

Portrait of a Leader

2 Timothy 2

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I want to draw your attention, this morning, to a special text of Scripture that is beloved to my own heart, and I am sure to the heart of many of us...2 Timothy chapter 2...2 Timothy chapter 2. God has put a high priority on leadership in His church. God has established very high standards for that leadership. You can even go back in to the Old Testament from the patriarchs on through the New Testament up until today, God has always had faithful men who were called and given gifts and responsibilities to lead His people.

The qualifications are high. They are demanding. They are difficult to fulfill. And yet they are crucial to the purposes of God. In Hosea the prophet said, "Like people, like priests." People do not rise higher than their leadership, generally. And where there is a real vacuum in leadership, there will be serious problems in the church.

I think most people understand that. Today there is a concern about leadership in the church. There are people who are very concerned that those who serve the Lord be stronger leaders, better leaders, more effective leaders. Numerous books have been written on the subject. There is even a preoccupation among some in the church with leadership books written by the secular world, somehow wanting to take principles and characteristics that make people successful in the secular environment and somehow transition them over to the church.

There's a lot of talk about what makes an effective leader in the world, and if we were to sort of sum up those characteristics the list would sound something like this:

Strong natural leaders are visionary. That is they can see beyond the moment, they can get the big picture and figure out a strategy to achieve the accomplishment within that vision.

Secondly, they are action-oriented. They're on the move.

Thirdly, they are courageous. To put it in another term, they are risk-takers. They're not afraid of the potential downside of things, they have the courage to march ahead against all opposition.

They are energetic. They maybe only sleep three or four hours a night. They're like someone with his finger plugged into a 220 socket . They wear us out with their endless energy.

And they are objective oriented rather than people oriented. People are only a means to an end, to be used or to be removed for the achieving of the objective.

Strong natural leaders are also paternalistic. They think they need to be the benefactor and the one

in charge of everything and make everyone behold to themselves. They are ego-centric. They are intolerant of incompetence. They are indispensable. And in today's world they are to some degree financially acute.

That's what seems to work in the world. That's what seems to be the characteristic of those driving kind of people who achieve immeasurable success. But the model really can't be transferred over to the church. In fact, God has a completely different pattern for His leaders.

Paul gives it to us in this chapter. And I want to take us through the whole chapter, jumping and skipping a little, to identify Paul's portrait of a leader. It helps us to sort of go back to where we started and regrip the identity that we must maintain as spiritual leaders. He's writing his last epistle before his death. He's writing it to his protegee, his young son in the faith, Timothy, who is in his thirties at this time. Timothy, to whom Paul will give the responsibility largely for carrying on the work in the churches that he himself began, and at this particular time Timothy is in a down experience, in fact he's in a rut.

As Paul begins this letter to him he is aware that some things have gone wrong in Timothy's life. He reminds him in chapter 1 and verse 6 "to kindle afresh the gift of God which was in him." Apparently he wasn't teaching, he wasn't preaching as he should have been. He allowed his gift to fall in to disuse because of tremendous pressure. He was in the Ephesian church, there were all kinds of problems. He was supposed to straighten them out. He was running into a lot of opposition from the leadership of that church trying to replace the existing elders was a great challenge. He was running into resistance among the people who did not want to conform to godliness. He was battling the threat of persecution by the Roman government outside the church, against the church. And being himself linked with the apostle Paul was not good for his reputation, the Romans knew Paul well, being a prisoner there at the very time he wrote.

He was also confronting some very sophisticated Ephesian error for which he didn't feel he had a good apologetic or polemic and he felt a little beaten up by the subtleties of the current philosophy. He was young and there were people looking down on his youthfulness. All of that had caused him to reach this place where he let his gift fall into disuse. In fact, in verse 7 he even had a spirit of fear or cowardice, or timidity. Verse 8, Paul has to tell him, "don't be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me, His prisoner, but join me in suffering." He really was trying to avoid any persecution at all, and to do that he had to silence himself with regard to his identity and his relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ and to the apostle Paul. Down in verses 13 and 14 we even have indication that he was holding the truth rather loosely. Paul says, "Retain the standard of sound words," and in verse 14, "guard the treasure which has been entrusted to you." Hold on to sound doctrine.

