

## **Qualities of an Excellent Servant, Part 3**

Scripture: 1 Timothy 4:12

Code: 54-32

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **An Interview on Policing the Ministry**

A few years ago I was asked to participate in a television program with a local network affiliate. It was held in a park in Glendale on Easter Sunday afternoon. They wanted to add a little religious flavor to their program, so they asked me if I would do an interview with a well-known local newscaster named Paul Moyer. In his attempt to identify where I fit in the evangelical framework, he went through a list of media preachers to determine whom I was most comparable to. I said I wasn't like any of the people he named. Then he asked me to explain the emphasis of our ministry. So I told him we teach the Word of God and work within the framework of a church. Then he asked, "Do the things other preachers do to raise money bother you, especially those who indulge their own desire for wealth?" I told him they did. So he said, "Why don't you do something about it? How can so many people who call themselves Christians do the kinds of things you feel misrepresent what you believe?" Then he asked, "Who is in charge of your movement?" That was an insightful question. I said, "From a human viewpoint, no one's in charge. But there is a standard that all of us who minister ought to be measured against, and that standard is the Bible. Admittedly, there are people who do not hold their lives or ministries against that standard." Then he asked an equally insightful question: "Why don't you police your movement? It's giving you bad press. The negative attitude about Christian ministers and ministry appears to have resulted because some ministers have abused the biblical standard." I told him I'd be happy to police people in ministry--I just didn't know how to pull it off. Fortunately, I know that ultimately God will deal with every violation.

Can we police our movement? We can when we use the Word of God as the standard. We should measure every ministry and every man in ministry by it--and we have the right to do so.

### **REVIEW**

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

"If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ"

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

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

Not long ago I spent two days with a Christian layman. He gave me a paper he wrote recently on the rapture of the church in relation to the sequence of events in the end times. The paper was about thirty pages in length, single spaced. He said to me, "I spent three hundred and fifty hours studying this particular theme so that I might understand the Word of God better." Here is a busy man who manages many corporations, yet he committed three hundred and fifty hours to study one biblical issue. I know men in the ministry who have never spent three hundred and fifty hours on any issue in Scripture! That layman is an excellent servant of Jesus Christ, and an expert student of Scripture.

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

"Refuse profane and old wives' fables"

#### **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."

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

"We both labor and suffer reproach [strive], because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, specially of those that believe."

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

"These things command and teach."

##### **A. The Power of Authority**

##### **B. The Foundation of Authority**

The ability to teach with authority is built on four things, the first being your view of holy Scripture. If you believe in an inspired and inerrant text, you know God's Word is authoritative. Second, authority is built on your understanding of Scripture. If you don't know what it means, how can you speak it authoritatively? That's why most seminaries teach the principles of hermeneutics (Gk., *hermeneuo*), which means "to explain," "to translate," or "to interpret." You need to understand the principles of interpretation so you can find the meaning of a passage. It's only after you study the language, context, culture, geography, and history of a passage that you can interpret it correctly. Anyone who desires to teach must learn those principles so he can be "a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). Third, you will speak with conviction and authority when you understand how urgent it is for people to hear God's Word. And fourth, you speak with authority because the Lord commands you to do that, and you want to be obedient. If those things are in place, you will teach with authority. There will be strength and boldness in your teaching.

### **LESSON**

#### **VII. THE EXCELLENT SERVANT IS A MODEL OF SPIRITUAL VIRTUE (v. 12)**

"Let no man despise thy youth, but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity."

##### **A. The Power of an Exemplary Life**

###### **1. Defined**

The Greek word translated "example" is *tupos*, which means "model," "image," or "pattern." To use a pattern in making a dress, the dressmaker will lay the pattern on top of the material and cut the material to match the pattern. An artist uses a model so he might be able to reproduce it in the style of his painting. When you set an example, you are giving people a pattern to follow. That is at the heart of excellence in ministry. Seventeenth-century Puritan Thomas Brooks said that example is the most powerful rhetoric (The Complete Works of Thomas Brooks, vol. 2 [Edinburgh: James Nichol], pp. 169-70). Someone once said, "Your life speaks so loud I can't hear what you say." Your life-style is your most powerful message. Excellent servants need to learn that.

**Godliness vs. Academic Credibility** A friend recently visited his alma mater, a well-known seminary in our country. He had noticed that the majority of the graduates appeared to lack an understanding of true godliness. He suggested they add a class about holiness and godliness in personal life. One of the professors told him, "That wouldn't have any academic credibility." But academic credibility is not the main issue in ministry. Give me a godly man and I'll show you someone you can pattern your life after. Give me a man whose head is full of knowledge but doesn't have any virtue in his life, and I'll show you a man you better run from. He will confuse you and you'll begin to act like him, having all the right truth and none of the right behavior. That kind of dichotomy is deadly and frightening.

