

The Pillar (Part 3 of 3)

The Ten Commandments of Pastoral Ministry

1 Timothy 4:11-16

Mark Vroegop

¹¹Command and teach these things. ¹²Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. ¹³Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. ¹⁴Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. ¹⁵Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. ¹⁶Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers (1 Timothy 4:11-16).

Dave Kraft, in his book *Leaders Who Last*, recounts the story of a bank president who had a mysterious habit every morning.

Before his retirement, this gentleman had a morning routine that mystified his employees. First thing each morning, he would walk to his desk, take a key out of his coat pocket, open a small drawer in his desk, look in it for a couple of seconds, and then lock it and begin his duties.

The Monday morning after his retirement party, the new president quickly went to the prior president's desk. With all the employees gathered around, he took the key and opened the secret drawer. In that drawer was a small note with the words, "Credits to the right, debits to the left."¹

Then Kraft makes his point: *"The guiding principle for the bank president's work was basic, simple, and foundational."² Credits to the right, debits to the left; it is the basics of banking.*

What about church ministry – especially pastoral ministry? What are the basic, simple, and foundational principles or priorities for church ministry? This is an enormously important question for three reasons: 1) the mission of the church is eternally important, 2) churches are led by people, and 3) the cultural expectations on pastors are constantly changing and not always in a helpful sense.

This third issue is a significant one. We want our pastors to be biblical and godly, but we also want them to be great communicators and excellent writers and charismatic leaders and compassionate friends and accessible and focused. We want them to be articulate but not plastic, disciplined but not impersonal, visionary but not naïve, and strong but not pushy. And the problem with this list is

¹ Dave Kraft, *Leaders Who Last*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Publishers, 2010), 43.

² Ibid.

that it is impossible for one person to be everything that people expect or demand. The internal and external pressure can become what John Piper calls a “carnival of mirrors.”

What begins as a searching introspection for the sake of holiness and humility gradually becomes, for various reasons, a carnival of mirrors in your soul: you look in one and you're short and fat; you look in another and you're tall and skinny; you look in another and you're upside down. And the horrible feeling begins to break over you that you don't know who you are any more. The center is not holding.³

Don't get me wrong. I love pastoral ministry and the church with all my heart. However, pastoral ministry is, by its very nature, personal, and it is hard, at times, to remember what the basics, or non-negotiables, really are.

That is why 1 Timothy 4:11-16 is so incredibly helpful – for me, for our pastors and elders, and for you as a congregation. In the midst of crisis and challenges, Paul gives Timothy a series of commands that should frame his pastoral ministry.

10 Commands for Pastoral Ministry

Remember that this chapter is all about Timothy's calling and ability to refute false doctrine through correct teaching and godly living. After addressing the problem of false teaching (vv 1-4), he then calls on Timothy to pursue personal godliness as a strategy (vv 5-10). Remember last week? Godliness is fueled by feeding on the Word, being intentional, and hoping in God.

In verses 11-16 it is as if Paul, in rapid-fire succession, gives Timothy his marching orders. This is what Timothy is to be and do. There are ten imperatives or commands. Let's look at them.

1. Be authoritative

The first word that Paul uses is not one that is culturally familiar to us. It used to be, but because of pastoral misuse and our post-modern culture, the pastoral office and preaching are not naturally seen as authoritative as they used to be. Now there are some pockets within our culture, the African-American community, and many senior citizens, for instance, that still view the pastoral office with authority. But that is not the cultural norm.

So when we hear that word “command,” it is important to define what that actually means. The word is a term of power, carrying connotations of military or judicial order.⁴ It means to announce or to proclaim what should be done. The word is used in Acts 17:30 where God “commands all people everywhere to turn away from their evil ways” and in Mark 8:6 when Jesus “directed the crowd to sit down on the grass.” So the idea is that there is something important that must be communicated because of the urgency or the necessity of the moment.

³ <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/biographies/charles-spurgeon-preaching-through-adversity>

⁴ William Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles – The Word Biblical Commentary*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 257.

Since the church has eternally important news to share, pastors are to see themselves as heralds who proclaim the Word of God. The authority doesn't come from the office or the person but from the weightiness of the Word. Therefore, when a sermon or biblical counsel lines with the Scriptures, you, as a listener, should treat it as the authoritative command – as a word from God.

