

The Qualities of an Excellent Minister (Part 2)

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[0:00] You might recall last week we began looking at the qualities of an excellent minister.

An excellent minister is first of all a servant. He warns his people of error. He is an expert student of scripture. He avoids the influence of unholy teaching. He disciplines himself for godliness. He is committed to hard work and he teaches with authority. And remember I said if you're a believer God's given you a ministry. So pick out these that apply to you and really consider them. And today we're going to focus more on the standards of excellence established by the Lord for his ministers. Last time we talked about personal qualifications.

Today what I would call the standards of excellence. So this will actually be a discussion on the actual functions within ministry. And again lest there be confusion let me say if you're saved one with Christ you've got a spiritual gift or gifts that you're supposed to be exercising in the church. And that's your ministry. An excellent minister is a model of spiritual virtue. First Timothy chapter 4 verse 12. Remember he's talking to Timothy here getting him ready for a very difficult pastorate in Ephesus. Very difficult. If you want to go to the end of the story look at Revelation chapter 2. And you'll see Ephesus. Let no one look down on your youthfulness but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity show yourself an example of those who believe. The Puritan

Thomas Brooks said that example is the most powerful rhetoric. Now what did he mean by that? He meant that the greatest example of ministerial leadership is the power of an exemplary life. God's ministers are to set the example of godly living so others may follow. And if a pattern of godliness is missing in a minister's life there's only left an empty shell. We've seen a lot of empty shells on television haven't we? Where these guys fell and they fell hard. Your life is always a message. You're walking billboard. We all are. And may I say to you this and I'm almost embarrassed to bring this up because I know me. Your life is what you do when you're all alone and only God is present to observe your character.

That's who you really are. I hope that brings comfort to most of you. It does it to all of us I can assure you. Paul understood the role of example and he lived a life that was an example. He told the Corinthians that they should be imitators of him just as he was an imitator of Christ.

[4:00] He challenged the Philippians to follow his example. He also told them to practice the things that they saw in him. And this is the power of example. An excellent minister is a role model.

An excellent minister has patterned himself after most likely after another minister. Many years ago I was traveling in Bentonville. We were driving through Bentonville, Arkansas coming back from a little vacation Diane and I and we'd run over to Eureka Springs. I was an FBI agent.

It was a Sunday morning. We're driving through. We didn't know the town. And it's a lot bigger Jerry than it used to be. And they have 67 police officers over there. I'm sending them. One of mine quit the other day and he's going to work there.

And we just pulled into the First Baptist Church. It was church time and we just pulled in. When it was over the pastor was greeting us and said where are you from? I said Barfield, Oklahoma. I said you know Ralph Dursham. I said I sure do. I said I go to church with his son. He said I am in ministry because of Brother Ralph Dursham. He was my mentor. I remember I mentioned your dad and he knew immediately who it was. I don't know if he'd know now.

But he knew then immediately who it was. He was a role model and Brother Ralph was a role model for many people. Paul also reminded Timothy that he was still young.

[5:31] In other words, Timothy had not yet established a track record that others could observe. He's going to have to first of all earn the respect of his flock. And I think we all know respect is not a given. It's something you earn.

He challenged Timothy to be an example in several areas of his life. He first wanted Timothy to be an example in the area of speech. And the Lord spoke about that and the importance of that in Matthew chapter 12.

This is Jesus. Now did he mean, you know, we're going to be judged based on what we say? We're going to be judged based upon a relationship to him. But the evidence, if we're in him or not, is often speech. It would be speech. The Lord knew something about speech. He knew that speech reflects our heart.

We must avoid sinful speech because that is the speech that people will remember. Our speech should be that which edifies, fills somebody up.

[7:10] Timothy was also to be an example in the area of conduct. As believers and leaders, we are to model righteous living.

Jimmy Swaggart tried to join, unite a biblical message of sorts, but with an ungodly lifestyle, and it all came crashing down.

It all crashed down around him. And it has been said before, if you leak in one area of your life, then you leak all over. I mean, a leak is a leak, you know, and you only have to leak in one area of the Christian life, and you leak everywhere.

Timothy was also to be an example in love. That is not the love of the world, which is often sensual or emotional. This is sacrificial love.

This is the type of love that gives time and energy to the people of God. This is the type of love that puts someone on a cross to die for someone else.

