

Proposition: 1 Timothy 4:11-16 tells us what God expects of a minister in two areas, one is church life and the other is personal life.

- I. Here's what God expects of a minister in the church (11-14).
- A. He must understand biblical authority (11).
 - B. He must understand the importance of his example (12).
 - 1. We earn respect through our speech.
 - 2. We earn respect through our behavior.
 - 3. We earn respect through our relationships.
 - 4. We earn respect through consistency.
 - 5. We earn respect through purity.
 - C. He must understand his priorities (13).
 - 1. I must give attention to reading.
 - 2. I must give attention to preaching.
 - 3. I must give attention to teaching.
 - D. He must understand his giftedness (14).
 - 1. It comes from God.
 - 2. It's verified by the church.
- II. Here's what God expects of a minister in his own life (15-16).
- A. He must *grow* (15).
 - B. He must *guard* (16).
 - 1. I must take heed to my life.
 - 2. I must take heed to my doctrine.
- Remember: God uses *ordinary* people to do an *extraordinary* work.

The following, supposedly, are real headlines that actually appeared in newspapers:

Police Begin Campaign to Run Down Jaywalkers
Miners Refuse to Work After Death
Man Struck by Lightning Faces Battery Charge

Words are funny things, aren't they? It's a scary thing to know your life's work depends on using the right *words*. That's true for a newspaper editor. But it also holds for ministers of the gospel.

James warned, "Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in *what he says*, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check (James 3:1-2)."

God has a high standard for those who speak His word--which includes all of us who name the name of Christ. God takes His standard seriously, and so must we. But the amazing thing about God is that rather than lowering His standard so we can meet it on our own strength, God through Christ brings us up to the standard. He works in us to do for us what we are incapable of doing on our own. He does it by His grace and through faith. If you're a Christian, you know that to be true, for that's how you were saved--not by reaching God, but by trusting in the One He sent to reach you, Jesus Christ.

So God doesn't lower His standard, but brings us up to it through Christ.

***Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

The same is true when we talk about ministry. God has a high standard for ministers. That standard is being ignored and at times even attacked in our day. But it's a good standard, and it's attainable again because of His provision of grace.

Which brings us to this question. What does God expect of a minister? We're going to find out this morning in our study of 1 Timothy 4. The text at hand was written by Paul to his junior associate Timothy. As such, it pertains to those in *pastoral* ministry--like Timothy was. It shows us what God expects of pastors. But by implication it speaks to all Christians, for all Christians are to be ministers (Eph. 4:12; 2 Cor. 3:6).

The passage is really a charge to those in pastoral ministry. There are ten imperatives, ten commands, ten marching orders from General Paul to Lieutenant Timothy in verses 11-16. See if you can pick out the imperatives as I read the text:

"*Command and teach* these things. *Don't let anyone look down* on you because you are young, but *set an example* for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity. Until I come, *devote* yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. *Do not neglect* your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you."

"*Be diligent* in these matters; *give* yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. *Watch* your life and doctrine closely. *Persevere* in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers."

I've never been in battle. Some of you have. What does it take to have a strong military unit in the heat of battle? Courage? A commitment to a cause? Yes, but something else. What if you're in a foxhole next to someone who's very courageous but he's committed only to what *he thinks* is best? Something else is needed, isn't it? A good soldier is one who has learned to follow the orders of the commander.

What's true of soldiers is true of ministers as well. We have a Commander--Jesus Christ, the Lord of the universe. And we're under marching orders--*His* marching orders.

What does He expect of those in the army of His service? Particularly, what does He expect of those in pastoral ministry?¹

What's a pastor supposed to do anyway? Ask five people on the street that question and you'll probably get five different answers! But what's God's assessment? We need not wonder. 1 Timothy 4:11-16 tells us what God expects of a minister in two areas, one is church life and the other is personal life.

I. Here's what God expects of a minister in the church (11-14).

Obviously, a pastor's life revolves around a local church. For Timothy, it was the Ephesian church. But if he's to have a good ministry, he must have a handle on four essentials which Paul addresses in verses 11-14.

A. He must understand biblical authority (11). "Command and teach these things." What things? Remember the context. There was a problem in the Ephesian church. That's not abnormal. A successful ministry is not a ministry without problems. It's what? It's a ministry where you solve the problems God's way.

The problem in Ephesus was that there were people who were teaching things other than the Word of God, things that undermined the authority of the Word of God, and in some cases things that outright contradicted the Word of God.

¹Though Timothy was an apostolic associate and not technically a "pastor," he was engaged in pastoral ministry. He was a local church "trouble shooter" serving in Ephesus at the time (1 Tim. 1:3).

So what does a good minister do in such a situation? Sit back and watch? Toss around clichés like, "Well, to each his own." "Judge not lest you be judged."? Is that what he's to do? That's not what Paul told Timothy to do.

