

Qualities of an Excellent Servant, Part 1

1 Timothy 4:6-9

54-30

Let's look together then at 1 Timothy chapter 4. We're going to be spending a few weeks in this section, verse 6 through 16, and I want us to get off to a good start this morning.

As we come to this section, it doesn't take much of a reading to discover that what Paul is here talking about to Timothy is basically a list of qualifications for someone who's effective and excellent in the ministry. The issue here is how to be an excellent minister of Jesus Christ. There is a phrase in verse 6 that I want you to notice. It is the second major phrase in the verse, "Though shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ." That really is the theme of the whole section from verse 6 to 16. In a sense, it's really an underlying theme of the whole epistle, for all of it is to instruct Timothy how to be an excellent minister on behalf of the church at Ephesus where he is presently laboring to correct some error and to build life and strength into that church. But in this section particularly there's a great preoccupation with the qualities of an excellent minister.

And so, I confess to you that this sermon is more for me than it is for you. Usually you come and I preach to you, now you come and you can listen to me preach to me and you can "amen" along the way. This is not just for me, but for anyone who serves the Lord Jesus Christ. And then, of course, in a sense, this is what we are to be in order to set an example so that you can be the same way also. So it really does involve all of us, though directly specifically at the qualities of an excellent minister of Jesus Christ.

Ministers and pastors are often evaluated on the basis of the wrong criteria. Typically the effectiveness of a pastor is usually evaluated on the size of his church, his reputation, his education, what school did he go to, where does he get his training, what kind of degree does he have? Sometimes pastors are praised because of books they have written. They are assumed to be excellent because of their popularity. They're well known popular speakers or writers. Perhaps they are on radio or television. Pastors usually are esteemed because they have been engaged in a building program...that's sort of a feather in a pastor's cap indicating there was some growth during the time of his ministry in a given place.

But all of those, frankly, are invalid in a biblical sense as criteria for evaluating a pastor. You can basically cancel out the size of his church, his education, his books, his popularity, his reputation, his radio, television, his building programs. All of that can be just set aside and you come to the real criteria by which a man of God must be evaluated when you look at this text. And this text is not

isolated, it really reframes for us and regrips things that have been laid out for us all through the epistles of the New Testament. But the key phrase is that phrase "You shall be a good minister of Jesus Christ." That's what Paul wanted Timothy to be. And this is how he told him to be that. Every young man who aspires to ministry, who attends college or seminary with a view to ministry, every one who seeks to serve Christ in leadership in the church, to be on a mission field, to have any capacity of responsibility over the flock of God must interact with this particular portion of Scripture and these great truths, and in a sense lay this down as the plumb line, as it were, by which he measures his own life and ministry.

The word "good" could better be translated "noble, or admirable, or excellent." It is used back in chapter 3 verse 1 to speak of the good, noble, admirable, excellent work of ministry and now we want a good, noble, admirable man to be in that ministry. So here is the excellent minister. Minister is the word diakonos, we get the word "deacon" from it. It means servant. It is used of those who are called specifically deacons in chapter 3 verses 8 and following. There it has to do with the specific office in the church called deacon. Here it has to do with the fact that one who is a pastor-teacher, one is an apostolic delegate even as Timothy was, representing Paul, also must see himself as a servant of Jesus Christ. Anyone who leads in any ministry in His behalf serves Him. So we're looking then at an excellent servant.

The word diakonos is different say from the word doulos. Both of them are translated servant. Doulos is often translated slave. It has the idea of subjection, submission. Diakonos has the idea of service ability or usefulness. This majors on the usefulness of the man. So we are to be excellent in our usefulness to the cause of Jesus Christ. We are called to be servants, that we know from many, many portions of the epistles. In 1 Corinthians, I'm always reminded of chapter 4 verse 1 and then verse 2, "Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ and stewards of the mystery of God, moreover it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful." We are called to be servants and stewards, managing that which belongs to God. And we are to do it in a way that will bring honor to His name.

So although Timothy is not like a diakonos of chapter 3, he's not a deacon, a servant of the elders in the church, he is nonetheless a servant of Jesus Christ. The deacons earlier are deacons of the church, in a sense. They serve the church. He is as any spiritual leader in the church is, uniquely called to service to Jesus Christ.

Now Paul's instruction to Timothy then becomes normative. What he says to him here is standard stuff for all of us who serve the Lord. And I speak to my own heart this morning. I measure my own self and I know, as anyone knows, that I fall short of the fullness of what God would have in these areas but it is so essential and has been so healthy for me to continually be refocusing myself on the standard to which I desire to attain by His grace.

