

1 TIMOTHY 4:11-16

THE PASTOR'S PERSONAL CONDUCT

“Command and teach these things. Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. 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.”¹

“Command and teach these things.” This imperative is reminiscent of the opening words of verse six, “If you put these things before the brothers.” “These things,” as we discovered in a previous message,² included all the matters presented to this point in the missive. Thus, the Apostle has provided the young minister with encouragement to minister in a particular fashion, and now he provides the impetus to do so through an imperative.

In particular, “these things” focus on the admonitions recorded in verses seven through ten. First, the elder is enjoined to avoid falling into the trap of embracing “irreverent, silly myths.” “Irreverent, silly myths” is translated in other instances as “ridiculous and seedy religious fads,”³ “foolish stories that disagree with God’s truth”⁴ and as “silly stories that get dressed up as religion.”⁵ Succinctly, the elder is not to follow every fad that comes along. People sometimes complain that the pastor is not current—but, he’s not supposed to be tuned in to every new fad! He is not to seize upon every fad that attempts to present itself as new and improved. Let me say quite clearly, if it is Scriptural, it is true; if it is novel, it is not Scriptural.

Again, the elder is to strive to be godly both in his life and in what he teaches. Do not expect that those opposed to the Word of God will be thrilled by the elder who stands like a rock against the currents of modern thought. He will be castigated as unwilling to change, as obstinate, as uncooperative, as petty; and when these opprobria slung about fail to sway him, know that the next fusillade will endeavour to sully his character. “He steals houses, he caused desperate women to end their lives, he attempted to sue the church, all he is concerned about is money”—all alike are slanders spread about in an effort to destroy him through assailing his character. The only defence against such craven efforts is a godly life that cannot be gainsaid.

Then, we are taught that the elder’s message is to present Christ as Saviour. His purpose is not to teach a Gospel designed only to allow us to avoid trials or pressures; he is to present Christ as the only Saviour, necessary precisely because man is sinful and utterly incapable of making himself acceptable before the True and Living God. The Gospel is not about maximising human potential and living “your best life now”—the Gospel is about rescuing sinners.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² Michael Stark, “A Good Servant of Christ Jesus,” Sermon, 27 October, 2013, <http://newbeginningsbaptist.ca/clientimages/42652/sermonarchive/1%20timothy%204.06%20a%20good%20servant%20of%20christ%20jesus.pdf>

³ Clarence Jordan, **The Cotton Patch Gospel** (Smyth & Helwys Publishers, Macon, GA 2004)

⁴ Tremper Longman III, Mark L. Strauss and Daniel Taylor, **The Expanded Bible: New Testament** (Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN 2009)

⁵ Eugene H. Peterson, **The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language** (NavPress, Colorado Springs, CO 2005)

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I understand that we live in a day in which religious celebrities present a gospel that promises health, great relationships, perfect kids and especially promotes incredible wealth. However, the situation is more perverted than that—this new gospel seeks to popularise the idea that faith is merely a therapeutic means designed to ensure that we feel better about ourselves. Tragically, this distorted message has infiltrated many, if not most of the churches of our Lord! Let me say quite clearly—the Faith of Christ the Lord is not a means of pain avoidance! Neither should any individual imagine that personal faith is a means to avoid trials and challenges. The chief symbol of the Faith is an instrument of suffering and death—the cross! When the Apostle asks whether “tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger or sword” is capable of separating us from the love of Christ [see **ROMANS 8:34, 35**], it is evident that he is assuming that we who believe in Christ the Lord will experience some, or even all of these!

After emphasising the necessity of teaching “these things,” the aged Apostle provides his expectations for the younger man of God. Timothy faced a hostile environment; and every servant of Christ will conduct his service in an environment of opposition and hostility. The milieu in which the man of God ministers will include unbelievers who reject their own sinful condition or their need of a Saviour. Counted among congregants will be individuals who seek a comfortable environment in which to preen their overweening egos. These hapless souls will resist any teaching that makes them feel uncomfortable. Therefore, the man of God will find it necessary to remain focused on essentials; Paul now emphasises these essentials.