I think the sum of all of that in chapter 1 leads us to the conclusion that this was a down time of significant character in Timothy's life. And it was a frightening time for this to be happening because Paul was about to exist and Timothy was to take up the work and needed to be the leader that God wanted him to be. It is with that in mind, that weakness in Timothy's life, that Paul starts out chapter 2 with these words, "You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." Strong, not in your natural talents, and Timothy certainly had some. He may have been very winsome naturally. He may have been able to articulate naturally. He may have been a fairly good public speaker. He may have had some passion and some zeal in his personality. He might have had some fine, natural gifts.

But this calls for something more than that. His strength must be in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. He is going to have to look for enabling grace. He is going to have to seek some supernatural power to get back to the place of leadership where God wants him and needs him to be.

Now as the chapter unfolds after verse 1, Paul outlines seven pictures of a great spiritual leader...seven pictures of the pastor, the elder. They're very, very clear.

The first one is in verse 2 and it is the picture of a teacher. In wanting to show to Timothy what the leader looks like, he gives him vivid pictures, word pictures. The first one, verse 2, "And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." The operative word in the verse is "teach...teach." It taught you, you teach them, they'll teach others. Timothy, you are a teacher. Spiritual leadership starts at that point. That is the first and foremost priority in spiritual leadership, the imparting of truth, divine truth, transmitting the truth to others. In fact, in Hebrews chapter 13 and verse 7 we read this, "Remember those who led you," and then immediately it defines what that meant, "who spoke the Word of God to you." That is primarily how we lead. We who are in spiritual leadership lead by dispensing the Word of God. We are called to be teachers and preachers of God's truth and to produce teachers and preachers for the next generation.

A deposit had been given to Timothy. It was a deposit of truth, a deposit of sound words. Paul called it, as I noted earlier in chapter 1 verse 14, a treasure. He calls it basically back in verse 20 of chapter 6 the trust, he says, "Guard what has been entrusted to you." You have a trust, you have a treasure. You have a treasure of sound words, sound doctrine, the Scripture. It has been deposited with you as a trustworthy, reliable, faithful man. I gave it to you, and you need to entrust it to other faithful men who will be able to teach others also. It needs to go from you into multiplication. This is the first priority of spiritual leadership, it is the divine truth that must be transmitted to others, apostolic doctrine as it was called in the book of Acts, studied, understood and transmitted.

In Acts chapter 20 as the apostle Paul met with the Ephesian elders at Miletus, he said to them in verse 28, "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to feed the church of God...to feed the church of God." That's what we do is feed the church of God.

In order to do that effectively, he points out that they themselves must be nourished up, that they must be committed to the Word that is able to build them up. So this whole process of Paul to Timothy to faithful men to others is a process of teaching.

In Colossians chapter 1, at the end of that great chapter, Paul speaking of Christ says, "And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom that we may present every man complete in Christ." What brings a person to completeness in Christ? What brings a person to maturity in Christ? Teaching...teaching every man with all wisdom brings a person potentially to the place where they can be complete in Christ.

In 2 Timothy also chapter 3 verse 16, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, training in righteousness that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work," same term, that the man of God may be perfect or mature. It is the Word of God taught, applied to the heart that brings about the maturing.

And so, Paul says to Timothy, "You are first and foremost a teacher." In Ephesians 4 he says the pastors and evangelists are giving to the church for the perfecting of the saints. We bring them to perfection by means of the Word which is able to build them up. Peter said, "Desire the Word as a baby desires milk that you may grow by it." And so we are committed to take the Word of Christ and put it into their hearts so it dwells there richly, and as a result they will have joy and speak in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs and they will praise the Lord and thank Him for what happens in their lives and they will submit to one another and marriages and families will be as they should, and so will other relationships as unfolds in that great third chapter of Colossians.

In Nehemiah chapter 8 and verse 8 it says, "They read the Scripture and gave the sense of it," and that's what we do. We read the Scripture and we teach its meaning. You cannot substitute for that. That is the heart and soul of spiritual leadership.

When Jesus was restoring Peter in John 21, He asked him three times if he loved Him, three times Peter responded and three times Jesus said, "Feed My sheep." If you're committed to Me, if you're called to ministry, feed the sheep. And man lives not by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. That tells us that we teach the Scripture. In chapter 4 He says, "Preach the Word."

So Paul's first picture of the leader of the church sets out these essential qualities. He must be a diligent student of the biblical message and able to articulate its teachings. He must be loyal and faithful to that message in his own life. He must be actively involved in equipping others so that they also can teach.