Now let me give you a little background. In the first part of chapter 4 he was talking about doctrines of demons, mentioned in verse 1 and seducing spirits, verse 2, lying hypocrites who were saying

things that are not true or representative of God as shown by how they violate the Word of God, which he mentions in the rest of those first five verses. But the issue was false teaching, false doctrines spawned out of demonic sources.

And having warned Timothy to be alerted to the fact that false teaching isn't human, it's supernatural, it's coming from demons, he then turns in verse 6 to tell Timothy how to be a good and effective minister in the face of the ubiquitous false doctrine, that which will always be around. And what is curious to me is that instructing Timothy in regard to dealing with false doctrine, he majors on the positive, rather than on the negative. That's a very important thought. The thrust of instruction here shows that the critical way to face false doctrine is not by refuting and denouncing false doctrine all the time, but by positively affirming the truth and living that truth. And you establish such a high respect for virtue and truth that it becomes far more attractive, desirable and believable than heresy and lies.

Some men choose to spend most all of their ministry denouncing things they disagree with. They spend their time refuting everyone who does not agree with them and anyone who violates the truth of God. And there is a place for that. But you can have a very negative ministry where people know everything they don't believe, they just don't know what they do believe. They can do well at refuting error, but it's hard for them to keep from falling into sin because no one's ever taught them the principals and dynamics of living the Christian life. They know what's wrong but they don't know what's right.

So, the emphasis here is on Timothy's duty to make himself an excellent minister of Jesus Christ. And by setting forth a model and standard of virtue in faith, devotion and conduct, he will dissuade people from heresy and at the same time be able to give full attention to the positive ministry to which God has called him. And the ministry must be a positive building up of the people of God, not always emphasizing the attacking error.

And I confess to you that sometimes this is difficult, especially if you are a little bit committed to the truth. I know in my own life I resist with the great effort the temptation to be negative because there's so many things that bother me so greatly. Every once in a while something leaks out, and you know how I feel about an issue or a person, but I try to fight against that, establishing the truth in your hearts and minds and believing that on the basis of the truth you'll be able to spot the error. You all know the familiar thought about the FBI training people in the counterfeit currency area, they don't show them anything counterfeit, they just show them everything real. And when they see a counterfeit, it's very obvious.

The nature of ministry is to be positive. It is to be the building up of the people of God. And so this is a very instructive and positive approach to an admirable ministry on behalf of Jesus Christ. It's the kind of thing I want to see in my own life and in the lives of others who stand in the place of ministry. And certainly we want to see it as well in the people to whom we minister.

Now there are about eleven things that I've identified in this passage. I've put them together in the outline and we'll be going over them for the next few Sundays. And we'll take four of them this morning...the first four and they're very very practical and helpful.

Number one, an excellent minister will warn his people of error. An excellent minister will warn his people of error. Now having said what I just said, that ministry is not to be dominated by a negative approach, I do not want to say that there's no place for warning, because there definitely is. In fact, the transition from the first five verses into the next part of the chapter moves on that aspect of warning. Look at the beginning of verse 6, "If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, that is demonic doctrines and seducing spirits and lying hypocrisies, all that false teaching, if you remind the brothers of these things, you will be a noble, excellent servant of Jesus Christ."

So, there is necessity then to remind the people of error. And all that I've said about a positive perspective in the ministry does not preclude the essential place that warning does have. Ministry demands warning. The verb here is a soft verb, it's a mild verb. And it would read this way, "If you suggest these things to the brothers." It is a word that means to remind or to suggest. It is a continual present participle, has the idea of continually laying these things before them. In fact, that's the most literal translation of the verb, to lay before. Just keep putting before them the reality that there is error. In other words, you must teach people to be discerning. You must teach them to think biblically and make biblical application of truth to what they see and experience. This is basic to all of spiritual leadership.

That is not the idea of commanding people, it is not the idea of forcing people to buy into things. That is not the word used here. It is a counsel and advice given in a gentle humble manner. You just continually remind them to be aware of error, and you identify error from time to time and point it out as such. That's not the theme of all your ministry, but that is a recurring note, that is a reprise from time to time in the ministry. In Acts 20 when Paul was meeting with the Ephesian elders he said to them, verses 29 to 31, "I know that when I leave grievous wolves will come in not sparing the flock and of your own selves perverse men will rise up and they'll deceive and lead you astray and I commend you to the Word." He didn't say I'm going to define all their doctrine, I'm going to give you a polemic on every bit of it, I want you to know every nuance. He said just be aware of error, it's going to come and I commend you to the Word. And there is the negative warning but the positive affirmation that the solution is not in always dealing with the error but in always dealing with the truth. And the truth supplies the foundation from which error can be dealt with properly.