###### **2. Described**

The single greatest tool of leadership is the power of an exemplary life. In verse 12 Paul says, "Let no man despise [look down on] thy youth, but be thou an example [to] the believers, in word, in

conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity." (The phrase "in spirit" was added in later manuscripts--it doesn't appear in the earlier ones.) We are to be an example in five areas: word, conduct, love, faith, and purity. Authoritative preaching is useless if it isn't backed up by a virtuous life.

A certain man who has a television ministry was calling for godliness on the part of the people who watch his program. He was saying we all need to be committed to the Lord and get our lives right with Him. Yet I know that man committed adultery, divorced his wife, and ran off with a twenty-year-old girl. Four years later he came back and started his ministry again. Based on the pattern of his life there's no credibility in what he says. For him to tell people to get right with God is sheer hypocrisy. Whenever a pattern of godliness is missing from a person's life, the power of his ministry is gone, and it becomes hollow and shallow. I've often heard people say, "So and so is such a good preacher; why doesn't anyone go to his church?" Perhaps the people who attended that church have seen that his life doesn't match what he preaches. A loss of integrity is more than any minister can handle. Puritan Thomas Fuller said that though the words of the wise be as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, yet their examples are the hammers to drive them in, to take the deeper hold. You can put the nails of truth on the surface of peoples' hearts, but if you want to hammer them deep into their souls, you need to set the pattern.

### 3. Demanded

The New Testament is replete with injunctions for setting a pattern of godly living. Note these commands from the apostle Paul:

a) 1 Corinthians 4:16--"I beseech you, be ye followers of me." You might think Paul was being egotistic. He wasn't--he was simply exhibiting the character of a godly man who knew he was to be an example. Now obviously he knew he wasn't perfect, but it was his objective--as much as was humanly possible--to be what the people were to be. No man should aim for less than that and still be in ministry. The Greek word translated "followers" is *mimetes*, from which the English word *mimic* is derived. b) 1 Corinthians 10:31, 33; 11:1--"Do all to the glory of God.... Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved. Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ." c) Philippians 3:17--"Be followers together of me, and mark them who walk even as ye have us for an example." d) Philippians 4:9--"Those things which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do." e) 1 Thessalonians 1:5-6--"Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance, as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord." f) 2 Thessalonians 3:7, 9--"Ye yourselves know how ye ought to follow us; for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you ... but to make ourselves an example unto you to follow us." g) 2 Timothy 1:13--"Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me."

The author of Hebrews said, "Remember them who have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God, whose faith follow" (13:7). When you minister in the church, you are to lead a life that others can follow. That's a tremendous challenge, which is why James said, "Be not many teachers, knowing that we shall receive the greater judgment" (James 3:1). It's a serious matter to be guilty of teaching error or living hypocritically. A man's life must match his message. Tragically, that principle is violated constantly in the ministry.

## **B. The Pursuit of Ecclesiastical Respect**

### 1. The disadvantage of youth

In 1 Timothy 4:12 Paul tells Timothy, "Let no man despise thy youth, but be thou an example [to] the believers." Timothy was young, and was therefore subject to a certain amount of questioning. So Paul told Timothy that he had to be respected if people were going to follow him. But since he was young, Timothy would have to earn that respect. In Greek culture, similar to other cultures, if a man wasn't aged, he had to earn respect.

How old was Timothy? When he first joined Paul on the second missionary journey (Acts 16:1-3)

Timothy was probably in his early to mid twenties. It is now fifteen years later. So he was probably in his late thirties. In the Greek culture, a man in his late thirties was considered youthful. In fact, in Acts 7:58 Luke refers to Paul as a young man at a time when he must have been over thirty. The Greek word translated "youth" in 1 Timothy 4:12 (neotes) was used to describe anyone up to the age of forty. A man was considered young until he was forty, and then he was deemed mature, skilled, wise, and old.

Since Timothy was under forty, Paul encouraged him by telling him not to let anyone look down on or show contempt for his youth. How was Timothy going to gain their respect? By being "an example [to] the believers." To offset his youth and gain the respect of his flock, he needed to reveal himself as a model of spiritual virtue.

