

Eight Marks of a Faithful Minister

Part 1

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.

This morning I want to talk with you about some of the marks (or characteristics) of a faithful minister. This is an important topic for at least two reasons. First, many people who have entered what is commonly called "the ministry" (pastor, missionaries, youth leaders, etc.) seem to have some confusion about God's priorities for their ministry. A lot of that could be cleared up by a careful study of the Pastor Epistles (1 & 2 Timothy and Titus) where Paul covers this question clearly and sufficiently.

The second reason it's important to know some of the marks of a faithful minister is because in a very real and biblical sense all of you are ministers. Eph. 4:11-12 make it clear that the pastors of a church are here to equip the saints for the work of the ministry." This gets even more relevant in the text before us today because while Timothy is certainly a minister, he is not serving in the role of a traditional pastor. We know this because (as Acts 18-20 reveals) the church of Ephesus to which Paul sent Timothy was a well-established church that had its own elders. Timothy was not sent there to take over leadership in the church. He was sent to serve as a representative of the apostle. From the beginning it was clear that his time there would be brief and last only until Paul himself was able to relieve him.

In fact, when Paul refers to Timothy in his ministry role at Ephesus he doesn't use any of the three common terms for pastor. Rather, in 1 Tim. 4:6 he says, "If you put these things before the brothers you will be a good" (NOT Pastor, not overseer, not shepherd)... you will be a good *diakonos* (servant) of Christ Jesus. That term *diakonos*, by the way, is the same word used of you in Eph. 4:12 when Paul says pastors are to equip the saints for the work of *diakonia* ("service" or "ministry"). And of course, it is the same word translated "deacon."

Now clearly, the kind of ministry tasks that Timothy was assigned to do was in many ways quite different than the ministry tasks you have been given to do. But it may surprise you to see how many marks of a faithful minister apply to you as well.

Another thing that we need to keep in mind as we work through this text together is the context of Timothy's ministry. As you know, he was being sent into a church that had been severely damaged by false teaching. Paul tells us all the way back in 1:3 he left Timothy there to tackle the problem of rampant false teaching in that church.

This was going to be a very difficult assignment for Timothy. His duty was to set the church back on its feet with regard to its doctrine and practice and (as we will see today) as he sought to

fulfill his mission he had to watch over his own soul lest he too find himself caught up in the error.

There is a reason false doctrine is dangerous. It always comes with a plausible promise to satisfy the desires of the flesh in ways that appear religiously acceptable. They always appeal the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, or the boastful pride of life. And Timothy was not immune to such temptation. In fact, no one in ministry is immune! Consequently, many men and women who go to seminary and enter “the ministry” subsequently fall away. Their faith is shipwrecked, their reputation ruined and their churches left in shambles. There is nothing new here. This has been happening since the beginning of the church. One only has to do a brief survey of the Pastoral Epistles to see sufficient evidence for such a claim. In these three short letters we have a whole catalogue of ministry drop-outs and the false doctrines that seduced them. Let me take just a few minutes to demonstrate.

- 1 Tim 1:6 Paul speaks of certain persons who have swerved from the truth in favor of vain discussions.
- 1:19 Some have rejected faith and a good conscience, suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith. Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, so that they will be taught not to blaspheme. (BTW: These men had served with Paul himself in the ministry)
- 4:1 Some ministers have departed from the faith and devoted themselves to deceitful spirits and the teachings of demons. They were deceived by liars whose consciences are seared.
- 6:4 Some ministers who had become puffed up with conceit have developed a unhealthy craving for controversy and quarrels about words
- 6:5 Some had been tricked into believing that the ministry is a way to get rich.
- 6:20-21 Some have swerved from the faith because they gave into the appeal of irreverent babbling that is falsely called knowledge.
- 2 Tim 1:15 Two men in particular turned their backs on Paul when he was in Asia. Their names were Phygelus and Hermogenes
- 2: 16-18 Hymenaeus and Philetus had also been ministers with Paul but who eventually began leading people into ungodliness which spread like gangrene in the churches.
- 2 Tim 3:5 Others had the appearance of godliness, but denied its power by allowing themselves to become swollen with conceit which caused them to become lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.
- 3:8 Some can be compared to Jannes and Jambres who opposed Moses. They are corrupt and are now disqualified regarding the faith.
- 4:3-4 Many who want to have their ears tickled will accumulate teachers who will affirm their own desires and will turn away from the truth to myths. And by the way, such people will pay well the minister who will pledge to give them what they desire.

- Titus 1:10-11 Many of these teachers will upset whole families with their false teaching for the sake of sordid gain.
- Titus 1:16 Describes all of these false ministers as those who profess to know God but by their deeds they deny Him; who become worthless for any good deed.

