

THE IMPERATIVES OF MINISTERIAL ETHICS

FROM THE LETTERS TO TIMOTHY

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When Jesus uttered his final earthly words, also known as the Great Commission, He had 11 faithful men who would initiate this part of His mission, with the power of the Holy Spirit.

In order for churches to have confidence in the ministers who graduate from our seminaries, it is more important than ever that we train them to obey the teachings of Jesus rather than be encumbered with secular camouflage. We can teach them church history and we can teach them ethics in general, but unless we teach them what is demanded of each minister from a moral perspective, we will have created a purely academic clergy that has no idea how to live righteously, much less how to train new disciples how to obey Christ's commands. Couple this with the postmodern church's pattern for ordaining untrained men for pastoral leadership, and the result imitates the blind leading the blind.

In Paul's epistles to Timothy, the issue of training his young pastor friend to train new converts is in the forefront of the apostle's intentions. These two letters are replete with present active imperative verbs intended to communicate clearly the mentor's instructions for his timid pupil. From these words, a body of work can easily be extracted that would formulate specific didactic material to better prepare young seminary graduates on how to avoid the temptations that await them. This paper is intended to briefly organize Paul's imperatives into a foundation for a system of ministerial ethics

which could hopefully become required seminary education.

Arguably, at no other time in American church history has society seen the moral failures of ministers as it does today. Detailing these events would be nauseating and impossible. Most recently, a Fort Worth church leader (not a licensed or ordained minister) was sentenced to 20 years in prison for a four-year sexual relationship with a 14-year old girl,¹ and the pastor of a Baptist church in Missouri received the same sentence for charges that included statutory sodomy, furnishing liquor and pornography to minors, and other sexual issues regarding children under 14 years old.² Closer to home, a former Southwestern Seminary professor was asked to resign as pastor of a Mid-Cities church when auditors uncovered some ethical failures involving real estate purchases through a church member.³

Judging from the contemporary media's apparent delight at publicizing ethical failures of Christian ministers, it is more important than ever that church leaders take up the armor of God in order to extinguish the flaming arrows of the evil one (Eph. 6:13-16; All biblical references are taken from the updated version of the NAS). Since these three instances are simply the tip of the proverbial iceberg, it becomes incumbent upon the

¹ Debra Dennis, "Former Teacher Sentenced To 20 Years For Sex With Student," *The Dallas Morning News*, <http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/dn/latestnews/stories/042007/> (accessed April 21, 2007).

² Hannah Elliott, "Missouri Baptist Pastor Sentenced To 20 Years For Child Sex-abuse," *Abp News*, <http://www.abpnews.com/1628.article.print/> (accessed April 21, 2007).

³ Hannah Elliott, "Ethicists Say Colleyville Pastor's Real Estate Deal Crossed Line," *The Baptist Standard*, <http://www.baptiststandard.com/postnuke/index.php?module=htmlpages&func=display/> (accessed April 23, 2007).

church and seminaries to begin more preventive procedures against these ethical failures for ministers. It is the contention of this paper that extensive biblical education regarding moral responsibilities of the minister is simply the foundation from which to build.

It is important to list the potential traps that await ministers, but would not be possible to complete. Paul's words to Timothy deal with general and specific issues, offer exhortation and encouragement, and deal as much with the kind of character Timothy should hope to develop, as well as describe forbidden fruit, most of which would have been obvious from other accounts in Scripture. Timothy also received practical advice in church administration and in teaching, each of which carries its own set of moral issues.

This paper will examine selected imperative verbs directly locatable in the Greek text, and it will also inspect certain indirect imperatives, most of which are identifiable through the English words such as "must," or "should." Imperatives, either direct or indirect, which are aimed specifically at Timothy and accomplishable only in his immediate setting (2 Tim. 4:13...bring ...especially the parchments), will not be studied for this purpose. Finally, the scope of this work will not permit an exhaustive study of the imperative verbs located in Paul's Pastoral Epistles, so the primary emphasis of this paper will be on the commands that have primary application for the minister in the 21st Century. For the sake of clarity, all biblical references will be in bold face, but the references where the command is implied and not inherent in the construction of the word will be underlined as well. At the same time, it should be noted that the category of Pastoral Epistles includes the letter to Titus, which will be unfortunately ignored here.

PASTORAL QUALITIES

In examining the genre of the Pastoral Epistles as letters of moral exhortation,

Mark Harding notes, "...Paul saw himself and was perceived by his contemporaries as a type of moral philosopher engaged in the practice of psychagogy or pastoral care. The Pastorals continue and enhance this picture of Paul."⁴

Having said that about the human author of these works, it may be prudent to note that Paul's list of required qualities for a pastor could be enhanced greatly in a different forum. However, in this context, they will serve only to establish a foundation from which the remainder of the project may be built.

