

SET IN ORDER: GOD'S DESIGN FOR HIS CHURCH

Sermon 9 — The Marks of a Faithful Minister

Matt Alexander- Fusion Church Madison 10-11-26

1 Timothy 4:11–16

CIT: Paul emphasized to Timothy the marks of a faithful minister.

Thesis: We must emphasize the marks of a faithful minister.

Proposition: I want FC to emphasize the marks of a faithful minister.

PQ: What are the marks of a faithful minister?

- 1. Prescribes Sound Doctrine — v. 11**
- 2. Patterns Holy Living — v. 12**
- 3. Progresses in His Gifts — vv. 13–15**
- 4. Perseveres in Faithfulness — v. 16**

INTRODUCTION

Church, we are continuing our series:

Set in Order: God's Design for His Church.

Paul has been teaching Timothy how the church of Jesus Christ is supposed to function.

- We've talked about sound doctrine.
- Prayer.
- Biblical roles.
- Qualified shepherds.
- Qualified servants.

And in chapter 4 Paul turns directly to Timothy and essentially says:

“Timothy, now here's the kind of minister you need to be.”

Because a rightly ordered church requires rightly ordered leadership.

It's not enough for a pastor to meet the qualifications when he enters ministry.

He has to remain faithful in ministry.

- A man can begin well and finish poorly.
- He can preach faithfully for years and eventually drift doctrinally.
- He can possess tremendous gifts and neglect his character.

- He can become so busy doing ministry that he stops watching his own soul.

So Paul gives Timothy instructions not merely for **entering** ministry, but for **enduring** in ministry.

(**Alistair Begg**, preaching this very passage, points out that because this letter would be read publicly, the congregation listening to Paul's instructions **“was simultaneously learning what they had a legitimate right to expect from their pastor.”**)

That's important.

This isn't merely a sermon for pastors.

It's a sermon about what the church should expect, encourage, and pray for in its pastors.

Paul tells us in 1 Timothy 4:11-16

11 Command and teach these things. **12** Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. **13** Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. **14** Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. **15** Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. **16** Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.

So here's our question:

What are the marks of a faithful minister?

1. HE PRESCRIBES SOUND DOCTRINE

Verse 11 Paul says: “Command and teach these things.”

Notice the strength of those words.

Command.

Teach.

Paul doesn't tell Timothy:

- “Offer a few suggestions.”
- “Share your personal opinion.”
- “Find out what everybody wants to hear.”

No.

“Command and teach these things.”

Why?

Because Timothy isn't the source of the message.

God is.

The pastor has no authority to stand behind a pulpit and demand that people obey his opinions.

But when Scripture speaks, the pastor has a responsibility to say:

“This is what God has said.”

Listen: Authoritarian preaching says:

“Do this because I said so.”

Biblical preaching says:

“We must submit to this because God has spoken.”

2 Timothy 4:2 says:

“preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort...”

Titus 2:15 says:

“Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority.”

The authority isn't in the personality of the preacher.

- It isn't in his volume.
- It isn't in his education.
- It isn't in his title.

The authority is in the Word of God.

Charles Spurgeon said:

“To me the Bible is not God, but it is God's voice, and I do not hear it without awe.”

That's the attitude a preacher ought to bring to Scripture.

Illustration

Think about an ambassador.

An ambassador doesn't get to rewrite the message of the king who sent him.

Imagine an ambassador receiving a message and saying:

“I don't think people are going to like this part.”

“So I'll soften this.”

“I'll leave that section out.”

“And I'll add something that might make everybody happier.”

At that moment, he has stopped functioning as an ambassador.

His job isn't to **edit the king's message**.

His job is to **deliver it faithfully**.

That's the preacher.

We don't write the message.

We deliver it.

Application

FC, you should expect your pastors to preach things that sometimes make you uncomfortable.

And you should expect me to preach things that sometimes make **me** uncomfortable.

Because the goal isn't:

“What does Matt want to say?”

The question is:

“What has God said?”

You don't need a preacher who always confirms what you already believe.

You need a preacher who opens God's Word and says:

“Here's what it says.

Here's what it means.

Here's what God calls us to do.”

And then we all submit to it together.

What marks a faithful minister?

He prescribes sound doctrine.

2. HE PATTERNS HOLY LIVING

Verse 12 Paul continues:

“Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example...”

Timothy was relatively young for the responsibility he'd been given.

And Paul knew people might use his age against him.

But notice Paul's solution.

He doesn't tell Timothy:

- “Demand their respect.”
- “Remind them of your position.”
- “Show them who's in charge.”

No.

He says:

Give them a life worth following.

Alistair Begg summarizes Paul's point to Timothy this way:

“Don't have them look down on you because you're just young. Have them look up to you because you're an example to them.”

That's powerful.

A pastor's authority isn't merely established by what comes out of his mouth.

It is reinforced by **how he lives his life**.

Paul identifies five areas.

