

# How to be a Great Minister of Christ, part 2

The Bible tells us that after a believer dies and goes to heaven, they will receive rewards for their good works and motives they had while here on this earth. Most believers would like to receive rewards from God and hear Him say that they had finished well. The apostle Paul had the same great desire. In 2 Timothy 4:7-8 Paul shared his heart. He wrote,

*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith. 2 Timothy 4:7 (NASB)*

In our last study, we discovered that the apostle Paul shared with Timothy, who was a pastor of a church, how he could also finish well! As we studied the advice Paul gave to Timothy, we discovered five principles as to how we also can finish well.

The first three principles told us that every pastor must 1) review and warn about apostasy, 2) constantly study Scripture, and 3) avoid ungodly teaching. As they strive to do this with excellence, they will have fought the good

fight, finished the course, and kept the faith. That is how a pastor can end well.

When you hear these principles, you may think they are only for a pastor and not for you. But that is not true. Why? Hebrews 5:11-14 gives us an important truth often missed.

*For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you*

*have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. Hebrews 5:11-14 (NASB)*

Here we are told that every Christian should be able to teach others. It is a mark of spiritual maturity. This does not mean that every believer should have the spiritual gift of teaching. Also, God has not called every believer to be a pastor of a church. But this passage does tell us that every believer should be learning so that they can at least explain the Scriptures to others. This is necessary for a believer to finish well. There is a difference between being able to explain the Scriptures and teaching them.

The fourth principle is that a pastor must strive for god-

liness in his life.

We discovered in 1 Timothy 3:16 that Jesus is the ultimate example of godliness. So, striving to be like Christ is striving for godliness. A few examples of godliness would be obeying God, loving God, growing in faith, following the

examples of your elders, giving, and avoiding false teachers.

The fifth principle is that a pastor must command and teach these principles.

In our study today from 1 Timothy 4:12-16, we are going to discover five more principles about how to be a great minister or servant for Christ and end well. We will also learn that if the pastor lacks these principles, then the believer will not



grow spiritually.

**Be an Example of a Believer.** Our study is 1 Timothy 4:12-16. Here is verse 12,

*Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe. 1 Timothy 4:12 (NASB)*

Paul gives Timothy the sixth principle of how to be a great minister of Christ and finish well. He told Timothy that he needed to be an example of how a believer should behave. This principle also applies to every believer.

This verse reveals that God wants a pastor to be a great example to the church whether he is younger or older. Many years ago, I knew a senior-pastor of a church who started dressing and acting like the younger people in his church. The music of the church changed, and his sermons changed. I wonder why he changed? Was he trying to appeal to a particular group of people, or was he trying to be an example to the believers in the congregation of a godly believer?

But Paul did not tell Timothy to behave in any way so as to appeal to other people. God told Timothy to be an example in his speech to other believers. A pastor must remember that the congregation will follow his example. They will be an example of spiritual maturity. Also, how he acts reveals if he is a spiritual father of the faith or just a baby Christian. God does not give him special rewards for acting spiritually immature in order to gain a greater following. He is supposed to be an example of Christ.

Notice the first quality he mentioned in the list. Paul tells Timothy that he must be an example of speech first. In Colossians 4:6 every believer is urged to,

*Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person. Colossians 4:6 (NASB)*

The emphasis is on speech. I have heard a pastor use swear words from the pulpit. Maybe he thought that would appeal to the people. But Colossians 4:6 reveals that God was not

pleased. His speech should be seasoned with grace.

He forgot this command that Paul gave to Timothy. He was to be an example to believers. He was not to mimic unbelievers for some effect. The gathering of the church is for the benefit of believers and not unbelievers. It is clear in the New Testament that the leaders of the church are to be godly examples to the believers. For example, Paul urged the churches to imitate his godly example. Listen to his exhortation to the believers in Corinth and in Philippi.

*Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ. 1 Corinthians 11:1 (NASB)*

*Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. Philippians 3:17 (NASB)*

In 1 Peter 5:1-3, the apostle Peter told the elders of the churches to be examples to the flock. In Hebrews 13:7, believers were urged to imitate the faith of their leaders. The verse says,

*Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith. Hebrews 13:7 (NASB)*

Notice that believers are first urged to imitate those who are their leaders. That could include one of the elders. Second, believers are to imitate those who teach them the Word of God. Third, believers are urged to imitate those whose lifestyle is truly godly.

So, Paul told Timothy to watch his speech, conduct, love, faith and purity. Paul does not mean to be a hypocrite, but a pastor should have a great desire to change his life if necessary to be an example. Ephesians 4:25 tells us that believers are to not lie.