***1 Timothy 3:1** It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. **2** An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, **3** not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. **4** He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity **5** (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?), **6** and not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. **7** And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.*

In a book written to his own son named Timothy, who is in the ministry (not referring to the Pastoral Epistles), John Bisagno concludes, "Keep your word, keep pure, stay on your knees, and do what you say you'll do. If you don't, apologize, explain, and ask forgiveness. Above all, be open, transparent, and honest. Integrity is the rudder that guides the ship of successful ministry."⁵

John MacArthur says, "...Paul lists four areas in which a man aspiring to church leadership may be evaluated as to whether he is above reproach. These have to do with

⁴ Mark Harding, *What Are They Saying about the Pastoral Epistles* (New York: Paulist Press, 2001), 75.

⁵ John R. Bisagno, *Letters to Timothy: A Handbook for Pastors* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2001), 43.

his moral character, home life, spiritual maturity, and public reputation.”⁶

Moral character is initially described through the minister’s marriage. Context appears to dictate that the apostle is not referring to how many divorces a man may have had, but rather his faithfulness to his wife. Often ministers are completely innocent, yet are asked for divorce. Many men may have only been married once, but could not be considered faithful, either through actual, literal adultery, or through pornographic or some other fantasy-based affair. As indicated in the introduction, sexual sins are the primary trap that causes ministers to stumble and ministries to crumble as a result. Unlike financial indiscretion, sexual error is one that carries a social scar that never fades.

Ministers must be easy to get along with, both in and out of the home. From the text it appears fairly obvious that ministers should avoid alcohol, likely due to the fighting attitude that often accompanies strong drink. Since hospitality is commanded in many other scriptural locations, it seems to be easily understood in this context.

Spiritually mature ministers have control over their emotions. They are not encumbered by the world’s issues, and prefer not to dwell on issues that are not described as true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, of good reputation, excellent, or praiseworthy (Phil. 4:8).

Public reputation is vital for the minister. Not only should he be free of the blatant sin that forfeits his ministry, he should also have a reputation in the community for preaching the Bible without compromise, and treating others in a Christlike manner.

Tony Cupit notes that “A high degree of ethical sensitivity must mark Christian ministers. They must be men and women of utmost integrity. Their word must be their

⁶ John F. MacArthur., *1 Timothy* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 104.

bond. They must be scrupulously honest in meeting all obligations and prompt in paying bills. Debts to persons within the congregation should be avoided.”⁷

Taking care of the household duties as priorities is seen by Dietrich Bonhoeffer as obeying the divine call when he said, “No one can fail to hear the Bible’s admonitions to ...discharge one’s domestic obligations before undertaking greater duties...Yet all these admonitions are contingent on the call of Christ, and they do not, therefore, imply any law which sets limits to the free responsibility towards this call.”⁸

PURSUING AND FLEEING

The two aforementioned traps of sexual and financial misconduct could, by themselves, provide ample material for a separate topic. However, Paul is clear that Timothy was to run away from certain things and to run toward other things. A gross oversimplification of this idea is to flee from sin and pursue righteousness, though other details are clearly involved. The following verses show a distinct blend of both notions of pursuing and fleeing, but brief examinations will occur discussing certain things to be pursued and to avoid. The importance of this section for ministerial ethics cannot be overstated.

1 Timothy 6:11 *But flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness.*

“These things” follow a brief look from the apostle at the love of money and a lack of contentment, both of which are direct results of inadequate faith in God’s

⁷ Tony Cupit, *Above Reproach: A Guide to the Professional Standards and Ethics of the Baptist Minister Today* (Hawthorn, Australia: Baptist Union of Victoria, 1982), 8.

⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, trans. Neville Horton Smith (New York: Touchstone, 1955), 256.

provision. Paul had just told Timothy that financial matters carry with them the potential for spiritual potholes along the interstate of righteousness, and those potholes should be expeditiously avoided and not merely ignored.

While perseverance will be dealt with below, righteousness (*dikaiousu,nhn*) is not strictly being made righteous by the blood of Christ. The Encyclopedia of Biblical Ethics says, “Paul ...uses these words predominantly, and he does so in a way that brings together the ethical and salvational elements ...once a man is reconciled to God, a new life is required of him, in which he embraces the ethics of Christ.”⁹ Righteousness in this passage refers to walking in a pattern of spiritual growth toward maturity. Godliness (*euvse,beian*) refers to a lifestyle that syncs with the character and nature of God. Faith (*pi,stin*) indicates that we must be able to trust God for all that we need, and all that we do, and supports the exhortation to avoid greed. Love (*avga,phn*) means that everything we do must exhibit a love of God and a love of others. Gentleness is often translated meekness, (*praupaqi,an*) but should never be viewed as weakness, but rather selflessness, which is anything but weakness.

