

Qualities of an Excellent Servant, Part 2

Scripture: 1 Timothy 4:10–11

Code: 54-31

REVIEW

The key phrase of 1 Timothy 4:6-16 is a portion of verse 6, which says, "Thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ." If the servant of Christ is to be what God wants him to be, what the ministry demands he be, and what the people need him to be, he must measure his life against the right standard.

Seventeenth-century Puritan John Owen wrote that a minister may fill his pews, his communion role, and the mouths of the public, but what he is on his knees in secret before almighty God is all that he is and no more. What God demands of those serving in ministry goes beyond ability and giftedness to character. What kind of person are you before God? Someone said that personality is what you are in the light when everyone can see, but character is what you are in the dark when no one can see.

Paul wanted Timothy--and anyone else who serves others--to realize that personal virtue is inviolably linked to effectiveness in ministry. God wants men of character.

What are the qualifications? We have looked at four, and we'll look at two more in this chapter.

I. THE EXCELLENT SERVANT WARNS PEOPLE OF ERROR (v. 6a)

"If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things"

II. THE EXCELLENT SERVANT IS AN EXPERT STUDENT OF SCRIPTURE (v. 6b)

"Nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, unto which thou hast attained"

III. THE EXCELLENT SERVANT AVOIDS THE INFLUENCE OF UNHOLY TEACHING (v. 7a)

"Refuse profane and old wife's fables"

A. A Contradiction of the Truth (see p. 31)

B. A Commitment to the Truth (see pp. 31-32)

1. 1 Timothy 6:2-5--Paul said to Timothy, "These things teach and exhort. If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and disputes of words, of which cometh envy, strife, railings, evil suspicions, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness; from such withdraw thyself." The excellent servant shouldn't get involved in unholy teaching. All it does is create suspicion about the Word of God.

2. Philippians 4:8--The excellent servant should be committed to the principle: "Whatever things are true, whatever things are honest, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." He is not double-minded (James 1:6-8); he is totally committed to the truth of God. That in itself creates strength.

3. 2 Timothy 2:16--Paul told Timothy to "shun profane and vain babblings; for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as doth a gangrene."

4. Titus 2:15--The excellent servant should speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority" that which pertains to the gospel.

The excellent servant feeds on holy truth and avoids anything that might corrupt his pure mind and

divert him from pursuing the things of God.

IV. THE EXCELLENT SERVANT DISCIPLINES HIMSELF IN PERSONAL GODLINESS (vv. 7b-9)

"Exercise thyself rather unto godliness. For bodily exercise profiteth little, but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance."

A. The Exhortation (v. 7b)

It is axiomatic that spiritual exercise for godliness is far more important than physical exercise.

Therefore, we are to be devoted to attaining personal godliness.

1. "Exercise" (see pp. 32-34)

2. "Godliness"

a) Its secular useThe Greek word translated "godliness" is eusebeia. It was used by ancient philosophers and religionists. The Platonic definition was right conduct regarding the gods. The Stoic definition was knowledge of how God should be worshiped. Lucian, a Greek writer of the second century A.D., said it described one who was a lover of the gods. Greek historian Xenophon said that a godly person was wise concerning the gods. In its pagan usage eusebeia referred to a reverence for things that are holy and a preoccupation with matters related to deity. (For documentation see Richard Chenevix Trench's Synonyms of the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973], pp. 172-73.)

b) Its spiritual useIn terms of the Christian faith eusebeia also refers to a right attitude toward God and a preoccupation with what is holy. Godliness is the highest of all virtues. If the highest attribute of God is His holiness, then the greatest pursuit of mankind is to attain Godlike holiness. Godliness is the heart and soul of spiritual character. Godliness is said to be at the heart of truth (1 Tim. 6:3). It comes through Christ (2 Pet. 1:3), yet we still must pursue it (1 Tim. 6:11). It brings trouble from a hostile environment (2 Tim. 3:12). And it blesses us eternally--but not necessarily with temporal prosperity (1 Tim. 6:5-8). (1) 1 Timothy 2:2--We are to "lead a quiet and peaceable [life] in all godliness and honesty." (2) 2 Peter 3:11--Peter asked, "What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy living and godliness?" We are to live lives that show respect for God, His Word, and His will. And it starts at home (1 Tim. 5:4).

