not tolerated. The congregation will only listen to "smooth things" from the pulpit.

This world's ministers are more worried about pleasing *people*—especially those who control their payroll. They

leave God out of the equation. Notice: “A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; the prophets prophesy *falsely*, and the priests bear rule by their means; and *My people love to have it so*: and what will you do in the end thereof?” (Jer. 5:30-31).

Pleasing the crowd might be the popular thing to do now, but God’s final judgment will prove this to be wrong.

The carnal mind has many different escape mechanisms, but eventually all people will face the all-powerful Eternal God. Then, everyone will recognize that they must please the only true God—*not the people—above all else.*

### **A Minister’s Path**

On one hand, the ministers of God’s true Church have an easier course than the world’s ministers. Rather than having to cover up, slant, twist and pervert Scripture to legitimize false doctrines, God’s ministers simply let the Bible interpret itself. It is so much easier when one’s beliefs are in harmony with what God’s Word teaches.

On the other hand, God’s ministers walk a far more difficult path. Because they are not afraid to preach true doctrines, they are routinely persecuted and attacked. This is because Satan, the god of this world (II Cor. 4:4), hates the truth. He uses his ministers (II Cor. 11:13-15) and followers to persecute and attack God’s truth and those who courageously teach it.

The more truth a minister of God teaches and preaches, the more viciously he can expect to be attacked.

### **God’s Calling**

Christ said, “No man can come to Me, except the Father which has sent Me draw him” (John 6:44). A Christian’s calling is not the answer to a plea from the pulpit, nor is it something someone can decide on his own. *God the Father chooses whomever He calls.* He decides whether one has something to offer and if he is able to serve Him.

God also considers whether or not a person has what it takes to endure to the end, given his present and potential attributes.

John 6:65 emphasizes this same vital truth: “No man can come unto Me,

except it were given unto him of My Father.” When one’s mind is opened to the truth, it is because the Father is calling him.

In the same way, God calls and selects men to serve in His ministry. In Matthew 16:18, Christ said, “I will build My Church.” Christ built His Church upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:19-21). This is why the twelve disciples were specially trained; they became the original apostles.

Ephesians 1:22-23 states, “And has put all things under His [Christ’s] feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the Church, which is His body.” Christ, working through Church leadership, selects men to assume ministerial responsibilities. Nowhere in the Bible did Christ’s servants hold democratic elections to decide who to ordain into the ministry. Neither is there any mention of pulpit committees or deacons hiring and firing ministers at their own discretion.

### **Different Ranks in the Ministry**

Church leadership is delegated into positions—ranks—of authority and responsibility: “And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers” (Eph. 4:11).

Why? “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 fullness 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 supplies, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, makes increase of the body unto edifying of itself in love” (vs. 12-16).

The original Greek word for minister, *diakonos*, means “teacher or pastor.” It also means “servant, attendant (as one who runs errands), or a waiter (as

one who looks after menial duties).” A minister must be willing to go to great lengths, just as a shepherd, to spiritually protect, guide and feed his flock.

Christ gave deacons and deaconesses the responsibility of fulfilling the Church’s *physical* needs.

In recent decades, the Philadelphian era of God’s Church (see Revelation 2 and 3 describing Church eras) followed Ephesians 4:11 in defining ministerial ranks. A man was not considered a minister until he at least reached the rank of Preaching Elder.

Local Church elders fulfilled many of the same functions as Preaching elders, but were not ministers. Local elders were often in training to *become* ministers. Preaching elders had acquired years of valuable experience as local elders before being raised in rank.

Likewise, to qualify to become a Pastor-rank minister, a Preaching Elder must have years of experience in faithfully serving God’s flock.

### **God’s Servants Did Not Volunteer**

Christ’s disciples did not choose themselves or run political campaigns to advance their promotion or selection. They were called and chosen by God. In fact, there is no example in the entire Bible of God’s servants ever coming forward and volunteering for the offices they were given. God chose them, through Christ.