So he says to the brothers, that is to Christians, to the family of God, it is the responsibility of the one who would be an excellent servant to be engaged in causing them to remember the presence of error. You don't want them to be tossed to and fro about, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, like little children, you want them to be firm and grounded and rooted in the Word of God. And if you read 1 John 2 you find that the way a person learns to deal with Satanic error is by being strong in the Word. That's what it says. You are strong in the Word and you have overcome the evil

one, which means you've overcome Satan who is disguised as an angel of light, purporting to be representative of truth when in fact he is the purveyor of lies. You overcome that by being strong in the Word.

So, you warn people, that's a part of it, a reminder, a continual suggestion of error, but you keep building them up in the Word. And I really believe that the failure to have a critical mind and the failure...and I don't mean by critical unkind or ungracious, I mean analytical...the failure to have a critical mind in our generation has allowed the church, first of all, to be infiltrated by all kinds of error. It has then led to the church becoming confused. It has then led to the church being weak, and, of course, the church is even liberal and in some cases it's totally apostate. Watered down teaching, platitudes and sermonettes for Christianettes and limp theology and convictionless preaching have replaced strong doctrine, clear exposition of Scripture, profound preaching and the legacy has been tragic. Charismatic confusion, psychology encroaching on biblical doctrine, science of mind, psychic and occult ideas pervading Christianity, cultic perceptions, success-oriented motives, prosperity doctrines, positive confessions, all of that stuff has come into the church like a flood. And honestly, I believe that all of this chaos can be laid at the feet of spineless convictionless uncritical pastors who have failed to draw the lines and say there is error and speak to that build their people up strongly in the Word of God.

It is reminiscent of an Old Testament text which speaks of the responsibility of spiritual leadership. Ezekiel chapter 3 verse 17 where Ezekiel says, "Son of man, I have made thee...and the Lord's speaking to him...a watchman on the house of Israel, therefore hear the word at My mouth and give them warning from Me." God says, Ezekiel, you must warn the people. When I say to the wicked you shall surely die and you give him not warning nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way to save his life, the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity but his blood will I require at your hand. And he goes all the way down to verse 21 discussing that idea.

This is the idea that when you come into spiritual responsibility and spiritual leadership, God holds you accountable to pass the word of warning on. And if you fail to do that, there is a resultant accountability to God for that failure. It is essential within the ministry to be involved in warning. You must establish in your people strong theology, strong doctrine, accountability to the Word of God, conviction and then the sense that there's error out there and we need to be aware of it.

Very often...very often...when you meet someone who seems a bit without convictions and a bit spineless and maybe without the kind of backbone you would like to see, someone who is a sort of a vacillating person but maybe is a nice fellow, you hear someone say about him, "Well, he's not much of a preacher. He doesn't seem to have strong convictions, but he really has a pastor's heart." I've heard that so many times.

Let me tell you something. What do we do to evaluate a pastor's heart? What do we base that on? Listen, a pastor's heart is not manifest in how good a man is at petting sheep. A pastor's heart is manifest in how capable a man is at protecting them from wolves. That is a pastor's heart.

We received a letter that's not atypical, it's common to get letters like this. We recently put a series on the air that we felt was very important to warn people across the country in our radio audience of things that are not true and are not biblical. And we do that without apology. We are one of few that does that. But we do that. And this is a typical letter from a very strong Christian radio station. They said, "During the week of August 18, Grace To You sent a series which gave us some pause for thought and concern. Because of this concern, we did not air Friday's tape." They just didn't play the program. "The enclosed cost of service invoice will indicate such, we have not charged you for that day. Although we may personally agree with all that John said, we cannot go against our station policy of nurture and encouragement to the Christian family." Now stop there.

"Nurture and encouragement to the Christian family" means don't ever say anything that in any way might offend anybody. That's what that means. And then they went on to say, "We feel that some of our brothers and sisters were not ready for the strong meat of John's message." If I may respond to that, I would say that that wasn't strong meat, that was just simple truth. But they went on to say, "We must have advance warning of any further series that you plan to run like this."

In other words, please warn us if you're ever going to warn the church because we want to stop you from warning the church. So, warn us so we can do that.