## 2. The advantage of godliness

a) In word The conversation of the servant of God is to be exemplary. In Matthew 12:34 Jesus says, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." Whatever comes out of the mouth reveals what is in a person's heart. That's why Jesus said, "By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (v. 37). (1) Raising the standard Ephesians 4:25-26, 29 tells us what our speech should be like. (a) Our speech is to be truthful Verse 25 says, "Putting away lying." A servant of the Lord should never speak any falsehood. He shouldn't talk out of both sides of his mouth--telling one thing to one person and another to someone else. Then Paul says, "Speak every man truth with his neighbor" (v. 25). You should speak the truth to everyone. The credibility of a leader is destroyed when people compare notes about the lies he has told them. (b) Our speech is to be gracious In verse 26 Paul says, "Be ye angry, and sin not." There's a place for holy wrath and righteous indignation, but not for the sin of anger--especially the smoldering kind of anger that lasts into the next day and longer. No excellent servant of Jesus Christ will ever speak words of wrath or anger. He will never reach the point where he is frustrated--so upset that his words are bitter, vengeful, or ungracious. His speech is to "be always with grace, seasoned with salt" (Col. 4:6). (c) Our speech is to be pure Verse 29 says, "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth." The speech of a believer should never be less than pure. It is embarrassing to hear someone who claims to serve Jesus Christ speak ungodly words. That just reveals a dirty heart. There's no place for corrupt or filthy communication in the Christian life. Speech that glorifies God "is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers" (v. 29). There's a place for fun and joy, for "a merry heart doeth good like a medicine" (Prov. 17:22). But there's no place for perverse talk, angry speech, and a lying tongue. (2) Lowering the standard Throughout the history of the church there are many illustrations of men who destroyed their credibility through anger. There have been men in the ministry who use double standards. Such people lower the standard of ministry and should be disqualified from serving as a result. Yet many people think that is an acceptable standard for Christianity. Colossians 3:8-9 says, "Put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not to one another." All those things refer to speech, and none of them should come out of the mouth of any believer, especially someone in spiritual leadership. b) In conduct (1) Insights into a righteous life-style You are to be a model of righteous living--a person who lives out his convictions based on biblical principles. The things you do, the places you go, the things you possess--any aspect of your life is a sermon. That sermon will either contradict or substantiate what you say. One pastor was given a new Rolls Royce from his church. I suppose they knew he wanted one. The pastor told them to take it back and redo the interior because he didn't like the color! Some ministers are like leeches, sucking blood out of people for their own benefit (cf. Prov. 30:15). Paul said, "I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel" (Acts 20:33). Paul didn't want anything from people except the opportunity to give his life to them. When you match a man's materialistic life-style with blatant hypocrisy that undermines everything he has said. A man is what he lives, not what he says. But when a man lives what he says, there is power and authority in his message. (2) Injunctions for a righteous life-style If we are to set a style of living that others are to

follow, it has to be righteous.(a) James 3:13--"Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? Let him show out of a good life his works with meekness of wisdom." You should follow the person who by example shows you how to live.(b) Hebrews 13:7--"Remember them who have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God, whose faith follow, considering the end of their manner of life." That kind of life- style will lead you to eternal reward.(c) 1 Peter 1:15--"As he who hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of life."(d) 1 Peter 2:12--"[Have] your behavior honest among the Gentiles, that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation." Your life should be so virtuous, honorable, and biblical that your critics have nothing to say against you.(e) 1 Peter 3:1-2--"Ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the behavior of the wives, while they behold your chaste conduct coupled with fear."(f) 1 Peter 3:16--"[Have] a good conscience, that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good manner of life in Christ."The proof of what you say is in how you live, where you go, what you do, and how you spend your money. I'm not saying you should be poor, or that you can't accept what God graciously gives you, but I am saying not to pursue a materialistic life-style. I've been blessed abundantly with tangible gifts. Sometimes I feel bad about that until I consider the source of them. If I can examine my heart and honestly say that I haven't sought any of them, and that God in His grace has chosen to give them, then I can accept them. The issue is attitude. You can have a wrong attitude toward material things even if you don't possess a lot. If you have the desire to possess many things, then your pursuit is wrong, whether you get what you want or not. Should God choose to bless you, and your heart is right, you will use what He has given you for His glory.

