

2 Timothy 2 • Characteristics of a Faithful Minister

Introduction

Because the term “Christian” in our time and society has largely become used to describe a demographic whose opinions can be measured and voting power assessed, it is easy to lose sight of the biblical definition. In Paul’s instructions to Timothy, we are provided a detailed assessment of the characteristics of a faithful minister by which we can assess our own degree of success or failure according to God’s view. It is worth noting that since so much of our life is spent in the “cyber world” of websites, blogs, online forums and social venues such as Facebook and Twitter, our ministry and witness no longer extends simply to our movements in the physical world, but reach further than any generation before us. Are we maintaining the same quality in the digital world as when we interact with others face to face? The metaphors Paul uses are all common throughout the whole of God’s Word, but as always are accompanied by specific details so that we know precisely how to personally apply them.

¹You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. ²The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

[Read v.1-2]

Q: What might be significant about the opening term of this chapter, “You therefore...”?

A: The old saying for the study of biblical literature is, “Whenever you see a ‘therefore’, stop and see what it’s **there** for”. The terms “therefore”, “wherefore” and “so” are most often providing a summary, conclusion and/or application of the teaching which came just before it.

Q: What were the main points in the previous section which this “therefore” summarizes?

1. (v.6) “...kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you...”
2. (v.8) “...do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord...”
3. (v.8) “...join with me in suffering for the gospel...”
4. (v.13) “Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me...”
5. (v.14) “Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you.”

Point: These all have to do with our personal walk and ministry.

Q: And what is the desired goal? Is it limited to just teaching or leading the unsaved to Christ?

A: The goal is discipleship, to leave a legacy of faithfulness—putting God’s Word into practice and teaching others to do the same who in turn engender the next generation to be faithful.

Q: What might indicate something particularly important about the word “entrust” used here? How might it indicate something more serious about what Paul is asking Timothy to do?

A: This is the same word Jesus used on the cross when in His dying declaration He said, “Father, into Your hands I **commit** My spirit”. (Lk. 23:46)

Application: A faithful minister is not only transformed and lives according to God’s Word, but disciples others who in turn do the same.

³Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. ⁴No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier.

[Read v.3-4]

Q: What is the first characteristic of a faithful minister who puts God's Word into practice?

A: "Suffer hardship". (v.3)

Q: What is the illustration Paul uses to demonstrate the kind of hardship he is speaking of?

A: "...as a good soldier of Christ Jesus". (v.4)

Q: What is the chief characteristic of a soldier's life highlighted by Paul?

A: A soldier is exclusively devoted to nothing but carrying out the orders and activities of the one who enlists him.

Application: A military enlistment commits a soldier to place everything else in their life second to their military commitment, even family, friends and self.

"He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it. — Matthew 10:37-39

Q: What are some other characteristics of a soldier which may apply to a Christian?

1. A soldier lives and goes wherever the military dictates and as they see fit to deploy and use them.
2. Every soldier is trained in the general skills of combat, but each receives specialized training. For every soldier dedicated solely to a direct combat role, there are nine more trained in various support roles to ensure their success (i.e., supply, maintenance, intelligence, etc.)
3. In America at least, service in the military is exempt from the U.S. Constitution and, in compliance with the Constitution, Congress enacts a separate code of conduct called the "Uniform Code of Military Justice" (UCMJ) to which a soldier is held accountable. It is a different standard from that for civilians.
4. No matter how many subordinate soldiers may be assigned to them, no matter the rank, there is always someone higher in charge.
5. A soldier never gets to choose their enemy, the issue in question, nor the place of battle, but everything is decided for them and they must not hesitate to obey.
6. Others?

Application: A faithful minister is no longer serving himself, much less when or where or for what pleases them, but exclusively according to the Word and ways of Christ the Commander.

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⁵Also if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules.

[Read v.5]

Q: What is the next characteristic?

A: "...competes according to the rules."

Q: What is the illustration Paul uses?

A: "...as an athlete..."

Q: What is the clear implication being put forth here?

A: There will be those who will be disqualified because their efforts were not in accordance with God's Word and ways.

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified. — 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

Q: What might be important that "competes" is used here instead of "trains"?

