

Qualities of an Excellent Servant, Part 5

Scripture: 1 Timothy 4:15–16

Code: 54-34

REVIEW

The key statement in 1 Timothy 4 is in verse 6: "thou shall be a good minister [servant] of Jesus Christ." That is Paul's emphasis; he is calling Timothy to excellence in the ministry. In so doing, he lists eleven qualities of a servant of Christ.

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 faith and good doctrine, unto which thou hast attained."

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)

"Therefore we both labor and suffer reproach, 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."

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."

VIII. THE EXCELLENT SERVANT HAS A THOROUGHLY BIBLICAL MINISTRY (v. 13)

"Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine."

IX. THE EXCELLENT SERVANT FULFILLS HIS CALLING (v. 14)

"Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery."

LESSON

X. THE EXCELLENT SERVANT IS TOTALLY ABSORBED IN HIS WORK (v. 15a)

"Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them."

A. The Avoidance of Distractions

Paul exhorts Timothy to be diligent in the things of the ministry and give himself continually to them. An excellent minister is single-minded, as opposed to the double-minded man, who is unstable in all his ways (James 1:8). Ministry is all consuming. The Greek word translated "meditate" (*meletao*) conveys the idea of thinking through beforehand, planning, strategizing or premeditating. When a minister is not doing the work of the ministry, he's planning it. Those are the two things that consume my life; I'm either participating in ministry or planning it. I'm either teaching the Word of God or preparing to teach it.

B. The Acceptance of Discipline

"Give thyself wholly to them" literally reads "be in them" in the Greek text. We're to be wrapped up in ministry, totally absorbed in it. It doesn't take much of a man to be a minister, but it does take all of him. An excellent minister is totally absorbed in his work.

1. Choosing the post

A minister can't have a double agenda. He can't divide his efforts between being in the ministry and becoming a tennis pro, a golf pro, making money, or developing a business on the side. People who fall into that trap never realize their full potential because they have too many things to distract them and drain their energy. A good servant of Christ must bury himself in his ministry, just like Epaphroditus, who nearly died fulfilling his ministry (Phil. 2:25-27). A good minister is either to be involved in his ministry, preparing for it, or praying for it.

2. Staying at the post

In 2 Timothy 4:2, Paul tells Timothy to "preach the Word; be instant." Greek scholar Fritz Rienecker tells us that the Greek word translated "instant" (ephistemi) is a military word. It means to stay at your post, to stay on duty (A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980], p. 647). A servant of God is never off duty, always at his post. My dad used to tell me that a preacher ought to be ready to preach, pray, or die within a minute. There's a certain preoccupation in the ministry that never goes away. It is not an insensitivity but a preoccupation. That's as it ought to be, because we are always on duty.

Paul tells Timothy to "be instant in season, out of season" (2 Tim. 4:2). A servant of Christ is on duty when it's convenient and when it's not. I went home one Sunday night and was really tired. All I wanted to do was get something cold to drink and sit in a chair and rest. I had no sooner sat down when the phone rang. A family was having major problems. I spent forty minutes on the phone, during which time the food my daughter had prepared for me became inedible. As soon as I hung up the phone it rang again, and it was bigger disaster this time. I suppose that's the Lord's way of letting me know that I'm always on duty. That's how it is in ministry--you have to be totally absorbed in it. In 2 Timothy 4:5 Paul says to Timothy, "Make full proof of thy ministry." He was to fulfill it, to stick with it, and be consumed by it. A minister who warns his people of error; diligently studies the Word of God; avoids unholy teaching; cultivates a disciplined, holy life; is committed to hard work; teaches with authority; models spiritual virtue; maintains a thoroughly biblical ministry, and fulfills the call of God will of necessity be totally absorbed in the work of the ministry.

XI. THE EXCELLENT SERVANT IS CONTINUALLY PROGRESSING IN HIS SPIRITUAL GROWTH (v. 15b)

"That thy profiting may appear to all."

Paul tells Timothy that his spiritual progress should be obvious to everyone. That implies he hadn't yet reached perfection. A minister should not try to convince his people that he has no flaws, but should allow them to see his growth. The standard for a servant of Christ is high, and we all fall short of it. Even Paul said, "Not as though I had already attained ... I press toward the mark" (Phil. 3:12, 14). Paul had his faults; he wasn't perfect. He lost his temper when the high priest ordered him to be struck in the face shouting, "God shall smite thee, thou whited wall" (Acts 23:1-5). People need to see our integrity and humility. I'm not perfect, but I hope I'm progressing.

A. By Strenuous Effort

The Greek word translated "profiting" (prokope) is used in a military sense to speak of an advancing force. It was used by the Stoics to refer to advancing in knowledge (Rienecker, p. 628). It was used of a pioneer cutting a trail by strenuous effort and advancing toward a new location. We are to be advancing toward Christlikeness, and we need to let people see that. Rather than trying to convince them we're perfect, we must be honest enough to let them know we're growing.

People sometimes point out to me that what I've said on one tape doesn't agree with what I said on a

later tape. My response to them is that I'm growing. I didn't know everything then, and I don't know everything now.