Second picture is that of a soldier in verses 3 and 4, "Suffer hardship with me as a good soldier of Christ Jesus, no soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of every day life so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier." Here is another metaphor, another word picture with regard to spiritual leaders and it is that we are seen as soldiers. Paul, you remember, back in 1 Timothy 1:18 urged Timothy to war a good warfare. And Scripture sees the leader as one engaged in war. We realize that, we are involved as we noted last Sunday from 2 Corinthians chapter 10 in fighting warfare, not with fleshly weapons but with divinely powerful weapons, and with those weapons we are literally demolishing fortresses. And what are those fortresses? Speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God. We are armed, as Ephesians 6 said, as we battle not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers and the rulers of the darkness of this world, spiritual wickedness in the heavenlies. In other words, the whole demonic host and all of the ideologies that proceed from them. We are engaged in war. War means suffering, war means pain, war means difficulty. And so in verse 3 Paul says, "Suffer hardship with me as a good soldier of Christ Jesus."

The verb literally means "to suffer bad treatment, mistreatment, maltreatment." He says, "Come alongside all the rest of us, you're not the only one." Have a readiness to suffer. Ready to take your share of rough treatment. So committed to the battle for truth, so committed to take the Word of God which is our divinely powerful weapon and with it assault the fortresses of humanity and demonic powers and to take what comes.

I'm sure many men wash out of leadership right here. They see it as a path to ease, or a path to

glory and aren't willing to see it as warfare and take their share of pain. God is not interested in primadonnas but true soldiers who are willing to suffer. I remember my father when I first came into the ministry told me that it would be a time of great suffering, I needed to get ready for it, there would be many trials and difficulties in my life. The first year that was not the case and I asked him, "When is it going to start?" And he said, "Just be patient," and he was right. And it started and I have been through it all through these years, whether it is battling someone who is full of demons, whether it is being disappointed that someone you have disciplined faithfully has walked away from the faith, whether it is being falsely accused and assaulted, whatever it is, whether it is, as it were, struggling over the souls of the lost that you battle the kingdom of darkness, whether it is battling error in the church and trying to get back to a sound doctrine...it's always some battle or another. Spiritual leadership is a warfare, it is not for those who seek ease, it is for those who are willing to be soldiers.

When you ask Paul, "What are your credentials, Paul?" He doesn't give you a list of his academic accomplishments, he doesn't give you a list of his degrees, he doesn't tell you what books he wrote, or what articles and the journals he wrote, he doesn't tell you what awards he's got, or plaques on his wall. He says, "If you want to know whether I'm an apostle, here are my credentials. I have been in far-more labors and far-more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death, five times I received from the Jews 39 lashes, three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep, I have been on frequent journey in dangers from rivers, robbers, countrymen, Gentiles, in the city, in the wilderness, on the sea among false brethren. I have been in labor and hardship through many sleepless nights in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And apart from such external things there's the daily pressure upon me of concern for all the churches." Those are my credentials.

"I bear in my body the marks of Jesus Christ." He had scars all over because of the stones and the whips and the rods that struck him. He was willing to be offered on the sacrifice of someone else's salvation. He was willing to suffer for their sake, as he said in Colossians 1:24. Being a soldier is being a leader and being a spiritual leader involves self-sacrifice, endurance, vigilance, obedience, and loyalty.

In verse 4 he says, "No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of every day life." In other words, you stop being a civilian. The recruit who comes into the military today is given a brief time to get his affairs in order. He disposes of all his commitments and is only a soldier. He is freed up from everything to devote all his time, all his energy, all his effort, all his thought, all his skill to being a soldier. He just cuts himself off from the past...total devotion to the duty he's been called to. And then at the end of verse 4, it tells us that he does what he does to please the One who enlisted him as a soldier. You can't be a man pleaser, that will paralyze you. He pleases the One who called him to be a soldier.

Paul was a man pleaser for a long time...all of his life, really, until his conversion. In Galatians 1:10 he says, "Am I now seeking the favor of men or of God? Am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men I would not be a bondservant of Christ." You can't be both. You can't please men and be the slave of Jesus Christ. You can't be a soldier committed to please your commander and be a man pleaser. First Thessalonians 2:4 makes it very clear Paul's commitment to service. He says this, "We have been entrusted with the gospel, so we speak not as pleasing men but God who examines our hearts." You have to answer to the Commander and to Him alone. Serving the Lord, Paul said in Acts 20:19, serving the Lord with all humility of mind, serving the Lord with many plots against my life.