B. The Explanation (v. 8)

C. The Exhortation (v. 9)

LESSON

V. THE EXCELLENT SERVANT IS COMMITTED TO HARD WORK (v. 10)

Having called us to be godly, Paul now brings us back to earth. The ministry is a heavenly pursuit, but it is also an earthly task--it's hard work.

A. The Price of Ministry (v. 10a)

"We both labor and suffer reproach [strive]."

Since we know that godliness has "promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come" (v. 8), we labor and strive. We work hard because we realize that what we do has eternal implications. The Greek verbs translated "labor" and "suffer reproach" refer to extreme hard work.

1. The motives

In 2 Corinthians 5:9 Paul says, "We labor that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him." Then Paul gives two reasons for working hard.

a) Knowledge of future rewardsIn verse 10 Paul says, "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ." We will stand before Christ and be eternally rewarded for the service we've rendered Him. The reward we receive will be commensurate with the service we have rendered Christ, whether good or useless (cf. 1 Cor. 3:11-15). b) Knowledge of impending judgmentIn verse 11 Paul says, "Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men." Here Paul is looking beyond himself to unregenerate people. They won't experience a time of reward; they'll face judgment. And since we know that, we should persuade them with the truths of the gospel in hopes that through salvation

they might avoid judgment. Paul worked hard because he knew his effort had eternal consequences--reward for himself and the possibility of changing the destiny of unbelievers. That is the perspective that propels the servant of God. There is an eternal heaven and an eternal hell. Everyone on the face of the earth will spend eternity in one place or the other. When we realize that, we are compelled to serve Christ. No one with a reasonable understanding of heaven's glory and hell's horror could ever be mediocre in the ministry unless he had a cold heart. Henry Martyn, the nineteenth-century English missionary to India and Persia, said he wanted to burn out for God. He was inspired by the example of David Brainerd, who died in his late twenties taking the gospel to American Indians. Both of those men gave of themselves because the work needed to be done, and eternity was the issue. We're engaged in an eternal work; the destiny of souls is at stake.

2. The meaning

In verse 10 Paul is probably referring to his companions, including Timothy, when he says, "We both labor and suffer reproach" (emphasis added). "Labor" (Gk., *kopiaio*) means "to work to the point of weariness." "Suffer reproach" (Gk., *agonizomai*) means to agonize in a struggle." We work to the point of weariness and exhaustion, often in pain, because we understand our eternal objectives. J. Oswald Sanders wrote, "If he is unwilling to pay the price of fatigue for his leadership, it will always be mediocre" (Spiritual Leadership [Chicago: Moody, 1980], p. 175). He also said, "True leadership always exacts a heavy toll on the whole man, and the more effective the leadership is, the higher the price to be paid" (p. 169). We will not mitigate that price because we understand the urgency of our ministry. Weariness, loneliness, struggle, rising early, staying up late, and forgoing pleasures all come with excellence.

a) Galatians 6:14--Paul said that by taking up the cross of Christ, he crucified himself to the world--he died to everything around him and became consumed with the gospel of Christ. b) 1 Corinthians 9:16, 26-27--Paul said, "Necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!...So fight I, not as one that beateth the air; but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection." That describes Paul's tremendous effort and commitment to a ministry with eternal consequences. In 2 Corinthians 11:24-27 Paul tells of the many times he was beaten with rods and a whip, and endured weariness, suffering, pain, agony, and shipwreck. He endured all those perils because he was totally committed to the ministry at hand. Why? Because he had eternity in view. He realized that the destiny of souls hung in the balance.

B. The Hope of Ministry (v. 10b)

"Because we trust in the living God"

The Greek text says, "We have set our hope on the living God." The phrase "have set our hope" is in the perfect tense, which means that we did it in the past and continue to do it in the present. We continually hope in God.

1. Is a contrast to dead idols

The Old Testament frequently contrasts the living God with dead idols (1 Sam. 17:26; 2 Kings 19:4, 16; Psalm 42:2; 84:2). All the so-called gods of the nations are actually dead idols. When people serve the gods of this world, they may perceive themselves as receiving some temporal, innate reward. Only in that manner can dead idols have any meaning. But dead idols can't carry anyone beyond the grave because they are dead. We serve the living God who can and will reward us eternally.