2 Timothy 2:22 *Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.*

To further understand the power behind the word “flee,” (*feu/ge*) it helps to see that our word “fugitive” is derived from it. Therefore, Paul’s command to flee is not an occasional sprint, but a continual, desperate attempt to avoid being overtaken by encroaching sin.

Paul is ambiguous about “youthful lusts” (*newterika,j evpiqumi,aj*) here, which

⁹ G.L. Carey, *The Encyclopedia of Biblical Ethics*, ed. R.K Harrison (New

should indicate that he felt Timothy and anyone else might understand his point without requiring precision. This is the only location in the New Testament where this adjective for “youthful” is used, and it really does not funnel the exact meaning.

In addressing this point, Phillip Towner states, “...sexual lust does not seem to be the focus, and the plurality of the whole construction suggests a broad pattern of behavior than a particular weakness...the context suggests that those related to argument and abrupt innovation would be uppermost in mind.”¹⁰ Towner appears to be tying verse 22 to verse 23, but the “but” that begins verse 23 seems to prohibit that exact conclusion. MacArthur agrees, stating, “These lusts involve much more than sinful sexual desire. They also include pride, craving for wealth and power, inordinate ambition, jealousy, envy, an argumentative and self-assertive spirit, and many other sinful lusts.”¹¹

2 Timothy 3:1 *But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. 2 For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, 4 treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5 holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these.*

The imperative in this section is not apparent until the word “avoid” (avpotre,pou). Paul is clear that as time goes by, the condition of man will only worsen. Here is a brief examination of his list.

York: Testament Books, 2003), 358.

¹⁰ Philip H. Towner, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. Gordon D. Fee, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2006), 544.

¹¹ John F. MacArthur, *2 Timothy* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 93.

Lovers of self and lovers of money come from times when people direct their affections toward themselves and materialism instead of God. Consequently, there is no love to direct toward others.

Proud (boastful, arrogant) hearts generally reveal themselves through selfishness. The word “boastful” (avlazo,nej) literally means “imposter,” and therefore fraudulent. The word translated “arrogant” (u`perh,fanoi) means “showing oneself above others.” People are thus shown to have over-inflated self-values and they look down their noses at other people. “Revilers” (bla,sfhmoi) is obviously almost exactly our word “blasphemer.” It may be better translated “slanderer,” than “reviler.” “Disobedient to parents” (avpeiqi/j) is not necessarily “disobedient,” in our sense of the word, but actually translates “uncaring.”

The description of “ungrateful” (avca,ristoi) is quite accurate. Someone who would classify themselves as “self-made” means they give no credit to anyone else, especially God. “Unholy” (avno,sioi) is literally “un-pious,” but since that is not a recognizable word, “unholy” is chosen. If we set God aside, we follow our own natural devices, and it is impossible to please God when we follow the leading of our flesh.

Someone who is unloving (a;storgoi) in Greek means “without normal human affection. This is the third word for “love” used in the New Testament. It is also used in Rom. 1:31 to describe people who resist God and follow their sinful flesh. People who are irreconcilable (a;spondoi) are “without truce.” Forgiveness is not a uniquely Christian concept, but forgiveness is not an option for the believer. “Malicious gossips,” people who slander other people, are characterized by the same word (dia,boloi) as the devil, who is the accuser of Christians. Destroying reputations gives perverted pleasure to

certain people. “Without self-control” (avkratei/j) literally means “powerless.” People who cannot put restraints on themselves of any type become thoroughly and shamelessly immoral. “Brutal” (avnh,meroi) refers to someone who is “not tame.” Some people can be cruel and savage like wild animals. They are generally crude and insensitive, and care only about personal power or physical desires. They could not care less if they inflict damage on other people. “Haters of good” (avfila,gaqoi) is a compound word describing people who despise others who are characterized as moral or upright. “Traacherous” (prodo,tai) means “traitor,” or “one who betrays.” When betrayal is combined with slander, truth is trashed. The word for “reckless” (propetei/j) reflects an attitude that absolutely must have its own way. “Conceited” (tetufwme,noi) is the perfect passive participle of the word from which we get “typhoon,” and is used several times in these two letters in one form or another. One can express extensive self-love and still conceal it somewhat. At this point, it has become evident. As the list ends with “lovers of pleasure,” (filh,donoi) it returns to its beginning, describing those who are self-occupied. The godly minister should be focused on God and then those to whom he is called to minister.

Paul’s list thus implies that these are qualities not to be found in ministers. They may or may not be part of his intent behind “youthful lusts,” but they are to be avoided by the man of God like someone desperately running from peril.