Beloved, the warning of the Pastoral epistles is that one day You Too may swerve from the faith. One day you too may become part of the spiritual wreckage that once represented the lives of faithful men and women. And it doesn't matter whether you are a man or a woman, whether you have gone to seminary or not; whether you have read all the theological books or none of them. All of us have a theology. All of us have beliefs about God. And one thing is for certain – your relationship with God is always in motion. You are either moving toward Christ or toward the world. You are moving toward a deeper faith or toward unbelief. You are either drifting with the ubiquitous current of the world or by the power of God's grace you are swimming against it and growing more and more into the likeness of Christ. **YOU CAN NOT REMAIN WHERE YOU ARE** in your relationship with God! One day you will apostatize. The only other option is that you will deliberately grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is why Paul says to Timothy in our text for this morning:

- 4:7 “Discipline yourself for godliness.”
- 4:15 “Let your progress be evident to all.”
- 4:16 “Keep a close watch on yourself and your teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.” Save them from what? From the damning consequences of turning away from the truth – turning away from Christ.

What are the marks of a faithful minister? We have already touched on the first few in previous sermons so let me just mention them briefly.

I. He Declares what is often Unpopular (6-7a)

Read v. 6

1. Paul says, “If you put these things before the brother...” What things? Well, all the things Paul has been writing about. He has spoken repeatedly about false teachers. No one enjoys hearing about that. He has taught on the role of women in the church. He taught about Jesus being the only way to God. And he keeps talking about sound doctrine.
2. There are many people in every generation and in almost every church who don't want to hear teaching from the pulpit on these and other subjects, but a faithful minister must speak about them. He must not only remind them of the glories of the gospel but also the dangers of false teaching and their teachers no matter who they are.
3. Of course we could look at the OT prophets as examples, but we need look no further than the

ministry of Jesus and the apostle Paul. They were always getting in trouble for proclaiming the truth. And there will be times when you declare what is true and people will not love you for it. As Paul would say it, you will have to “Teach sound doctrine and refute those who contradict” (Tit. 1:9). But Paul says having the courage to declare unpopular truth is a mark of a faithful minister.

II. He Pursues Personal Holiness (7-9)

Read 7-9

1. A couple weeks ago we spent our entire time together talking about something called Progressive Sanctification. Faithful ministers are NOT only concerned about the spiritual growth of others but are even more concerned about their own growth into Christ-likeness.
2. Spiritual fitness and physical fitness have something in common. They both require rigorous exercise. They both require personal discipline. Paul says (9) “This saying is trustworthy and deserving full acceptance.” Paul uses this phrase five times in the Pastoral Epistles. On each occasion he was speaking about things truths that were widely known and accepted in the church. Show me a person who can win an Olympic marathon and I will show you a self-disciplined person. Show me the most spiritually-minded person you have ever known and I will likewise show you one a self-disciplined person – one who sacrifices other things for the joy and pleasure of growing in his knowledge and fellowship with Christ.
3. Now, of course, we understand that it not our labor that sanctifies us. It is the grace of God through the H.S. who gives us the will and empowers the work that causes us to grow in holiness.
4. A faithful minister will be marked by the pursuit of personal holiness.

III. He Finds Courage in the Character of God (10)

Read v. 10

1. Now I know a number of you have been waiting to hear what this verse means because it sounds like Paul is preaching Universalism – the false teaching that everyone born into the world will be finally saved. But let’s look at this piece by piece.
2. Paul says, “For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God...” I think Paul is speaking about motivation. What motivates him to get up every day knowing full well he may have to suffer severely for the gospel Christ has sent him to preach. How does Paul and his collogues find the courage – the motivation – to press on? Answer? They have set their hope on the living God. And what is it about God that gives them persevering hope? It is the truth that unlike worthless idols, the living God is a saving God. His purpose for sending Jesus into the world was not to condemn the world but that the world through him might be...SAVED (John 3:17).

3. But it is the description of God at the end of this verse that give people pause. What does it mean that the living God is one “who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.” Some take this to mean that Paul is speaking of two kinds of people, those whom God saves temporally and those whom he saves eternally.

