

April 9, 2017

Eight Marks of a Faithful Minister

Part 2

1 Timothy 4:10-16

A faithful minister believes that God's work done God's way will never fail to accomplish God's will in His church.

Introduction:

If you have ever studied 1 Timothy on your own or listened to good preaching on this epistle you know this passage offers a great deal of instruction on the priorities and practices of those who are to lead the local church. In fact, we are going to see some of those priorities and practices this morning as we work our way through this text. But as I mentioned last week, Paul's concern goes beyond what a faithful pastor should do. In fact, He has a concern that transcends even the man of God's personal character and reputation. Paul is concerned that the believers in the church of Ephesus (including Timothy himself) would not fall away from the faith. He wants to steal them against apostasy. He wants them to remain to the end.

If you wanted to put a theological label on Paul's concern we would call it the doctrine of "perseverance" or (more formally) the "perseverance of the saints." What is the doctrine of Perseverance? I want to make sure this remains a sermon and not a lecture on soteriology, so let me see if we can boil it down.

The doctrine of Perseverance says that everyone whom God saves He keeps to the end. When God the Father adopts a person into his family He forms a permanent relationship that cannot be broken. Most of us know this teaching under a different name. It is most often referred to as the doctrine of "Eternal Security." Now I think the most concise and theologically rich statement of this doctrine is found in Romans chapter eight (Turn to Rom. 8:29). Here is what we read (ESV).

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

This passage has often been called the golden chain of salvation. Those whom God foreknew (the "elect" Rom. 8:33), he predestined, called, justified, and glorified. Notice that even though your glorification has not yet happened Paul refers to it in the past tense. In other word, the final salvation of the elect is so secure that Paul can speak of it as if it has already taken place. This is "eternal security." It assumes the doctrine of perseverance – that every person who enters God's family by grace through faith will be kept secure to the end.

- Romans 8:35 “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?”
- Romans 8:37–39 “in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
- John 6:37–40 [Jesus says] All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. ³⁸ For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. ⁴⁰ For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

These are some of the sweetest and most comforting passages found in the Bible for those who love Christ... and there are many more like them! We rejoice with confidence in the believer’s security and God’s promise to keep us from falling away until we see Him face to face.

However, the doctrine of eternal security is often thought about in an incomplete manner. What I mean is that there are other texts that we need to take into consideration as well, because the reality is that some who sit in church week after week and even have confidence in their salvation will not finally and ultimately be saved. In other words, some will fall away.

Witness verse 1 of our text for this morning (1 Tim. 4:1). Paul says, (Read 4:1-2).

We know that some WILL indeed fall away from the faith. There are some who are not only secure in their salvation but who are surrounded by people who would affirm that their faith is real, and yet they fall away. Witness Judas. No one thought He was going to fall away. Even on the very night he betrayed Jesus; even though on that night Jesus said that one of them would betray him, no one suspected that it would be Judas.

You see, beloved, there is more going on in our church gatherings than simply fellowship and instruction among believers. In every church there are people who sincerely believe that they are children of God and yet who will finally fall away proving that they never actually belonged to Christ to begin with. In 1 John 2:19 the apostle John explains this when he says concerning those who fell away, “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.” John is teaching us that these who have fallen away were NOT true believers who lost their salvation. No! They were professing believers who were members of the church but who did not actually know the Lord.

Consider also such NT passage as the following:

- Matt. 7:21–22 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ Then I will declare to them, “depart from me. I never knew you.”
- Matthew 10:21–22 [Jesus teaches] “Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, ²² and you will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.
- Colossians 1:22–23 “he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, ²³ if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard...”
- Hebrews 3:14 “For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.”

So what do we learn from these very clear statements of Scripture? We learn,

1. We learn that God sovereignly preserves His own until their receive final salvation.
2. We learn that some who belong to local congregation WILL fall away and prove that they never really belonged to Christ to begin with.
3. We learn that God’s sovereignty over our perseverance does not nullify man’s responsibility in his/her own perseverance. As John MacArthur
4. writes,

While all true believer are sovereignly preserved in their salvation by the almighty power of God, His sovereignty in no way eliminates their responsibility to persevere in the faith throughout their lives.¹

What does all of this have to do with 1 Timothy 4? It helps us understand Paul’s sense of seriousness and urgency about the things he is telling Timothy to do and be in his ministry at Ephesus. As John Piper explains, “What is at stake in pastoral admonition and in preaching is not merely the church’s progress in sanctification but its perseverance in final salvation.”² This, I believe, is why Paul ends the chapter by writing (1 Tim 4:16) “Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.” The NAS translates it even more emphatically, “you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.”

So you see, Paul is concerned is about much more than simply getting the priorities and practices of the local church in order. His ultimate goal for Timothy to apply the means of grace to himself and his hears in such a manner that will result in their final

¹ John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue (editors), *Biblical Doctrine*, (Wheaton, Crossway, 2017), 647

² John Piper, *Brothers We Are Not Professionals* (Nashville, B&H, 2013), 128

salvation before the throne of God. Paul is concerned about Timothy's perseverance, and that of every member of the church of Ephesus.

Now this brings us back to the Eight Characteristics of a Faithful Minister. Last week we looked at the first four, which were,

- I. He Declares what is often Unpopular (6-7a)
- II. He Pursues Personal Holiness (7-9)
- III. He Finds Courage in the Character of God (10)
- IV. He Strives to Model a Gospel-shaped Life (12)

V. He Devotes Himself to the Ministry of the Scriptures (11&13)

Read v. 11

1. There is a presumption of authority in in these words. When Timothy stood before the people to teach and preach he was to do so with borrowed authority. His confidence and power was not to arise from the force his personality but out of the conviction that what he taught was the very word of God. And we see that affirmed in v. 13.