[8:15] It's sacrificial. It's the level of love that goes to the cross to purchase a people out of the bondage of sin. And Timothy was also to be an example in faith.

The reference here is not so much to belief, but faithfulness in service. That we are faithful servants of the Lord. The minister does not swerve off track.

What happens when you swerve off track? Well, it's a train wreck. That leads to a train wreck.

Watching the sun go down. The minister must also be an example of purity.

The godly leader is to maintain a standard of living that others will want to emulate. And really, the three areas that are so vital is he must be blameless, above reproach, and assuming he's married, a one-woman man.

Blameless, above reproach, and one-woman man. You may recall when I played the tape of Dr. MacArthur right after Jimmy Swaggart fell, and Dr. MacArthur spoke to the ministerial students at the college and seminary where he's president.

[9:28] They said the question that he'd been asked most often after Jimmy Swaggart was, can he come back? You know, when can he come back? And Dr. MacArthur's position was that based on scripture, he was unqualified.

It wasn't a matter of forgiveness. He can be forgiven. We can all be forgiven. But he said he's no longer blameless, above reproach, and a one-woman man.

And that's why, you know, he has said, and it's so true, we all hang by a very thin thread. And if that thread is snapped, it's over for the minister of the gospel.

And that area of blameless, above reproach, one-woman man is probably the greatest battlefield a minister finds himself in, in our day especially.

Paul admonished that Timothy, flee from youthful lusts. If Paul could speak to a state and say, don't turn on TV, you've got to flee from youthful lusts. I mean, they sell hammers with girls in bikinis.

[10:32] They're everywhere. An excellent minister has a thoroughly biblical ministry. Paul says, until I come, give attention to the public reading of scripture, to exhortation and teaching.

True ministers, which are to say God-blessed ministers or ministries, are built on the word of God. And that's the missing ingredient nowadays. There's churches, mega churches that have abandoned the teaching of the word of God. There are denominations that have abandoned the teaching of the word of God.

And this goes beyond the time devoted to the pulpit. For a minister, it encompasses the preparation time.

And that, of course, is carried on in private. It is teaching, but it also is joined to times of prayer over the message, to study, and to preparation.

[11:37] That's a thorough biblical ministry. Now, the pattern in the early church, which was in homes. You know, we didn't have church buildings for the third century.

That was Constantine, and he made the church move into government buildings because they were abandoned, and he needed revenue. So he appointed a minister out of the government, and he put them in buildings. But the early church met in homes.

The early church was to publicly read the scriptures. That was followed by an exposition of the passage so that the people present could understand what had been read.

And that is why, in my opinion, expositional preaching is true preaching. I love, you know, I know where Don will be the next time he's in the pulpit, you know, in Luke.

I know where he's going to be. How ironic, in our community, I'm only aware of two churches that engage in expositional preaching, one of which is ours. And I only know of two.

[12:40] Preaching in our day has fallen on some very difficult times. Depending on where you're at, depending on what part of the country, depending on what denomination, it has become more of an exercise in crowd-pleasing.

That's really what preaching has become. Preachers use technique over revelation. They employ drama and comedy and wed them to the latest marketing scheme in order to grow a church.

There are churches today that literally advertise that they don't preach. Preaching is not the magnet that gets them in there. We have churches in this community that are essentially coffee houses, and they'll sell coffee, and they'll bring it into the sanctuary while you're kind of like, you know, at the ballgame throwing peanuts.

You know, you buy peanuts from a guy. Maybe soon we'll have vendors tossing peanuts in the auditorium. I think one of the most startling was ever heard of was a church in California, and they were going to milk a goat and milk a cow.

They both won at the county fair, and they're going to see which one gave more milk. And they spread hay all across the stage into the platform and took the pulpit out of it. And now I'm sorry these boys are here, but the worst one was when they had the second ten of the prettiest women and did a striptease.

[14:10] They had a second layer of clothes on. So they were clothed, but they did it to the sensual music. And let me tell you something. They had a crowd.

What church? That in California. They had a crowd. They got a crowd that Sunday. I can reach you at Andrews Mark if you'd like. Yeah, yeah. Don't go to the Internet. It's not on there.

I've looked. True ministers are to exhort. To exhort is to challenge. It may come in the form of warnings about the need to be obedient.