This is typical. This is a funny time for the church. Everybody wants to embrace everything. And a man of God must develop convictions and a strong sense of theology and what is right and biblical and he must be continually warning his people of error. He is a protector of the flock.

Secondly, an excellent minister is also an expert student of Scripture. He is to be an expert student of Scripture. How the church ever lost touch with this is hard for me to believe, but very frankly, and I say this with sadness in my heart, I hear a lot of people who speak and teach and preach who from my standpoint and the standpoint of those who would look at them from the Bible knowledge aspect reflect a very minimal understanding and a minimal commitment to the study of Scripture. There was a day in the history of the church when the great students of Scripture and theology were pastors. The Reformation, all the great reformers who gave us the heart and soul of much of our theological understanding were pastors of churches. You get into the Puritan era when they were pumping out tremendous books and volumes on doctrine and theology and they were pastors, that was what a pastor did. He was above and beyond all things a student of the Word of God. He was not just a quote/unquote "communicator," he was a student first and foremost. He had capability to deal with precision in the understanding and interpretation and application of the Word of God.

And that's what Paul wants to say to Timothy at the end of verse 6. If you want to be a good minister of Jesus Christ, being nourished by the words of the faith and the good doctrine which you have closely followed. This is so basic. Present passive participle, being nourished, you need to be being

continually nourished. It is a continual process of self-feeding, by reading and reading and reading and reading and inwardly digesting and meditating and dialoguing and mastering the content of the Word of God, rightly dividing it so that you are a workman who needs not to be ashamed. We are called above and beyond all other elements in the ministry to be expert in the study of the Word of God. In that sense, we are in a rabbinical tradition, a scribal tradition. We are to be the experts who have mastered the Word of God. It is essential in that regard that we be being continually nourished by the words of the faith.

That phrase "the words of the faith," the word "the" is in there, refers it to biblical or scriptural writing. The words of the Christian faith is Scripture, the body of Christian truth contained in the Scripture. We are to master the Scripture. We'll never do it but that's our pursuit. And at the Master's Seminary we are so committed to that, to that every person who graduates will have mastered the text of the Word of God. We are to be expert in that area...not just good communicators who can tickle people's ears and make them think they heard something enjoyable, but someone who can defend and divide properly the Word of the living God. We need to be able to think biblically and comprehend biblically and speak biblically. And that means we have to spend a massive proportion of our time interacting with the text of Scripture. It is a...it is a treasure that is inexhaustible and demands a life time to just begin to understand its profound and full riches. We are to bear the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God and be able to use it in any way at any time in any occasion. We are to have the Word of Christ dwelling in us richly and profoundly and deeply.

And if the Word of God is profitable for instruction and correction and all of the things that 2 Timothy 3 says, then we must know it. If it is the source of making the man of God perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works, then we must know it. And there can be no premium placed on biblical ignorance. And the issue is not how good a communicator are you, the issue is how well do you know the Word of God. But we are a generation of people who do not like to sit and think, we like to be entertained. And so there is a...there is a sort of a drift toward entertaining people instead of teaching people. We are to be committed to the understanding and the study and the articulation of the Word of God. We grow in the Word, 1 Peter 2:2. We grow through that Word. There's no substitute for this.

He says not only the words of the faith, but he says and the good doctrine...and of the good doctrine. That means that which Scripture affirms. So first he says the words of Scripture and then the theology that comes out of it, the application of that biblical truth, didaskalia, that which is taught and the authority which is behind it. So we are to be involved in becoming expert in the knowledge of the Scripture and all that Scripture affirms...all of its teaching.

And Timothy was already on schedule. He says to him at the end of verse 6, "Unto which or which you have closely followed." It all started when he was a boy and he was under the teaching of his grandmother and mother, Eunice and Lois. And then it followed through that from a child he says to him in 2 Timothy 3, you have known the holy Scriptures. And then Paul says to him also in 2 Timothy 1, "And you heard it from me." Second Timothy 2, "You heard it from me among many witnesses." From the time Timothy was a small child, all through his life he was being taught the Word of God.

You've closely followed it, now he says you must be being continually nourished by that same Christian truth revealed in God's Word.

So the excellent minister, the excellent pastor has strong Bible knowledge, continually feeds daily on more divine truth. He cannot give out what he does not take in. And so it's very simple, the better the learner, the better the teacher. And it's easy for me to understand that in my own life practically because for every one hour that I teach, there are at least 15 hours of direct study in preparation for that to say nothing about a whole life time that's behind that. It's mastering the Word of God, to be able to teach people all things whatsoever I have commanded you, as Jesus said in Matthew 28.