2. It is a commitment to a living God

We live in hope of the future. Missionaries who preach the gospel of Jesus Christ through the years deprive themselves of almost every earthly pleasure because their hope is set on the living God. They believe He will provide life for them beyond this life. We're not trying to amass a fortune here so we can indulge ourselves before we leave. Our hope is set on the future.

a) Romans 8:24--Paul said, "We are saved by hope." b) 1 Corinthians 4:2-5--Paul said, "It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged

of you, or of man's judgment judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts; and then shall every man have praise of God." Paul wasn't looking for human praise; he was waiting for God's eternal reward.

As Paul looked to the future, that caused him to serve with his whole heart, striving in the work of the ministry. We hope in an eternal, living God, who will some day reward those who faithfully serve Him.

C. The Affirmation of Ministry (v. 10c)

"Who is the Savior of all men, specially of those that believe."

In what sense is God the Savior of all men? How is He specially the Savior of those who believe?

Many suggestions have been made. The key to interpreting this phrase is to stay in its context.

The God whom we serve and have set our hope on will one day bring us to full glory. All our sacrifices and labor are eternally worthwhile. But what is our affirmation that God "is the Savior of all men, specially of those that believe."

1. The universal-salvation interpretation

a) The concept Some people believe verse 10 teaches universalism--that ultimately everyone will be saved. They believe all things will be resolved in Christ, and that there is no eternal hell. b) The contradiction We know verse 10 can't be interpreted that way because the Bible doesn't teach that all people will be saved. We believe in *analogia scriptura*, which means that Scripture is always analogous to itself--it doesn't contradict itself. Since God is the author of it all, it is consistent. And Scripture teaches that there is an eternal hell. It is a place where the "worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:44, 46, 48). It is eternal just as heaven is eternal. It is the place where the unsaved are set apart from the presence of God forever (Rev. 21:8). It is a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 8:12). It is a place of evil, torment, isolation, and loneliness, separate from the presence of God. Jesus said to the religious hypocrites, "Where I go, ye cannot come" (John 8:21). He was telling them that their ultimate destiny was away from the presence of God. There is an eternal hell and separation from God for those who reject the Lord Jesus Christ. So 1 Timothy 4:10 can't be teaching that all people will be saved in a soteriological sense. Second Thessalonians 1:9 says that unbelievers will be "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power." So the phrase "God is the Savior of all men" does not mean that all men ultimately will be saved because that would contradict Scripture.

2. The potential/actual-salvation interpretation

This view states that God is potentially the Savior of all men, but actually the Savior of those who believe. That's a true statement. The death of Jesus Christ was powerful enough to pay for the sins of the whole world and deliver all men from their sin (1 John 2:2). However, even though that statement is biblical, I prefer another interpretation of 1 Timothy 4:10.

3. The temporal/eternal-salvation interpretation

a) The concept We do not need to limit the Greek word here translated "Savior" (*soter*) to mean only salvation from sin. (1) The use of "Savior" in the Old Testament When Paul preached to the learned men of Athens on Mars' Hill, he said that God is not "worshiped with men's hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things...for in him we live, and move, and have our being....For we are also his offspring" (Acts 17:25, 28). In a general sense God is the provider and sustainer of life for all people. *Soter* can mean "sustainer," "provider," or "deliverer." (a) Acts 27:34--During a storm at sea Paul said to the crew, "Take some food; for this is for your health." The Greek word normally translated "salvation" is here translated "health." Paul wasn't talking about spiritual salvation but physical health. (b) Acts 4:9--After Peter and John healed a man, Peter said, "If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made well." Here the Greek word most often translated "save" is translated "made well." (c) James 5:15--James said, "The prayer of faith shall save the sick" (emphasis added). So the Greek words translated "salvation" or "save" aren't limited to describing the salvation of the soul. they can speak of

deliverance from disease or trouble or of sustenance from food. That is the analogy Paul is using in 1 Timothy 4:10. We have seen God's sustaining and providing power on a worldwide basis. We have seen His great temporal provision for all people. But that provision is especially glorious for the believer because it is not only temporal but also eternal. God was the Savior of Israel in a temporal sense, but He is the Savior of only a few Jewish people in a spiritual sense. In 1 Corinthians 10:1-5 Paul says, "I would not that ye should be ignorant, that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual food; and did all drink the same spiritual drink but with many of them God was not well pleased." God provides sustenance on a temporal level for all, but eternal salvation comes only for those who believe. The nation of Israel left Egypt and eventually entered Canaan. God sustained the existence of the nation by providing them with food and water, and delivering them from illness, danger, and enemies. He preserved the nation for many years, yet redeemed only those who believed in Him.

