

Title: What's in your pulpit?
Text: 1 Timothy 4.6-10
Theme: a good servant of Christ Jesus
Series: I Timothy
Prop Stmtnt Every church member should expect this from the elders.

Read Text:

In April, I am scheduled to speak at Detroit Theological Seminary. This is the seminary I attended and graduated from after 10 years of study. I am aware that the students will be listening to me knowing full well, that I am the only speaker they will listen to at school whose words they will not be tested over. Therefore, they will be tempted to mentally check-out. I also know that some of them stayed up way too late the night before doing homework that should have been done days and weeks before. I also know having sat through my share of very forgettable chapel speakers that I'd like to say something memorable, perhaps engaging, and at the very least something that will keep people awake. With all of that in view, don't you think that a text like this would be fitting for that occasion? Doesn't this appear to be a text tailor-made for a chapel service in a seminary? In fact, it seems to be so perfectly suited for pastors and elders, that it really isn't all that pertinent for the vast majority of you, right? WRONG!

It is no secret that churches suffer from poor leadership, but this happens because churches oftentimes do not demand good leadership. I have been your pastor for many years. It is very likely that in ten years I will no longer be in this role. This humbling, overwhelming and demanding responsibility will be another's and you will vote on that person. What kind of man and what kind of ministry are you to expect? What kind of man and what kind of ministry are you to expect from your pastors and elders now? What are the marks of faithful gospel ministry? So, while I may preach this text or one like it in a seminary chapel, this text was not written with a seminary chapel in view, but with a church in view, so that you can know how you ought to answer the question of, "what's in your pulpit?"

Now, there is a change between verse 5 and verse 6. Verses 1-5 are a more general admonition, but verse 6 connects with what Paul has just written, with a clearer focus on Timothy. The chapter begins with a warning how false doctrine will work its way into the church while here Paul challenges Timothy to do his job, do it well, do it thoroughly, do it faithfully and do it personally. In verses 6-10 there are 3 charges, 3 results and 1 motivation. These verses present a clear picture of what the pastor and elder ought to look like and what a congregation ought to look for in a pastor and elder.

I. **Three Charges** (6-7)

A. #1 - **Preach it all.** (6a)

"If you put these things before the brothers (and sisters)"

By the way, there are many times when the term “brothers” is word that means the church and the church includes brothers and sisters. So, while translating this literally is “brothers” the ESV rightly gives us a footnote explaining that brothers and sisters is in view. This is not unique to Paul; Jesus did the same thing in Matthew 12.50; Mark 3.35;

So, what are the things that you are to put before the church? The NIV translates this as, “*if you point these things out.*” This particular verb, translated as “*put these things before*” or “*point these things out*” also occurs in Romans 16.4, where it is translated as “*risked their necks.*” The obvious idea of this is to preach and teach in such a clear manner, that there is no mistaking as to what you are saying.

The Bible is controversial. It tells us many things that we do not particularly like to hear, but that we need to hear. When you tell speak the truth clearly, some people will become angry with you. But, if you do not speak the truth clearly, people will not hear the gospel. So, what do you want? Do you want a preacher who is so smooth and suave who never offends, or do you want a preacher who will tell you the truth, and will in fact even tell you the whole truth? Jesus spoke the whole truth and was executed for it. As long as he stuck to healing, he was fine. But when he healed the sick, raised the dead and spoke the truth; that is when he got into so much trouble. But think of this. Some of you grew up in families where no one ever really talked about personal or controversial issues. Anything that broached those topics was shut down, and as a result, you were shut down. You felt like a stranger in your own family, like you were really not known or understood. Some of you made a promise that if you ever had your own family that it would be different. You would talk about things. But since you never had any experience with how to do it, you’ve found it to be clumsy, difficult and even explosive. How do people do this? How do people talk about and work through difficult questions without straining relationships? Is the depth of the relationship worth the difficult investment of long conversations? Yes, a thousand times, yes! But how do you do that? Hang in here with me, it is worth it.

One of the most significant influences on your home is dinnertime. Dinnertime sets the tone for so much of your family life. There is lot I could and should say about that, and perhaps will at another time. But, just as dinnertime sets the tone for your family, our Sunday morning worship service sets the tone for our church family. If at dinnertime your family refused to talk about anything of genuine substance, you felt robbed. If I refuse to address certain issues because they are well, a little controversial, or will make some people uncomfortable and I always “play it safe”, then we will have a family that pretends that things are fine, but doesn’t really know how to have real relationships. And since God sent Christ to this earth in order for us to have a relationship with him and to have real relationships with one another, we are going to talk about controversial issues when they come up in the text. It is not just that I have to (v.6), it is an enormous benefit to the church.