EXCELING IN GODLINESS — “Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.” The Ephesian congregation was in disarray. It had individuals functioning as elders who were unsuited for the call. They were teaching error as truth and introducing heresies that could only lead to ruin. Paul had gone to Ephesus to address the problems; but for some reason he found it necessary to leave suddenly.

Paul had not left the congregation without oversight, however. He had left Timothy with specific instructions of what he was to do. “As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith” [**1 TIMOTHY 1:3, 4**].

However, Timothy had a decided weakness, one that every minister of Christ has faced at one time—he was young. Whether young in years or bereft of experience, every servant of Christ begins with a deficit that can only be rectified by staying the course. However, it is more than just enduring that is required; the man of God must always endeavour to grow in the Faith. Paul specifically addressed several aspects of spiritual maturation that the youthful servant of Christ (and consequently, each minister of Christ) must address if he would serve acceptably.

Should Timothy fail to confront his youthfulness, he would fail in his service before the Lord. By the same criteria, should Timothy manfully confront his deficit, he would be prepared for success in his service to the people of God and before the Lord. May I say that I love young ministers; I trained young men for ministry at one period of my service to Christ. It was an exhilarating time, and I still enjoy encouraging young ministers in their service.

Paul urged Timothy to excel in godliness. Godliness is a term that is often misunderstood, or at the least it is misconstrued. Godliness is not piety to be strapped on at the start of each day; neither is godliness a condition that is worn on Sunday only to be ignored throughout the remainder of the week. Godliness is practical, reflecting one's walk with the Master. Godliness is our pale reflection of Christ, garnered through time in His presence.

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I note that after admonishing Timothy to avoid being despised because of youthfulness and/or inexperience, Paul counsels him to provide a godly example. It may interest you to know that at the time Paul wrote these words, Timothy may have been around thirty years of age.⁶ Youthfulness was relative and not absolute. In admonishing him to be an example, the Apostle focused on five areas in particular. Timothy was urged to excel in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity. In short, the young man was to excel in godliness as reflected in these five areas. Let's think through the implications of the apostolic admonition.

In the first place, Timothy was to be *an example to the flock through his speech*. The command was likely necessitated because of caustic comments coming from fellow believers. The natural reaction when challenged by saints is to become defensive, dismissive or detached. During the years of my service among the churches of our Master, I've observed ministers of Christ respond with sarcasm to questions concerning their conduct or concerning their decisions. Others have at times been dismissive, attempting to pull rank. Others react with cold dismissal, asking how anyone could question them. In the busyness of ministerial demands, it is woefully easy for ministers to succumb to temptation to respond in such fashion.

I have observed that when ministers get into trouble, it is often with the tongue. This is not surprising—we ministers are wordsmiths, we employ our speech to instruct, to counsel, to fulfil our service before the Lord. Consequently, one of the serious problems afflicting ministers is a tendency to speak more than to listen. God has cautioned in the Proverbs:

“When words are many, transgression is not lacking,
but whoever restrains his lips is prudent.”

[PROVERBS 10:19]

The Proverbs present many other sayings that are applicable to the man of God's speech.

“The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable,
but the mouth of the wicked, what is perverse.”

[PROVERBS 10:32]

“Whoever guards his mouth preserves his life;
he who opens wide his lips comes to ruin.”

[PROVERBS 13:3]

“The mouths of fools feed on folly.”

[PROVERBS 15:14]

“The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer,
but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things.”

[PROVERBS 15:28]

“If one gives an answer before he hears,
it is his folly and shame.”

[PROVERBS 18:13]

⁶ John A. Kitchen, **The Pastoral Epistles for Pastors** (Kress Christian Publications, The Woodlands, TX 2009) 180-1

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Just as speech is observable, so conduct is observable; therefore, Timothy must set *an example in his conduct*. Peter, in particular, appears to favour this word, using it at least eight times in his Letters.⁷ The conduct of one's life reveals the biblical convictions of the individual. A biblical message paired with an ungodly lifestyle is blatant hypocrisy. What is worse, people tend to follow the minister's life rather than what he teaches. A godly life lends power to the message delivered from the pulpit.