PROPER DISCERNMENT

These epistles to Timothy find the apostle warning his timid friend about false teachers, just like virtually all of the apostle’s works. Clearly, the minister is morally compelled to understand the truth of the gospel and to be able to discern error which may

be presented in different venues to his flock. Ministers who intentionally (or not) dilute or rearrange the word of God to elicit financial prosperity or garner undeserved power should be considered ethically compromised.

1 Timothy 4:7 *But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness;*

MacArthur says, “Every elder is required to be skilled in teaching truth and able to refute unsound doctrine. As a pastor, I am constantly aware of this responsibility. Everything I read...goes through a grid of discrimination in my mind...My passion is to know the truth and proclaim it with authority.”¹²

Joe Trull takes the issue from theory to practice by saying, “No real Christian ministry can exist without the ability to discern the truth. Prudence is (Karen) Lebacqz’s word for it. This virtue helps a minister perceive what is required in any situation. Prudence, or discernment, is the ability to make right decisions and thus is central to ethical decision making.”¹³

2 Timothy 2:23 *But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels.*

In discussing judging doctrine, Erwin Lutzer writes, “Discerning Christians will test teachers, prophets, and evangelists by the clarity with which they preach the gospel of the Cross. And if the gospel is distorted or ignored, we can be quite sure that we have encountered a teacher who is not to be followed. For only the Cross, properly understood,

¹² John F. MacArthur, *Fool's Gold: Discerning Truth in an Age of Error* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005), 23.

¹³ Joe E. Trull and James E. Carter, *Ministerial Ethics: Moral Formation for Church Leaders* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 50.

can take us home to the Father.”¹⁴

PULPIT RESPONSIBILITIES

Not only is a minister an ethical failure if he ignores or even brings heresy from the pulpit, but Paul is clear in giving Timothy a moral challenge to rightly divide the word of God to his church. In today’s world of entertaining and encouraging sermons, usually dealing more with the natural realm than the supernatural, true exegetical, expository preachers are hard to find. Paul didn’t challenge Timothy to market his church, but simply to “preach the word.” With church members confused with an onslaught of “psychobabble,” biblical illiteracy at an all-time high, and spiritual and ethical messages of relativism from high profile people like Hillary Clinton and Oprah Winfrey, the importance of responsible biblical preaching is paramount.

In a letter to a composite young pastor named “Timothy,” Roger Ellsworth writes, “The sermons we preach must not merely use the Bible as a springboard... Our sermons must seek to lay before our people the message that God Himself intended when He inspired the authors of Scripture. As God gives us light and ability to discern His Word, it is our responsibility to draw out and expound the truth of the text.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Erwin W. Lutzer, *Who Are You to Judge: Learning to Distinguish between Truths, Half-Truths, and Lies* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2002), 81.

¹⁵ Roger Ellsworth, *Dear Timothy: Letters on Pastoral Ministry*, ed. Thomas K. Ascol (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2004), 272.

1 Timothy 4:13 *Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching. 14 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.*

Ramesh Richard sees the connection between expository preaching and ministerial ethics as he defines his topic by saying, “Expository preaching is the contemporization of the central proposition of a biblical text that is derived from proper methods of interpretation and declared through effective means of communication to inform minds, instruct hearts, and influence behavior toward godliness.”¹⁶

Ronnie Floyd urges ministers much in the same fashion that Paul did with Timothy, saying, “God has bestowed upon you spiritual gifts. Ensure those gifts are being exercised where you are serving. If not, the trap will bite you. You will begin to identify your worth with your performance or on what you do, forgetting you are in Jesus Christ and what He has gifted you to do.”¹⁷

1 Timothy 4:15 *Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress will be evident to all. 16 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.*

“These things” refer back to the use of spiritual gifts, especially in preaching. George Barna indicts the modern minister by writing, “Our research shows that a majority of those who attend worship services in any given week (more than three-quarters of adults in attendance) do not experience the presence of God during

¹⁶ Ramesh Richard, *Scripture Sculpture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 17.

¹⁷ Ronnie Floyd, *10 Things Every Minister Needs to Know* (Green Forest, AR: New Leaf Press, 2006), 39.

worship.”¹⁸ Barna does not necessarily conclude a connection to ineffective preaching at this point, but such a result certainly seems implied.

Exhortation and teaching and all the private preparation that go into them are still important today. When we teach expositionally, we employ the same tactics as the early Christians. Scripture would be read, and then a clarification would follow. The greatest difference is they were never bound by time. There were no crowds to beat at local restaurants. Brains weren't pre-programmed by television to shut down after 30 minutes.

Exhortation is more of a challenge to obey and apply what has been taught. The two go hand-in-hand. Exhortation may be counsel, rebuke, or comfort. If, in counseling, someone only hears what she wants to hear, she would not have needed counseling in the first place. It remains unfortunate when the church people get mad when ministers give them biblical counseling that binds their conscience. Nobody likes to be corrected, even when it may be beneficial!