### **Examining an Incompatible Life-Style**

What do you spend your time, money, and energy on? The life-style propagated by the world today is completely incompatible with the standards of Scripture. Many families disintegrate because both spouses want to work so they can buy bigger houses or bigger cars. They devote what little spare time they have to firming up their bodies instead of building up their souls, their families, or their children. And the church, instead of maintaining an alternative life-style, too often mimics the world's perspectives.

c) In loveMinistering in love doesn't necessarily mean you're to be a hand-shaker and a back-slapper, all spur this question in my mind: Should I stay and spend myself at Grace Church, or move on to another ministry? Yet I know God has called me to give my life to the people of this church. That's exactly what I'll continue to do, and that's how my love for the brethren is expressed. We're to offer self-sacrificing service on behalf of others.d) In faithThe Greek word translated "faith" in 1 Timothy 4:12 could be translated "faithfulness," "trustworthiness," or "consistency." Timothy was to be consistent, faithful, and trustworthy in his ministry. People can follow that kind of leader. In 1 Corinthians 4:2 Paul says, "It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful." Consistency separates those who succeed from those who fail. Only loyal, trustworthy, and faithful people will serve Christ with unswerving consistency throughout their lives.Paul had the reputation of being faithful. So did his co- laborers. Epaphras (Col. 1:7) and Tychicus (Col. 4:7) were just two of many faithful servants of Christ.e) In purityThe Greek word translated "purity" (hagneia) refers not only to sexual chastity, but also to the intents of the heart. If your heart is pure, your behavior will be pure as well.History has shown us that a ministry can be devastated by sexual impurity on the part of its leaders. I believe that men in leadership of the church are vulnerable in that area when they let their guard down. We all must maintain absolute moral purity. In 2 Timothy 2:22 Paul tells Timothy to flee youthful lusts.

## CONCLUSION

First Timothy 4:12 tells us that if a person is to be an excellent servant of Jesus Christ, he must be a model of virtue in speech, life-style, sacrificial love, trustworthiness, and moral purity. Anyone who is not a model in those areas has no business being in the position of spiritual leadership. Why? Because if he lives at a lower level, that's where he sets the standard. The responsibility of a spiritual leader is not to live in isolation from the godly standard, but to live according to the standard God has set for every believer. That standard must be maintained.

So how can we raise the unacceptable standard of Christianity in our country? First, men who are disqualified on the basis of 1 Timothy 4:12 ought to leave the ministry and do something else. Perhaps God will bless them and use them if they avoid hypocrisy. Second, we need to reinforce God's standards in pastors from all across the world. We must police Christianity--someone has to. Finally, we must train a new generation of young people who are totally committed to that standard. I'm not willing to accept a lower standard, and I don't believe you are either. I know the Lord isn't. If we are to maintain His standard, we must begin to measure people by it. If they don't qualify, that must be made known. If they qualify, they must be called to greater holiness in their lives. Then we must raise up young people who are committed to these things. We have to police our movement. We should be just as eager to put the wrong person out as we are to put the right person in.

## Focusing on the Facts

1. What should every man in ministry be measured by?
2. Define "example" as it is used in 1 Timothy 4:12.
3. What is a believer's most powerful message?
4. Why is it dangerous to follow someone who is full of knowledge yet doesn't have any virtue in his life?
5. What is the result when a pattern of godliness is missing from a person's life?
6. What are some of the injunctions that Scripture gives for setting a pattern of godly living?
7. In what way was Timothy at a disadvantage in ministry? Explain.
8. How old might Timothy have been when Paul wrote 1 Timothy?
9. What does a person's words reveal (Matt. 12:34)?
10. According to Ephesians 4:25-26, 29 in what three ways is the speech of the servant of God to be exemplary? Explain each one.
11. What is a model of righteous living like?
12. A man is what he \_\_\_\_\_, not what he \_\_\_\_\_.
13. What does Scripture teach us about living a righteous life?
14. How is the believer to be an example in love?
15. How did Paul show his love to the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 2:7-12)?
16. Why did Epaphroditus almost die (Phil. 2:30)?
17. What separates those who succeed from those who fail (1 Cor. 4:2)?
18. In what two ways is the excellent servant to be an example in purity?
19. How can we raise the standard of Christianity in our country?

## Pondering the Principles

1. As Christians, we certainly are exhorted to become knowledgeable of Scripture. Yet we must be careful not to pursue biblical knowledge to the exclusion of living holy lives. Read 1 Peter 1:14-16. According to verses 15-16 why should Christians live holy lives? According to verse 15 who is the model of holiness? What is the best way for believers to know as much as they can about the model of holiness? Based on your answer, what is the main reason for gaining biblical knowledge? As a

result, what should be the priority of your life?

2. What are the five areas in which you can be an example to other believers (1 Tim. 4:12; see pp. 6-10)? Are you an example to others in any of those areas at the present time? Give some examples. Are you proving to be a negative example in any of those areas? Again, give some examples. How might you turn those negative examples into positive ones? Seek to be an example in every area, and ask God to grant you the wisdom necessary for doing so.

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