Consider the multiple scriptural admonitions urging godly living. "Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom" [JAMES 3:13]. "Like the Holy One who called you, become holy yourselves in all of your conduct" [1 PETER 1:15 NET BIBLE]. "Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation" [1 PETER 2:12]. "In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame" [1 PETER 3:15, 16].

In addition to those aspects of life that are easily observed, Timothy was enjoined to excel in the more abstract areas of love, faith and purity. These areas cannot be directly observed; nevertheless, they are obvious to those who watch our lives. The minister of Christ must be *an example in love (agápe)*. The love of Christ must shine through the man of God's speech and conduct. In his relationships, the elder must be one who reveals the love of the Master. The love of Christ must overflow in the minister's life [cf. 1 TIMOTHY 1:14], because it is that love that is sent into our hearts [see 2 TIMOTHY 1:7]. We saw earlier that this divine love is the goal of our preaching and teaching [see 1 TIMOTHY 1:5]. The pastor is to set an example for the flock in his personal pursuit of divine love [see 1 TIMOTHY 6:11].

Timothy was also urged to *excel in faith*. Paul is not referring to "the Faith," but to the minister's unswerving commitment to the call he has received. The Apostle wrote to the Corinthians, "It is required of stewards that they be found faithful" [1 CORINTHIANS 4:2]. The man of God must have an unswerving loyalty to Him who appoints to holy service. The ministry is not a job—it is a calling. We who serve do so not in order to obtain a paycheque; we serve because we can do no other thing but honour Him who appointed us to this ministry. With the Apostle, the pastor testifies, "If I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel" [1 CORINTHIANS 9:16]! The minister of Christ walks by faith, and it must be evident that faith directs his steps.

Finally, Timothy was enjoined to provide *an example in purity*. Though the word refers primarily to the area of sexuality, it implies a much broader area of innocence and integrity.⁸ The only other use of the word is in 1 TIMOTHY 5:2, where Timothy is urged to treat "younger women as sisters, in all purity." This is the expectation derived from the criterion that the elder is to be a one-woman man [see 1 TIMOTHY 3:2]. A wise minister must heed Paul's admonition to "flee youthful passions" [1 TIMOTHY 2:22].

⁷ 1 PETER 1:15, 18; 2:12; 3:1, 2, 15; 2 PETER 2:7; 3:11

⁸ Cf. Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (United Bible Societies, New York, NY 1996) 745; cf. William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature: a Translation and Adaptation of the Fourth Revised and Augmented Edition of Walter Bauer's Griechisch-Deutsches Worterbuch Zu Den Schrift En Des Neuen Testaments Und Der Ubrigen Urchristlichen Literatur* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL 1979) 10; see, also, Henry George Liddell et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Clarendon Press, Oxford 1996) 11

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Candidly, the man who is incapable of setting a pattern in these areas does not belong in church leadership. The leader's life sets the standard that others are to follow; an unqualified leader lowers the standard of godliness in the assembly of the Lord. Since Paul is warning against false ministers, it is perhaps significant to note that those false elders failed in each of these areas. Timothy was to excel in speech; the false ministers were teaching a different doctrine that did not agree with the sound words of the Master [cf. 1 TIMOTHY 6:3]. Consequently, "their talk [would] spread like gangrene" [2 TIMOTHY 2:17]. In their conduct, they were practising a false asceticism [see 1 TIMOTHY 4:3]; these phony pastors had no qualms about fleecing the flock [see 1 TIMOTHY 6:5, 9, 10]. They could not set examples in love, because they were "lovers of money" [2 TIMOTHY 3:2] and "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" [2 TIMOTHY 3:4]. It would have been impossible for the false ministers to set an example in faith because they had "made shipwreck of their faith" [1 TIMOTHY 1:19]—they were among those who would "depart from the faith" [1 TIMOTHY 4:1] or wander away from the faith [see 1 TIMOTHY 6:10], and because they will swerve from the faith [see 1 TIMOTHY 6:21] they are guilty of "upsetting the faith of some" [2 TIMOTHY 2:18]. Therefore, these false teachers, as is true of all false teachers, were "disqualified regarding the faith" [2 TIMOTHY 3:8]. They failed to set an example in purity, since they were among "those who creep into households and capture weak women" [2 TIMOTHY 3:6], perhaps targeting younger widows who were struggling with their passions [1 TIMOTHY 5:11].

