

Proposition: If we want to be good ministers, 1 Timothy 4:6-10 tells us how in clear and simple terms. To have ministries that honor God, we must pursue two goals.

- I. Have a Word-centered ministry (6-8).
 - A. A good minister reminds (6).
 1. He gives the Word to others.
 2. He is grounded in the Word himself.
 - B. A good minister resists (7a).
 1. He's not impressed by man's ideas.
 2. He knows he possesses something far better.
 - C. A good minister resolves to be godly (7b-8).
 1. Physical training has limited value.
 2. Godliness has eternal value.
- II. Have a God-centered ministry (9-10).
 - A. It submits to God's truth (9).
 1. It's reliable.
 2. It's worthy of our attention.
 - B. It appreciates God's work (10a).
 - C. It magnifies God's reputation (10b).
 1. He is the living God.
 2. He is the saving God.

Implications: What does this teach us about God?

1. The way we do ministry matters to God.
2. Godliness matters to God. Does it to you?

What does a good minister look like? Ministers are all different, aren't they? Some are short, others tall. Some outgoing, others more shy. Some very academic, still others bent on practicality. Some are old, others young. Some with quick wit, others very solemn. Some athletic, others could care less whether Michael Jordon retires.

So the bottom line is that good ministers are all very different. Or are they? Certainly, there are differences, but is there a common denominator that's found in all good ministers?

The answer, according to 1 Timothy 4, is *yes*. What's true of all good ministers? You need to know the answer to that. Why? You have ministers, and need to know what to expect of them. And if you are a believer in Christ, you *are* a minister. Every member of the Body of Christ is called to be a minister, to do ministry (Eph. 4:12).

So you are a minister. So am I. The question we need to ask ourselves is, "Am I a *good* minister?" How can we tell?

We can take a poll. We can leave the matter up to public opinion. "I like Preacher Paul. He's a good guy. I feel comfortable when I'm with him. He's a *good* minister. All in favor say 'Aye.'" But what happens if I don't feel comfortable around Preacher Paul tomorrow?

You can quickly see the problem of measuring goodness by a poll. No, we need an objective standard. And we have one--it's God's standard, and it never changes.

In the Word of God, specifically, in 1 Timothy 4, God tells us His estimation of a *good minister*. In Paul's letter to his ministry associate Timothy, God gives us practical instruction on what a good minister is, and how to be one.

If we want to be good ministers, 1 Timothy 4:6-10 tells us how in clear and simple terms. To have ministries that honor God, we must pursue two goals.

***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.

I. Have a Word-centered ministry (6-8).

Verse 6, "If you point out these things to the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus." Stop there. Notice the "if/then" setup: *If* you do this, *then* you will be a good minister.

If you do what? First and foremost, according to verses 6-8, if you have a Word-centered ministry, then you will be a good minister. What does that mean? What does a minister with a Word-centered ministry do? Paul mentions three activities.

A. A good minister reminds (6). The KJV reads, "If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith [lit. "the faith," since the definite article "the" is in the Greek text], and of good doctrine, unto which thou hast attained."

A good minister reminds. Reminds whom? The "brothers." In Timothy's case, his task was to remind the Christian brethren in the Ephesian church. Remind them what? Of "these things." What things? The things just explained in verses 1-5. What were those things? The source, symptoms, and solution for apostasy.

That's heavy stuff. The thrust of verses 1-5 was a stern warning from Paul to Timothy: "Timothy, some will abandon the faith (1). Some, under the sway of Satanic influence will try to teach demonic doctrines right in the church! They're apostates, Timothy, hypocritical liars who may profess Christ but whose consciences have been seared (2). They're stricter than God is (3), and intimidate the church with their self-centered piety. And not only do they add their own ideas to God's Word, but they forbid God's people to do things that God created and God's Word says is good (4-5). Now, Timothy, if you point out these things to the brothers, you will be a *good minister*."

So what does a good minister do. He reminds. But what does that involve? The text mentions two aspects of the "reminding" ministry.