Notice the account in the book of Amos: “For thus Amos said, Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel shall surely be led away captive out of their own land. Also Amaziah [one of King Jeroboam’s chief officers in the northern Kingdom of Israel] said unto Amos, O you seer, go, flee you away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there: but prophesy not again any more at Bethel: for it is the king’s chapel, and it is the king’s court. Then answered Amos, and said to Amaziah, I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet’s son; but I was an herdman, and a gatherer of sycamore fruit: and the LORD took me as I followed the flock, and the LORD said unto me, Go, prophesy unto My people Israel. Now therefore hear you the word of the LORD” (Amos 7:11-16).

Amos saw himself as a common shepherd and laborer—without the cre-

dentials of a prophet. But he continued to tell Amaziah the real message from God—not an imaginary feeling in his heart. This message and charge was so moving that Amos boldly relayed it to Jeroboam’s highest officers—an action that could well have cost Amos his life! He did not volunteer to do this, or take it up as a challenge from friends. He did it because God chose him and gave him that responsibility.

Throughout the Bible, there are numerous examples of God selecting men to minister as His servants—men who did not volunteer for their commission. In fact, they often searched for ways to get out of it.

The prophet Jonah ran away from God’s charge to warn Nineveh. When God first called Jeremiah to become His prophet to Judah, Jeremiah made excuses. “Ah, but, O Lord Eternal, I cannot speak, I am too young” (Jer. 1:6, Moffatt translation).

Moses also made excuses when God called him: “Who am I, that I should go...O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since You have spoken unto Your servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue” (Ex. 3:11; 4:10).

God offered Moses encouraging support: “And the LORD said unto him, Who has made man’s mouth? or who makes the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? Have not I the LORD? Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth, and teach you what you shall say” (vs. 11-12).

But Moses still tried to avoid his calling: “O my Lord, please send by the hand of whomever else You may send” (vs. 13, New King James).

Thankfully for Moses, God was patient, though understandably angry: “And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses” (vs. 14).

God used Moses, in spite of his reluctance to step up to the “firing line.” Aaron became his spokesman.

As you can see, Moses, Jeremiah and other great servants of God did not volunteer their services. God selected them.

### **Known by Their Fruits**

One critical key God uses in selecting His ministers is found in Matthew 7:

“Even so every good tree brings forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree brings forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that brings not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits you shall know them” (vs. 17-20).

Christ spoke these words to His disciples on the night before His crucifixion. This was also near the end of their three and a half years of intense training, and the beginning of their apostleship in helping build the Church under Christ.

Christ said to them, “You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that you should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain” (John 15:16).

These disciples and future apostles (with the exception of Judas Iscariot) confirmed their calling by their loyalty and growth in God’s Spirit and power. Christ, abiding by the Father’s will, chose each of them, calling them from their previous occupations, to come and follow Him.

Today, the leaders of God’s Church are responsible for carefully weighing the fruits of potential ministers. They must examine their accomplishments and growth in different situations, especially the fruits of God’s Spirit: “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance” (Gal. 5:22-23).

### **Track Record and Background**

Selecting men to become God’s ministers takes careful deliberation over a long period of time. God holds Church leadership accountable. They need to be careful and circumspect in such vital matters.

In most cases, God’s ministers have served in lesser capacities for many years, proving their long-term commitment and reliability. Ordaining men into God’s ministry is never done suddenly. The apostle Paul admonished Timothy, a minister, concerning this: “Lay hands *suddenly* on no man, neither be partaker of other men’s sins: keep yourself pure” (I Tim. 5:22).

Ordaining a spiritual “babe” or novice into the ministry nearly always spells

disaster. God knows this. He has witnessed 6,000 years of human nature and all that springs from it: lust, greed, pride and vanity. God understands that human beings are, at best, extremely complicated and capable of deception—even self-deception.

For this reason, loyal ministers have always observed a man’s track record. However, that man is almost never aware of this. Thus, he does not volunteer or run political campaigns to somehow “land” a ministerial position. As God leads His ministers, He makes clear to them whom to choose by examining a man’s fruits, in addition to other biblical guidelines.

However, in recent decades, certain liberal ministers have carelessly and casually ordained men solely for political reasons. Some of these “political appointments” have settled into various splinter groups of God’s people. Becoming harsh and overbearing, these men have been given free reign to plunder the scattered remnants of God’s flock. Because they should never have been ordained in the first place, these “wolves” have driven a number of brethren away from God’s Church altogether (Acts 20:29). You can see why precautions are necessary in selecting God’s ministers.