Summarizing the soldier then, the spiritual leader must hear God's call, join the battle, break all ties with the world. The spiritual leader is willing to accept suffering as his Lord suffered, and other soldiers have suffered through the years, even to the degree that we heard in that song, "Though he slay me, I will serve the Lord." And the spiritual soldier is totally concerned with gaining his commander's approval.

The third picture that Paul gives us is in verse 5, and it is the picture of an athlete. "Also if anyone competes as an athlete," he reminds Timothy, "he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules." Games, obviously, were a great part of Greek and Roman life as they are of our life in this time. The verb here in verse 5, "if anyone competes as an athlete," is the Greek word athleo. It means to strive, it means to agonize, it means to compete. It is a word of devotion and discipline and passion. And he is saying you've got to look at ministry like an athlete looks at an Olympic event, the dedicated athlete who is wholly absorbed in his pursuit, who will settle for nothing less than his best, who wants success and victory. In other words, you can't approach ministry listlessly in a half-hearted way. You can't approach it as a part-time deal, as a come-and-go, give-and-take. It takes everything, all you are and have and hope to be...everything. That's how you win, that's how an athlete competes. An athlete who doesn't compete like that is dishonored.

Then he says, secondly, he does not win the prize. In other words, he's saying here that the athlete competes with a prize in mind that he wants to win. He wants to be triumphant. You know, what really separates the greatest athletes from the good ones is desire and self-control. The ability to focus on a goal with such devotion and focus and singlemindedness that you can completely control everything around you to achieve that end. That's the difference. The talent level is much the same when you get to the pinnacle of athletics. What separates the great from the good is that passion and that drive that takes them past the others because they stripped themselves of all the encumbrances. They want the prize...they want the goal.

Paul says, "Timothy, you have to compete with all the devotion and discipline and focus of a great athlete who really wants to win more than anything, who really wants to hear, 'Well done, good and faithful servant.' Who really wants to receive the runner's crown."

But...end of verse 5...you have to compete according to the rules or you can't win. In all games there are rules. In all races there are rules. You can't break the rules and win. So it is not only a matter of self-discipline in your preparation and training, it is a matter of self-discipline in your running, in your competing. You must compete nomimos, lawfully. Mere effort is not enough. It has to be effort within God's tolerances.

The man who runs with all his might and all his energy and all his strength toward the prize will only receive it if he keeps the rules. This is a very serious race and God has very high standards. That's why Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9:27, "I beat my body into submission lest in preaching to others I myself would be disqualified." I don't want to be disqualified. I don't want to break the rules.

The athlete operates on self-discipline, self-control, self-denial. Times come when you want to quit the training and you want to drop out, but you can't. Something drives you. You go through that struggle. You keep going through that struggle. It's just in you.

I was talking to a professor of preaching years ago and he said to me, "I never met a powerful preacher, a successful preacher in my life who wasn't competitive."

I said, "What do you mean by that?"

He said, "I don't mean competitive against other preachers, I mean competitive against his own weakness, his own ignorance, his own sinfulness, his own lack of priorities, his own laziness. If you can't win the battle there, you can't win the race." Somewhere along the line you learn that driving, compelling attitude that takes you right to the goal.

Summing that up, the spiritual leader must be one who is willing to compete with all his strength, must be one who really wants to win, motivated by a future reward not present pleasure, must be one with strong self-discipline, willing to conform to God's standards without letting up. The fourth picture that Paul gives is that of a farmer in verse 6. The hard-working farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops.

Now this is a wonderful picture again of the spiritual leader that Paul wants Timothy to be. He's giving him pictures so he can visualize he is to be as a leader. And he says you're to be a farmer, a hard-working farmer who brings in the crop and who shares in it. Hard-working is from kopiaō, it means to work to the point of exhaustion and weariness. You have to understand that being a spiritual leader, being a pastor, one who serves as an elder is hard work, it's hard labor to the point of exhaustion and weariness.

