

Text: 2 Timothy 2:1-7

Title: A Good Minister

Truth: The Bible commands the Christian minister to be faithful in service.

Date/Location: June 26, 2016 at FBC

Introduction

The apostle Paul presents to Timothy several metaphors to help him understand how he should conduct Christian ministry. These pictures are useful for **all believers** to understand how they should conduct their lives, for whether we are vocational ministers (pastors and missionaries) or "part-time ministers" (the rest of us), we have a responsibility to serve God acceptably on His terms. The instructive metaphors are:

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| 1. A child | 4. A farmer | 7. A servant |
| 2. A soldier | 5. A workman | |
| 3. An athlete | 6. A vessel | |

I. A Child: Be a Growing Christian , v. 1

- A. The word to *be strong* means to become able or powerful in some realm or action, usually with an inner kind of strength or fortitude. See verses like: Romans 4:20 (strong in faith); Ephesians 6:10 (strong in the Lord); Acts 9:22 and 1 Timothy 1:12 (strong in preaching ministry); Phil. 4:13 and 2 Timothy 4:17 (endowed with an ability to handle all situations).
- B. An important aspect of this word is that it is present tense. "Be growing strong" is the idea. That means that the pastor should be getting stronger in the realm of grace. He should be growing in grace and knowledge of God, like a child naturally grows in physical stature.
- C. So what does it mean to be growing strong in the grace that is in Christ? We know that Christ is full of grace and truth (John 1:14, 17). To be growing strong in *that* means to be growing in likeness to Christ's moral character; to behave as a mature Christian should behave; to be a good replicator in teaching and living of the doctrine of the gospel that was given to us. Perhaps thinking of the opposite will help you understand the concept: what is it to be "weak" in the grace of Christ?
- D. This favor and help from God will help Timothy to face the anxious situation of a mentor about to be killed and of himself next on the government hit list. Note that in Hebrews 13:23 Timothy is said to have been released from prison, so he suffered some of the same as his mentor. We read the following in a Wikipedia on Timothy that quotes a tradition concerning him: "In the year 97, the 80-year-old bishop tried to

halt a procession in honor of the goddess Diana by preaching the gospel. The angry pagans beat him, dragged him through the streets, and stoned him to death."

II. A Child Grown Up: Entrust the Truth to Others, v. 2

When children grow up, they have their own families and pass things down to the next generation via their children.

- A. Timothy received a lot of "stuff" from Paul. This is not talking about only the death-burial-resurrection gospel information alone. It is the entire revelation about Christ. He received it among many witnesses, thus indicating the truthfulness and accuracy of what he received.
- B. Paul has given it to Timothy, and he requires Timothy to "commit" it to others who will do the same. This committing/entrusting is for safekeeping, as the BDAG dictionary puts it. Safekeeping does not at all mean "to keep under lock and key." Safekeeping refers to guarding the truth and giving it to others. Actually wide distribution of the truth is a good way to guard the truth, as long as it is distributed faithfully.
- C. The task of finding faithful men is hard. The task of finding faithful men who will be able to and will in fact continue long enough to teach others also is even harder. I read a statistic this week that is shocking: "only 1 in 20 men who study for ministry are still serving in ministry when they reach 60 years of age" (Kevin Bauder, Nick of Time, 6/24/2016). The laborers preparing for the harvest are very few. 1/20th of that is a number almost indistinguishable from zero in the grand scheme of things. God delights to use ministers, sometimes ones who will fail, and especially that remnant which is faithful all along the way. Here's a very needful prayer: "God, help me and us to be faithful to You."
- D. Our task as a church is not just to make believers and baptize them. It is also to train them to obey everything the Lord has commanded.
 - 1. I see this in a tiered manner, where we first train our people to gather in the church (Acts 2:47, 10:25). We teach ourselves to grow and serve through the church (2 Peter 3:18, Eph. 4:11-13). We teach ourselves to multiply by evangelizing others and completing the cycle again (Acts 9:31). And finally, we train some of ourselves to lead so that the church, new churches, and future churches will have men who can carry out what Paul is saying here.
 - 2. Some of us haven't thought about this discipleship process. Some of us are *stuck* in the process somewhere. Others are moving along well. Where are you?