My paraphrase (and be glad that I have never written a paraphrase of the Bible, it would be 10x larger than what it is) of verse 6 is this: “*If you preach and teach in such a clear manner that not only everyone knows exactly what you mean and what you don’t mean, and in so doing, you end up putting your own neck on the line, well then, while you will*

no doubt stir things up, make more than a few enemies, perhaps even lose your job, you will be a faithful minister of the gospel and in the end, that's really all that matters."

The "these things" that Timothy is to clearly explain to the church refer back to what Paul just talked about in 4.1-5. A faithful pastor and elder has to...

1) Give Warnings

He has to warn people of teachings and doctrines that are contrary to Scripture. Is that potentially uncomfortable? Yes. Is that potentially offensive? Yes. Is it possible that people will get upset, leave the church and not give? Yes. But, they have to be said. And yet, they have to be said in love. This instruction to Timothy is not hypothetical. This is not a matter of, "hey, if you ever happen to run into something like this, somewhere in your ministry life." No, this is happening in the church and Timothy has to address it. Remember the end of chapter 1? Alexander and Hymenaeus were teachers in the church, and they were teaching false doctrine. They probably had some friends, a following and perhaps some family members in the church and Timothy has to deal with it.

2) Give Admonitions

A faithful pastor needs to warn you but he also needs to admonish you and encourage you to believe that God is good, and to willingly and humbly accept God's creation and God's provision as a gift that is given to you by a generous and joyful God who loves you. I need to remind you to revel in the gifts of God with thankfulness because thankfulness opens your eyes to all of the good things God has provided. When you focus on what you don't have, you become blind to all that you do have.

This may sound a bit odd, but it is possible to preach too much on warnings about sin and not enough about God's grace and goodness. How do you know if the pastor is giving you a balanced diet? Seriously, just because you think that he emphasizes one over the other too much, how do you know if your gauge isn't off? That is why it is so important for the pastor to preach primarily expositional sermons. Preach through books of the Bible from beginning to the end of the book and preach from the entire Bible. That way, what God emphasizes in his Word is being emphasized in the pulpit. The amount of time that God gives an issue is reflected in this time and the way God talks about things sets the pattern for how we talk about them. God's balance between warnings and admonitions is the perfect balance and faithful expositional preaching captures that. One of the reasons why I know that you need expositional preaching is because my soul needs expositional study. I need to study the entire text. I need to be protected from starting with what I want to say and looking to the Bible to support me, rather I need to start with what does the Bible say and let that confront and correct what I wanted to say.

B. #2 - Stay away from irreverent and silly stuff. (7a)

Irreverent obviously means lacking reverence. And this could certainly be applied to the sad fact that in an effort to be more relatable, down to earth and "vulnerable" some

preachers have simply been crude and vulgar and say things for shock value. But, I think that the meaning of this word goes deeper. Irreverent is the idea of profane or godless. In other words, the preacher is saying things that have no real basis in God. Political constructs, psychological theories, business models, conspiracy theories, economic forecasting, may be interesting, but that is not what drives the pulpit because none of those things can save you. You need Christ. You need to see that he is the hero of the story of the world. So, I need to preach the Bible as it was written, with the goal of pointing you to Christ. Silly stuff may entertain and intrigue, and Satan will be thrilled if all we do is entertain and impress people. The third charge for the pastor and elder is to:

C. #3 - Train yourself for godliness. (7b-8)

The pastor/elder is to take personal responsibility for his own growth in godliness because he is in a position to call the members of the church to follow him. Over time, a congregation will look like its leaders. I told someone recently, that I have been here so long, that every problem in the church is mine. If I am not growing, you are probably not growing. That is why, if there are issues going on in the church, the pastors and elders need to look first at themselves. How am I, how are we setting the pace. The text expands on this point.

1) Bodily exercise has some value (8a)

There is some benefit to keeping your weight down, your blood pressure under control, your LDL's and HDL's and all that in balance. But, bodily exercise will not stop you from dying; it only tends to delay it. And that is good. As the text says, it has some value. However, eternity is a really long time – like forever. And some of you spend a great deal of time on a physical body that will die and you are neglecting your soul that is forever.

Do you have a fitbit? Fitbit can own you, can't it? Talk about living with guilt, wow! But at the end of the day, if you know how many steps you took, how many miles you walked, how many calories you burned, and you set a new personal record, but you did not grow in godliness, you just wasted an entire day. And you only have so many days.