***1 Timothy 6:17** Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. **18** Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, **19** storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed.*

Once again we hear the apostle warning his young pastor friend about the over-importance of finances, even in the mind of the believer. Paul knew it would not be easy for rich people to depend on God, so their faith could not be exercised. Not only was he aware of their traps and inability to bring true contentment, he wanted Timothy to teach the rich people about the ethical responsibilities of finances. Sharing their resources

¹⁸ George Barna and Mark Hatch, *Boiling Point: It Only Takes One Degree* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2001), 254.

with people in need is not something that comes naturally to wealthy people. This type of sharing is a supernatural response.

Due to the overwhelming success of modern “Word-Faith” preachers such as Joyce Meyer, Kenneth Copeland, and Joel Osteen, who unashamedly teach a gospel of prosperity, many mainstream evangelical pastors have begun to sacrifice straightforward expository preaching in favor of more popular sermons. Evangelical messages seem now aimed more at growing the church numerically than spiritually with a focus that is farther from expository in nature, yet less inclined toward God’s obligation to return fully-developed “seed money” to people who give to those ministries.

2 Timothy 1:13 *Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. 14 Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you.*

Paul’s telling Timothy to imitate him or to parrot the things that he has been teaching. Paul wants Timothy to stay consistent with Paul’s teachings, because they came straight from heaven. If Timothy would follow Paul’s outline, he would stay in line with the truth. Paul was concerned both for the proper teaching of the gospel and the preservation of its content. We can reach people through their felt needs, but we must not dilute the truth of Scripture or its contents in order to meet people’s needs. Even when the gospel doesn’t feel good, we still must preach it.

2 Timothy 2:2 *The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.*

John Piper restates and comments, “...the writings of the apostles-especially the hard ones-unleash generation after generation of education. Education...is helping people learn how to get an understanding that they didn’t already have. Education is cultivating

the life of the mind so that it knows how to grow in true understanding.”¹⁹ An ethically responsible minister will teach truth to faithful men who can carry the baton to future generations in order to perpetuate the faith.

2 Timothy 2:14 *Remind them of these things, and solemnly charge them in the presence of God not to wrangle about words, which is useless and leads to the ruin of the hearers.*

Most doctrinal differences arise during “wrangling about words,” which is another way to describe interpretational problems. An authoritative pastor, standing on the power of Scripture, can skillfully preach in such a way as to correct doctrinal error and confusion. Millard Erickson and James Heflin write, “We must be prepared, in dealing with didactic passages that are primarily ethical, to distill the doctrinal elements from these passages and utilize them in constructing our own doctrine, which will...be the basis for our ethical teaching and preaching in the present time.”²⁰

2 Timothy 2:15 *Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth. 16 But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness, 17 and their talk will spread like gangrene.*

“Diligent” (spoudason) carries the idea of being ethically zealous. It presents a stark contrast to false teachers. Not everyone who teaches from the Bible teaches it accurately. False teachers today are prospering because the church does not know the Bible well enough to be able to discern truth. We are called to dissect (accurately handle) Scripture with skill and precision as we present it to people in our churches. When we look closer at this verse, a sobering thought comes to mind. Students may be able to

¹⁹ John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1990), 41.

²⁰ Millard J. Erickson and James L. Heflin, *Old Wine in New Wineskins: Doctrinal Preaching in a Changing World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 102.

receive seminary diplomas and thus be considered approved workmen, but Paul's words call for being approved by the Author of Scripture. Passing God's inspection carries a much more stringent approach than would be initially conceived.

Where heresy exists, sin is often tolerated. Where grace is cheapened, moderation becomes excess. Liberty becomes license. The technological advances of television and the internet have helped broadcast the faith all across the globe and have helped get the gospel into areas where it had been forbidden in the past, but the same can be said about modern heresies. In fact, the prince of the earth seems to ensure the advancement of the exposure of these lies to people everywhere.

2 Timothy 4:1 *I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: 2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.*

Piper says, "When these kinds of things (cultural moral relativism) take root, the Bible will be silenced in the church, and preaching will become a reflection of current issues and religious opinions. Surely this is not what Paul meant...All Christian preaching should be the exposition and application of biblical texts."²¹

PROPER RESPECT AND EXAMPLE

The apostle challenges Timothy to lead an exemplary life for his church in five areas: speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity. Despite his evident lack of experience, young Timothy would still, by the power of the Holy Spirit, be able to live lovingly and ethically in order to model the gospel for his church. In order to win the respect of

²¹ John Piper, *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals: A Plea to Pastors for Radical Ministry* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2002), 100.

quarrelsome church members, he must first demonstrate love, and make sure his actions were morally above reproach. Perhaps at that point, the congregation would be able to respond to the young minister in a similar fashion, and the witness of the church would be sound.