1. *He gives the Word to others.* Paul says, "If you point out these things ["put in remembrance," KJV]." The verb is quite gentle, and carries the idea of suggesting or giving advice. He ministers God's Word. He doesn't club people with it. An apostate dispenses destructive words (1-2), but a good minister's words are like stepping stones through the minefield of life.

Right here Paul summarizes a huge part of a minister's job description. He is to remind God's people of God's truth. All of it. Even the unpleasant parts (like verses 1-5). He resolves to teach the whole counsel of God's Word.

Recently I received an email from someone who did a web search of that phrase, "the whole counsel of God's Word" and found it on our church's web site. He said the phrase, 'the whole counsel of God's Word,' was new to him, so he did a search, found it on our web page, and wanted to know what it meant.

Do you know what it means? It's what Paul told the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:27 (KJV), "For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God ["the whole will of God," NIV]." Paul elaborates in 2 Corinthians 4:2, "We have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, *by setting forth the truth plainly* we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."

To be quite honest, though many would say it's important, very few churches actually teach the whole counsel of God's Word. They shy away from portions that don't fit their doctrinal box, or that don't seem relevant.

But all of God's self-revelation is good. That's why Paul taught it. And so must we. Even the unpopular parts like warning about apostasy. "If you point out these things you will be a good minister."

Which implies that it's possible to be a not-so-good minister. And what's the difference? What determines a good minister is what he does with the Word. We can't pick and choose the parts of the Bible we like if we want to be a good minister. A good minister gives the Word to others. Secondly...

2. *He is grounded in the Word himself.* You can't give what you don't possess. What's true of a good minister according to the end of verse 6? He is "brought up in the truths of the faith and of the good teaching" which he has followed.

The participle translated "brought up" ["nourished," KJV] means "to train up" and is in the present tense, indicating this is a daily task. You don't go to seminary or anywhere else to "get your theology." You may get the tools to do theology, but a good minister never stops learning.

The participle is also passive, that is, a good minister allows himself to be "brought up" by the influence of something outside of himself. What influence? The influence of the "truths of the faith" and "good teaching" ["good doctrine" in the KJV]. Before a minister can teach he must be willing to be taught. He must have a learner's spirit.

Barclay says it well (96), "No man can give out without taking in. He who would teach must be continually learning. It is the reverse of the truth that when a man becomes a teacher he ceases to be a learner; he must daily know Jesus Christ better before he can bring him to others."

That's true whether you are a pastor, a Sunday School teacher, a youth worker, a parent, a grandparent, or whatever. If you want to please God in teaching those under your care, you must resolve to be a learner, to be grounded in the Word.

Yet this is no mere academic exercise as the last phrase of verse 6 indicates. "That you have followed" ["attained" in the KJV] contains a word which means "to investigate, to follow closely." A good minister has more than "book knowledge." He not only investigates truth, but he implements truth--in his own life.

I should point out at this point that the word "minister" in verse 6 is *diakonos*, the same word translated "deacon" in chapter 3. But here it's not used in the technical sense of a particular office, but in a general way for anyone who "serves" in any ministry on Christ's behalf (MacArthur, 158).

This applies to you. If you want to be a good minister of Christ, here's what you must do. Resolve to make the Word of God the center of your life. Ground yourself in it and give it to others. According to God's standard, a good minister reminds.

B. A good minister resists (7a). "Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales." This is a command: "Have nothing to do with (NIV)!" "Refuse (KJV)!" Literally, "Beg off!"

Here's the flip side of a Word-centered ministry: avoiding false teaching. A good minister reminds people of God's Word, but to do so he must resist all potential substitutes.

Many have abandoned a Word-centered approach to ministry in our day. Oh, they *use* the Bible, but it's on the peripheral, not at the center. What accounts for this neglect?