True ministers are called to teach. This word appears many times in the pastoral epistles. Teaching involves the systematic explanation of God's word.

That can occur one-on-one. It may involve your wife. Maybe you're teaching your wife something. It may involve your children. If you were here last night, you heard the brother of Jim Spencer. Twelve kids and one on the way.

[15:08] My wife said, put a lock on that bedroom door, ladies. You know, what we're doing tonight is teaching. Teaching has gone on in the church since the very earliest days.

The church father, Justin Martyr, had this to say about a worship service in his day. And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together in one place.

And the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read as long as time permits.

Then when the reader has ceased, the president, I guess that's the minister, verbally instructs and exhorts to the imitation of these good things.

Then we all rise together and pray. And as we said before, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought. And the president, in like manner, offers prayers on thanksgivings according to his ability.

And the people is sent by saying, Amen. So be it. Reading and explaining the word was central to the worship service.

[16:22] Preaching and teaching is the highest calling of a minister. And I'll tell you, you're never at greater corporate worship than when you're sitting under the preaching of the word. In our day, we have saddled ministers of the word with a lot of non-essentials.

You know, they're responsible for everything. We pay them to do it all. We pay them to do what we're supposed to be doing. And that's led to spiritual impoverishment in our nation.

And it really has. An excellent minister fulfills his calling. 1 Timothy 4.14. Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed upon you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of

hands by the presbytery.

You didn't know that Paul was a Presbyterian, right? I thought he was going to count there. Yeah. Timothy was going to face some great difficulties in ministering to his flock.

Paul knew that. Knew it by divine revelation, I'm sure. Paul knew that some ministers leave the ministry because God has not called them in the first place.

[17:34] Okay, that's okay. We can handle that. Others, however, defect from their actual calling. And Paul wanted to prevent this in Timothy.

And Paul gives a great testimony to the pressures that Timothy faced. And he did this in his second letter to his protegee. And let me say this.

I remember hearing Dr. McGee one time. A young minister came to him. And he said, I'm going to leave the ministry.

He said, did God call you? He said, yeah, but I'm leaving. He said, why are you leaving? He said, I've discovered I'm not worthy. He said, is there a moral blight in your life?

He said, oh, no, no. No, no. I'm faithful. I'm, you know. But I'm just not worthy. He talked to me and goes, show me in that book where it says you are worthy. You know? Show me.

[18:33] Listen to these words of Paul to Timothy out of the second letter. I thank God whom I serve with a clear conscience, the way of my forefathers did, as I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day, longing to see you even as I recall your tears, so that I may be filled with joy.

For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice. There's some speculation they led him to the Lord.

And I'm sure that it is in you as well. For this reason, I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.

For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline. Therefore, do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me, his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God.

For this reason, I also suffer these things, but I'm not ashamed. For I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day.

[19:53] Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. Guard through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us the treasure which has been entrusted to you.

You are aware of the fact that all who were in Asia turned away from me, among whom were Pygaleus and Hermogenes. Boy, that's quite a charge, just given this young preacher.

As Paul's getting ready to board a ship and head to Jerusalem. Never going to see him again, as far as we know. Back in our 1 Timothy passage, the apostle Paul gives Timothy three sound reasons to remain faithful to his calling.

He first speaks of the spiritual gift that was within him. All believers are given the Holy Spirit at the time of rebirth. The scriptures are very clear on that.

And the scriptures say, he who has not the Spirit has not Christ. The scriptures are very clear on that. God has designed each believer's gift in order that they might minister to the church in that capacity.

[21:02] Timothy's gift was that of preaching, teaching, evangelism, and leadership. These were his gifts. Second, Paul notes that Timothy's gift was confirmed through prophetic utterance.

There was a public affirmation of his gift confirming in public, meaning the church, that it had in fact come from God.

It was a divine call. And the divine call that Timothy received was very similar to Paul's. The precise utterance, though, is not revealed to us.

But we know that God spoke to Timothy's heart. Paul affirmed that God was speaking to his heart. And he received a divine call to be a minister of the flock.

Now, today, men are not being knocked to the ground like Paul on the road to Damascus. Not being blinded by heavenly light. Not spoken to the Lord Jesus as he instructs them to enter into ministry.