When I visited Ukraine two years ago, a pastor gave me a memento. He handed me a wooden rod that looked like a very serious weapon from the Middle Ages, complete with intimidating spikes. I was alarmed at what he was giving me, but then he explained it: "This is a 'rod of authority,' and it was given to a pastor as a symbol of his authority." As a symbol, the rod of authority is a bit extreme for my tastes, but it does illustrate something important and somewhat neglected: pastors are to deliver the Word of God with authority.

2. Be Instructive

The second thing that Paul says in verse 11 is that Timothy is to "teach these things." This balances out the strong command orientation that we heard in the previous point. Ministry is not just about perpetually prescribing or commanding the right actions; it must also involve teaching that is helpful.

Paul is likely referring here to the positive instruction Timothy is to give them. The verb and noun that he uses here are most often used in the Pastoral Epistles for good doctrine or biblical teaching. He intends for Timothy to deal seriously and strongly with false teaching, but he has to do more than refute error or deconstruct bad teaching. He has to help people know what is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and worthy of praise (Phil. 4:8).

In other words, the calling of pastors is to do more than just tell people what they should not do or what they should put off. Good pastors teach their people what to "put on." The book of Colossians gives us a great example of this:

But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth... ¹²Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony (Col. 3:8,12-14).

Churches and pastors cannot just be known for what they are against; they must also be known for what they are for. Ministry leaders are to be authoritative and instructive.

3. Be admirable

The next phrase gives us a hint of some of the challenges that Timothy likely faced in his church. Remember that Paul sent him to Ephesus, a well-established church, in order to correct doctrinal problems, especially in leadership. Timothy was a trusted assistant of the apostle, but he was young. You can imagine that those who opposed him used that against him. Similar things have

happened to others. The Puritan Herbert Palmer, fresh out of Cambridge University and relatively short in stature, climbed into the pulpit for the first time, only to hear a woman loudly say, "Alas! What shall this child say to us?"⁵ So what do you do? You can't change your stature or your age.

Paul says, "Don't let them despise you for your youth." Timothy's credibility was going to have to come from something other than his experience. He was not to be held back by what people thought of his age. Instead, he was to be respected because of the substance of his life. One translator said it this way: "Let the gravity of thy age supply the want of years."⁶ Timothy's maturity was to be the admirable quality of his life.

Paul probably also had an audience beyond Timothy in mind when he wrote those words. The letter would have likely been distributed throughout the church. Paul is not just speaking to Timothy about how he is to conduct himself; he is also speaking to the church about how they are to treat this young pastor. Timothy was to be admirable, but they were to be respectful.

4. Be an example

The fourth imperative helps us understand the way in which Timothy was to be admirable to his people. Since his credibility could not come merely from his age, he needed to be an example in many areas. Incidentally, this is the theme verse for our youth ministries. What a joy it is to my heart to know that our teenagers are getting a vision to fulfill what comes next in this text.

Pastors should model godliness regardless of age but especially if they are young. These qualities were particularly lacking in those guilty of false teaching. There are five areas listed:

- **Speech** – This refers to everyday conversation and talk. He is to be an example by his words.
- **Conduct** – He is referring to the totality of a person's life or a person's general behavior. What is the man known for?
- **Love** - It appears that the false teachers were guilty of greedy, self-centered behavior, and in contrast to that, a minister is to operate from love and selflessness.
- **Faith** – This likely refers to Timothy's own faith, his walk with the Lord, or his personal trustworthiness.
- **Purity** – 1 Timothy 5:2 uses this word for the way in which Timothy is to treat younger women as sisters. Given the meaning of the word, there is clear sense that Paul is talking about sexual purity, chastity, and moral trustworthiness. He is to be model of moral purity.

This is what you should pray for our young people, aspiring leaders, and your pastors and elders. We live in morally perilous times, and a person's godliness is the basis for all ministry. Robert Murray M'Cheyne, a pastor who died at age 30, famously said, "My people's greatest need is my personal holiness."⁷ Timothy was young, and you might be too. But "the best way to stop people from looking down on you is to make sure that they look up to you."⁸

⁵ Philip Ryken, *1 Timothy – Reformed Expository Commentary*, (Phillipsburg: New Jersey, 2007), 182.

⁶ Mounce, 257, quoting Ellicott.

⁷ Ryken, 184.

⁸ Ryken, 182.

5. Be committed to the Scriptures

The fifth command is connected to the centrality of the Word in pastoral ministry. It would be hard to overemphasize the importance of this point. The Word of God must be central in the pastor's heart and the church's ministry. In 2 Timothy 4:2 Paul says this: *"preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort with complete patience and teaching . . ."* Through every season of life, the faithful heralding (that is what "preach" means) of the Word of God is to be constant.