B. By the Spirit's Power

Humanly speaking, no one is fit for the task of ministry. The Lord knows that; the same Lord who gave us these high standards knows that we can never meet them. There's only one answer to that dilemma: When we yield to the Spirit of God and depend on Him for what we can never accomplish on our own His power will work through us. That's what Paul meant in Colossians 1:29 when he said, "For this I also labor, striving according to His working, which worketh in me mightily." It's comforting to know that God, through His Spirit, can make us the servants He wants us to be.

You're not off the hook! If you're not a pastor, you might be thinking that the qualities of an excellent servant don't apply to you, but they do. Ministers model the behavior that all Christians are to follow. You're to imitate their behavior so that your life will be a pattern for others to follow.

CONCLUSION

A. The Measure of a Minister (v. 16a)

"Take heed unto thyself and unto the doctrine; continue in them."

"Take heed" means "pay attention." Paul commands Timothy to focus on two things: his conduct and his teaching. Those two things are the heart of the ministry. The eleven qualities we've seen in this passage can be summed up in those two commands.

1. Right conduct

Paul tells Timothy, "Take heed unto thyself." He said the same thing to the elders of the Ephesian church (Acts 20:28). The theme of right conduct runs throughout 1 Timothy 4--"nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine (v. 6), "exercise thyself rather unto godliness" (v. 7), "be thou an example" (v. 12), "neglect not the gift that is in thee" (v. 14). Are you an example? Are you training yourself in godliness? Are you being nourished by the Word?

2. Right teaching

This is another theme in 1 Timothy 4: "put the brethren in remembrance of these things" (v. 6), "refuse profane and old wives' fables" (v. 7), "these things command and teach" (v. 11) "till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine" (v. 13).

All eleven qualities of an excellent servant of Christ can be reduced to this: concentrate on your own spiritual life and your exposition, exhortation, and application of the Word of God. That is to be the focus of an excellent minister.

B. The Goal of Any Ministry (v. 16b)

"For in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee."

The reason we concentrate on personal holiness and accurate teaching is two-fold.

1. Perseverance

In what sense does personal holiness save us? In the sense of the perseverance of the saints. In John 8:31 Jesus says, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed." Scripture repeatedly affirms that those who are genuinely saved will continue in the faith. Paul tells Timothy that if he continues in personal holiness and accurate teaching he will keep moving along the inevitable path of final and glorious salvation. He doesn't mean Timothy would become his own redeemer, but that perseverance in godliness would guarantee that his faith is genuine.

John warns that those who appear to be believers and then depart were never truly saved (1 John 2:19). However those who persevere give evidence of being truly saved.

2. Persuasion

If we persevere in godliness and truth, our lives will affect others; we'll bring them the message of salvation. We don't actually do the saving, but are used by God as we preach the Word of God and live godly lives. That is the climax of 1 Timothy 4. All the qualifications of an excellent servant ultimately result in the salvation of souls. That is our purpose in life and the reason we remain in the

world after we've been redeemed. If all God wanted was our worship, He could take us to heaven at the moment of our salvation. If we were saved just to know Him, it would be better for us to go immediately to heaven, where we will know Him perfectly. If we were saved for perfect fellowship, our fellowship would be perfect in heaven. The only reason we've been left here is because we are the agents by which God brings the message of salvation to lost people. That's the sum of ministry. It's a high, holy, and glorious calling. I trust that by the power of God's Spirit we will experience its fullness in all our lives for His glory.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What is Paul's emphasis in 1 Timothy 4?
2. What two things must a good servant of Christ be preoccupied with?
3. An excellent minister is _____ in his work.
4. What happens when a minister divides his efforts between the ministry and other interests?
5. A servant of God is never _____.
6. True or False: It's important for a minister not to let his people see his faults _____.
7. True or False: We are unable to meet the Lord's standards for a servant of Christ on our own _____.
8. Are the standards in 1 Timothy 4 only for pastors? Explain your answer.
9. Paul commands Timothy to concentrate on _____ and _____.
10. In what sense does personal holiness save us (1 Tim. 4:16)?
11. The Bible teaches that those who are genuinely saved will _____.
12. What is the ultimate purpose of all ministry?

Pondering the Principles

1. In 2 Timothy 4:2 we learn that an excellent servant of Christ is to be ready to minister at all times, whether it is convenient or not. Do you find that there are times when you fail to minister to others because you don't want to be inconvenienced? Do you minister only when it is easy to do so? If so, spend some time this week meditating on 2 Corinthians 11:23-33 and see some of the inconveniences the apostle Paul had to put up with in his ministry. Then ask God for His grace to enable you to minister in season and out.
2. Timothy was encouraged to allow others to see his progress in spiritual growth. He was to be open with people, and not pretend he had no flaws. How about you? Are you afraid to let those you minister to--your spouse, friends, or family--know the real you? Are you like the Pharisees, who gave the outward appearance of holiness, but inside were full of uncleanness (Matt. 23:27)? If you struggle with that, realize that God knows the person you are on the inside (cf. Ps. 139:1-4; 1 Sam. 16:7), yet accepts you. Armed with that confidence, dare to start being open and honest with other people.

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