1 Timothy 4:12 *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.*

Referring to this verse and to the need to import a set of core values into the Christian ministry, Aubrey Malphurs observes, “Leaders shape people’s values, and they directly instill those values best through what they do more than through what they say. If their behavior is consistent with their values, they infuse their leadership with large doses of credibility. If...their walk does not match their talk...followers will view them as hypocrites and they will lose all credibility.”²²

Clark Hensley says, “There should be respect for differences, including differences of opinion-especially when their opinion differs from that of the pastor. The pastor ought to like everybody. This is most difficult for many to do. I used to ask, ‘What is it in that person that causes me not to like him?’ Now I ask, ‘What is it in me that causes me not to like him?’”²³

1 Timothy 5:1 *Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but rather appeal to him as a father, to the younger men as brothers, 2 the older women as mothers, and the younger women as sisters, in all purity.*

Like their congregations, relatively few (though rising steadily) ministers fall into

²² Aubrey Malphurs, *Values-Driven Leadership: Discovering and Developing Your Core Values for Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 24.

²³ J. Clark Hensley, *Preacher Behave!: Pointers on Ministerial Ethics* (Jackson, MS: C&S Printing Co,), 42.

the traps of murder or sexual or financial misconduct. Most of our ethical failures involve our thoughts and words. No one is to be rebuked sharply, except someone committing heresy. In the church, when someone much older or much younger is out of line, we are to gently and submissively exhort them just like we would someone in our own family. Biblical leadership should be characterized by attitudes of servanthood and gentleness. When someone is wrong, she should be gently told so. The church cannot be as guilty of enabling bad behavior as the world has become. If disagreements occur, they must be conducted without being disagreeable.

If we treat everyone the way we would want to be treated, we will find that we will be better respected, because we treat others with respect. Women were no longer to be treated like property. Women and men should both be treated with respect. If church leaders are to be above reproach, one of the simplest methods of achieving this is to treat everyone the same way we treat members of our families. How can ministers treat the women of the church with all purity? Today's minister simply must conquer this foe.

2 Timothy 2:7 Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

Scripture is foolishness to the unsaved. Similarly, understanding truth comes from God. Teachers can make certain things clear to you, but you also need to be able to discern truth. One of the reasons why the church falls for false doctrines is because we have programmed ourselves to trusting what we hear from a pulpit. We need to be able to trust the Holy Spirit to give us the ability to wrestle with what we hear and read, and be able to make proper decisions.

POWERFUL PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Paul is quick to encourage Timothy to spend time in prayer, and these commands

deal with relationships with other people rather than the divine one. The apostle's purpose is to lighten Timothy's disappointment with humanity, especially people in authority. Being jailed for preaching about Christ can easily create anger, and Paul is pointing Timothy around that. Jimmy Draper says, "It is easy to pray for our children, our friends, and those who love us, but it is difficult to pray for our enemies. To pray for those who oppose what we stand for is not natural. The Lord must be moving in our lives to enable us to pray for those who attack us."²⁴

1 Timothy 2:1 *First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men,² for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.*

John Calvin wrote of the primacy of intercession by praying, "First we have your commandment to pray for those whom You have established over us as rulers and governors, and then for all the needs of Your people, and indeed of all peoples."²⁵

PURITY OF CONSCIENCE

Obviously, guilt is married to ethical failure. When the Christian faith is boiled down to its essence, forgiveness remains. Sinners seek atonement, and find it from a gracious God. Similarly, Jesus commanded His followers to forgive people (Mark 11:25) who have offended them, in the same unconditional respect with which He forgave us. Therefore, forgiveness must be immediately accessible in the heart of the Christian. Paul understood that this concept of grace could be easily manipulated, so he mandated that believers should not continually sin in order to experience more grace (Rom. 6:1-4).

²⁴ James T. Draper, Jr., *Where Real Worship Begins: Lessons from the Life of Job* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, Inc, 1995), 165.

²⁵ John Calvin, *John Calvin: Writings on Pastoral Piety*, trans. Elsie Anne McKee (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2001), 127.

Ministers cannot achieve sinless perfection, but a clean conscience is the sign of someone who is walking in a fashion that pleases God. Clearly, one of Paul's purposes for these mandates is for Timothy to walk blamelessly in order to deter criticism of the young minister's character.

