

The Tests of Trust (Can Our Church Depend On You?)

Colossians 4:7-12 One of the most effective pastors in church history was George W. Truett, who was pastor of the largest Baptist Church in the world at the time. George Truett said, "A great pastor does not make a great church, but a great church will make a great pastor." This statement reminds me of the time when a layman came to his pastor and said, "You are not a strong preacher. In the usual order of things you will fail here, but a little group of men have agreed to gather every Sunday morning to pray for you." That little group of men grew to more than one thousand who gathered every week before worship to pray for the pastor. What happened after that? The man who was a weak preacher and pastor was J. Wilbur Chapman. He is now considered to be one of the greatest pastors in church history, one of the most influential Christian leaders the church has had. What made him great? Was it great ability, great talent, or a great mind? No, it was not. The one thing that produced this great pastor was his great church, a church that lifted him to God in faithful prayer.

In recent weeks we've talked about the qualifications of pastors, elders, and deacons. Now it's time to look at another set of qualifications, those required of a congregation. God has requirements for everyone in the church, not just for its leaders. It is especially important to look at what God expects of us as a congregation as we prepare to call a new pastor. The pastor cannot do everything by himself. So the question we must ask is, "Can the new pastor depend on us to help him do the work of the ministry?" The more important question is, "Can our church depend on you?" What kind of person does our church need? What are the characteristics of a member whom the church can trust? We can find essential qualifications for congregations by examining what Paul said about men he recommended to the Church at Colossae. Notice the characteristics of these men. They are the traits that each of us need to have to be an effective congregation. According to Paul, the church can depend upon members who pass the following tests:

- **The Test of Reformation – we must believe that people can change (Col. 4:9)**
 - "Change" is a word we can use to measure our growth ["I'm not what I should be. I'm not what I will be (in heaven). But thank God I'm not what I *used to be*" (2 Cor. 5:17; Phlm. 2, 11, 15-16)]
 - The only way that we can correct past mistakes is to be willing to confront them [The only failure that is final is the one we refuse to face (Matt. 5:5-6; Phlm. 12, 18)]
 - Change is the authority that frees us from prisons of our past [One of our greatest freedoms is to believe that we are free to change (Rom. 1:16; 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 4:17-24; Col. 3:5-10)]
 - We must remember that Jesus sees us more for what we *can be* rather than what we *are* now (Matt. 4:19; John 1:42; 8:11)
- **The Test of Revitalization – We are to focus on the need to encourage others (Col. 4:8, 10-11)**
 - The most effective treatment for a dying church is to give its members a new heart (Eph. 6:21-22; Col. 4:8, 11)
 - We must realize that negativism never brings positive benefits [It's hard to use our *hands* effectively when our *mouths* are full of complaints and criticism (Matt. 7:1-5; 23:3-4; Eph. 4:29; Phil. 2:14)]
 - We should acknowledge that criticism is not a spiritual gift [Running others down only places you beneath where they are (Eph. 4:25-32; Col. 3:8)]
- **The Test of Reconciliation – We are to seek renewal of broken relationships (Acts 15:37-39; Col. 4:10)**
 - Healing comes when we are willing to forgive those who've caused the wound [Resentment produces retaliation rather than reconciliation (Matt. 5: 38-42; Col. 3:14-15; Phlm. 12-16)]
 - Forgiveness is a gift to be given as well as received [We cannot receive or share God's grace if our hands are clenched (Matt. 5:23-24; 6:12, 14-15)]
- **The Test of Renunciation – We are to offer our lives in sacrificial service (Col. 4:10)**
 - Our relationships are only as strong as the risks we are willing to take to maintain them (Acts 15:26; 19:29; 27:2; Phil. 2:30; Col. 4:10)
 - We don't really miss privileges we surrender for those we love [We really aren't serving if someone else is making the sacrifice (2 Sam. 24:24)]
 - True worship is when our offerings *really are* "sacrifices" [Love is shown by the sacrifice we are willing to make to express it (Gen. 4:3-4; John 15:13)]