And sadly there are many men who have no delight in their studies. They spend an hour now and then, or they spend no time. They reach into the old bag and pull out something from the past. And it may be good, but it isn't fresh. And they're not staying in the Word so there's something missing in their life. And there's nothing new that they're gaining. Study seems for many an unwelcome task. It sort of interrupts the easy schedule of activity. They like to have guests as often as possible in their pulpits so they don't have to spend time studying and they can sort of spin their way through a variety of administrative tasks and meetings. And they may study just to make a sermon and when it's done, it's not a very powerful one at that. And so they give out some soft sermon that falls on hard hearts and makes no penetration whatever.

But above all things, if the Bereans were more noble than anybody else because they as a congregation daily searched the Scriptures, how much more should we who are in the role of teachers? And the great men of God, the men who have left their imprint on the church through the years have been those men who have made impressions because of their understanding of Scripture. I think of the very familiar testimony of William Tyndale, that marvelous man of God responsible for getting the Bible in print to those of us who speak the English language in those early years. He was in prison and when he was in prison facing martyrdom, he wrote a letter to the governor and chief because he had some requests. And the letter is most fascinating. Here he is in prison facing martyrdom, which came imminently after the letter was written, and this is what the letter said.

"Here are my requests, this is what I want." This is a man facing death. "A warmer cap, a candle, a piece of cloth to patch my leggings, but above all, I beseech and entreat you your clemency to be urgent with the procurer 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." Now any seminary student who has gone through Hebrew cannot relate to such a request. But later in life when you plunge more deeply into the profounder things of the Word of God, it's wonderful to be able to say to yourself the things that I cherish the most are the things that help me understand the Word of God the best. This was the desire of William Tyndale.

And I really believe that this reflects what is in the heart of Paul as he speaks to Timothy. Timothy, you need to be a man who is continually being nourished in the words of the faith and of the good

doctrine which you already are closely following. Stay in the Word. Stay nourished by the Word.

Thirdly, an excellent minister is not only consistent in warning his people of error, but also he is an expert student in Scripture. Thirdly, an excellent minister avoidst the influence of unholy teaching. He avoids the influence of unholy teaching. As strong as he is in the Word, the flip side of that is he is correspondingly disinterested in unholy teaching. Verse 7, "But refuse," that is a very strong word, paraiteomai, a strong word, reject, put it away, "profane and old women's myths." He says refuse unholy teaching. Profane is bebelos, it means unhallowed, unholy, radically separate from what is holy. It is the opposite of the Word of God, anything that contradicts the Word of God.

And then he refers to "old women's myths," which is kind of an interesting phrase. That, by the way, is the opposite of biblical truth. In 2 Timothy 4:4 the same word muthos from which we get myth is used there. They shall turn away their ears from the truth unto muthos. So truth and muthos are seen as opposite. And what he is saying here is you are to be nourished up in the words of the faith and the good doctrine, but you are to refuse the opposite, the bad stuff.

Now what are the old women's muthos? Why does he throw the "old women" in there? Well, that was a...that was a cultural thing. In philosophical circles in that time they used a little epithet, a sarcastic epithet and when they wanted to heap disdain on some viewpoint, they would call it an old woman's myth. That's something a senile old lady would tell a kid, that's a fairy tale. Don't give me any of your old women's myths. That indicated a total lack of credulity. So Paul sort of picks up that existing sarcastic epithet in philosophical circles and uses it here and the readers would have understood it.

Don't you fool around with what is radically opposed to that which is holy and don't you fool around to something that is opposite the truth. The mind is a precious thing. And for the one who serves in leadership in the spiritual realm, God wants a pure mind...a pure mind that is saturated with the truth of the Word of God. There's no place for foolish silly myths, shallow, radical, ignorant fantasies. And yet somehow in our contemporary day we have decided that old ladies' fables and all these profane teachings are scholarship. And supposedly to be truly educated you've got to spend years learning all of that stuff. We have bowed down to the elite academic establishment in theology that have been doing nothing but pumping out old ladies' fairy tales and doctrines of demons spawned by seducing spirits.

I wanted to complete a doctorate some years back after I completed seminary. And I went in the first time to meet the academic representative who would tell me about the program. And he looked over my transcript and said, "Well, you have one problem. This is going to be a problem, you have too much Bible in your curriculum...too much theology." I said, "I thought this was a degree in theology." He said, "Well, it is but you've got too much Bible and theology, so we're going to have to have some course work given to you which you'll have to make up before you can enter into the program and then you can finish in a year and a half." And he said, "I'll give you a list of books that you'll be required to read and immediately you'll have to begin a course that will start right this summer."