In his book, *The Trivialization of God*, Donald McCullough offers this perspective (124): "Many factors undoubtedly have contributed to this neglect of Scripture. One, surely, is the advent of the information age and its consequent diminution of the significance of books. Another may be the growing dominance of the visual. We live in the video age, of course, and as Neil Postman has convincingly shown in *Amusing*

Ourselves to Death, this has profoundly altered not only what we think but the way we think. We no longer think linearly (sentence by sentence, idea by idea); instead, we experience reality as a kind of impressionable collage. So we are less inclined than ever to do the hard work of study. The Bible, when read, is rarely grappled with on its own terms in an effort to understand what it has to say; more often, it's approached as a kind of spiritual collage, as a suggestive resource to stimulate our own ideas or as a springboard for sharing personal experiences with one another."

Is he right? How else can you account for the fact that, according to one survey, about three-quarters of Americans say they have made a commitment to Jesus Christ, and yet only 13% believe the Ten Commandments are binding? McCullough concludes, "For all the warm feelings people have toward Christianity, apparently not many people pay attention to God's Word. The consequence is cafeteria-style religion, a do-your-own-thing spirituality that inevitably trivializes God to fit the contours of individual taste."

A good minister *resists*. What does that mean practically? According to verse 7, two things...

1. *He's not impressed by man's ideas.* In Timothy's case the potential distraction came in the form of "godless myths and old wives tales. What's that? The phrase probably refers to the "myths and endless genealogies" mentioned in 1:4. There were actually people in the Ephesian church who were teaching fanciful, man-made stories that used a biblical truth and embellished it with extra-biblical imagination. In chapter one, Paul told Timothy to silence these false teachers (1:3). Now in chapter four, he goes a step further and warns Timothy to stay clear of their teaching. Have nothing to do with it!

What exactly, though, is the "it" we're to resist? Paul calls them "myths" ["fables," KJV]. Man crafted stories and ideas. What kind of man-crafted ideas? They are "godless" ["profane," KJV]--they don't come from God--and are "old wives tales."

In that day, women were not usually allowed the educational opportunities afforded to men. Commentator J. N. D. Kelly says that this phrase was a sarcastic epithet frequently used to refer to someone with "limitless credulity" (that is, very gullible). What the apostates were teaching in Ephesus was the kind of teaching that's fit only "for superstitious old women." Moffatt paraphrases it as "driveling myths."

A good minister resists. He's not impressed by man's ideas. Why? Because #2...

2. *He knows he possesses something far better.* What's that? God's Word! Let that sink in. We have a Book that comes from Someone who knows everything there is to know about everything we need to know. And He has told us everything we need to know about life and godliness in this Book! That's amazing!

Yet here's what sad. Many ministers in many churches would say they agree with what I just said. Yet when they speak, they spend so much time talking about other things that when they do mention biblical truth it gets lost in the clutter. Preachers who preach "skyscraper" sermons--one story on top of another. Sunday School teachers who present psychologized lessons sprinkled with Bible verses.

But not the good minister. He's not impressed by man's ideas, for he knows he has something better.

The American church stands in need of reformation--not just revival, but true reformation like the one that shook the world nearly 500 years ago. What will it take for such reformation to occur?

Gerhard Ebeling, in a lecture on Martin Luther delivered to all the faculties of the University of Zurich, asked, "Why did Luther's Reformation, in contrast to all prior attempts at reformation, become a reformation in deed and not just in words?" His

provocative answer was, "Luther's Reformation became a reformation in deed and not just in words because Luther trusted only in the Word and not at all in deeds."¹

C. A good minister resolves to be godly (7b-8). "Rather, train yourself to be godly." The Greek term for "train" comes from *gumnazo*. It speaks of rigorous, strenuous work, the kind that an athlete in training exhibits.

But it's what a good minister does. Timothy was to exert himself--the emphatic pronoun indicates it won't happen by itself. It takes hard work to be godly.

Don't misunderstand. Salvation is a free gift. We don't work for it. We could not be godly were it not for the work God did for us. What work?

Jesus lived a perfect life--so we could be godly. At the cross, Jesus gave His perfect life to pay for our sins--so sinners like us could be godly. Then He rose again--so now through Him we have the power to be godly. We don't earn godliness, we receive it.

