

God, the supreme life-giver and all-powerful one, commands his people to obey their holy orders without fault or failure: that we run from moral evil and toward godliness, stand for the truth of the gospel until Christ's appearing, and lay hold of the eternal life that we confess.

Introduction: Lots of people today believe Christianity is of no practical good. With a jaundiced eye, it might appear the only folks profiting from religion are the ones drawing a paycheck from it.

I. Holy Orders: Who Are They For?

A. For all elders (vv. 11-12)

We call this collection of letters written to Timothy and Titus the Pastoral Epistles because they are primarily addressed to men who pastor the church. "Man of God" is a highly honorable OT title referring to a leader of God's people (Moses, Samuel, David, and Elijah among others). Its usage across the whole Bible refers to a man speaking on behalf of God, bringing God's message to God's people. In this sense, elders who preach and teach God's Word are "men of God" exercising some of the same duties as the OT prophets, declaring, explaining, and applying God's Word to others.

B. For all Christians

Countless Bible passages exhort all Christians to live the same way (cf. Rom 12; Eph 6:10-18; 1 Pet 1:13-25). Men who are called to be pastors and elders are ordained from the pool of believers in the church. They show themselves good examples of how all Christians are called to believe, live, and feel. So non-elders are not off the hook! Any Christian who is thoroughly equipped by Scripture for every good work is a "man of God" (2 Tim 3:17). Holy orders are for all Christians.

C. For the sake of the world (v. 13b)

When Christians are being annoying or poorly representing God to the world, unbelievers understandably reject us. But when we make it our life's mission to conform our beliefs, our actions, and our hearts to the shape of God's holy orders for us, the world becomes a better place. Christians who are profoundly shaped by God's holy orders have what the world wants and needs.

II. Holy Orders: What Are They?

A. Ethical: Run (v. 11)

Christians must hate moral evil so much they run from it. Conversely, Christians must love godliness so much they run toward it. So what are "these things" you must run from? Contextually they are false teachers, false doctrine, and the love of money (1 Tim 6:3-5, 9-10). You have to run to the positive, pursuing Christian virtues that are suited to defeat covetousness and the lure of wolves in sheep's clothing. These virtues are listed in three pairs.

1. Righteousness has to do with doing what is right or just, particularly in relationships. To run after righteousness is to deal ethically and fairly with others. We owe justice to those who need it. Godliness has to do with imitating God. To run after godliness is to imitate, follow, and obey the one true God, not a false god such as Money. Both righteousness and godliness are behavior-oriented, getting at how you live in relation to God and others.
2. Faith in this context means faithfulness, living with Christian integrity. There is a saying that the greatest ability is dependability. In verse 11 the Greek word for Love is "agape," which is the highest Christian virtue (1 Cor 13:13). Love sacrifices for the sake of others, seeking to give, not gain. It rejoices in the truth, not tolerating lies. This pair of virtues, faith and love, have to do with your heart's attitude behind your behavior.
3. Steadfastness has to do with an enduring patience in the midst of trial, temptation, and difficult circumstances. It means sticking with God when the going gets tough, being courageous in the

hard places in life. Gentleness has to do with meekness, which is strength under control. When you run toward gentleness you will be patient with difficult people. Both steadfastness and gentleness involve being patient with difficulties, either in circumstances or in relationships.

B. Doctrinal: Stand (vv. 12a, 14)

You must stand and contend for the truth. This entails having right beliefs and confessing right doctrine. Verse 12 says, "fight the good fight of the faith." You see, fighting is another way of looking at making the good confession. Fight is a metaphor for what Jesus actually did when he made his good confession before Pilate. He stood on the witness stand and confessed the truth of the gospel. You also have holy orders as pertain to doctrine. Don't retreat or faint or waffle.

C. Experiential: Hold (v. 12b)

God wants your affection and love. It appears Paul says something like this: Remember the eternal life that God called you to? Remember when you confessed your faith Christ and the truth of the gospel before the church? Remember how happy you were then? Don't forget you can have that same joy now. Grasp it again, enjoy right now the eternal life God gave you, and never let it go!

III. Holy Orders: How Can You Obey Them?

A. In God's strength, so have no fear (vv. 15-16)

I think Paul understood that God was asking a lot from Christians. Only God can give you the power to obey these holy orders. And because he so strong, you don't have any reason to fear. Look at your God sitting on the highest throne, ruling over an eternal dominion that stretches to the four corners of the universe, and then look at your fears. God's strength can conquer all your fears.

B. As alive to God, so look to your reward (vv. 11-13a)

This passage says God is the giver and sustainer of life, including eternal life for his people. Look to the spiritual riches that are yours in Christ. Compared to what the world has to offer in terms of material possessions and wealth, spiritual riches are an infinitely greater reward. You can't take it with you, but you can store up treasure in heaven.

C. By confessing the gospel, always through the Great Confessor (vv. 13b-14)

God, the King of kings and Lord of lords, has sent his one and only Son Jesus Christ to die for sinners in order to save them. God has given the nations to his Son as an inheritance, and Jesus confessed before men that he himself is the great king. He is the Great Confessor of the faith because his confession was not merely about God, but also about himself. When you make the good confession, you testify to the gospel which is nothing but pointing to Jesus.

Conclusion: The gospel makes you bold because you serve God Almighty. But it also humbles you, because you confess to be a repentant and recovering sinner. These are your scriptural holy orders, given to you who are already saved by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. Now go, in the power of the Spirit, and live for God's glory alone.