He gave me a list of about 200 books, a third of them were in English, the others were in French and German. Now I took a little bit of German, just enough to ask a few questions that very few people care to answer and I don't know much else. But I had a little German. I could sort of find my way through. I knew when I was going to a doctoral program I'd have to know some of it, so I took some German. But I didn't have any French. And I looked at this and I checked out the list with somebody who knew these various titles. I went through the whole thing. And I can say that of all 200 of them, none of them told the truth basically. Some of them may have intersected with the truth here and there but they were all a lot of error, they were a whole lot of profane and old ladies' fairy tales passed off as scholarship.

And then I received a letter telling me that I would have to take a course in the summer in "Jesus and the Cinema." Which sounded kind of curious to me. So I called up and I said, "What is Jesus and the Cinema?" that was a course title. "Well, what you'll be doing is watching contemporary movies and evaluating them on whether they are antagonistic to or supportive of the Jesus ethic." And so what, of course, we were dealing with was strictly the ethical Jesus. I mean, there's no divine Jesus, just an ethical Jesus and so you go watch movies and see whether they interact on one side or the other with the ethical Jesus.

And then they gave me some other assignment and I went through all of this and then I went back out there and I walked to the fellow's desk and I just put the material down. And I said, "I just want to let you know that I have spent all my life to this point learning the truth, I can't see any value in spending the next couple of years learning error, so just forget it." And I walked away. And I really think that was of the Lord because I'm grateful to God that from the time of the beginning of my training right on through to today, my mind is filled with the truth of God. And I'm not a battleground. I'm not warring in my own mind because my mind is not saturated with all kinds of things as 1 Timothy 1 says that do nothing but minister questioning and not Godly edifying. And I think that's partly where conviction comes from, that's because...I can stand up and maybe it's just blindness but I can stand up and say things with conviction because there's no equivocation in my mind. And I think part of that is due to the fact that I'm not having to battle this whole plethora of supposed intellectuals and scholars who disagree with all of that. There's a sort of a stupid simplicity in my preaching, to draw it at the bottom line. I'm not ignorant when it comes to a lot of things, and maybe that's a help.

What really hit me hard in this area was I had ministry as a young man with a fellow who decided to go away to a seminary. And, of course, very liberal, denying the faith and so forth. He came out of there a bartender. That stuck in my mind. It was never my judgment that a seminary was to train bartenders. But in his case, that is precisely what happened. He went in to prepare for ministry, came out a bartender. Frankly, he would not have been an effective minister because of that kind of background. But the point to me was what a terrible devastation of a person with some kind of positive motivation to start with.

In our little "distinctives list" at the Master's Seminary, one of the things we say is this, "Instruction is based on biblical certainties from the Word of God rather than on doubts, critical theories, or reactions." If you come to the Master's Seminary, we're going to teach you what the Word of God says. You will not be totally ignorant of error, there will be an ability to recognize error, but you will be taught the positive things of the Word of God. Your mind is a precious thing and it needs to be kept clear from Satanic lies. And so Paul says refuse to get involved in profane and mythical things, stay away from that. The excellent minister maintains his conviction and his clarity of mind and his biblical sense by exposing himself to the Word of God.

Fourthly, and this is the last one we'll have time for this morning, an excellent minister is disciplined in personal godliness. He is disciplined in personal godliness. Verse 7 picks it up, "And exercise yourself unto godliness." Exercise yourself unto godliness. Oswald Sanders says his book *Spiritual Leadership*, "Spiritual ends can only be achieved by spiritual men using spiritual methods." That makes sense.

So, the issue in ministry is godliness. It isn't how clever you are, it isn't how glib you are, it isn't how good a communicator you are, it is do you know the Word of God, do you have a pure mind, and are you godly? Because ministry is an overflow out of that. It's an overflow of your life, your virtue.

Now let me tell you a little bit about the background of this. Why does he use the word "exercise"? Interesting word, *gymnazo*. We get the word *gymnasium* from it, *gymnasium*. There's a word even in that same word group that means "naked" because they participated in athletics in those days naked, or striped down to just the bare minimum. And so the word meant to exercise, or to train yourself in an athletic endeavor, which means rigorous strenuous self-sacrificing kind of training. He uses that word. But he picks up on the whole culture that goes with that word when he does it.