4. The problem with this view is that in the PEs the word “saved” always refers to salvation. There is no reason to think Paul means something else here

5. I think a better interpretation of this verse, however, is related to other texts in this same letter. For example,

- 2:1 “petitions should be made for all men” (Kings, and all who are in high positions of authority, etc.). Now, Paul is not saying that we should pray for every individual person on the planet. Rather, he is saying that we should pray for all kinds of men; namely, kings and rulers, and people in high positions.
- 2:4 God “desires all men [all kinds?] to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”
- 4:10 the phrase “especially believers” can be translated “that is, believers.” Paul is modifying the phrase “all people” by defining it. God is “the living God, who is the Savior of all people [i.e. all kinds of people], “that is” [by definition] believers.
- I tend to gravitate to this interpretation because it seems better built upon the context. And as you know when it comes to interpreting a text of Scripture, “Context is ... KING.”

6. But the point I think Paul is making here is that he and his helpers derive much hope and courage in their ministry by reminding themselves of the character of God; namely that He is by nature a Savior and that he will act sovereignly to save!

7. In fact, Jesus said in John 17 that to know the Living God is eternal life (Jn. 17:3). The whole purpose for Paul’s life and ministry was to bring people into the knowledge of God by preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. Not everyone wants to hear it. Some will hate you for tell them about it. But Paul kept himself encouraged by the hope that the Living God is in the business of saving sinners. And Paul was determined to be a part of that. This is a mark of a faithful minister.

IV. He Strives to Model a Gospel-shaped Life (12)

Read v. 12

1. There would be some in the church who would show disrespect to a young leader such as Timothy even though he was likely 35-40 years old. So how do you respond to such disrespect? How do you respond to being marginalized by your peers? You could assert your authority and demand that people show proper respect to the apostolic representative. Or, you could follow Paul’s strategy of humility.

2. Paul's plans was simply to have Timothy focus on living an exemplary life in all the core areas; namely, Speech, Conduct, Love, Faith, and Purity.

- **Speech:** how you talk
- **Conduct:** how you behave
- **Love:** how you relate to others
- **Faith:** how you trust God in the practical issues of life
- **Purity:** specifically moral purity, and how you one relates to young women.

3. This verse corresponds to Paul's qualifications for elders in the local church (1 Tim. 3). They are to be above reproach in all the important areas of life. They are to be the men in the church body who show everyone else how believers are supposed to live.

4. In our study of 1 Tim. I have called it "the gospel-shaped life." As believers, we are not only saved by the gospel we are subsequently shaped by the gospel. As Titus 3:12

Titus 2:11–13 "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men,¹² instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age,¹³ looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus..."

5. When we talk about becoming more like Christ, or growing in sanctification, we are talking about developing a gospel-shaped life; one that conforms completely to the purposes of the gospel of Jesus. It is life whose Speech is full of grace; whose behavior are full humble righteousness; whose Love reach both friends and enemies alike; whose Faith is evident in the face of trial; and whose Purity is on display in his choices of entertainment and relationships with the opposite sex.

6. Rather than have Timothy assert his authority, he was merely to focus on modeling for people what the gospel-shaped looks like. He was to focus on his own character and relationships knowing that the most powerful influence we have on others is often the power of our character.

7. Paul emphasizes this same mark of a faithful minister when he writes to Titus who was ministering on the island of Crete. He wrote (Tit. 2:7) "Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works."

8. Now there are four more marks of a faithful minister that we will look at next time, but before we close for this morning its important that we not walk away from this text without asking ourselves some practical questions.

9. Remember, Paul was not only concerned with Timothy dealing with false teaching in the church. He was also concerned about whether Timothy was actively fortifying his own soul against the deceitful spirits and the and doctrines of demons that might draw his heart away from Christ. In verse 16 he will sum al of this up by saying, "Keep a close watch on yourself and your Teaching. It's important to make sure the doctrine you proclaim is true. But it is just as important that your life is one that models that truth. So ask yourself,

- Am I prepared to bring scripture to bear issues that come up in conversation

with others? Am I willing and able to share the harder truths of Scripture when necessary?

- Am I actively pursuing personal holiness? Do I discipline myself for the sake of godliness? Am I engaging in appropriate spiritual disciplines such as reading Scripture, fellowship with other believers, and prayer?
- Does the character of God as Savior motivate me to engage with other people? Perhaps you haven't shared the gospel with anyone in a long time. Where can you find the courage and motivation to speak? We remind ourselves that God is the Savior of all who will believe! And how shall they believe on Him of whom they have never heard? And how will they hear unless someone tells them (Rom. 10:14-15)?
- Am I striving to live a gospel-shaped life? Am I eagerly seeking to grow and change in practical ways? Am I concerned about how my speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity (or the lack thereof) affects others? Do I recall that other people (especially my children) are learning from me what it means to live for Christ?

These are some of the marks of a faithful minister. A Pastor doesn't have to be especially clever, creative, or in tune with the culture to be effective. And Christians don't have to go to seminary to make an impact.

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