Farmers know about that, so do faithful pastors. Farming essentially is an unglorious hard work. Digging in the dirt a lot, just like pastoring. It's hard work. It's expected to be hard work. And you expect that because it's hard work, look at verse 6, the farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops. Deiō in the Greek indicates this is an absolute necessity. It is absolutely necessary that the farmer get to feed off his own efforts or he's not going to be able to keep being a farmer. The picture here is very, very interesting. The farmer toils to produce food for others but in order to do that he's got to be able to feed himself. And that's...that's the point here.

Before the pastor can work to produce food for others through his study and his teaching, he has to first have his own soul nourished in the doing. Before he can give food to anybody else he has to have some for himself. This to me is the great reward of teaching. The great reward of teaching is that I get to eat myself. My own spiritual life is nourished. According to 1 Timothy 4, a pastor is to be nourished up on the words of the faith and sound doctrine. And when you're nourished up, then you have the energy to plant and harvest for somebody else. When it doesn't happen, the pastor dries up and so will everybody else.

An undernourished farmer can't plow a field, can't tend a crop, can't bring in a harvest. A weak and sickly farmer can't do that. A strong robust well-fed farmer can plow and harvest so others can eat. The most important thing in my life as a pastor is my own personal time with God in His Word. Unless my own soul is fed, yours really can't be. And that is the discipline of study and learning. And that's why I stay in this church. In part there are a number of reasons, that's one reason because I don't want to go somewhere else and be tempted to preach old sermons. I cannot preach old sermons here because we have old people here who have heard them. That just keeps me fresh, which is keeping me in the Word. And as my soul is nourished and fed and made strong by the

Word, then I can feed you. There are plenty of people sitting in churches with undernourished and weak pastors, unfed themselves with nothing to bring to their people.

There's something else about the farmer that is unique to farming and that is that he has to be patient for the crop to come in. A painter paints and when he's done painting the painting is done. A builder builds and when the building is done it's done. A car mechanic fixes a car and when it's fixed, it's fixed. But a farmer plants and waits and operates by faith because he's taken all of his money, bought seed and thrown the seed in the ground knowing it's going to die. And he has the faith in the reproductive power of decomposed seed that it's going to come alive in another crop. But he has to wait.

That's something very inimitable to ministry. You don't get instant gratification in the ministry, folks. It takes a long time. You have to be patient with disappointments, you have to be patient with failures, you have to be there over the long haul. That's one of the wonderful things about staying in the same place a long time is eventually the crops come in and you get in on the harvest. And what a joy that is. We sow the good seed, sometimes we see no immediate results, sometimes it takes so long, but the farmer is patient and gentle, he's not abusive, doesn't pressure people, he doesn't force them into molds and try to make them something with external pressure. He waits patiently for the Word to do its work.

So, when we look at the farmer, what do we see in this fourth metaphor? The spiritual leader must be willing to work hard, must, first of all, nurture his own soul in the Word and then be patient for the results in the lives of other people. That takes us to number five in this chapter down in verse 15.

And here we come to the workman, or better translated, the craftsman, ergaten(?), the worker, the craftsman. "Be diligent, or literally, do your best to present yourself approved to God as a workman, a craftsman." It's quite an interesting thing in this context to comment before we read any further.

The verses around this verse sort of feature the idea of talking. Back in verse 14 we are reminded to charge people not to wrangle about words which is useless and leads to the ruin of the hearers. And down in verse 16, on the other side of this verse, to avoid worldly and empty chatter for it will lead to further ungodliness.

What is this saying? This is saying we're not just talkers, we're not just people who stand up and talk, we are craftsmen who handle accurately the word of truth to the degree that we don't need to be ashamed of the way we've handled it and we can present it to God and know it will be approved. We're not talkers, we're not verbal quibblers. We're craftsmen if we're obedient to God. God didn't call us just to get up and talk, but rather to be craftsmen who take the word of truth and handle it with great precision so that we don't need to bear any shame for any misrepresentation but rather can present it to God for His approval. Approved is dokimos, you know that word all through the New Testament that means "to stand the test." We take our sermon and to whom do we offer it? To God. I've learned through the years that you're a very gracious and loving and kind congregation, and you're prone constantly to thank me and show appreciation for the message, and I do appreciate that. I cherish that. That encourages my heart. But the fact is God is the one who knows best the character of my heart as I preached, the character of my effort as I prepared and the singularity of my commitment as I preach. God knows that better than anybody knows it. And sometimes when you think I'm really good, He may know I wasn't that good. And sometimes when you think I'm mediocre, He may think it was better than you even understood it to be. But God is the one to be

concerned about.

