

A Faithful Minister 1) Endures Persecution

2 Timothy 2:1-13 • 2021-07-11 • Series: A Faithful Minister



Have you ever wondered why we have pastors in the Christian Church? We could, of course, come up with many misguided answers. Someone might simply say, "Because no one else wants to talk in front of a crowd." Others might say with skepticism, "We don't need pastors. We only have pastors because they are the narcissists who want all the attention." And still others might view worship as a place for mere entertainment. They might reason, "The best pastors are comedians and know how to make me laugh." Everyone seems to have different ideas. I heard an older pastor once joke, "Do you know why God wanted me to be a pastor? It's the only way he could get me to go to church each Sunday." Well, what does God say about pastors? Today we'll be starting a four-week series looking at Scripture for our answer. We'll examine what a pastor's purpose is, what his pitfalls are, and where his power comes from. And although you may not be thinking about becoming a pastor, this series has important truths for all believers, including you. So, what makes a faithful minister?

Thankfully, we don't have to rely on human tradition or ideas to know what God intends for spiritual overseers in his Church. We have entire letters dedicated to the topic. We'll be looking at four different letters. Each one will help us better understand what makes a faithful minister. These aren't just ideas that some men came up with. They wrote instructions as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. These are God's instructions for us regarding ministers of the gospel. Today we will be looking at the Apostle Paul's letter to a pastor named Timothy.

Firstly, Paul reminds Timothy to *"be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus."* No pastor can serve by his own strength. Nor can he get by with his own wit. He must be in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. He must remain in Christ's gospel and continually connected to his Word. That is every faithful minister's source of strength.

Next, we have an answer to where pastors come from. A pastor doesn't just appear out of nowhere. As a minister of the gospel, he is to be trained in the gospel. *"Entrust the things you heard from me, in the presence of many witnesses, to faithful men who will also be able to teach others."* Paul is instructing Timothy to serve as one of the first seminary professors in the New Testament Church. Timothy is supposed to take the teachings he learned and pass them on as a sacred trust to "faithful men." Those men are supposed to be faithful to the Word and able to teach others the Word. Paul is telling Timothy to set up a Christian worker training system.

The most important thing isn't how organized or structured a worker training system is. Some programs run for years with a full theological curriculum; others have less. But regardless of how it is structured a worker training system is vital to a healthy church body. A Christian ministry that cares little for training its workers will soon lose its Christian aspect. Our church body isn't alone in operating a worker training system. From the school of the prophets at the time of Elijah, to Jesus instructing his disciples before sending them out, every church throughout history has had a center of learning focused on teaching the Scriptures. Discipleship and training the Word of God makes faithful ministers.

Do we take this charge to train our workers in the Word as seriously as we ought? Do we sometimes wish we could lessen the need for training? Doctrine is often treated like a bad word by people today. Even Christian churches will speak of doctrine as if it is only a man-made invention and harmful. But the Scriptures affirm that sound doctrine is always the first criteria for any minister of the gospel. Doctrine, which means "teaching," is vital. If we ever begin to say that our college and seminary are a waste of time or that our college and seminary should spend less time instructing students in Scripture, we will begin to lose faithful ministers. Thank God that you belong to a church body that still values time and resources spent in passing on the things we have learned to faithful ministers.

Sound doctrine is vital because those who serve as ministers will not have it easy. Some people might want to be pastors because they think it is one of the easier jobs. Many people joke that their pastors have it easy because they only work one day a week. Maybe even those who must go through eight years of training like in our church body reason that it will only get easier after that. Paul would strongly disagree with any notion of ministry being easy. A faithful minister needs the time spent in training because his work will be anything but easy.

We have three pictures to help us understand what a minister must do. The first is a soldier. *"Endure hardships as a good soldier of Christ Jesus."* A soldier may at times be able to rest, but he must at many times endure things which civilians never would. He must be prepared and face long marches, battles, and difficult circumstances. A faithful minister can't get entangled in civilian affairs. He can't work a side-job merely for the purpose of getting wealthy. He can't be invested in the same pursuits as those who are building a business for profit. Instead, he must work to please his commanding officer. And that commanding officer isn't his buddy on the church council, or the family that gives generously. No, his commanding officer is the one who commands the heavenly hosts of angels and holds the universe in his hand. He works only to please the Lord. That will often mean doing things against popular culture. It will mean fighting against the spiritual forces of evil when others stand by. And it will mean being persecuted.

If that wasn't hard enough of a picture, he adds another. The faithful minister is like a competing athlete. Competing as an athlete demands training, discipline, and submission to the rules of the game. A faithful minister cannot just

invent his own rules of engagement. He must abide by the rules God has set down. He is called to use the gospel and to teach and baptize, he must rely on that for his game. He should not try to win converts by manipulating hearts or using deception. He won't be faithful if he bends the rules and changes the teachings of God's Word. He'll be cheating and disqualifying himself from the prize. He'll no longer faithfully serving the Lord.