EXPOSITING THE WORD — "Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching." It would be necessary for Timothy to ground his service on God's Word. Public reading of Scripture was a part of worship in the Jewish economy, and it became central to worship among the churches of our Lord. You will no doubt recall an incident early in the public ministry of the Master. "[Jesus] came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and [read what] was written" [LUKE 4:16, 17].

The practise of reading the Scriptures publicly was obviously a part of synagogue worship as demonstrated by the Master's participation in the synagogue at Nazareth. Another instance of this public reading of Scripture among the worshippers in the synagogues is given during the ministry of the Apostle Paul. Here is the account provided from his first missionary journey. "After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent a message to [the missionaries], saying, 'Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, say it'" [ACTS 13:15].

We have the account of reading the Scriptures publicly in Nehemiah. "Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand what they heard, on the first day of the seventh month. And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand. And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law. And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that they had made for the purpose... And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people, and as he opened it all the people stood. And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, 'Amen, Amen,' lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. ...The Levites helped the people to understand the Law, while the people remained in their places. They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading" [NEHEMIAH 8:2-8].

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The churches of our Lord continued this practise, adding to it the reading of the Apostles' letters. Paul admonished the Colossians, "When this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea" [COLOSSIANS 4:16]. It is apparent that the churches placed the Letters of the Apostles on the identical footing as the books of the Old Covenant.

Paul issued an exceptionally strong admonition to the Christians in Thessalonica. "I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers" [1 THESSALONIANS 5:27].

Justin Martyr provides a glimpse into the worship of the early churches when he wrote, "On the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray."⁹

In our text, Paul used a word that implies that Timothy was to occupy his mind with the reading of the Word.¹⁰ Moreover, the verb tense communicates that this action is to be taken repeatedly. The public reading of Scripture served to emphasise the continuity between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. Also, when a congregation gives attention to the public reading of Scripture, it makes a statement that the preaching which follows is secondary to and derived from the Scripture. For this reason, we stand when the Scripture is read as an act of reverence for the Word. In a practical sense, this communicates that those who read Scripture must prepare in private before reading in public. The reading of Scripture is not merely important—it is essential and vital to healthy worship.

It is a tragic situation when the Word of God has been translated into nearly every major language and dialect, and yet so few people read the Word. Attend almost any service conducted by the various congregations of Christ throughout our nation, noting how few of those attending bring a Bible. Perhaps the church provides Bibles in the pew, though they are usually dusty from lack of use. If the failure of churches to read the Scripture publicly is sad, how much sadder are the multiplied services where the Word is seldom used or even seen in the service. How tragic that among so many churches—dare I say among most churches—the preacher does not use a Bible, as though his wit and brilliance will suffice to communicate the mind of God.

Following the reading of Scripture, the shepherd of the congregation was charged to exhort and to teach. Get that, the man of God is commanded to preach and to teach. From earliest days of the Faith, preaching was expositional—that is, preaching is to be biblical. Preaching is to be grounded in the Word and it is to lead the people back to the Word. Preaching is to open what appears to be closed, to make plain what is obscure, to unravel what is knotted and to unfold what is tightly packed.¹¹ Tragically, what passes for preaching from far too many pulpits today is "disexposition."¹² Hughes and Chapell define "disexposition" as preaching encrusted with stories and jokes, or preaching that is distorted because it is preached through a therapeutic, political or social lens.