Remember 1:3? "As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may *command* certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer." Command--that's a strong word. It's the same word in 4:11, *parangello*. It has military overtones and means "to order." It's a call to obedience by one in authority.

Paul had already, according to his own words in 1:20, handed the ringleaders "over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme." And now Timothy had a job to do. What was it? He was to speak authoritatively to the church concerning "these things."

J. N. D. Kelly suggests that "these things" refer to no particular instruction, but in a general sense refers to all the counsel given thus far in the letter. In the immediate context "these things" certainly pertains to dealing with those who teach and undermine the authority of God's Word. What God through Paul had commanded Timothy, Timothy was to pass on to the church in an authoritative manner.

But that's out of style today, isn't it? We don't *preach* God's Word. We *share* it. We *discuss* it. The church growth gurus tell us that authoritative preaching is out, and sharing twenty-five minute sermonettes is in. And we wonder why our pulpits don't seem to have the life-changing power of days gone by.

Dear friend, read the sermons of the men God has used in previous generations. You won't find Jonathan Edwards or George Whitefield or Martin Luther saying, "Thanks for coming today. I want to share some thoughts with you. Does everyone feel okay about that?"

Did you realize that you will look in vain for one joke in the 1200 sermons of Jonathan Edwards that remain. In one ordination sermon in 1744, Edwards said, "If a minister has light without heat, and entertains his [hearers] with learned discourses, without a savour of the power of godliness, or any appearance of fervency of spirit, and zeal for God, and the good of souls, he may gratify itching ears, and fill the heads of his people with empty notions; but it will not be very likely to teach their hearts, or save their souls."²

The minister is not the authority. God's Word is. So when a minister commands and teaches "these things," the God-revealed truth recorded in Scripture, he does so with authority. He recognizes the authority that's inherent in the Bible.

Paul told Titus the same thing in Titus 2:15, "These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you." A minister is not to be abusive nor abrasive, but his teaching should have an unmistakable tone of authority--not his, but God's. He strives, as the Puritan Richard Baxter put it, "to screw the truth into men's minds."

A minister, then, must understand biblical authority. His job isn't to share opinions. It's to command and teach God's Word, and to the degree he does that, he can announce, "Thus saith the Lord." A second essential...

B. He must understand the importance of his example (12). That's what Paul underscored for Timothy in verse 12 (KJV), "Let no man despise thy youth, but be thou an example of the believers."

²from John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, pp. 47-8.

Here's a way to undermine a teaching ministry--discredit the teacher. "Ah, you don't have to listen what that guy's saying. He's just a young whipper-snapper." Cast a shadow on the teacher and you won't have to deal with what he's teaching.

Apparently, that's what Timothy faced in Ephesus. Because he was young.

We know that Timothy was a timid fellow by nature (2 Tim. 1:7). One of the barriers he had to overcome in ministry was his age.

Don't misunderstand. Timothy was no wet-behind-the-ears novice. By this time, he's been in the ministry for fifteen years. The Greek word Paul uses for "youth" (*neotes*) can describe anyone of military age, that is up to the age of forty. In Acts 7:58, Luke describes Paul as a young man at the time of Stephen's death, and he was about thirty at the time. *The Apostolic Canons* specified that a man couldn't become a bishop until he was over forty, for by then "he will be past youthful disorders (Barclay)."

So Timothy was likely in his mid-thirties, not a juvenile certainly, but young compared to Paul (who was in his sixties), and young compared to the current elders in the Ephesian church. And whether the problem was imagined or real, Timothy was inclined to let his age keep him from fulfilling his God-given duty. To which Paul said, "Don't!"

Bible teacher, J. Vernon McGee, tells his story (66), "When I began as a young minister, even before I was ordained, I told an old, retired minister that I felt a little embarrassed and even frightened when someone with gray hair would come into the church to hear this young preacher who was still a student. He advised me, 'Don't ever worry about that. Don't let anyone despise your youth, but make dead sure you are an example of the believers.' The important thing is not your age, but whether you are an example"

Young people, you don't have to wait to have a significant ministry for Christ. God can use you right now--if you're willing to follow the counsel Paul gave to Timothy.

Listen. Respect isn't something you demand. It's something you earn. How? By being an example in five areas.

1. *We earn respect through our speech.* "Set an example for the believers [lit. "the believing ones," that is, the Christians under your ministry] in speech ["in word," in the KJV]." Your speech includes both what you say and how you say it. Your speech is the window of your heart (Matt. 12:34)."

"Hey, did you hear the stupid thing that Bob did? Let me tell you about it." That's the opposite of earning respect through one's speech.

2. *We earn respect through our behavior.* "Set an example for the believers...in life ["in conversation," KJV; the Schofield has "in conduct"]." You can't keep people from criticizing you in ministry. Remember Jesus had His share of critics. But you can make sure they don't have grounds to criticize you. How? Through your behavior. By resolving to live a godly life.