[22:10] The method today is providential. If God wants a man in the pulpit, this is an example, he will provide to him the desire and then give him the opportunity.

That's how God calls men to the pulpit. The desire, and he wedges that with the opportunity. It's not a dramatic road to Damascus, you know.

We always say knocked off his horse. There's no horse mentioned in that whole section. I don't know why we came up with that. Maybe he was. Paul then tells us that Timothy's gift was through the laying on of hands by the presbytery.

With all of these collectively happening, it was obvious that God called Timothy to the ministry. And Paul is urging him to remain faithful to that calling and particularly to remain faithful in light of the fact that very difficult days are coming.

[23 : 19] We've been teaching that on Sunday morning in here. And Paul is dealing with the church at Ephesus with false teachers. And they had infiltrated Ephesus, infected the church.

And it was a great sadness to Paul. And he was doing battle, and he's preparing Timothy to do battle with the false teachers. And let me tell you, false teachers abound in our day.

And the Lord said in the last days there will be an increase in that. There will be more in the last days than at any other time. And we're in the last days because John said these are the last days. We've been in the last days for 2,000 years. And there's an increasing number of false teachers the further in we get in these last days. And they're everywhere.

They're on every channel except 378. It's the only channel that you can really trust. An excellent minister is totally absorbed in his work.

[24 : 20] Take pains with these things. Be absorbed in them. Boy, that's quite a message from Paul. The true man of God is focused, regardless of what your spiritual gift is, you're focused, even consumed with the calling that God has put on your life.

I've said before when I spoke at VOM, I said, maybe God called you to lick stamps. Then be consumed with it. Be the best stamp licker they have out here.

Lick more stamps than anyone else. No, they don't even lick stamps anymore, Oscar. They stick them on there. Yeah, they quit licking. Totally got lost here.

Be consumed with your calling. James warned about men who were unstable. They weren't stable in ministry.

The man of God is not to be unstable. He's to be stable. The word takes pain. It starts out to take pains with these things. That word, it's one word in the Greek language, carries with it the idea of thinking things through from the start.

[25 : 35] That speaks of a man that makes plans. He strategizes before taking action. He doesn't just shoot from the hip. When the minister is not involved with his ministry at that particular moment, in other words, when he's not standing in the pulpit, he is busy preparing.

He's busy praying. He's busy planning for it. Absorbed means, literally in the Greek language, be in them.

Be absorbed. Be in it. That's what it means. Actually, the word absorbed is not even in the Greek language. It's the words, three words in English, be in them.

And it is a phrase really meaning be engulfed. Be sold out. The excellent minister is engulfed in his work.

And let me say this. The servant of Christ is never off duty. It's kind of like police chief. Yeah, I'll stop at Lowe's at 8 o'clock at night.

[26 : 45] And they say, are you off duty? No. I'm never off duty. The servant of Christ is never off duty. Let me say this, too. There's no retirement plan. There's no retirement plan.

Ministers don't say, well, I'm going to get to such and such age. I guarantee you, Brother Ralph is just as busy as he ever was, but it's prayer ministry. No doubt. No doubt. There's no retirement. Talked about in Scripture. An excellent minister is progressing in spiritual growth. You know, we tend to think, well, they've already arrived, right? No.

They're growing in the Lord. Paul, again, so that your progress, progress. That's growing. Your progress may be evident to all.

You know, we see Don now, and if he's here 20 years from now, we will see a different Don because he will have grown. Now, if I'm with you then, you know, I'll be 86 years old.

[27 : 49] Men in ministry are not flawless. Men in ministry are not perfect. For that reason, Paul mentions the necessity of spiritual progress, spiritual growth.

No minister has yet arrived. Not in this life. And won't do so in this life. They will not do so in this life. The minister is always to be growing.

How does he do that? The Word of God. He camps out in the Word of God. He is growing toward maturity. He is growing toward Christlikeness.

And that is the call of every believer. Be recreated in the image of Christ. And that is growing toward Christlikeness.

Another word for that is sanctification. You know, you were justified at salvation, at rebirth.

Justification is a legal term.

[28:56] You're declared righteous. And then you start that path of growing toward Christlikeness. That's sanctification. We will be on that road until the Lord calls us home.