Can I stand the test with Him? I have to be a craftsman and my trade is to handle accurately the Word of truth. I have to have tools to do that. That's why we have seminaries. That's what I am, I'm a craftsman. And I've been given tools. And then I have to have knowledge and understanding and a plan and diligent effort to take those tools and build something that I can offer to God knowing it will please Him.

"Handling accurately" actually translates a verb that means "to cut something straight." It's used of cutting a pattern straight. For example, a tentmaker might have a pattern for his tent, he'd cut the material and then fit it together. It's used of a farmer plowing a straight furrow. It's used of a straight line of bricks laid by a mason. It's used of a straight road built.

In other words, no wavering, no wandering. It's done right. It's cut straight, no deception, no huckstering, no deviation, great precision. How we handle the Word of truth is here indicated to us. We are to handle it accurately, with precision.

So what do we find out then about the craftsman, the workman? He is accountable to God for approval on all his work. That demands that we do our best, that we never be ashamed of anything we have done, we be careful in the handling of God's Word which comes down to less talk and more work. And that probably means less talk during the week and more work. We would like to just be available to everybody for every conversation, but we can't be.

You know, solitude is the friend of the gifted preacher. We spend a lot of time in the crowd but we have to spend a lot of our time alone in the Word.

Well, number six, the next part of Paul's picture of a leader is the image of a vessel, skeuos in the Greek, a pot, a pan, some kind of utensil. It's in verse 20 and 21 that I draw your attention. "Now in a large house," we're talking here about a great house, a house with some wealthy, "there are not only gold and silver vessels but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, or clay, and some to honor and some to dishonor, therefore if a man cleanses himself from these things he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the master prepared for every good work."

Now we want to be a vessel that is useful. If I have my choice between being wood or clay, and being gold or silver, I think I would choose the gold or silver, I want to be useful. Now the picture here is extremely graphic and I don't want to get too graphic with it but say enough so you'll get the picture here.

In a great house you have two kinds of utensils here...the gold and silver vessels would be the ones that were used for eating, that were brought into the dining room on which the food was served, with which it was prepared in this wealthy house. But then there were vessels of wood and earthenware. You will notice that in verse 20 it says the gold and silver were for honorable uses...honorable uses. The wood and earthenware were not just for common uses, he's not talking about just common use, they are for dishonorable uses.

In an ancient house you had honorable things and dishonorable things. You still do in your house. You have that which comes to the table, and then you have that which goes away from the table, the

waste in all the various forms that it takes in the house. That's why you have plumbing in your house. But in ancient days they didn't. They had utensils for the waste, the garbage, the filth of the house. They were made of wood and clay.

Now verse 21 says, "If you want to be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the master, prepared for every good work," verse 21, "then you have to be cleansed." He doesn't use a filthy utensil. Cleansed...you say...from what? The end of verse 19, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord abstain from...what?...wickedness." Back to verse 16 and 17, worldly empty chatter that leads to ungodliness, talk that spreads like gangrene, like Hymenaeus and Philetus who led people astray because they taught error about the resurrection. Whether it's the filth of false doctrine or the filth of personal iniquity, if you're not cleansed of that stuff you cannot be a vessel fit for the master's use, prepared for every good work.

There are within the framework of the kingdom dishonorable vessels. Paul would certainly be identifying them with his word "castaway"...tested and found useless because they're not pure from false teaching and they're not pure from iniquity.

So Paul is adding some more qualifications for a spiritual leader here. He must be sanctified, pure in his own personal life and set apart from heresy and false teaching, clean, prepared, useful to his master. God is not going to carry the pure gospel in a garbage pail, He'll carry it in a clean clay pot, as 2 Corinthians 4 indicates, but not in a vessel used for dishonorable purposes. That's why Paul beat his body into submission.

And then lastly is the slave. By the way, as a footnote to the point prior, look at verse 22. This is why Paul says to Timothy, "Flee youthful lusts and pursue righteousness and a pure heart." That fouls up so many people in the ministry, don't have a pure heart, don't pursue righteousness, don't run from lusts.

Then he comes to the slave, the last one, the slave. After the vessel, the vessel that's pure comes the slave. And this is wonderful because when it's all said and done in spiritual service, in the end we are servants, aren't we? We are bondslaves. And so in verse 24 he says, "And the Lord's bondservant," doulos, "must act like a bondservant. Don't be quarrelsome, don't be contentious and combative and abusive and overbearing and don't be argumentative, just take your task and humbly serve." There's no honor in a quarrelsome servant, "But be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition."