1 Timothy 1:5 *But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.*

1 Timothy 1:18 *This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you fight the good fight, 19 keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith.*

Towner sees these verses as quite complementary. He says, "...the posture of faith is closely aligned with the good conscience (e;cwn pi,stin kai. avgaqh.n sunei,dhsin) and appropriate conduct, as we see from the reference to Timothy's ministerial conduct in the preceding statement..."²⁶

PERFECT PRIDE

Throughout these letters, the conclusion may be clearly drawn that Timothy was struggling with many internal issues. Likely, he was dealing with frustration from having older believers being condescending with him, and the desires to leave the ministry. Heb. 13:23 indicates that Timothy had been released, and readers are left to conclude that the release was from prison. So, he knew more about suffering than modern readers acknowledge. Perhaps he was ashamed of being a minister, or at least being a run-over pastor. Paul's challenge in these verses is to welcome the suffering and not dread it. Just as in resisting temptation and flawlessly performing "oughtness," there is an ethical

²⁶ Philip H. Towner, *The Goal of Our Instruction: The Structure of Theology and Ethics* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1989), 157. *and Ethics* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1989), 157.

appeal to avoid griping and complaining during times of difficulty. Paul knew that God could not be glorified until all bitterness was removed, and a lack of shame replaced it.

2 Timothy 1:8 *Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, 9 who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, 10 but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, 11 for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher. 12 For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day.*

One of the most striking things in this verse is the omission of the tiny preposition “in.” Paul didn’t say he knew he believed in Jesus; he said he knows Jesus, in whom he believes. The difference is huge. Knowing Jesus implies a direct personal relationship. Knowing about Jesus implies little more than a religious concept.

PERSEVERING AND SUFFERING

Considerable pressure can be applied to the minister, both from the church and from outside. Although the 20th Century saw more Christians martyred than the previous 19 centuries combined, few American pastors will be killed at home. We really know little about Paul’s type of suffering unless we have served abroad. We can, however, know that the call is the same. To whatever extent we may be asked to suffer for the sake of the gospel, we should accept it as one would an invitation to a celebration. Ministers fail ethically when they compromise their callings in order to avoid difficulties. Ministers today should expect opposition as well as temptation, and, through the power of the Holy Spirit, may persevere in order that God may receive the glory through the ministers’ faithfulness.

1 Timothy 6:12 *Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.*

Oswald Sanders notes the connection between this verse and image of a soldier in the following one by noting, “It (avgwni,zou) describes a soldier battling for his life, or a man struggling to deliver his friends from danger (John 18:36). True prayer is a strenuous spiritual exercise that demands the utmost mental discipline and concentration.”²⁷

2 Timothy 1:8 *Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God,*

2 Timothy 2:3 *Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.*

2 Timothy 2:8 *Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel, **9** for which I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal; but the word of God is not imprisoned.*

Frank Matera writes, “In order to convince Timothy to adopt this pattern of behavior, Paul presents himself as a model of the conduct that he urges Timothy to adopt. Paul is already suffering, but he is not ashamed...Timothy is not to be ashamed of the testimony about the Lord, or Paul the Lord’s prisoner.”²⁸

2 Timothy 3:14 *You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, **15** and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*

Jerry Bridges refers to a faithful pursuit of holiness when he says, “You can readily see that this structured training in holiness is a lifelong process. So a necessary ingredient of discipline is perseverance.”²⁹

²⁷ J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership: Principles of Excellence for Every Believer* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 88.

²⁸ Frank J. Matera, *New Testament Ethics: The Legacies of Jesus and Paul* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 237.

²⁹ Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1996), 102.

2 Timothy 4:5 *But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.*

There are four imperatives in this verse. “Be sober” (nh/fe) literally means to abstain from wine, but context here requires a figurative interpretation geared more toward clear thinking than tee-totaling. “Enduring hardship” (kakopa,qhson) literally means to suffer evil. Suffering financial hardships and physical frailty are not in the same category as suffering evil for the sake of the cross. “Do the work of an evangelist” (e;rgon poi,hson euvaggelistou/) is a literal and straightforward translation of the third imperative. Technically, Paul never refers to Timothy as an apostle or an evangelist, but the responsibility of preaching salvation through Jesus was part of his mission, nevertheless. The final imperative in the passage is “fulfill your ministry.” The word “fulfill” (plhrofo,rhson) speaks of eagerly accomplishing a goal. MacArthur summarizes, “The apostle wanted Timothy also one day to be able to say what he himself was about to say: ‘I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith’ (2 Tim. 4:7).”³⁰

PROFITABLE GODLINESS

Paul’s command to Timothy here is to prescribe and teach the benefits of godliness, not only in the abundant life on earth, but also in the eternal life in heaven. His point is that our spiritual condition is more important than our physical condition. Ladies who are beautiful on the inside do not need to envy the supermodels of today, who are obsessed with their outward appearance. Similarly, there are many Christians today who spend more time in the gym than they do in Scripture, and they wonder why their lives

are bungled. Ministers especially need to stay involved in the disciplines of the Christian faith-Bible study, service, worship, prayer, and giving.