Timothy is to be committed to the Scriptures. The word he uses here for "devote" means to continue with close attention and devotion, to give oneself to something, or to apply oneself. The idea is that there is a level of intensity and a bottom-line commitment, and it is evidenced in three areas:

- **Public Scripture Reading** – The focus here seems to be on the reading of the Scriptures, not just the public nature of the reading. In the absence of personal copies of the Scriptures, the only place to read the Bible would be in public worship services. The point is rather simple: Be committed to helping people read the Bible.
- **Exhortation** – This is the Greek word *paraklesis*, which is also used to describe the role of the Holy Spirit. The meaning is to encourage or to persuade, and it refers to spoken words about the Word – sermons, Bible Studies, challenges, etc., with a view toward application.
- **Teaching** – This likely refers to instruction in doctrine or the fundamentals of the faith. The charge of pastors is to build their people's spiritual lives on the solid footing of the Scriptures.

I heard a very distressing news story on NPR this week. It was about the challenges surrounding the Crystal Cathedral, a church that Robert Schuller founded in 1955. The church was known for its self-help, positive-thinking teaching, and it became – justifiably so – a prime example of large churches that moved from teaching the Bible to teaching a psychologized, "believe-in-yourself" message. Two years ago, the ministry filed for bankruptcy, and the local Catholic Diocese bought the building. This weekend Schuller's daughter, who is the Senior Pastor of the congregation, announced that she was leaving, taking the choir and some staff to a new place of worship. It was the commentary by Jonathan Walton, assistant professor at Harvard Divinity School, that struck me. His assessment of how the church ran aground was as follows: "I think this is a quintessential example of a failure to institutionalize charismatic leadership so it can stand the test of time."⁹

Really? I have a different perspective: I think this is a quintessential example of failure to institutionalize biblical teaching and solid doctrine so that it can stand the test of time.

Charismatic leadership doesn't create longevity and security, but a commitment to the Scriptures does.

⁹ <http://www.npr.org/2012/03/12/146241932/schuller-family-breaks-away-from-crystal-cathedral>

6. Be a good steward

Timothy was given gifts for ministry, so he needed to be sure he used those gifts well. Verse 14 gives us the sixth command: *“Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you” (1 Tim. 4:14).*

Paul referred to the beginning of Timothy’s ministry, when the council of elders “laid their hands” on him. This was some form of public affirmation of Timothy’s ability and gifts, as well as a charge to fulfill a particular ministry. Historically, this has been known as ordination, a time when the established church authorities gave their blessing to a person’s fitness toward a particular role. Whether it is a formal ordination that involves a rigorous doctrinal review or an informal ordination that involves church leadership evaluating and putting a person into a particular ministry role, it is important for the person to realize the gravity and the importance of the moment.

I remember well a conversation/charge that Dr. James Grier gave to me in the hallway at my own ordination. He said, “Mark, for the rest of your life you must live with two values in mind: 1) What must you do on a personal level to maximize the gifts God has given you? and 2) Where is the place where your gifts will have the greatest impact for the kingdom of Christ? Always remember: to whom much is given, much is required.” I’ve never forgotten his words.

Pastoral ministry is the affirmation of two realms. It is the work of the Holy Spirit in calling a person, but it is combined with an earthly authority endorsement. It seems to me that the phrase “given you by prophecy” is an indication of the supernatural nature of what is undergirding all of this. The eldership is merely recognizing a person who has been gifted by the Holy Spirit. The elders are recognizing what the Holy Spirit is doing. The authority of heaven and earth combine to place a mantle on this person.

In light of that, Timothy is called to not neglect the gift. What does that mean? It could mean many things, including 1) developing his gifts, 2) shepherding his own heart, 3) working hard, 4) persevering through trials, 5) prayerfully choosing the right ministry strategies, and a host of other things. In fact, it seems that Paul answers that question of stewardship in the list that follows.

7. Be disciplined

“Practice these things” is what Paul says next. The meaning appears to have something to do with a consistent concern or cultivation. Other translations render this as “be diligent” (NIV), “put these things into practice” (NRSV), or “take pains with these things” (NASB). The variety of words has a common thread: Work hard!

This continues the athletic metaphor that Paul had used in 4:7, and he is urging Timothy to throw all of his energies into his pastoral work. He must know and proclaim the truth, but he also must put the truth into practice. If a person takes the ministry seriously, then it will show up in personal discipline.