All of that is the spirit of a servant...patient, kind, not argumentative, gentle. Oh we have to correct, but we do it with the gentleness and meekness of Christ. That word "gentleness" there is actually the word "meekness." We're always humble, always meek, we always come with a gentle spirit. We are patient when wronged and we are kind to all, and quarrelsome (I think he means not quarrelsome). And then there's this one qualification, it shows up every time you have a list of qualifications for a pastor. First Timothy 3, Titus 1, 2 Timothy 2, "He must be able to teach." And we come right back to where we started, didaktikos, a skilled teacher, capable of and willing to impart truth with the spirit of a servant.

No contentious, not combative, not overbearing, not lording it over the flock, not abusing them, not taking advantage of them, not manipulating them, not intimidating them, but serving them humbly.

Willing to work in submission to the master as a slave and maintaining the spirit of gentleness, kindness, meekness, even when attacked as you faithfully and ably teach the truth. That's what we do.

Well, God wants leaders. And we ask ourselves, "Am I a candidate?" Let me sum up, you ask yourself if you're a candidate.

Am I a diligent student of the biblical message and able to articulate its teaching?

Am I loyal and faithful to that message in my life?

Am I actively involved in the training and equipping of additional teachers?

Have I heard the Lord's call and am willing to join in the battle no matter what the cost?

Am I willing to suffer the hardships involved?

Have I separated from the world and its activities so that I have a singleminded commitment?

Am I totally concerned with gaining Christ's approval and not man's?

Am I strongly self-disciplined, willing and able to conform my life to God's standards without letting up all the way to the end?

Do I desire above all to win His approval?

Am I motivated by future reward rather than present pleasure?

Am I willing to work hard and exhaust in toil, careful first to nurture my own soul and be patient for the results in the lives of my people?

Am I eager to be accountable to God for His approval and inspection on my work?

Do I desire to never be ashamed of anything I offer to Him? Am I careful to handle His Word without error or distortion?

Am I committed to talk little and study much?

Have I been cleansed from evil?

Am I available, ready?

Have I distanced myself from false teaching?

Am I a servant willing to submit my will to my Master's?

Do I possess the right spirit no matter what happens to me?

This is leadership. You say, "Boy, God's standards are high." That's right. And after preaching this sermon twice this morning, I think I'll resign. Who could live up to this? It is our goal, it is our desire, it is our passion, but we all falter. And when we falter we have to go back to chapter 2 verses 7 and 8 where we'll end this morning.

When we falter we go back there. And verse 7, "Consider what I say for the Lord will give you understanding in everything." Paul is saying...Go back and look at these things and get another grip on them." This is something you have to go back to over and over again. Go back and the Lord will give you an understanding of these things. Regrip these great truths. Remember the standard, is what he's saying.

And then verse 8, I love this, "Remember Jesus Christ." What does that mean? What that means is you're not alone. "Remember Jesus Christ risen from the dead"...why does he say that? That notes His deity and His power. "Descendant of David," that notes His humanity and His compassion. Remember Jesus Christ who rose from the dead and has the power to make you the man He wants you to be, remember Jesus Christ descendant from David who was man and has the sympathy to understand your failures.

This is leadership and when you falter go back and remember the standard and then remember Jesus who is the power for the keeping of it and who is the sympathetic High Priest for the sympathy in all our failures.

Father, we thank You this morning for Your Word to us. We know that in the very next chapter, and the very next verse Paul said, "Realize this that in the last days difficult times will come." It must have been difficult in Timothy's time to follow this pattern, maybe it's even more difficult now since evil men get worse and worse. But, Lord, we know what the standard is and we have gone back and we ask You to give us understanding in everything. And we remember Jesus Christ, we labor in His strength, not our own. We labor in His resurrection power, not our own. We are strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, not our own. And so thankful that He as a descendant of David came into the world as a man and was in all points tempted like as we are and is a sympathetic high priest who has been touched with the feelings of our infirmities, understands our weakness and our failure and compassionately lifts us up.

O God, how we pray that You'll make all of us who are in spiritual leadership what You want us to be for Your glory and the honor of Your Son whom we love and in whose name we pray. Amen.

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