A: Such competitions take place in full public view not just of the judges, but the spectators. It's an allusion to our witness in the world.

Application: *A faithful minister publicly lives according to the dictates and conditions of God's Word and ways that they might be found ultimately successful according to God's standard.*

⁶The hard-working farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops.

[Read v.6]

Q: What is the next characteristic?

A: "...hard-working..." (v.6)

Q: What is the illustration employed?

A: "...farmer..." (v.6)

Q: How might this speak to how the results of our ministry in Christ will come about?

A: It takes the patience and hard work of preparing the field, planting the seed of the Word God, and cultivating and caring for it until a harvest is finally experienced; we should not expect instant results and even bear in mind that harvests are subject to seasons.

Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. — Galatians 6:9

Application: *A faithful minister patiently works in and out of season like a hard-working farmer for the results to eventually come.*

⁸Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel, ⁹for which I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal; but the word of God is not imprisoned. ¹⁰For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus *and* with *it* eternal glory. ¹¹It is a trustworthy statement:

For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him;

¹²If we endure, we will also reign with Him;

If we deny Him, He also will deny us;

¹³If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.

¹⁴Remind *them* of these things, and solemnly charge *them* in the presence of God not to wrangle about words, which is useless and leads to the ruin of the hearers. ¹⁵Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth. ¹⁶But avoid worldly *and* empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness, ¹⁷and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, ¹⁸*men* who have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and they upset the faith of some. ¹⁹Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness."

[Read v.8-13]

Q: How might this characterize Paul as "walking the walk" where his instructions to Timothy are concerned?

A: Paul is not asking Timothy to do something Paul is not doing himself, and Paul is not doing something Christ did not do Himself.

Point: Paul's "gospel" included the message that just as Christ suffered and was persecuted, so shall we in the course of this life. The true Gospel is not a "prosperity" gospel promising ease and riches in this life, but only in the life to come for those who biblically endure for the next life.

Q: What is the overall message of Paul's "trustworthy statement" in v.11-13?

A: First, that we are at one with Christ regardless of the circumstances, and second that nothing can alter the faithfulness of Christ, which we can rely upon regardless of all else. Our life is characterized as a continual test of faith.

Application: A faithful minister does not compromise the Gospel either in the course of their own life as they live it out, nor their own life bearing witness of it to others.

[Read v.14-19]

Q: What is the list of references to God's Word which are provided in v.14-16?

1. (v.14) "...charge them...not to wrangle about words..."
2. (v.15) "...present yourself approved to God...accurately handling the word of truth."
3. (v.16) "...avoid worldly and empty chatter..."

Q: What does Paul say will result from these activities?

1. (v.14) ...[it] is useless and leads to the ruin of hearers."
2. (v.15) One so approved "...does not need to be ashamed..."
3. (v.16-17a) "...it will lead to further ungodliness, and...spread like gangrene."

Point: If we are not adhering to God's Word, we are engaging in the world's. Both have a lasting effect on our life and ministry both in the course of this life and the one to come. Both have a lasting spiritual effect on both the speaker and the hearer.

Q: What is the characteristic and illustration Paul uses here:

A: "Be diligent...as a workman..." (v.15)

Q: How may we know for sure who is a workman who is diligent according to God's point of view?

A: They are "accurately handling the word of truth." (v.15)

Q: How does Paul here illustrate his point with a real-world case of the wrong results?

A: With the real-world example of Hymenaeus and Philetus. It has caused them to stray from the fundamental doctrines of the Gospel itself, leading others astray in the process.

Q: What do we know to be the meaning of "the firm foundation"?

A: It was the ending message of the Sermon on the Mount.

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And

the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall.” — Matthew 7:24-27

Q: What is the greater point being made in Paul’s warning to “abstain from wickedness”?

A: It’s the application of Jesus’ teaching that hearing His Word is not enough but requires acting on it—putting it into practice.

Application: *The faithful minister is focused on “accurately handling the word of truth” not just in their own life and ministry, but for the benefit of everyone around them.*

[Read v.20-23]

²⁰Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. ²¹Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these *things*, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work. ²²Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. ²³But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels.

Q: What is the next characteristic?