b) The conviction Paul's argument is this: we labor and strive in the ministry because we believe the consequences are eternal. We have set our hope on a living God, and we know He will save the souls of those who believe because we have seen His sustaining power at work in the world. That's why we work hard. We see beyond the temporal to the eternal consequences. If you ever lose sight of that then you'll lose out in your ministry. We're to serve with all our heart. That's why Paul endured what he did, and that's why any faithful, excellent servant endures what he does. He has set his hope on an eternal God who has proved He can sustain life.

(1) Of Thomas Cochran I remember reading about a man named Thomas Cochrane as he was being interviewed for the mission field. He was asked, "What portion of the field do you feel yourself specially called to?" He answered, "I only know I wish it to be the hardest you could offer me." The Lord's work is not for people who are looking for ease and comfort. Yet it is eternally rewarding for those who set their hope on eternity.

(2) Of Richard Baxter Seventeenth-century English Puritan Richard Baxter wrote that the ministerial work "must be managed laboriously and diligently, being of such unspeakable consequence to others and ourselves. We are seeking to uphold the world, to save it from the curse of God, to perfect the creation, to attain the ends of Christ's redemption, to save ourselves and others from damnation, to overcome the devil, and demolish his kingdom, and set up the kingdom of Christ, and attain and help others to the kingdom of glory. And are these works to be done with a careless mind or a slack hand? Oh see then that this work be done with all your might! Study hard, for the well is deep, and our brains are shallow" (The Reformed Pastor [London: James Nisbet and Co., 1860], pp. 164-65). Our whole work is a labor, but not human labor. Paul said his goal was to "present every man perfect in Christ Jesus" (Col. 1:28). Then he said, "For this I also labor [Gk., *kopiaō*, "agonize"], striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily" (v. 29). Our work isn't performed in the flesh. I work hard, and can sense that my energy comes from a source beyond myself. I can't explain what I do. If I endeavored to perform my ministry in the flesh, I couldn't do it. My children have said to me, "When you preach, you're interesting; but when you talk, you're nothing special." I can't explain the difference. But I do know that through the Spirit the Lord energizes those who serve Him. We must carry on the work with an awareness of our own insufficiency and our dependence on Christ.

VI. THE EXCELLENT SERVANT TEACHES WITH AUTHORITY (v. 11)

"These things command and teach."

Someone told me about an individual who flunked out of the police academy because he didn't have an authoritative voice. I said, "What does that have to do with being a policeman?" He replied, "You can't go up behind some guy and say in a high-pitched voice, 'Stick 'em up! You're under arrest.'" A policeman has to convey a sense of authority to be effective. That's important in the ministry as well.

A. The Power of Authority

The Greek word translated "teach" in verse 11 refers to passing on information, in this case passing

on instruction or doctrine. It is to be done in the form of a command.

1. Its absence in the present

There is much popular, entertainment-oriented preaching today, but not much that is powerful or transforming in nature. Are the weak suggestions coming from the pulpit these days really what God wants? According to Acts 17:30 God "commandeth all men everywhere to repent." When did we decide that was only a suggestion?

2. Its abundance in the past

We are to be in a command mode. We are to teach with gentleness, meekness, and love; yet also with a certain amount of authority and assertiveness.a) The authority of Christ

Matthew 7:28-29 says, "It came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings [the Sermon on the Mount], the people were astonished at his doctrine; for he taught them as one having authority."b)

The authority of Paul

Paul told Timothy many times to be authoritative. In 1 Timothy 1:3 he says, "Charge some that they teach no other doctrine." Then he said, "These things command" (5:7). In 5:20 Paul talks about rebuking people publicly. Then in 6:17 he gives commands to rich people. In Titus 2:15 he says, "These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. let no man despise thee." That doesn't mean we are to be abusive or ungracious. But we are to confront people when they are in flagrant disobedience of God's Word. Somehow we have lost that approach. Paul was often in a command mode. He exhibited moments of tenderness and compassion, but in no way did he mitigate the demand to obey Scripture.