⁹ Justin Martyr, "The First Apology of Justin," in **The Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, Vol. 1**, Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson and A. Cleveland Coxe (eds.), (Christian Literature Crusade, Buffalo, NY 1885) 186

¹⁰ See Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg and Neva F. Miller, **Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament** (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI 2000) 332; Arndt et al., op. cit., 713

¹¹ See John R. W. Stott, **The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century: Between Two Worlds** (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI 1982) 126

¹² The term and definition is from R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell, **1 & 2 Timothy and Titus: To Guard the Deposit, Preaching the Word** (Crossway Books, Wheaton, IL 2000) 116

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With exposition, the man of God must also ensure that sound doctrine is presented. Again, this injunction is in keeping with the apostolic mandates both to Timothy and to Titus. “An overseer must be ... able to teach” [1 TIMOTHY 3:2]. The Apostle expands on this point when he writes Titus, “[The elder] must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it” [TITUS 1:9]. From the beginning of the churches, those who shepherd the flocks of God have been expositors of the Word—declaring the mind of God and instructing the listeners in righteousness. Consider some of those men whom we rightly speak of as great.

The fourth-century overseer of Constantinople, John Chrysostom, was nicknamed “golden-mouthed.” Of him, John Stott writes, “He is generally and justly regarded as the greatest pulpit orator of the Greek church. Nor has he any superior or equal among the Latin Fathers. He remains to this day a model for preachers in large cities.

“Four chief characteristics of his preaching may be mentioned. First, he was biblical. Not only did he preach systematically through several books, but his sermons are full of biblical quotations and allusions. Secondly, his interpretation of the Scriptures was simple and straightforward. He followed the Antiochene School of ‘literal’ exegesis, in contrast to fanciful Alexandrian allegorizations. Thirdly, his moral applications were down to earth. Reading his sermons today, one can imagine without difficulty the pomp of the imperial court, the luxuries of the aristocracy, the wild races of the hippodrome, in fact the whole life of an oriental city at the end of the fourth century. Fourthly, he was fearless in his condemnations. In fact, ‘he was a martyr of the pulpit, for it was chiefly his faithful preaching that caused his exile.’”¹³

Luther often preached four times on a Sunday. Every quarter of the year, he would teach a two-week series on doctrine using a catechism. Over two thousand sermons preached by Luther are available for our edification today.¹⁴ Similarly, John Calvin was an expositor of the Word, speaking twice each Sunday and every other week preaching each night of the week. Those sermons were recorded stenographically, becoming the basis for his commentaries.

Throughout the history of the Faith, great preachers have provided sound exposition to guide the people of God and to instruct them in righteousness. How blessed I have been to have sat under some of the finest expositors of the Word imaginable. I came to faith under Dr. James L. Higgs and was privileged to work under his direction in the Outer Mission District of San Francisco. Later, I sat under Dr. W. A. Criswell. While at the First Baptist Church of Dallas, I was blessed to have sat under the ministries of such pulpit luminaries as Paige Patterson, Adrian Rogers, Charles Stanley, Vance Havner and John MacArthur—each noted as masters of expository preaching. Via radio and television, every Christian can hear these pulpit masters.

Undoubtedly, preaching and teaching is the highest calling of any minister; the elder is to be noted as an expositor of the Word. What a tragedy that in this day the pulpit is reduced to pulpit meisters delivering sermonettes designed to produce christianettes. Can it be otherwise when the minister of the modern congregation is consumed with administrative duties and with counselling duties, and when exposition is so depreciated?

The point is important precisely because it is neglected in this day. Timothy was to be radically biblical in his preaching—he was to be an expositor of the Word. Were the pulpiteers of this day to determine that they would be radically biblical, I must believe that we would witness revival among the churches. Without the centrality of the Word, there is no proper worship. Talent shows, interpretive dance and book reviews cannot be worship—ever!