In Speech

How does he talk?

Are his words truthful?

Gracious?

Edifying?

Does the man who handles God's Word publicly control his tongue privately?

In Conduct

How does he live?

Not just on Sunday.

Monday.

Tuesday.

At home.

In traffic.

At the restaurant.

When he's frustrated.

When nobody from church is watching.

In Love

Does he genuinely love people?

Ministry without love eventually turns people into problems, projects, or numbers.

In Faith

Is he dependable?

Does he trust God when ministry becomes difficult?

In Purity

Are his relationships clean?

Are his thoughts and actions morally pure?

Because gifting can never compensate for ungodliness.

Illustration

Think about a road sign.

A sign can point you toward a destination without ever going there itself.

It can say:

Atlanta — 20 miles.

But that sign isn't going to Atlanta.

And there's a danger in ministry of becoming a **spiritual road sign**.

Always pointing everybody else toward holiness while never moving there yourself.

Preaching:

“Pray!”

but not praying.

“Love your family!”

while neglecting yours.

“Walk in purity!”

while hiding secret sin.

“Trust God!”

while living by fear.

Paul says:

Timothy, don't merely point people toward godliness.

Walk there in front of them.

Paul says it this way in 1 Corinthians 11:1:

“Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.”

Application

FC, don't expect perfection from your pastors.

You will be disappointed.

There is only one perfect Shepherd.

But you have every biblical right to expect **godliness**.

A pastor should be able to say:

“I'm not perfect, but follow me as I follow Jesus.”

And this applies beyond pastors.

Parents—

your children need more than instructions about Jesus.

They need an example of someone following Jesus.

Small-group leaders.

Teachers.

Deacons.

Mature Christians.

People are watching.

The most powerful sermon you preach may be the life you live after the sermon is over.

What marks a faithful minister?

He prescribes sound doctrine.

And:

He patterns holy living.

3. HE PROGRESSES IN HIS GIFTS

Verses 13–15

Paul says:

“Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.”

Then:

“Do not neglect the gift you have...”

And verse 15:

“Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress.”

Notice the words.

- **Devote yourself.**
- **Do not neglect.**
- **Practice.**
- **Immerse yourself.**

Paul expects Timothy to **grow**.

Faithfulness is not being stagnate...

You see: God had gifted Timothy, but Timothy still had a responsibility to develop that gift.

A gift from God is not an excuse to stop growing.

And notice where Timothy's ministry is centered.

Verse 13 gives us three activities.

Reading.

Exhortation.

Teaching.

Read the Word.

Explain the Word.

Apply the Word.

That's pastoral ministry.

And that's why the Bible must remain central to the gathered church.

Spurgeon described biblical preaching as:

“not a lecture about the Scripture, but Scripture itself opened up and enforced.”

That's exactly what Paul is describing.

- We read what God has said.
- We explain what God means.

- And we call people to respond.

The pulpit isn't central because the **preacher** is important.

The pulpit is central because God's Word is important.

Hebrews 4:12 says:

“For the word of God is living and active...”

2 Timothy 3:16 says:

“All Scripture is breathed out by God...”

God changes His people through His Word.

Example:

Think about a musician.

A gifted musician may have tremendous natural ability.

But if he says:

“God gave me musical talent, so I don't need to practice,”

what happens?

Eventually the gift becomes sloppy.

Listen- Natural ability is not the same thing as developed ability.

And ministry is no different.

God's calling isn't permission to become lazy.

It's motivation to become diligent.

A preacher should be a better student of Scripture after twenty years than after two.

- A better communicator.
- A wiser counselor.
- A more compassionate shepherd.
- A more disciplined Christian.

Paul says:

“so that all may see your progress.”

I love that.

He doesn't say:

“So everybody can see your perfection.”

He says:

“So everybody can see your progress.”

A faithful pastor should still be growing.

Application

FC, pray that your pastors never stop growing.

Pray we never reach the point where we think:

“I've preached enough sermons.”

“I've studied enough Bible.”

“I've learned enough theology.”

“I've been doing this long enough.”

That's dangerous.

And again, the principle reaches every believer.

God has gifted every Christian for service.

1 Peter 4:10 says:

“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another...”

Don't bury what God has given you.

- Develop it.
- Use it.
- Grow in it.

God doesn't expect us to be instantly mature, but He does expect us to be progressing.

What marks a faithful minister?

He prescribes sound doctrine.

He patterns holy living.

He progresses in his gifts.

And finally:

4. HE PERSEVERES IN FAITHFULNESS

Verse 16

Paul brings everything together:

“Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this...”

There are two things Timothy must watch.

His life and his doctrine.

Himself. And his teaching.

Character. And truth.

A minister can destroy his ministry by abandoning either one.

- He can maintain orthodox doctrine and destroy himself morally.
- Or he can maintain a respectable outward life while slowly abandoning biblical truth.

Paul says:

Watch both.