The faithful servant is bold. He challenges sin head on. He confronts unbelief, disobedience, and lack of commitment. God said of Jesus, "This is my beloved Son ... hear ye him" (Matt. 17:5). The excellent servant carries on that directive, commanding all men to repent and listen to Jesus Christ.

B. The Foundation of Authority

Our authority has a foundation. First, you must know what you believe about the Bible. If you're not sure it's the Word of God, you won't be authoritative. Next you have to know what God's Word says. If you're not sure what it means, you can't be authoritative. Then you must be concerned about communicating it properly because you care that His Word is upheld. Finally, you should care about people's response to His Word. Authority is built on that foundation. If you have a weak foundation, you won't communicate with authority.

Our teaching should be filled with commands, not just sentimental pleadings. Instead of trying to sneak up on people with God's truth, we need to speak forth the Word of God and let it do its work. An excellent servant speaks with authority.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What does God demand of those who serve in ministry?
2. What principle should the excellent servant be committed to?
3. How did the ancient philosophers and religionists define *eusebeia*?
4. What is the heart and soul of spiritual character?
5. What two things motivates the excellent servant to work hard? Explain.
6. Define *kopiao* and *agonizomai*.
7. Describe Paul's commitment to ministry (1 Cor. 9:16, 26-27).
8. Explain the phrase "we trust in the living God" (1 Tim. 4:10).
9. Describe the universal-salvation interpretation of 1 Timothy 4:10. How is that interpretation contradicted?
10. What will hell be like for the unsaved?
11. Describe the potential/actual-salvation interpretation of 1 Timothy 4:10.
12. Describe the temporal/eternal-salvation interpretation.
13. What are some of the other possible translations of "salvation" and "save" in Scripture?

14. In what way was God the Savior of the nation of Israel (1 Cor. 10:1- 5)?
15. Why does the excellent servant work hard?
16. Although the excellent servant should work hard, what is the source of his work (Col. 1:29)?
17. According to 1 Timothy 4:11 in what manner should the excellent servant teach? Explain.
18. What is the foundation of the servant's authority?

Pondering the Principles

1. Read Philippians 4:8. The excellent servant should be committed to dwelling on the things in that verse. Make a list of each attribute listed in Philippians 4:8. Next to each one, list the things that fall under that attribute. For example, under the attribute pure you might list those TV programs you know are pure in their content. You might also want to make a separate list of that which is opposite as a reminder to avoid them. Whenever you are confronted with something new, evaluate it in light of Philippians 4:8 and your list.
2. What kind of commitment are you willing to make to the ministry of Jesus Christ? Are you willing to be as committed as Paul, who risked his life in service to Christ? Or will you risk none of your comfort and possessions so you can maintain your unthreatened life-style? Perhaps your commitment to Christ lies somewhere between those two. Examine it in light of Matthew 16:24-26. What should your commitment be? What do you need to do to make good on that commitment?
3. Review the section on the foundation of authority (see p. 11). Do you have a strong foundation to draw on when you teach God's truth to someone else? Do you believe the Bible is the complete Word of God? Do you know how to interpret God's Word--do you know what it means by what it says? Can you communicate it so others understand what you are saying? When you teach others, are you legitimately concerned that they practice what they have been taught? If you are weak in any of those areas, strengthen them by strengthening your commitment to God's Word. Consult your local Christian bookstore or church library about books on the Bible itself. Learn why it is reasonable to believe that the Bible is God's inerrant Word. Also, take advantage of the various Bible study tools available to become more proficient in interpreting the Bible. The better you understand God's Word the better you will be in communicating it. Finally, examine your attitude regarding others. Do you truly seek that they might grow in Christ? Have the same goal that Paul reflects in Colossians 1:28. Thank the Lord for the provision of His Word.

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