Read v. 13

2. Literally, the verses says, "Until I come devote yourself to the reading, the exhortation, and the teaching."

A. The Reading: was a reference to reading the text of Scripture to the believers.

- 1) This was the ground and basis of the whole worship service, and It is taken from the practices of the synagogue. The teacher of the morning would first stand up and read the Scriptures. It might be a long passage or a short one, but there was always a reading of the Scriptures.
- 2) T. David Gordon rightly highlights the fact that "Believers today have great difficulty even imagining what it was like to be a believer in the first fifteen centuries of the church, when no individual own books (and therefore no individual owned a Bible); when the entire encounter with inscripturated revelation was exclusively in the public reading of the Bible..."³
- 3) So before there was any teaching of preaching in church there was first the reading of the Text.
- 4) Unfortunately, in many churches today they have dispensed with the reading of the Scriptures. They make time for special music and other

³ T. David Gordon, *Why Johnny Can't Preach*, (Phillipsburg, P&R, 2009), 62

creative expression of Christian belief but no place is given to the reading of the word of God. This simply should not be the case in any Christian church.

B. The Exhortation: Exhortation calls for a response from the hearers. They were not merely to be hearer's of the word but doers of the word as well. And the preacher, or disciple, or counselor was to take what the word of God said and help the hearer understand what God's word was calling them to do.

C. The Teaching: This involved the explanation of the text.

- 1) What does this particular text mean? Not "What does it mean to me?" but "what did it mean to the original author"? What did God intend to communicate by this text as substantiated by the immediate and larger context.
- 2) The minister of the word is to read the text, explain the text and apply the text. No teaching should be offered to the body of Christ apart from the text of Scripture.
- 3) Why did Paul make "Teaching" the last of the three? Perhaps he meant it for emphasis since this is a distinguishing qualification for a man who aspires to become an elder. He must be "apt to teach."

3. So a faithful minister is one who devotes himself to the ministry of the word of God. His goal is not merely to encourage people with religion, or to proclaim his own ideas about how to improve one's life. No, is calling is to proclaim God's message – His Word – to anyone who will hear. He is the Read the text, explain the text, and apply the text of Scripture to the lives of those he serves. This, like no other means of grace will "ensure salvation for yourself and for your hearers."

VI. He Does Not Neglect his Spiritual Gift: (14)

Read v. 14

1. In the Greek there is a greater sense of urgency communicated in this verse. Paul says, "Stop neglecting your spiritual gift."

2. Apparently Timothy had begun neglecting his responsibility in regard to his area of giftedness. He was sent to teach and preach and exhort and he was gifted to do so. But under the pressure of the false teachers he was slacking off.

3. Timothy's "charismata" (spiritual gift) was in the area of leading and preaching. The member of his home church recognized this about him before Paul had come to their town. And Paul was there when that church affirmed Timothy's gift and laid hands on him as a sign of affirmation regarding his gifts. In fact, there had even be a prophesy declared regarding his future ministry on the day the elders of his church laid hands on him.

4. Paul's message to his young protégé seems to be, "Timothy, how can you hope to ensure the ultimate salvation of your hearers in the church of Ephesus apart from the faithful, bold, authoritative preaching of the word of God? How can you justify NOT using your spiritual gift? The people of that church need you to be faithful even in the face of opposition. So stop neglecting your spiritual gift. Get busy reading, exhorting, and teaching the Scriptures. Explain sound doctrine and refute those who contradict.

5. This was Timothy's calling. And it is the calling of everyone who has opportunity to minister to others. Whatever your spiritual gift may be, stop neglecting it! The church needs your ministry! A faithful minister does not neglect his Spiritual Gift.

VII. He Does Not Neglect His Spiritual Health (15-16a).

Read 15-16a

1. "Practice" means "exercise yourself" or "take pains with these things.
2. "Immerse" (or "be absorbed). The GK simply says "Be in them" (pres. Act. Imperative – command). That is, "be continually being in them."
3. What "things" is Paul speaking of? All of these things. He is to immerse himself or be absorbed in...

Declaring what is often Unpopular (6-7a)

Pursuing Personal Holiness (7-9)

Studying the Character of God (10)

Striving to Model a Gospel-shaped Life (12)

Devoting Himself to the ministry of the Scriptures

Employing his Spiritual gift.

4. And as he faithfully immerses himself in these things his progress or his growth in these things will be obvious to all. People will notice that he is growing in his ability to teach and preach the word; That He is growing in personal holiness; that he is progressing in his knowledge and love of God; that he is becoming a better example of the gospel-shaped Life; and even in his effectiveness in the use of his spiritual gift.

5. Paul's summary statement is this (16) "Keep a close watch on yourself and your teaching." Don't be so focused on ministry to others that you neglect to guard your own heart.

6. These are the ways you accomplish God's will in the local church. This is how you ensure salvation for yourself and your hearers. This is how you fulfill your responsibility in the preservation of your own soul and the souls of those to whom you minister.

7. Let there be no mistake. The Father will sovereignly bring each of His own safely home to heaven. But the means by which he achieves that sovereign design is through our

ministry to one another. Perseverance is a community project. We need each other in the church to help keep one another from falling prey to the influence of false teaching and false impulse of our own sinful hearts.

8. And while this is the primary responsibility of the elders of the church, it is also the responsibility of all who desire to be faithful servants – faithful ministers – in the local church. And of course, that should be all of us.

9. So the author of Hebrews commands,

Hebrews 3:12–13 “Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. ¹³ But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

10. So a faithful Minister Does Not Neglect His Spiritual Health.

VIII. He Never Forgets What’s at Stake in His Ministry (16)

Are you a faithful Minister?