Alistair Begg says verse 16 essentially summarizes Paul's charge:

“Watch your life and doctrine closely.”

Then Paul says:

“Persist in this...”

- Not for a year.
- Not until ministry gets difficult.
- Not until people criticize you.
- Not until another opportunity comes along.

Persist.

Faithfulness is measured over time.

Galatians 6:9 says: “let us not grow weary of doing good...”

1 Corinthians 15:58 says:

“be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord...”

Illustration

Anybody can sprint for a few seconds.

But ministry isn't a hundred-yard dash.

It's a marathon.

The challenge isn't just leaving the starting line enthusiastically.

The challenge is crossing the finish line faithfully.

I've known people who began ministry with tremendous enthusiasm.

Gifted.

Passionate.

Full of potential.

But somewhere along the way they stopped watching themselves.

Or stopped watching their doctrine.

And eventually something collapsed.

Paul says:

Timothy, keep watching.

Keep guarding.

Keep growing.

Keep preaching.
Keep believing.
Keep going.

Then comes this difficult phrase:

“for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.”

Paul isn't saying Timothy earns salvation by being a good pastor.

The Bible couldn't be clearer:

We are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

Paul's point-concerns **perseverance and preservation**.

You see- God uses faithful gospel ministry as a means through which people hear, believe, grow, and persevere in the truth.

Romans 10:17 says:

“faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”

The stakes are eternal.

This isn't merely about improving somebody's Sunday.

Souls are involved.

- That's why doctrine matters.
- That's why character matters.
- That's why perseverance matters.

Spurgeon once said:

“Keep the word of God, and the word of God will keep you.”

That's good counsel for every minister.

- Stay with the Word.
- Stay near Christ.
- Watch your life.
- Watch your doctrine.
- And keep going.

Application

FC, don't merely pray that your pastors preach good sermons.

Pray that we **finish well**.

Pray for our marriages.

Our children.

Our private lives.

Our prayer lives.

Our theology.

Our purity.

Our endurance.

Pray that twenty years from now, if God gives us twenty years, we're still standing behind the Word saying:

“Thus says the Lord.”

- Because the goal isn't to become famous.
- It isn't to build a platform.
- It isn't to impress other pastors.

The goal is faithfulness.

Let me bring it all home....

So what are the marks of a faithful minister?

He Prescribes Sound Doctrine.

He teaches God's truth with biblical authority.

He Patterns Holy Living.

His life reinforces his message.

He Progresses in His Gifts.

He remains devoted to Scripture and continues growing in his calling.

He Perseveres in Faithfulness.

He watches his life and doctrine and refuses to quit.

And church, these aren't merely things you should **expect** from your pastors.

They're things you should **pray for** in your pastors.

Don't just pray:

“Lord, give us a good sermon Sunday.”

Pray:

“Lord, keep our pastors faithful.”

Because sermons come and go.

Programs come and go.

Methods come and go.

Pastors come and go.

But the Word of God remains forever.

— — — —

And there's something every pastor needs to remember.

No minister in this room perfectly fulfills this passage.

I don't.

No pastor does.

But there is One who did.

Jesus Christ.

Jesus perfectly taught the truth.

He said in John 17:17:

“Your word is truth.”

Jesus perfectly lived what He taught.

There was never a contradiction between His public message and His private character.

He perfectly fulfilled His mission.

And Jesus persevered all the way to the end.

- He didn't quit when the crowds left.
- He didn't quit when Judas betrayed Him.
- He didn't quit when Peter denied Him.
- He didn't quit when the soldiers beat Him.
- He didn't quit when they nailed Him to the cross.

He remained faithful unto death.

Why?

Because He came:

“to seek and to save the lost.”

— Luke 19:10

At the cross, the faithful Shepherd laid down His life for unfaithful sinners.

He took our sin.

Our guilt.

Our judgment.

He died in our place.

And on the third day:

He rose again.

That's the gospel.

- Your hope isn't in a faithful pastor.
- Your hope is in a **faithful Savior**.
- A pastor can't forgive your sin.
- A sermon can't save you.
- Church membership can't reconcile you to God.
- Jesus saves.

Salvation is by **grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone**.

So if you've never trusted Christ, repent of your sin and believe the gospel.

And Christian, let me ask you:

Are you growing?

Does your life match what you say you believe?

Are you using the gifts God has given you?

Are you persevering—or have you begun drifting?

And FC, will you pray for your pastors?

Pray that we will never substitute personality for biblical authority.

Pray that our private lives will match our public preaching.

Pray that we'll continue growing.

Pray that we'll remain faithful to Scripture.

And pray that when our ministry is finished, we can say with Paul:

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”

— 2 Timothy 4:7

Because ultimately, that's what we want.

Not celebrity.

Not applause.

Not recognition.

Faithfulness.

A faithful life.

A faithful ministry.

A faithful church.

All for the glory of our faithful Savior.

Let's pray.