Some personalities are naturally more dominant than others, but overbearing and dominant people rarely make edifying ministers. The worst thing that could happen to such men (and those under them) would be to give them too much authority and power. Sooner or later, they would become virtual dictators.

In selecting men to become elders, Paul gave Timothy detailed guidelines: vigilance, sobriety, hospitality, the ability to teach and help the brethren, patience, and having properly taught his children respectful behavior.

Some attributes that would disqualify a man from being a minister include a weakness for alcohol, greed for money, etc., or if he was contentious.

Paul wrote that a man must not be “a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil” (I Tim. 3:6). A man’s fruits must be evaluated, and he must have a long track record of faithfully serving God. These are not produced overnight.

They take time and need careful deliberation.

### **A Case in Point—the Apostle Paul**

When God miraculously called Paul into the truth, Paul did not immediately become a minister, even though he had been “brought up...at the feet of Gamaliel,” who was a doctor of the law, well-known and highly respected for his doctrinal knowledge and understanding.

Under Gamaliel, Paul was “taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God” (Acts 22:3). Paul was so zealous, he even persecuted and imprisoned Christians, bringing many to their deaths (vs. 4). He was so effective and, as a result, respected for this that the high priest and council of elders—the highest religious powers in Judea—gave him the authority to act on their behalf.

Notice what he wrote about himself in Philippians 3: “Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinks that he has whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless” (vs. 4-6).

In Galatians 1:14, he wrote, “And profited in the Jews’ religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.”

Paul, humanly speaking, had much to boast about. In the eyes of the world, he was fully credentialed to immediately become a minister upon conversion.

But God did not use him that way.

When God called Paul (approximately A.D. 35), He did not immediately make him an apostle—or even a minister. Instead, Paul went to Arabia and was taught by Christ, in vision, for three years. Afterward, he visited Jerusalem for 15 days and met the apostles Peter and James—Christ’s half-brother. Then Paul traveled through Syria and Cilicia, settling in his hometown of Tarsus (Gal. 1:11-24; 2:1; Acts 9:1-30; 11:19-26).

Scripture reveals that, despite Paul’s impressive credentials, he was not

actively used as an apostle until *many years* after conversion.

### **Outside Reputation**

In I Timothy 3:7, there is another qualification—a potential minister “must have a good report” from those *outside* the Church. This means not having a police record, such as habitual reckless driving or some type of felony or misdemeanor. It could also mean having a clean financial record, such as an acceptable credit rating, not being involved in tax evasion, etc. It also means having a track record of integrity in his occupation or any other business dealings.

I Timothy 3:10-11 lists the qualifications of deacons, but it also applies to local elders and ministers. “And let these also first be proved...Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things.”

God selects His ministers by thoroughly examining and evaluating each man’s fruits and track record—spiritual, occupational, financial and legal. This selection process cannot be taken casually, because God’s ministers represent His government in the Church, “which is...the pillar and ground of the TRUTH” (I Tim 3:15).

If a man “makes the grade” and meets the qualifications, he then comes to another hurdle: Is he willing and able to do the job?

This is expressed in Titus 1:9: “Holding fast the faithful word as he [the man being considered] has been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers [those who refute, deny or contradict the truth].” He must be able to use sound doctrine to exhort and convince gainsayers because, as verse 10 shows, “there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers.” This was true in Paul’s time and even more so today, in the end time, when the flock is scattered and faithful elders are so few.

So then, the ministry must be more careful and cautious in ordaining men, because the greatest threat to God’s Church always comes from disloyal ministers.

Paul warned about this in Acts 20:29-30: “For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.

Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.” Ministers and elders who remain close to God will also remain loyal to His true Church and in doing His Work.

### **Other Considerations**

Although being a minister brings great rewards in serving God’s people, there are serious implications. James, apostle of the Jerusalem Church (about A.D. 42 to 62), said, “My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation [judgment]” (Jms. 3:1).