¹³ Stott, op. cit., 21

¹⁴ John F. MacArthur, Jr., **1 Timothy, MacArthur New Testament Commentary** (Moody Press, Chicago, IL 1995) 176

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EXERCISING THE GIFT — “Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. 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.”

Perhaps Timothy questioned whether he was indeed capable of fulfilling the charge he had received. However, Paul assured him that he did, indeed, have what was necessary to shepherd the flock of God. Paul charged Timothy to hearken back to an electric moment when the young man knelt, and Paul and the local elders had laid their hands on him, prayerfully intoning prophecies concerning his gifts and his service.

This moment is obviously special, if not to Paul, then assuredly it was special to Timothy. Earlier in this letter, the Apostle had written, “This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare” [1 TIMOTHY 1:18]. In a later missive, Paul will write, “I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands” [2 TIMOTHY 1:6]. Timothy needed to recall the prophecies concerning his service before the Lord that he had heard.

Early in my ministry, I was tutored by a rough, country preacher. Ben was about as smooth as the backyard gate. He was used surprisingly powerfully at times despite his rough exterior. On one occasion, Ben commented that something he couldn't explain happened when a man was set apart to the ministry. When the presbytery laid hands on an individual, according to Ben, something changed in that man. I can't say that anything magical or supernatural occurred when I was set apart to the ministry of Christ, but I do say that I was energised by the knowledge that those men believed in me. As each one prayed and pronounced the words of prophecy, I was conscious of a desire to honour God. There was born within my soul a new desire to fulfil the appointment God has given me. Perhaps there is something to Ben's observation.

Timothy was urged to use what he had received from God. The young minister had received a “charisma,” a divine gift. Perhaps that blessed gift was the ability to communicate the Word in clarity and power; perhaps it was something altogether different. What that gift may have been is less important than the knowledge that Timothy must use it or lose it. Some men defect from the place God intended them to be and leave the ministry. To avoid this possibility, Paul will insist, “Fan into flame the gift of God” [see 2 TIMOTHY 1:6]. The gift to which Paul referred, and the gifting of every minister of Christ, is not a once-for-all, unchanging endowment from God; the gift of God must be used and cultivated. God's gift is intimately associated with the Spirit of God. As such, His presence and His working in the life of the man of God must be cultivated. For where the Spirit of God reigns, He will work through that individual in power.

I don't profess to know the gift that is in the Apostle's view; I do know the One who gifts His man. Perhaps the reference indicates a time when the Spirit, through the presbytery, pointed out the type of ministry Timothy would conduct. Perhaps Paul refers to an indication of how the Spirit would work through the young servant of Christ. I will suggest that the fullest account of the Spirit working among His churches by setting apart men for service is that recorded of the appointment of the first missionaries. The account is recorded in ACTS 13:1-3. “There were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch and Saul. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.”

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Prophets and teachers who were present at that particular time are named. Within this body of men who were worshipping and fasting, the Spirit spoke to at least one. That man then communicated to the others what the Spirit was saying to him. There was unity as the Spirit gave understanding to all who were present at that time. Then, those present at that time set apart the two men for this particular service; they did this through the laying on of hands.

Perhaps Timothy, having witnessed the pressures Paul faced in his service, was tempted to quit the ministry. No one who has faced the giants roaming through this dying world can say, "I've never been tempted to quit." In fact, preachers may have quit at times, urged on by wives who were sorely wounded by the despicable treatment of the man they love. Paul gives us insight into the pressures Timothy faced in Ephesus, when he wrote, "I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well. For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

"Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God... [For this reason] I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me. Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.

"You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes" [2 TIMOTHY 1:3-8, 12-15].

In effect, the Apostle has said, "Timothy, I understand you face some formidable foes. I know they must appear at times to be as giants. I am fully aware of how these battles sap your soul. However, you need to toughen up." Here is the exhortation Timothy would finally receive. "You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus... Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops... Flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart" [2 TIMOTHY 2:1, 2-6, 22].

"Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress," Paul writes. To stay the course, Timothy would need to remember these truths. It would be necessary for him to excel in godliness, to provide sound exposition of the Word and to exercise his gift. Literally, Paul commands the young minister, "Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them" [1 TIMOTHY 4:15 NET BIBLE]. God expects His minister to grow, and He anticipates that growth will be evident to all who observe the minister of Christ as he lives out his faith.

Timothy would need to be engulfed by the work. One truth I learned early in my ministry—the man of God is never off duty. He must be prepared to labour, striving to excel in service before God and to His holy people. He must know that others are watching him at all times, especially to see if he is real. God has quite enough plastic saints—he calls us to be real. Timothy would learn, as must every minister of Christ, there is no success in pastoral ministry without hard work. The minister of Christ must be prepared to toil and to labour at his task.

THE PASTOR'S PERSONAL CONDUCT

If you have followed the course of this message, you will know that God seeks balance in life and doctrine. Doctrine divorced from a godly life is insipid, weak, puerile. Life without doctrine is powerless, even meaningless. What we believe about God determines how we live; however, how we live can never dictate what we believe. A godly lifestyle reveals what we believe about God. If we do not live according to what we know of God and His Word, we will soon jettison any pretension of righteousness and attempt to change Word so we no longer feel badly about how we are living. Though we will know what is true, we will reject it through the way in which we live; and we will be miserable.

Elsewhere, Paul had commanded Timothy, "Train yourself for godliness" [1 TIMOTHY 4:7]. In a short while, he will command him "keep yourself pure" [1 TIMOTHY 5:22]. In a later letter, he will command, "Make every effort to present yourself before God as a proven worker who does not need to be ashamed, teaching the message of truth accurately" [2 TIMOTHY 2:15]. Titus would be warned, "Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works" [TITUS 2:7]. Obviously, how the minister of Christ lives is vital.

Paul concludes his charge regarding the pastor's personal conduct by urging the young minister, "Be conscientious about how you live and what you teach. Persevere in this, because by doing so you will save both yourself and those who listen to you" [1 TIMOTHY 4:16 NET BIBLE]. Timothy would need to heed the Apostle's word, as is equally true for each servant of Christ. If Timothy heeded Paul's instruction, he would save himself and those who listened to him. No, Timothy would not be the source of salvation for those who listened to his message; however, he would be God's agent of salvation for those who listened and obeyed the call to faith. It is an axiom of the Faith that "We are not saved by our faithful performance of our duties, but the faithful performance of our duties is the sphere within which our salvation is realized. A pastor unfaithful in doctrine and morals is saving neither himself nor his congregation."¹⁵

Now, the question must be asked of you. Though you may not be an elder, does your life reflect your faith? As one who professes to follow the Christ, are you consistent in life and in speech? How is your life? Your love? Your faith? Your purity? Is your doctrine truly biblical? Or has it become secular and syncretic? Do you really believe what you say you believe? Is it evident that you are progressing in your faith? If you cannot answer in the affirmative as you consider these questions, is it because you are playing a role for which you are unsuited? Is it possible that you have never been born from above?

Beyond all else, your relationship to Christ is essential. Know that God became a man, that He gave His life as a sacrifice because of your sinful condition. He took upon Himself the punishment you deserve. He was buried, but He broke the bonds of death. Jesus, the Son of God, conquered death, hell and the grave. He came out of the grave, was witnessed among those to whom He revealed Himself. Then, He ascended into Heaven where He is now seated at the right hand of the Father. Now, the call of God is to believe this message of life. If you openly agree with God that Jesus is your Master, believing with all your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be set free. Believing that God raised Jesus from the dead makes you right with the Father, and openly agreeing with Him that Jesus is Master sets you free. God promises, "Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord shall be set free" [see ROMANS 10:9-13]. And that promise is extended to you. Believe this message and receive His gift of life. Do it now. Amen.

¹⁵ D. Edmond Hiebert, **First Timothy, Everyman's Bible Commentary** (Moody Press, Chicago, IL 1957) 89