For example, in Greek cultures, and of course Ephesus was right in the heart of Greek culture, every city had a *gymnasium*. It was a focal point of the city and youths between the ages of 16 and 18 gave the major proportion of their education to physical training. So much of life in those days was involved with physical activity. Today we have what we call service industries, where you sit behind a desk and push paper. In those days people moved and walked and worked and bent their back and whatever. And even in domestic chores that was necessary. Physical training was very vital. And there was a great great and prized and esteemed viewpoint of athletics. And so in every town there would be a *gymnasium*.

A sort of a sad corollary to this is that those *gymnasiums* became literal hotbeds of homosexuality and that's part of Greek cultural history as well. But nonetheless, and that's where that kind of pedophilia comes from, the young boys in the *gymnasium* with the older men, and the whole sick homosexual thing that goes with that.

But nonetheless, that was their culture. In spite of the Stoics who were forever and always protesting against the cult of the body, the cult of the body flourished in the time of the Apostle Paul. There were people into the body beautiful, into exercise, into training. Does that sound familiar? That sounds familiar. And we're in the same kind of a situation today. They were into training the body. So Paul just by using that one verb just plays off of that whole cultural illustration and says, "Look, exercise yourself unto...what?...godliness." I mean, if you're going to go into training, go into training for godliness, go into training for virtue, go into training for the inner man, the soul, the spirit, unto godliness, eusebeia means reverence, piety, true spiritual virtue. Keep yourselves in training for godliness would be a good way to translate the tense of the verb, keep yourselves in training for godliness, discipline yourself unto holiness. Beat your body to bring it into submission, 1 Corinthians 9:27, as Paul did, lest in preaching to others you yourself would be disqualified. You must maintain godliness.

We talked about this so many times. How many men in the ministry don't do that? Jay told me two days ago he got a call from a church where the pastor defected immorally and blew the whole church sky high again. It's a daily routine. It just goes on day after day after day after day. There's no great longing and pursuing of holiness. And you can be more preoccupied with the form of your body and the looks of your wardrobe and the whole shot than you can with the pursuit of godliness. So there's that necessary soul discipline for true holiness. Second Corinthians 7:1, perfecting holiness in our lives, building up the inner man to be strong and capable in serving the will of God. This means to know God's will and to do God's will, train yourself to know God's will, train yourself to do God's will.

Over in chapter 2 of 2 Timothy, do you remember what he says there? Verse 3, "Endure hardship or suffer," really it means to suffer, "as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." And then in verse 4 he says, "Don't get tangled up with the world and this life." And then in verse 5 he says, "If you're going to get involved in athletics," he uses the Greek verb *athleo*, again an athletic metaphor, if you're going to engage in athletics, you're not going to win the crown unless you keep the rules, so stay within God's rules, confine yourself to God's standards. That's the idea. You're a soldier, you've got to endure hardship, you've got to make sacrifices. You've got to cut yourself off from the world, please the one who called you to be a soldier, do whatever you need to train to win the crown and keep the rules. In other words, discipline, the spiritual discipline.

It's so tragic, you know, to watch our culture, to watch these people go literally off the deep end of the physical body. All these people running around jumping and bouncing and doing aerobics and women weightlifters. Boy, I mean, talk about ugly, that...where that ever came from I don't know. But how in the world you could ever...women could ever lose the beauty of true womanhood and trade it in for the size of a bicep, what a pathetic commentary on a society.

But anyway, all this instead of character and virtue, everything is physical. And it was the same in Paul's day. You know, you look at those people and you say, "Yeah, yeah, just wait, just wait," I mean, all that is for nothing...for nothing. That's what he says in verse 8, "For bodily exercise profits a little." What does he mean by that? It profits a little in two ways, extent and duration. It profits a little. In extent, it's only good for the physical body. In duration, it's only good for the time. In fact, it's a

short time. You exercise and stop exercising and in a month, it's all gone. It's just for the body and it's just for a short time. It's such a brief time. It's such a little time. Excessive athletic training has value only for the body and only for a brief time, and that's it. And people spend hours and hours and hours on something that is so short lived.

But he says godliness, verse 8, is profitable unto all things. Boy, if you want to work on something, work on that...work on that. Beyond just the physical, it's profitable not just to the body but the body and the soul. It's profitable not just for a brief time but for a life time and for eternity, you see. So if you're going to train yourself, if you're going to go into training, if you're going to make a New Year's resolution, don't make a New Year's resolution to go to the gym three times a week, that isn't the priority unless that fits somewhere at the bottom of your list. Make a resolution to spend time in the Word of God every day and cultivate godliness because godliness is profitable for all things, all things, spiritual things, for time and eternity. Why? Look at verse 8 again. Because it has promise of the life that now is, that's our life right now.