3. *We earn respect through our relationships.* "In love," the text says. *Agape* is the Greek word. What's that? *Agape* love is self-sacrificial love. If you want a picture of it, here it is--Jesus' words in John 15:13, "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends." That's what a good minister does. He pours his life into others, not to get something out of them, but for their good, for their spiritual good.

4. *We earn respect through consistency.* "In faith." The word Paul uses is flexible. Here it probably doesn't refer to a person's faith--that is, what he believes--but to a person's *faithfulness*. That's how you earn respect. By being reliable. By keeping your promises. By finishing a ministry when you start it. By being consistent, steady, and

dependable. That's not hard when things are going well, but the real test is when things don't go the way you'd like. That's when you find out if a minister is *faithful*.

5. *We earn respect through purity.* This was, and is, a big issue for ministers. The Greek term *hagneia* refers to purity primarily in the area of sexuality. Is there anything that has eroded the respect for the ministry in our day any more than the lack of moral purity? A church leader must be a one-woman man (3:1). About three years later, Paul reemphasized the warning to Timothy, "Flee from youthful lusts (2 Tim. 2:22)."

That's how you get respect. You earn it through your speech, your behavior, your relationships, your consistency, and your purity.³ A third essential...

C. He must understand his priorities (13). "Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching."

It doesn't take long for a pastor to learn that a host of expectations circulate in churches when it comes to the subject of his job description. When I was in seminary, I interviewed with a senior pastor to find out about an associate's position. I learned what the expectations were. And then discovered there was an unwritten one. It was the associate pastor's job to pick up pine cones around the church.

The subject of expectations is a big one for ministers. Don't misunderstand. A minister should be willing to do anything for the cause of Christ. At times that includes pine cones--after all he is a *servant*. But his love for the ministry will soon be sapped by people's expectations if he doesn't get a handle on what God expects.

What are the priorities that God expects me to have as a pastor? Paul mentions three.

1. *I must give attention to reading.* "Until I come"--Remember, Paul intended to visit Ephesus (1:3). "Devote yourself"--Lit. "attend to;" and the present tense indicates that week in and week out these priorities were to be the meat and potatoes of Timothy's ministry. There may be pine cones to pick up along the way, but let nothing interfere with giving attention to these three responsibilities.

The first is "the public reading of Scripture." The Greek text simply reads, "the reading." Early church members didn't carry Bibles to church. Why not? They didn't have them! In order to learn God's Word, they were dependent on the public reading of it. So in a typical church service (which was patterned after the synagogue practice), the Scriptures were read aloud--an Old Testament section, and New Testament letters when available.

For instance at the end of his letter to the Colossians Paul wrote (4:16), "After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea." And in 1 Thessalonians 5:27 Paul exhorts, "I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers."

God holds the pastor responsible to make sure that His Word is at the center of the life of the church. So I must give attention to reading. Priority #2...

2. *I must give attention to preaching.* "To exhortation," is how the KJV and NASB put it. Once the Word of God is read and explained, there must be a call for change (or the result will be little more than intellectual stimulation).

³Please notice that Paul told Timothy to not allow people to discredit his ministry because of his age. Timothy was to see to it that he was respected because of his office--not by acting big, or throwing around his credentials, but by example. It's not a matter of who the minister *is*, but who he *represents*. And who's that? The Living God. The attitude of society towards authority is low right now, in large part due to scandalous behavior by those in authority. So disrespect for authority is not only tolerated, but often encouraged.

I think the Scottish commentator William Barclay said it well: "Every sermon should end with the challenge: 'What about it, chum?'" That's what preaching (or exhortation) is, presenting the Word of God and challenging people to apply the truths they've heard.

3. *I must give attention to teaching.* "To doctrine," says the KJV. The Bible is a difficult book. It needs to be explained. It needs to be *taught*.

What's the difference between "preaching" and "teaching"? In our day the comment will be made, "Some pastors teach, but I want one who can *preach*!" What's the difference? Is a preacher louder than a teacher? Does he tell more stories? Does he use more emotion? Does he give evangelistic messages? But these are cultural distinctions and have little to do with words Paul uses here.

There's actually much more overlapping of the terms in the Bible than in our setting. For Paul, *preaching* is the exposition and application of Scripture. *Teaching*--a word which appears 15 times in the pastoral epistles--involves the systematic explanation of the Word of God (MacArthur).

I read an interesting comment by commentator William Hendriksen, and though it was written in 1957, it's timely (159): "A minister should strive to effect a proper balance between the reading of Scripture, exhorting, and teaching. Some never exhort. Others never teach. And the reading of Scripture is prone to be regarded merely as a necessary preface to what the preacher himself is going to say!"