Discipline distinguishes greatness from mediocrity – even our secular world recognizes that. Malcolm Gladwell, in his book *Outliers: The Story of Success*, identifies the distinguishing pattern of discipline. He said the following:

“Practice isn't the thing you do once you're good. It's the thing you do that makes you good . . . Once a musician has enough ability to get into a top music school, the thing that distinguishes one performer from another is how hard he or she works. That's it. And what's more, the people at the very top don't work just harder or even much harder than everyone else. They work much, much harder.”¹⁰

Jim Collins, in his book *Great By Choice*, identifies that companies who are great in the midst of chaos have at their core something he calls fanatic discipline – a consistency of action driven by the inner will to do whatever it takes to create a great outcome, no matter how difficult.¹¹

If athletes, musicians, and business leaders have this motivation, so shouldn't those whose lives are dedicated to the truth that leads to life?

8. Be devoted

The eighth commandment relates to being “all in.” I have a first edition of the ESV, and it reads “devote yourself to them so that all may see your progress.” Other editions of the ESV read “immerse yourself in them . . .” The idea is a continual saturation or to be totally absorbed in. Charles Spurgeon said that a pastor should be so full of the Bible that if you prick him anywhere, he bleeds Bible.

The ministry is too costly, too serious, too painful, and too personal to be “half-in.” It is not something that a person “clocks in” to or “clocks out” of. The calling to pastoral ministry is total and all-encompassing. You give your life!

9. Be watchful

Verse 16 is a strong warning, and it is a call for self-evaluation. “*Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching*” (1 Tim. 4:16). This is a present active command, which means that it should be something that Timothy is doing continually. Paul calls pastors to watch their souls and their sermons carefully. The phrase “keep a close watch” means to be in a continuous state of readiness to learn of any danger, need, or error. The idea is to be on guard against.

Pastors are to be on guard against where their souls and their teaching could go. They need to take seriously the nature of their work because, unlike any other profession, an error in their lives or in their teachings could have eternal consequences. Therefore, there must be constant vigilance.

¹⁰ <http://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/3364437>

¹¹ <http://stephenblandino.com/2011/12/fanatic-discipline-lesson-1-from-jim-collins-great-by-choice.html>

The book *Valley of Vision* is a collection of Puritan Prayers for a variety of occasions, and there is one written for pastors as they prepare to preach:

*"My master God, I am desired to preach today, but go weak and needy to my task . . . Give me assistance in preaching and prayer, with heart uplifted for grace and unction. Present to my view things pertinent to my subject, with fullness of matter and clarity of thought, proper expressions, fluency, fervency, a feeling sense of the things I preach, and grace to apply them to men's consciences. Keep me conscious all the while of my defects, and let me not gloat in in pride over my performance."*¹²

10. Be faithful

Finally, there is a call for persistent faithfulness to all of this – especially to the watching of oneself and the teaching. This call for faithfulness is driven by what is at stake here: *"persist in this, for by doing so you will save both yourself and your hearers"* (1 Tim. 4:16). This is a call for spiritual perseverance – to demonstrate that Timothy is "real" by enduring to the end. John Stott said, "Perseverance is not the meritorious cause, but rather the ultimate evidence of our salvation."¹³ And this is a call for pastoral faithfulness since the eternal destinies of people are on the line.

Pastoral ministry is serious work; it is eternal work because the message of the ministry – "that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" – is the only hope for forgiveness and eternal life. Therefore, it demands faithful perseverance.

These ten commands are weighty, aren't they? In the midst of all of the other things that pastors could do or we expect them to do, these ten are the basics – like "credits to the right; debits to the left." Therefore, let me ask you to do the following:

- If you are a spiritual leader in any capacity, let me encourage you to meditate on this list.
- If you aspire to spiritual leadership and specifically pastoral ministry, this is the nature of the calling and the demands. Ask God to make you like this.
- If you care for our church and for our future, pray this over our spiritual leaders. Pray that we would fulfill every single one of these ten commands and do it for the rest of our lives.

On a personal note, let me tell you how grateful I am to serve as one of the pastors at this church. None of our pastors takes the responsibility lightly, and we are grateful and honored that we are able to serve the Lord Jesus by serving you. I know I speak for all of them that it is our aim to live out these commands for the glory of Christ and the good of you, his church.

Pray with us to that end!

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Scriptural Citations: Unless otherwise noted, biblical quotations are from the English Standard Version.

¹² Arthur Bennett, *The Valley of Vision – A collection of Puritan Prayers and Devotions*, (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth Trust, 1975),

¹³ Ryken, 191.