III. A Soldier: Endure Hardship, v. 3-4

- A. The command is twofold: to endure hardship and to not be entangled in the affairs of this life. The endurance is really the sharing in the suffering of obeying the gospel (see 1:8 for another use of this word).
- B. The illustration is that of a good soldier. The minister's Christian life is likened to a soldier's life: engaged in battle, under the authority of another, organized into troops, and dedicated to the task at hand. Christians are the same: engaged in spiritual battle, under the authority of Christ, organized into local churches, and supposed to be setting aside worldly affairs to be dedicated to Christ.
 - 1. Pastors, missionaries, and all Christians can expect hardship. It is just the way things are.
 - 2. The person who is a work-a-day Christian has some more contact with the things of the world than does the vocational minister of the gospel. The latter should have fewer entanglements with the affairs of the world. A secular job takes away time to serve the Enlisting Officer. Many time-consuming hobbies will do the same. There is enough work that it is less than ideal to be tangled up in a lot of outside affairs. A soldier sets aside everything else for the time of his enlistment, and he may go anywhere in the world, spends most of his waking hours doing work related to the army. And this is especially true in active war-time. Allow me to remind you this: we are at war.

IV. An Athlete: Minister by the Book, v. 5

- A. The command is to minister according to the rules. The Christian life, like any athletic competition or job, has certain rules that must be followed. The rulebook is the Bible. I'm not making it out to be a legalistic rule book. But the fact is that God was not afraid of legalism so much that He didn't give us some specific guidance about how to behave!
- B. The illustration is that of an athlete. The rules in athletics give a level playing field and circumscribe what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior. I believe for the apostle, this includes particularly the *act* of competition. You cannot kick your running opponents in the shin to put them out of the race. You have to RUN, not do things other than running! The competition in the athletic metaphor is extended to include *preparation* things like performance-enhancing drugs or other equipment that may give a person an unfair advantage.

V. The Farmer: Work Hard, v. 6

- A. The illustration conveys the idea of hard work. Laziness is not permissible in Christianity. The word for hard-working is used about ministers in 1 Tim. 5:17 and 1 Thess. 5:12. It is also used in Col. 1:29 and many other verses that would make a good homework assignment to study out (**to become weary** in Rev. 2:3, Matthew 11:28, James 4:6, Isaiah 40:31; **to work hard** in Luke 5:5, John 4:38, Acts 20:35, 1 Cor. 4:12, 1 Cor. 16:16, Eph. 4:28, Romans 16:6, 16:12, 1 Cor. 15:10, Gal. 4:11, 1 Tim. 4:10, Isaiah 49:4, Isaiah 65:23, Philippians 2:16, and Psalm 127:1). It is a word that indicates working to the point of weariness, struggling, toiling, striving.
- B. The illustration is the farmer. Lots of people work hard, although my impression is that the percentage of hard-working Americans has waned to a low point at present with so many on government assistance or not working. (According to the BLS for 2015, 1 in 5 families have no employed member in the family.) But I think we would have to agree that farmers generally work very hard, whether in animal husbandry or planting and harvesting and the like. Up early, outdoors working hard, and finding it hard in many cases to eke out an existence with the forces arrayed against them.
- C. The difficulty in understanding this verse comes in the part that says, "first to partake of the crops." It is true that the minister receives his support from the spiritual work that he does (1 Cor. 9:14). But the point here is not only pay or remuneration for spiritual service. The minister receives blessing and reward from hard work well done both in this life and in eternity. God will reward him according to his work (Heb. 6:10).

Conclusion: Stop and Think About These Things, v. 7

If we stop to think about the Christian life with these metaphors a bit, we can see where we may need a tune-up. Are we growing like children? Are we passing on truth to the next generation? Are we good soldiers of Christ? Are we an athlete competing according to the rules? Are we a hard working farmer?

Thinking itself is awfully hard work. But it is necessary work. So take some time today to think about your Christian life and how it matches up, or doesn't, with these illustrations. May the Lord give you good insight into all these things.

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