But godliness isn't passive. Yes, we're saved by grace the moment we believe in Jesus Christ. But we also live by grace. Titus 2:11-12 explains, "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and *godly* lives..."

So to be a good minister you must resolve to be godly. And verse 8 gives two reasons why we should.

1. *Physical training has limited value.* The KJV puts it this way, "For bodily exercise profiteth little." Again Paul uses the Greek *gymnasia*. Training in the gym has some value.²

Remember Paul had spent three years in Ephesus. He knew that there was a great coliseum there where Olympic games were held at times. The stadium held 100,000 people. He knew the Ephesus was fascinated by games, by athletics. So is America.

You can go to city after city in America and find huge stadiums full of people on the weekends. And nearly every smaller town has a ball park or an athletic field. Not to mention health clubs and racquet courts and the rest. Yes, we are a sports crazed nation.

J. Vernon McGee steps on our toes--but isn't he right?--when he remarks, "Many believers put more emphasis on athletics than they do on the things of God. There are church officers who spend more time during the summer in the ball park than they spend in prayer meetings. Paul is not saying that bodily exercise is wrong. He is saying, 'Let's hold things in correct perspective.'"

Paul knew about exercise. He traveled the Roman Empire at least three times--on foot much of the way. I remind you that he didn't have a car. Once and awhile he took a ship, but most of the time he *walked*. He walked literally hundreds, if not thousands of miles. No, he's not downgrading exercise. Our body is the temple of the Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). Physical training has some value. But...

2. *Godliness has eternal value.* Notice again the contrast in verse 8, "For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come."

It just doesn't make sense to invest your attention on the temporal and ignore the eternal. It would be like washing paper plates. What's the point? It's just as foolish to treat this body as if it was going to last forever and ignore the part of you that will.

I like sports. I learned a lot from sports.

¹Donald McCullough, *The Trivialization of God*, p. 124.

²Barclay observes (96-7), "In the ancient world, especially in Greece, the gymnasia were dangerous places. Every town had its gymnasium; for the Greek youth between the ages of sixteen and eighteen, gymnastics were the main part of education. But the ancient world was riddled with homosexuality and the gymnasia were notorious as hotbeds of that particular sin."

Some of our young people here today play sports. Some are in the band. Some take piano lessons or some other instrument. In all cases, what does it take to excel? Practice, practice, practice. The difference between a mediocre and an excellent participant, for the most part, is determined by his or her willingness to work at it. It takes discipline.

It's no different when it comes to godliness. But the stakes are higher. Godliness doesn't just happen. It takes a willingness to do spiritual exercises: like Bible reading, Bible study, prayer, self-examination, consistency participation in church, service, fellowship, and witness. As we do these spiritual exercises, the Spirit of God uses them to help us become more godly.

There is no shortcut to godliness. To train the body is fine. To train the soul is excellent.

William Tyndale, the Bible translator and reformer God used so significantly in the 16th century, knew about the importance of training the soul. Just before he was martyred, while in prison, he wrote a letter to the governor-in-chief asking for "a warmer cap, a candle, a piece of cloth to patch my leggings. . . . But above all, I beseech and entreat your clemency to be urgent with the Procureur that he may kindly permit me to have my Hebrew Bible, Hebrew Grammar and Hebrew Dictionary, that I may spend time with that in study."³

Do you want to be a good minister? You can be. There's nothing magical about it. Resolve, like Tyndale, to have a Word-centered life and ministry. Which leads to a second, related goal which Paul develops in verses 9-10.

II. Have a God-centered ministry (9-10).

Indeed, if you have a Word-centered ministry you will have a God-centered ministry. Like Paul did. You say, "What do you mean by a 'God-centered ministry'?" Paul mentions three characteristics of a God-centered ministry in verses 9-10.