1 Timothy 4:8 *for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.*

1 Timothy 4:11 *Prescribe and teach these things.*

Certainly one must take care of the physical body, and the minister is equally susceptible to disregard in this area when he places his calling as the utmost priority.

Nolan Harmon echoes Paul's call for spiritual discipline as he writes, "Most present-day ministers indicate that they take the first hour of the morning for their personal devotions. Practically all insist that the need here can only be met by an unbending purpose...All agree that no one can fulfill his ministry unless he keeps the fountains of his own spiritual life springing up afresh each day."³¹

1 Timothy 6: 6 *But godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment.*

In the preceding section, Paul was setting up a contrast with false teachers. In the pericope that follows, the apostle makes a call for contentment and a plea to avoid ethical financial failures. Sandwiched between is this great challenge to pursue an upright walk with God. Left alone, that concept can still witness an interaction with bitterness over financial struggles. Blended with contentment, godliness produces "great gain." The apostle's most beloved words on this subject are found in ***Phil. 4:11*** *Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.*

³⁰ John F. MacArthur, *2 Timothy* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 186.

³¹ Nolan B. Harmon, *Ministerial Ethics and Etiquette* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1950), 46.

Gaylord Noyce says, "...there is no essential difference in our calling from that of other Christians...but a simple call toward the 'devout and holy life' comes to all...All three of Jesus' temptations had to do with satisfying personal ambition at the expense of fidelity to God's way."³²

PROPER EQUIPPING

In order for the minister to be properly equipped for the task that awaits him, he must use Scripture to teach (*didaskali,an*), reproof (*evlegmo,n*), correct (*evpano,rqwsin*), and train (*paidei,an th.n evn dikaiosunh*) in righteousness. In other words, it helps us to think right, be right, and do right. In spite of the numerous other books used in modern seminary education, it remains clear that nothing is as effective as Scripture in sculpting a minister out of a forgiven sinner.

2 Timothy 3:16 *All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.*

Joseph Stowell notes, "Paul reminds (Timothy) that all Scripture is the very breath of God. It comes from the core of God's being, and therefore it is not only consistent with all that He is but carries the full weight of His authority...It is His name that brings credibility and worth to our presentation."³³

³² Gaylord Noyce, *Pastoral Ethics: Professional Responsibilities of the Clergy* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988), 129.

³³ Joseph M. Stowell, *Shepherding the Church: Effective Spiritual Leadership in a Changing Culture* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1997), 270.

CONCLUSION

There are countless other instances of modern ministerial ethics not addressed in these two epistles. The two major failures of money and sexual misbehavior are only touched in general fashion. These letters also do not deal with specific issues that fall under the larger umbrella of the two major problems that involve the minister only as the shepherd of the flock. Further work could be done in this regard.

It remains likely that the next newspaper, newsletter, or news broadcast whether through electronic or print medium will include some story about a ministerial ethical failure. The most recent copy of the *Southern Baptist Texan*³⁴ contains 10 articles dealing with either pornography in the church or ministers who have had extra-marital sexual encounters. Most Christians might not have been familiar with the name Ted Haggard until his recent misbehaviors became public knowledge. Haggard's staffers are quoted in the *Southern Baptist Texan* article as saying, "His loose discussions about sexuality might have seemed refreshingly raw and real, especially since church had always been so stuffy and prudish...some of his comments and interactions that seemed edgy, but innocent enough, now seem questionable." The loss of absolutism and the lowering of standards for ministerial ethics cost those staffers the ability to discern inappropriate behavior and left the minister with no system for accountability. Flying as close to the flame of sin as possible is an abuse of grace. Ministers do not need to be "stuffy"; they just need to be righteous.

In Paul's epistles to Timothy, the foundation has been laid for a system of

³⁴ Erin Roach, "Haggard Has Habitual Problems, Staff Says," *Southern Baptist Texan*, April 9 2007.

ministerial ethics. Certainly the letters do not include all of Paul's notions toward value ethics, but the pastorals are aimed squarely at young ministers. Human moral codes have certain worth for the modern minister, and they are allowed the flexibility of expansion. However, they lack the authority of inspiration, which is exclusively reserved for Scripture.

It is humanly impossible to calculate or even estimate the damage done to the kingdom by the moral failures of ministers in the last 25 years. The mere recollection of high profile names like Jim Bakker, and Jimmy Swaggert and the targets for ridicule their lives became also causes the reminiscence of a tragic loss of credibility and witness among all ministers. A generation ago, local ministers were the most trusted and respected men in most communities. Today, trust and respect have been replaced by doubt and suspicion. This is a call for churches and seminaries to teach and model ministerial ethics in order for the contemporary paradigm to be reversed.

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