Listen, you cultivate godliness, is it a blessing now? Of course. You cultivate godliness and you have a rich fulfilled God-blessed fruitful effective useful life now. And he says of that which is to come. You get involved in spiritual gymnastics and you go to your spiritual gymnasium every day and do your spiritual workout and the results will not only be blessedness in the life that now is, but blessedness in the life that is to come. Spiritual exercise benefits my true self, my soul, my inner man in this life and on into eternity.

And there's so many people, I think even in ministry, who can get so preoccupied where they've got to have their exercise, they've got to have their exercise and they're spending far more time exercising their body than they are exercising in the regard of their soul. So he just lays out a very simple principle, the excellent of servant of Jesus Christ is one who is disciplined unto godliness.

This is so obvious, this statement in verse 8, that in verse 9 he calls it a faithful saying. "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance." Now that is a little formula that Paul uses five times in the pastoral epistles: "This a faithful saying, this is a faithful saying, this is a faithful saying." Two times he says, "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance," which is just an emphatic kind of affirmation of the first half of the statement. It means it's a trustworthy statement. It's a truism. It's an axiom. It's a maxim. It's something patently obvious. Everybody knows it, in fact that is a formula referring to a common saying in the church. It's probably a proverbial statement. It's like in verse 1 of chapter 3, this is a true saying, this is a faithful saying, if a man desires the office of an overseer he desires a good work. That was floating around the church. Everybody said, "Yeah, if he desires the office, he desires a good work."

Well, another maxim axiomatic thing that everybody knew was bodily exercise profits a little but godliness profits unto all things because it has the promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come. It benefits both. That was also axiomatic. So the statement then, "this is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance," refers back to verse 8, not forward to verse 10. We know that because

verse 8 is much more of a proverbial statement, it is much more axiomatic. Further we know it because the beginning of verse 10 with that "therefore" concept, that *eis touta gar*(?) really doesn't lend itself at all to verse 9, for those of you who are Greek students, the rest of you just forget that part. And the idea that you would start a maxim or axiom by saying "we both labor and suffer," no, that's a personal statement.

But the proverbial nature of verse 8 is clearly indicating that it was the faithful saying. So everybody knows that bodily exercise is only good for a little time and for a body, whereas spiritual training is good forever and for the soul.

People, it's so infantile, it is so spiritually infantile to preoccupy ourselves with the body. It just shows the level we're on. It shows an inability to gain perception of the reality of the spiritual dimension and the eternal dimension. It's just that narrow confined perspective.

So, it should be axiomatic in the church that the church is not occupied by a whole bunch of body worshipers, but that it's a group of people who are in training and what they're in training for is their soul, to be conformed to the will of God that they can be godly for that profits for time and eternity. Godliness is the pursuit of the excellent minister. He uses all the means of grace available, prayer and Bible study and spiritual discipline and sometimes fasting and the Lord's table and the confession of sin and active service and accountability and whatever it is, all of the spiritual means are applied in the discipline of godliness.

What then makes a godly minister? What makes an excellent minister? Is it the size of his church? Is it whether he's on radio, television, whether he's a clever speaker or not? What is it? God looks at him and says, does he think critically and warn his people about error? Is he proficient in the knowledge of the Scripture? Does he have a pure mind and avoids the influence of unholy teaching? And does he exercise himself with rigor, with great strain, with great effort and self-sacrifice to be godly? That's the stuff of which an excellent minister is made.

And there are seven more and we'll be looking at those in the weeks ahead. Let's pray together.

Father, thank You for clarifying in our minds any unclear thought in this area. Thank You for reminding me what it is that You desire. I confess, Lord, that I come short of my own understanding of the standard and surely that puts me way short of Yours. But, Lord, even as Paul said, I press toward the mark. Give me the strength of Your Spirit to do what in the flesh would be an impossible pursuit.

Raise up many faithful men and faithful women, too, in Your church who can serve. Father, help the whole congregation to know that all of us are called on to be alert to error, to be students of Scripture, to stay away from unholy teaching, the fire that can burn so readily. All of us are called to

exercise ourselves to godliness. It's just that leaders are to be the example to us all.

Thank You, Father, for this clear word to us and so practical. And we pray for this morning's message to somehow translate itself into living that we may not be those, as James said, who are hearers only and no doers of the Word. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

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