Paul's third picture is that of a farmer. I can relate to this comparison. I used to grow an exceptionally large garden. My favorite part was the first taste of all the labors. The first plucked fresh tomatoes, the first pulled potatoes, and the first sweet zucchini were treasures. After months of working and waiting it was all worth it. That's what it is like for a pastor. He is the first to benefit from all his labor. And I'm not talking about physical blessings. I'm talking about spiritual food. Every class, every sermon, –all of it– feeds the faithful minister. A faithful minister never shows up to worship or Bible class without first feeding himself with the fruits of his labors digging into Scripture. The time spent can be a challenge, but it is always worth it.

How easy it would be to picture a faithful minister as someone who doesn't make God their commanding officer but considers the people he serves as his commanding officers. Is that the kind of pastor you want? He may always make you feel good about yourself. But his job is to make you feel good about and praise your merciful God. Many don't want a faithful minister. They want a backscratcher. And they persecute or abandon faithful ministers. How easy it would be for a minister to not compete according to God's rules but make their own rules. If they find something that is too difficult to jump over, they just knock it down. If they find a fellow athlete who they don't like, they strike against them. They don't abide by the very rules from the Lord. Many don't want a faithful minister. They want someone who can break the rules and isn't bound to the Word of God. The faithful minister who says, "I'm sorry, but I can't just change the rules," is often persecuted or abandoned. How easy it is for a minister to set aside his time in God's Word as unnecessary. He may say to himself, "It's a waste of time to dig the soil and turn the pages of Scripture. What do I benefit from all that hard work? I don't see any fruit." He is cheating himself of the very first fruit of his labors. His faith will grow weak. He will have nothing fresh to share when it comes time to feed his flock.

So many don't want a faithful minister! How does someone continue with discipline and obedience when the task is hard? Paul knew the answer. He lived it. *"Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, a descendant of David, in accordance with my gospel, for which I am suffering, even to the point of being chained like a criminal."* Paul knew what it was like to be a faithful minister. He lived the hardship. He was a faithful minister of Jesus Christ. But what did he get? He was chained like a criminal. He wrote this letter while locked up. Many had abandoned him.

Why did he suffer all this? It was all about Jesus, the risen and victorious savior. He was a descendant of David. According to his human nature he lived as a lowly and faithful minister. We read earlier how his hometown rejected him. And he was more than chained. He was crucified for his faithful preaching and teaching. But as Christ, God's chosen one, he was victorious. Jesus is the true Son of God. And he rose back to life in victory. He was faithful as a soldier obeying his Father in all things. He didn't break the rules but kept God's Word perfectly and didn't change it. And Jesus was the first to enjoy the benefit of his work as he rose from the grave. We teach and preach him. He is our commanding officer who won the war. He is the one who stands with the prize already won at the end of the race. He is the one who planted the seed and will come for the harvest at the end of this age. A faithful minister serves and remembers Jesus Christ -the crucified and living Son of David and Son of God. His gospel will not fail.

Paul was in chains. But he reminds us, *"God's Word is not chained."* You can censor me online. You can fine me for my message. You can lock me up in jail. You can chain my hands and feet. You can take my life. But you can't chain the gospel message I share! The gospel doesn't depend on any one person. Your pastor isn't your power. I am nothing. The gospel is everything. There will be others. Close one seminary and chain up its men and God will raise up another. This he has established for our benefit. His gospel will never be chained by the powers of this world.

And the faithful minister has every reason to endure all persecution and suffering. *"I endure everything for the sake of the elect."* There are other sheep who are not yet in the sheep pen of the Good Shepherd. So, the faithful minister endures chains and suffering. He endures persecution. The faithful minister endures all this "For the sake of" others. So that they too *"may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus for eternal glory."* God's gift of eternal life won on the cross is shared by all who trust in his Word. That is worth it.

I want to close the first part of our series with a creed or hymn of the ancient Church. Paul calls it *"A trustworthy saying."* Like other confessions of the Church, it is worth us repeating often. Listen to this beautiful confession which acknowledges we dare not deny or turn away from Christ, but he will never turn away from those who trust in him. *Indeed, if we have died with him, we will also live with him; If we endure, we will also reign with him; If we deny him, he will also deny us; If we are faithless, he remains faithful, because he cannot deny himself.* I have not been a faithful minister as I ought. None of us can say we have faithfully been good soldiers, athletes, and farmers. We haven't endured hardships but sometimes started to cower in the face of them. But Jesus has. Even if I have failed to be the faithful servant, and you have failed to faithfully follow the Good Shepherd at all times, he remains faithful. It all depends on the faithfulness of Christ. He is a minister who came to seek and to save. He came to give and to serve us all. And he remains forever living and faithful. Faithful ministers endure all to serve Jesus. He is our faithful minister.