It is not necessarily wrong for a man to desire to become a minister. Notice: “This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop [elder], he desires a good work” (I Tim. 3:1).

But he must recognize that God will hold him to a higher standard and a tougher judgment. God expects those who teach others to practice what they preach and walk in His truth—else they be found walking in hypocrisy.

James 3:1 gives a clearer picture: “My brothers, do not crowd in to be teachers; remember, we teachers will be judged with special strictness” (Moffatt translation).

### **Only Men**

God also forbids women from becoming ministers in His Church. However, He does allow them to serve as deaconesses and in other capacities. God sets the standard. He has long ago determined that men be the leaders in their families and in the Church.

In I Corinthians 14:34, Paul admonished, “Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also says the law.”

I Timothy 2:12 adds, “But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over a man, but to be in silence.”

Finally, I Peter 3:1-4 shows a beautiful aspect of such humble submission: “Likewise, you wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation [conduct] of the wives; while they behold your chaste conversation coupled with

fear. Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.”

Unfortunately, women today must sometimes assume leadership in *families* because either the man is not present or he fails to assume his God-given responsibilities. In such cases, women “carry the torch”—the responsibility—out of necessity.

But in the Church of God, that is not the case. Christ said, “I will build My Church; and the gates of hell [death] shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18). Throughout the Church’s 2,000-year history, God has always provided faithful, loyal ministers—men—to feed and lead His flock.

### **Leaders With Groups Coming Into the Truth**

Through the years, occasions have arisen in which a group, including its minister, comes into the truth for the first time, and seeks to enter God’s Church together. It is encouraging when God’s Work makes an impact in countries around the world. We welcome those who seek to follow God’s ways and laws.

Yet we must exercise care and caution when faced with groups possibly coming into The Restored Church of God. The process must be slow and methodical. Since our doctrines are new

to many, they need to be examined carefully and thoroughly.

Our goal is to diplomatically show due respect to a leader who seeks to come with us as the main spokesman and coordinator of a group. But only after a considerable period of time, usually many years, could he be ordained as a minister, if God is selecting him.

God holds the leadership of RCG accountable to not *suddenly* ordain someone who is new to the faith. In addition, all other scriptural qualifications must be met.

If God opens the mind of a leader and those within his group, and he continues to serve the group and is willing to humble himself, this could be an indication that God is working with him. Remember that Christ, whom we are to follow and imitate, “made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant...humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death...Wherefore God also has highly exalted Him” (Phil. 2:7-9).

Such a leader would have to come to understand that his former position is of no consequence in God’s eyes.

It is God whom we serve. We submit to His government for the sake of order and unity. If such a leader is ordained after a period of time, he would have to continue to submit to God’s government—even more so. As a minister, he would directly represent God’s government to his group. He could never be a ruthless dictator. He must help and serve God’s people.

II Corinthians 1:24 says, “Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith you stand.”

God invariably calls *only a tiny few or none* in any given group. Church history shows this. There are isolated accounts of larger groups coming into the truth—yet they generally thinned out over time.

Notice what Christ said in Luke 21: “And you shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolk, and friends; and some of you shall they cause to be put to death” (vs. 16). Since it is hard even for families to stay unified under God’s truth, the probability that a group of hundreds would do so is remote. Past experience has shown that, when a group first came to the truth, *only a few* were actually called.

### **The Stakes Are High**

God, in protecting His flock, requires ministers to meet certain qualifications in order to properly teach and guide the future leaders of His soon-coming kingdom. As a screening process, God evaluates the fruits and track record of potential ministerial candidates. He has also created specific scriptural guidelines, requiring that such men be held at a higher standard of character.

Those who become His ministers have one of the most demanding, challenging, yet rewarding jobs they could perceive. The stakes are high. The ministry is not a place for novices, nor is it something to be taken lightly. □

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Printed in the USA

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## HOW TO CONTACT US

The Restored Church of God  
P.O. Box 23295  
Wadsworth, OH 44282  
USA

The Restored Church of God  
P.O. Box 4064  
St. Catharines, ON L2R 7S3  
CANADA

Phone: (330) 334-2266  
Fax: (330) 334-6513

www.thercg.org  
e-mail: info@thercg.org