If you'll notice, several things are missing from this list. It's not an exhaustive listing of everything that should happen in public worship. For instance, *prayer* is not mentioned. But it didn't need to be mentioned here, since Paul already addressed it in chapter 2. But the undeniable point is clear. If there's no reading, preaching, and teaching of the Scriptures, then you don't have a *worship* service as God intended. The ministry of the Word is fundamental and foundational to true worship.

That truth has been clouded in our day. When someone says, "Well, such-and-such a church doesn't do much when it comes to preaching God's Word, but the worship is great!", they're indicating they don't understand what biblical worship really is.

The Reformers were deeply committed to expository preaching of the Scriptures.⁴ Martin Luther often preached four times on Sundays. And four times a year he would teach a two-week series on doctrine using a catechism. John Calvin ministered in Geneva for twenty-three years, preaching twice on Sundays. Every other week he preached each weeknight. His Sunday sermons covered the New Testament, his weeknight sermons the Old Testament.

Why so much attention given to the Word? Because a good minister understands that the Word is central to his God-given priorities. Fourthly...

D. He must understand his giftedness (14). Remember, Timothy was no giant. He was an ordinary guy. The question he no doubt struggled with, in light of the challenges he faced and the responsibilities he held, was, "Can I do it?" For that matter, how can any of us do ministry? We can't on our own. But we can because of spiritual *giftedness*.

Verse 14, "Do not neglect your gift [*charismatos*], which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you." If you are a believer, you have a spiritual endowment, a Holy Spirit produced enablement for ministry. In Timothy's case, the gift equipped him to do evangelism, preaching, teaching, and leading. As John MacArthur observes (170), "Each believer's gift is a God-designed blend of

⁴See MacArthur, p. 177.

spiritual capabilities, which acts as a channel through which the Spirit of God ministers to others." Notice two insights concerning spiritual giftedness from verse 14.

1. *It comes from God.* Paul emphasizes, "Which was *given* you through a prophetic message." In Timothy's case there was a public affirmation of his gift through direct revelation from God (1:18), although the Scriptures don't tell us when or what was said. What we do know is that spiritual giftedness comes from God (1 Cor. 12:7).

2. *It's verified by the church.* In Timothy's case, it was verified "when the body of elders [lit. "the presbytery"] laid their hands on you." Perhaps this refers to Timothy's ordination. Ministers are not free-wheeling, lone-rangers. Their giftedness and call to the ministry is to be confirmed by the local church. Acts 16:2 specifically states that members of Timothy's home church "spoke well of him," so Paul recruited him for his ministry team.

Beloved, God doesn't give us gifts so we can squander them. He gives us gifts so we can what? *Use* them for His glory and the good of His people. If you are a Christian, you have a spiritual endowment. Are you using it? May I encourage you to take seriously the matter of giftedness?

So when it comes to church life, here's what God expects of a minister. Next Paul touches base on a second area.

II. Here's what God expects of a minister in his own life (15-16).

In his own life, a minister has two God-given responsibilities.

A. He must grow (15). "Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress." Be diligent--"take pains with these things," is how the NASB puts it. "Give yourself wholly to them"--lit. "Be in them." The goal in ministry isn't to be novel. It's to stick to the stuff, to be a student of the book, to grow.

One of the greatest things ever said concerning the evangelist D. L. Moody was said by a neighbor (McGee, 67), "Every time Mr. Moody comes home, you can just tell how much he's grown spiritually." Are you growing? A good minister is a growing minister. He knows that he never arrives. So he must grow.

B. He must guard (16). "Watch your life and your doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers."

Charles Finney, an American evangelist from the 1800s used to preach on this text. He titled his sermon, "Preacher, Save Thyself!" Before you can minister to others, and indeed all the while you are ministering to others, you've got to keep guard of the home front. How do I do that as a minister?

1. *I must take heed to my life.* "Watch your life!" Paul says. An unguarded life is not fit to minister God's Word. In addition...

2. *I must take heed to my doctrine.* Guard your *didaskalia*, that is, what you believe and teach. When you minister to people and say, "Thus saith the Lord," you'd better make sure that it's truly what He said.

And why is it so important to be this kind of minister? Paul finishes with two motivating reasons: "If you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers." Of course, the minister is not the source of salvation, merely the agent of it. The goal of ministry is to see people saved to the glory of God. That's why you want to be this kind of minister--it's good for you and those who hear you.

My friends, I'm convinced we need to take seriously God's standard for ministers. Why? Because the stakes are so high.

There's a world of people who need to know the good news of Jesus Christ, of Who He is and what He did, of His atoning sacrifice on the cross, and of His offer of eternal life. How will it happen? Remember this as we close...

Remember: God uses *ordinary* people to do an *extraordinary* work.

Ordinary people just like Timothy, just like you, who are willing to be ministers according to His expectations. May God help us.