*Therefore, laying aside falsehood, SPEAK TRUTH EACH ONE of you WITH HIS NEIGHBOR, for we are members of one another. Ephesians 4:25 (NASB)*

God tells believers that their speech should always edify others in verse 29. Then in verses 26 and 31, believers are told to avoid angry speech and evil words. Next, Paul told Timothy to be an example of conduct. The Greek word for “conduct” is *anastrophe*. It refers to a person’s pattern of life. A good example of this word is found in Ephesians 4:22-24.

That, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. (NASB)

Notice that Paul referred to the former manner of life of believers. Then he said that we need to lay aside our old self and put on our new self. This helps us understand that conduct refers to our pattern of life. We all sin because we are not perfect. Paul is talking about our normal conduct.

Then, Paul said that our pattern of life should also include love and faith. People cannot see the love and faith in your heart. But they can see the effect it makes in your pattern of life. Finally, Paul told Timothy to be an example of purity. The word refers to sexual purity. It is one of the most difficult areas for most Christians. So, Paul told Timothy to control himself in this area.

In summary, Timothy was to be an example of a believer to everyone in the church. He was to show them how a believer in Jesus Christ lives! Otherwise, he would cause others to stumble. Ultimately, in Ephesians 5:1 Paul commanded us to imitate God.

**Will Have A Biblical Ministry.** The seventh principle of a great minister of Christ is that he will have a biblical ministry.

Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching. 1 Timothy 4:13 (NASB)

Notice that Paul told Timothy that he was to do three things: read, exhort, and teach. Paul literally commanded Timothy

to be committed to the reading, the exhortation, and the teaching. The order of the words is important. Paul starts with reading and ends with teaching. Paul followed the same pattern that is described in Nehemiah 8:8,

They read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading. Nehemiah 8:8 (NASB)

The word “publicly” in 1 Timothy 4:13 is in italics in the NASB. That means “publicly” is not in the original Greek text. It was added. It is an interpretation by the translators, but publicly is implied.

What Paul describes follows the pattern of public worship in the Jewish synagogues. The gospels reveal that when Jesus entered a synagogue, He stood to read Scripture and then taught the passage. Just read Luke 4:16. So, Timothy was to do the same thing.

First, Paul told Timothy to read Scripture during the church service. I am afraid that sometimes this is viewed as a ritual. But it was not a ritual to Paul. It was an essential of worship. The congregation should hear God speak. Second, Timothy was commanded to teach and exhort the Scriptures. The Greek word for “teaching” is *didaskalia*. Most of the time in the New Testament it is translated as “instruction” or “doctrine.” That is, it refers to the principles or doctrines of Scripture. Timothy was to teach the doctrines in the passage and then exhort. If we examine Paul’s pattern of teaching we discover that he taught doctrine before he applied the passage.

For example, Romans 1-11 is all doctrine. The last part of Romans 11 is a doxology. Then beginning with chapter 12, he starts his exhortation. He says in Romans 12:1,

Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. Romans 12:1 (NASB)

In the book of Galatians, he teaches from chapter one through chapter four, and then in chapter five he starts his

exhortation or application. In Ephesians, Paul teaches doctrine from chapters 1 through most of chapter 4, then he begins the application in chapter four, verse 25. Paul repeats this pattern in most of his books. He has a doctrine section and then application follows. Paul commanded Timothy to read, exhort and teach.

Justin Martyr, an early church father reveals that Paul's pattern was adopted by the early church. He wrote this in his book "First Apology":

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 and the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has finished, the president speaks, instructing and exhorting the people to imitate these good things.<sup>1</sup>

So, the early church read, taught the principles, and applied them. John MacArthur makes this insightful comment,

The fourth-century bishop of Constantinople John Chrysostom was nicknamed "golden-mouthed." Of him John R. W. 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

rages 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." (Cited in John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982], 21)

His simple, direct exposition of Scripture, coupled with moral application, is a model for all preachers to imitate.

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Preaching and teaching is the highest calling of a minister. It is tragic that so many in our day have been diverted from that. They spend their time on nonessentials, and their people end up spiritually impoverished.<sup>2</sup>

Dr. McGee adds this helpful comment for pastors and anyone else who follows Paul's instruction to Timothy. He says,

This was applicable to Timothy personally also. The minister can grow personally only by reading the Word for his exhortation and instruction. A growing minister will make a growing church. One of the greatest things ever said concerning Dwight L. Moody was said by a neighbor: "Every time Mr. Moody comes home, you can just tell how much he's grown spiritually." Are you further along spiritually today than you were this time last year? Are you growing in grace and the knowledge of Christ? The only way to do so is by reading the great truths of the Word of God.<sup>3</sup>

**Will Use His Spiritual Gifts.** The eighth principle of a great minister of Christ is that he is to use his spiritual gifts. This principle is given in verse 14,

2. John MacArthur. 1 Timothy. The MacArthur New Testament Commentary. Moody Press. 1995. pp. 179-180.

3. J. Vernon McGee. 1 Corinthians through Revelation. Thru the Bible. Thomas Nelson Publishers. 1983. p. 450.

1. Justin Martyr. First Apology. Translated A. W. F. Blunt, Cambridge Patristic Texts (Cambridge University Press, 1911), I.67. John Stott. The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus. Inter-Varsity Press. 1996. p. 121.

**Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery. 1 Timothy 4:14 (NASB)**

Now Paul commands Timothy to not neglect the spiritual gift that was given to him. A better translation of “do not neglect” is “to not be careless.” What an incredible command. Some commentators struggle with the idea that Timothy may have started neglecting his ministry. But that seems to be what he did. In chapter one, Paul reminded him that he had been instructing him to not let certain men teach strange doctrines. But it appears that he had. Later in 2 Timothy 1:6, Paul told Timothy to kindle afresh the gift that God had given to him. It appears that Timothy had become discouraged in the ministry and ignored Paul’s advice in this verse. He may have become lazy in his ministry, and Paul knew it.

In this verse, Paul encouraged Timothy to use his spiritual gift. 1 Corinthians 12:11 teaches us that the Holy Spirit gives us spiritual gifts. One of those gifts is teaching (1 Corinthians 12:28). It is also clear that since the Holy Spirit gave Timothy a spiritual gift, then it was God’s will for Timothy to have the spiritual gift. God wanted him to use it. Therefore, Paul reminded Timothy that he had been commissioned to be a pastor by a group of elders. We are told that the group of elders was the council of the elders. The NASB uses the word “presbytery.”

The application for pastors and every believer is that God has given every Christian a spiritual gift. The application for us is that God wants us to use it.

**Will be Absorbed in These Things.** The ninth principle for a great minister of Christ is that a pastor is to be absorbed in these things. Verse 15 says,

**Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress will be evident to all. 1 Timothy 4:15 (NASB)**

This verse does not agree with the Greek text very well. The Greek word for “take pains” is better translated as “to care for.” That is, rather than not caring about his ministry, Paul commands Timothy to deeply care for his ministry.

Also, the word “absorbed” is not in the Greek text. The Greek actually just reads “be in.” The idea is that Timothy was to be completely dedicated to or consumed with these principles. He was to be an example of a godly believer. He was to be reading, exhorting, teaching, and using his spiritual gift. His heart was to be greatly committed to these things. He was not to be a hypocrite.

A wise congregation that pays attention to a pastor’s teaching will be able to eventually sense if their pastor is growing spiritually. If he is growing spiritually, he will learn new insights due to being absorbed in the Scriptures. He will want to teach what he is learning. But a pastor who is not absorbed in the Scriptures will not be growing. His lack of progress will be evident to all. When this happens he will become boring and your spiritual growth will be hindered. The church will begin to decay, because God blesses through the leadership of the church.

**Will Persevere in These Things.** The tenth principle for a great minister of Christ is that he perseveres in his ministry. Verse 16 says,

**Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you. 1 Timothy 4:16 (NASB)**

So, Paul commanded Timothy to do more than pay attention to himself and his teaching. Notice that after Paul commanded him to pay close attention to himself, Paul focused Timothy on his teaching. His teaching or doctrine was the most important task. Teaching the principles of doctrine is the priority. It is an error to be more interested in application. The Holy Spirit will apply the principles to each believer. The doctrine is always the power behind the application.

Then Paul told Timothy to persevere in these things. That is, as Timothy followed these ten principles he would ensure salvation for himself and those listening to him. What Paul meant was that as he faithfully followed these principles, he and other believers would continue to grow in their faith. Throughout the New Testament, believers are told to persevere in their faith. Why? Because some of them may not really

be believers but tares (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43). 1 John 2:19 reminds us that just because someone attends church, that does not mean they are a Christian.

They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us. 1 John 2:19 (NASB)

Philippians 2:12-13 teaches us that we must continue to persevere in our salvation, and yet, God is helping us do that. It says,

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. Philippians 2:12-13 (NASB)

To work out our salvation includes reading and studying the Scriptures, obedience, confessing our sins, and praying. As we do these things, we are striving to sin less and less. Romans 8:13-14 tells us that a primary sign a person is saved is that they sin less. That is how we work out our salvation. As Timothy persevered in the ten principles, he would also work out his salvation. That is what Paul meant by, “or as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.” In addition, as believers follow these principles, they will gain confidence that they are saved. Yet, from the divine perspective, 1 Peter 1:3-9 tells us that God keeps true believers in the faith.

**Conclusion.** 1 Timothy 4:6-16 gave us ten principles. We have learned what to look for in a pastor. We have learned what makes a great minister for Christ. We have learned how all believers can finish well.