A: “...sanctified...prepared for every good work.” (v.21)

Q: What illustration does Paul use?

A: Vessels.

Q: What were the basic Old Testament rules where “clean” and “unclean” vessels and such were concerned?

A: The “unclean” are considered defiled and unfit for service until they go through God’s process to restore them **IF** they are eligible—some forms of defilement rendered an unclean vessel unrecoverable and had to be destroyed lest it contaminate the other vessels in the house.

Point: *There is the biblical doctrine of separation whose New Testament application of the Old Testament principle is explained by Paul in 2 Co. 6:14-7:1.*

Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? — 2 Corinthians 6:14

Q: Specifically, how does Paul identify a vessel of dishonor in v.22-23?

A: It pursues “youthful lusts” and engages in “foolish and ignorant speculations” even “knowing that they produce quarrels”. They not only live to please themselves but divide others in the process.

Q: How does Paul identify a vessel of honor?

1. (v.22) “...flee from youthful lusts...”
2. (v.22) “...pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace...”
3. (v.22) “...call on the Lord from a pure heart.”
4. (v.23) “...refuse foolish and ignorant speculations...”

Q: What is the biblical definition of a “pure heart”?

A: Whenever we see the word “pure”, we can substitute the phrase, “unpolluted by sin” in order to understand its scriptural meaning.

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Application: A faithful minister is a sanctified vessel of honor “prepared for every good work” of the Master, unpolluted by sin and pursuing “righteousness, faith, love and peace”.

²⁴The Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, ²⁵with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, ²⁶and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.

[Read v.24-26]

Q: What is significant about the illustration Paul saves for last?

A: A “bond-servant” in the ancient world was someone who entered into a permanent situation of servitude to another, carrying out their master’s business and taking up residence in their master’s house. A bond-servant’s will was completely subservient to their master’s and they no longer lived according to their own will or desire.

Q: Who is contrasted to “the Lord’s bond-servant”?

A: Those held in captivity to Satan.

Point: The clear distinction is that we are either slaves to Christ or slaves to Satan. What is your choice?

Q: How does a faithful minister in the character of “the Lord’s bond-servant” go about rescuing those in “the snare of the devil”?

1. (v.24) “...not quarrelsome...”
2. (v.24) “...kind to all...”
3. (v.24) “...able to teach...”
4. (v.24) “...patient when wronged...”
5. (v.25) “...with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition...”

Q: What does Paul state as the greater goal in addition to securing their escape from the captivity they are in?

A: (v.25) “...God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth”.

Application: A faithful minister does not return evil for evil, but rises above it all to be a living example of what awaits the backslidden if they will return to Christ.

⁷Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

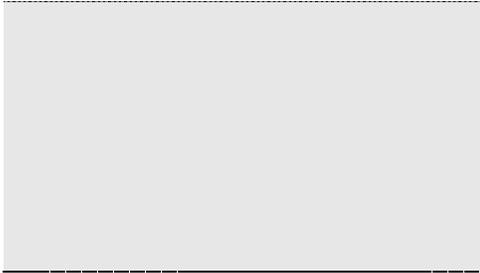
[Read v.7]

Q: Taken together, what are the main things in which Paul is asking Timothy to do (i.e., “consider”) in order to receive “understanding in everything” from Christ?

1. (v.3-4) Suffer hardship so as to please Christ. (Ex.: Soldier)
2. (v.5) Compete to win in compliance with the Word. (Ex.: Athlete)
3. (v.6) Work hard to share in the harvest to eventually come. (Ex.: Farmer)
4. (v.15) Diligently and accurately handle God’s Word. (Ex.: Workman)
5. (v.21) Pursue sanctification. (Ex.: Vessels)
6. (v.24-26) Carry out the Master’s business the same way the Master would. (Ex.: Bond-Servant)

These are all expressions of a life no longer living for the things of this world but exclusively devoted to the Kingdom of Christ.

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Overall Application

- *How does Paul's teaching compare or contrast to the consistent message delivered in your hearing each week?*
- *What points provided here might we need to improve upon if not outright change about our self in order to both preach the Gospel to the unsaved and rescue the backslidden?*
- *How well do you measure up to Paul's definition of "a faithful minister"?*

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