Parents, do you see why Johnny and I beg you not to sign your kids up for every basketball, baseball, soccer, football, music, dance, cheer, karate group you can find? It will own you and it will rob you of the limited time you have to influence your kids with the gospel. How many of you cannot eat together as a family because you are constantly running to games and practices? Bodily exercise has some value, but only some.

2) Godliness has ultimate value

What is godliness? Godliness is the collection all of the attributes of God that we can reflect. To be like God is the ultimate good. There is a wonderful relationship between good and godly. Good is godly and godly is good. The more good something is the more like God it is. There are some things about God that we cannot train ourselves in. I haven't figured out omnipresence, omnipotence, omniscience or immutability yet. But, I

need to grow in love, grace, compassion, gentleness, humility, purity, faithfulness, peace, contentment, wisdom and joy. But, if I do not have a training plan for any of these, it is not going to happen. How do you train yourself for godliness? You study it and you practice it and you get a teacher to help you. That is called real church. Our relationships are supposed to be characterized by helping one another grow in godliness. We do that as we read the Bible with one another, talk about the details of our lives with one another, pray with another and encourage one another.

But, one of the greatest encouragements that I can provide for you to grow in godliness is for me to grow in godliness.

Questions to ask:

- Is the pastor willing to address difficult and controversial issues?
- Is the pastor willing to warn us?
- Does he point us to the goodness and grace of God?
- How does he train himself for godliness?

II. **Three Results** (6b-9)

A. He will be a good servant of Christ Jesus (6b) - standing

This should be what he wants and it should be what you want for him. A good minister serves the church best by serving Christ above all.

B. He will be trained by what he teaches. (6c)

The words of the faith (emphasis on words) will affect the life of the minister. The words of the faith is a reference to the specific things that Christ said and the specific things that the apostles taught. These words matter. These words are the words of God, which mean they are life, authority and power. These words communicate truths that change belief, and change behavior because the words of God are living. They are life. These words are rightfully called the “words of the faith.” The doctrines determine the course of life that a minister takes and they are rightfully called “good doctrine” in contrast to the teachings of demons that Paul referred to a few verses back. When the pastor is studying in order to know God and not just prepare a talk, then the words and doctrine will confront, convict, comfort and change him. As he is trained by what he studies, you will be trained by what he preaches.

There is an eternity’s worth of distance between delivering a speech and preaching a sermon. The primary responsibility of a pastor is to teach and preach the Word (as we will see in next week’s text). But this teaching and preaching is not primarily information and motivation. Preaching is the handling and declaration of the Word of God and since God is living (v.10), his word is living. His word has authority. His word humbles. His word convicts. His word amazes. His word comforts. His word causes joy. His word causes life and growth. And all of these effects should be evident in the life of the

minister. If he is putting these things before the church, that is preaching and teaching the entire counsel of God, then this is going to have an effect upon his life. The word will shape his life and ministry. And having a word shaped life is more important than anything because the benefits of a word-shaped life are both now and forever.

C. His training will be extremely valuable (helpful) (8b)

Do you see it now? Bodily exercise has some benefit for now, but you will still die. Godliness has benefit now and for eternity. For example, let's say that you run marathons, and I am not picking on that because I have done quite a few and hope to do some more. But, if you can run a marathon but do not know what to say to your co-worker who was just diagnosed with cancer, or to your cousin who just lost her pregnancy, or to your son who desperately needs to know how to fight against pornography, what good is your running? Godliness is not always rewarded now, but it will make an eternal impact and we tend to forget that, which is why Paul uses this formula again in verse 9.

More questions to ask:

- Does the pastor preach to himself?
- How does the gospel shape his life?
- How does the gospel shape his ministry?
- How does the Word inform his counsel?

III. One Motivation – the Living God (10)

“For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God...”
(10b)

Look at this verse and follow the reasoning. The motivation for faithful ministry comes from having hope set on the living God. That is a mouthful. If he wasn't living, there would be no reason for hope. But, because he is living, there is reason for him to be your ultimate hope. That frees the pastor and that should free you. Since he is living, and he is God, we are going to be confronted with him, right? What kind of a God is he? He is a God who loves to save!! In fact, he is the Savior of all people. This is an affirmation of 2.4. God's plan is to have a people that he has rescued from every tribe, language and nation. He saves all who come to him by faith. And he saves each one from lostness in sin to being found in grace, named and known in a family, loved and provided for, forever. A healthy church is foretaste of that life where we watch over one another, and care for one another and help one another get home safely

More Questions to ask:

- Does the pastor work hard?
- Is his work motivated by a genuine faith in God?
- Can you follow his lead?