A. It submits to God's truth (9). "This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance." The question commentators scratch their heads over is what Paul means when he says "*This* is a trustworthy saying." What saying? Some say he's talking about what he just said in verse 8; others believe it refers to what he's about to say about God in verse 10. I prefer the latter, but regardless what stands out is that a God-centered ministry is one that submits to God's truth. And why would we do that? Notice two traits of the Word.

1. *It's reliable.* "This is a *trustworthy* saying," meaning "faithful" or "reliable" (*pistos*). Paul reminds Timothy, "You can depend on what I'm saying. It's God's truth."

2. *It's worthy of our attention.* It "deserves full acceptance," or "approval." If I give you my opinion, you can take it or leave it. Not so God's Word. A God-centered ministry is one that submits to God's truth.

B. It appreciates God's work (10a). "And for this we labor and strive." Paul uses two verbs that communicate intense, physical exertion. "For this"--for the God-given, trustworthy saying. For this we *labor* (*kopiomen*--it means to toil to the point of exhaustion; elsewhere it is used to depict the backbreaking physical energy Paul invested in tent making; see Acts 20:35; 1 Cor. 4:12). Paul uses the same word in Colossians 1:29, "To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me."

³Cited in Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, 148.

For this we labor and *strive* ["suffer reproach," KJV]--from the Greek word *agonizomai* from which we get the English word "agony." Which indicates that ministry is not easy. In fact, at times it's down right *agonizing*. It takes all you've got, plus some.

But you don't hear an ounce of regret in Paul's words here. Yes, it's hard work, but it's a good work (see 1 Tim. 3:1). There's no room for complaining. And a good minister who has a God-centered ministry is one who appreciates God's work.

C. It magnifies God's reputation (10b). "That we have put our hope in the living God who is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe." A God-centered ministry is preoccupied with God, not man. It strives to advance God's reputation, not man's. We want the world to know the truth about God, namely two things.

1. *He is the living God.* We've put our hope in the *living* God. Secondly...

2. *He is the saving God.* He is "the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe." Which raises a question. How is He the Savior of all men when all are not saved? The text doesn't say He offers salvation to all--though other texts do (Rom. 10:13). It says He *is* the Savior of all men. What does Paul mean?

I think the "all" is in response to the exclusivistic false teachers in Ephesus. They had the narrow attitude that only a few qualified for the offer of salvation. Is that true? No, the Living God is the Savior of all men, that is, in all the world with all types of people, He's the only Savior.

But who benefits? Those who *believe*.⁴ So if we want to have a God-centered ministry, we must submit to God's truth, appreciate God's work, and magnify God's reputation.

Like Julius Hickerson did. Does that name mean anything to you? Probably not. Hickerson was a promising young doctor who could have enjoyed a comfortable life in the United States, but he felt God's call to serve as a missionary in Columbia. He wanted to minister to souls as well as bodies. Here's what happened (as told by Donald McCullough, 124-5):

"His friends and associates thought he was crazy, and he himself must have wondered when, after two years, he could point to few visible results of his labor. It ended in tragedy as he was killed in a plane crash attempting to take supplies to a remote village."

"But in the wreckage some natives found a well-marked Bible in their language, and they began to read it. They told others what they had read, and before long churches were started. The Southern Baptists, unaware of what had taken place, sent a missionary back into the area, and he discovered the place fully evangelized. When the missionary asked how it had happened, the Colombians showed him a Bible. On the inside of the cover was a name--Julius Hickerson."

That's why we're committed to a Word-centered, God-centered ministry.

Implications: What does this teach us about God?

1. *The way we do ministry matters to God.* The way we minister in our homes, at our jobs, at school, and in our church--let's purpose to have a Word-centered, God-centered ministry. If we do, we will be *good ministers*. And God will be pleased.

2. *Godliness matters to God. Does it to you?*

⁴MacArthur offers another perspective by suggesting the word Savior is used in the Bible in both a temporal and eternal sense. In the temporal sense, God is the Savior of all men, for even unregenerate people experience to some degree the protecting, delivering, and sustaining power of God. But only believers experience His eternal salvation (p. 168).