Or comes back for the church. And people say to me, well, I'm saved. Well, how you know? They say, well, I prayed this prayer. Well, wait a minute. Where are you at on the sanctification road? And we all travel at a different pace. But every true believer is being sanctified. Being recreated in the image of Christ. Where are you at on that road?

Paul even admitted to his needs to grow spiritually. This is the great apostle Paul. Book of Philippians. Not that I have already obtained it.

He said, I'm not there yet. Or have already become perfect. He said, I'm not perfect. But I love this. But I press on that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.

[30:05] He said, brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet. But one thing I do. And boy, he's going to give us some great advice here.

Forgetting what lies behind. And reaching forward to what lies ahead. I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

And if you've never looked at that, that's powerful. That's over in Philippians. Progress there is a military term in the Greek.

It speaks of an advancing army. The excellent minister is advancing in Christ's likeness.

To the extent that the flock should be able to see, to measure his progress. Don's been advancing while he was there.

[31:10] He got his doctorate. Finished that thing up. I told him the other day, you might want to get one in Latin now. He wasn't interested. John MacArthur, who said, I listened to him the other day, he said, I just wish I had a better grasp of Scripture.

I'm like, oh my gosh. John MacArthur has a wonderful footnote on this Philippian passage. The Lord here talks about the Spirit of God through Paul says, forget the past.

Forget the past. And I read John's footnote several years ago and I reread it often. Do not dwell on past failures.

Do not dwell on past successes. They will both debilitate you. They will both restrict or inhibit your growth in Christ's likeness.

Put it in the past. Press on toward the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Stay focused on Christ.

[32:21] And I think that is a great footnote. Don't dwell on failures. Don't dwell on successes. Press forward. The army is advancing. Press forward in your spiritual walk to Christ's likeness in your sanctification.

Well, let me give you some concluding remarks for tonight. And again, I said I'd get you out a little early. This is Paul. Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching.

Persevere in these things. For as you do this, you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you. Paul says we are to pay close attention to the work that the Lord has given us.

And if it's pulpit ministry, do it. If it's giving your testimony to you crying, Jerry, do it. Lives change. Can be changed. And were.

If it's washing dishes, do it. We are to watch what we teach. What are we to watch out for? Make sure it is scripturally accurate.

[33:25] Make sure it's accurate. We are to persevere in all things related to our calling. And by persevering in our message, in other words, not watering it down, people will hear and be saved.

Walter Chantry has a wonderful book. He is actually the head of Banner of Truth Books and a former pastor. And he has got a wonderful book called The Gospel in Our Day, Authentic or Synthetic.

And he talks about how the gospel has been reduced down in our day to the lowest common denominator. So it's most palatable by the most people at any one given time.

And he says, but it's another gospel. Paul said, don't preach another gospel. You'll be the anathema of God. First chapter of Galatians. Around verse 12 and verse 14. He repeats it twice.

Do not water down the message. This is one reason I think the only way to teach the Bible is verse by verse. I really believe in that.

[34:34] I remember a number of years ago I was teaching the Hebrews. It was the first time I ever taught it. I've taught it two or three times since then. It takes about two years to get through there. And a good friend of mine, he's no longer in this church, but he came up.

He said, why can't you do this in about four to six weeks? And I said, well, how do I do that? And he said, leave out the unimportant parts. And I said, well, Bill, what are those?

If you can identify them, I'll think about it, you know. But how do we identify what's... I mean, it reminds me of when Reader's Digest had the condensed version of the Bible.

Excuse me? Come on. When a church has godly ministers, some people are going to be saved. Did you notice I didn't say all? Paul said, I have come that some might be saved. The Lord Jesus had 12 followers when he was on earth. One of them was a devil.

[35:36] Never did get saved. I mean, some will be saved. That is the church's highest calling. We preach Jesus. We get equipped to teach Jesus, to talk about Jesus.

We go out and tell the dying world about Jesus. Let me suggest to you that it is the sole reason why we are still on earth.

Why didn't the Lord just call the church home? Why didn't the Lord call us home when we get saved? That would be pretty neat, you know. You get saved and go be with Him.

Because we are leading others to Christ. And let me tell you, that is the one thing, fellas, you will never be able to do in heaven.

You're never going to get to lead anybody to Christ in heaven. If you've never had the joy of doing that here, you need to do it. Because you will not do it in heaven. It won't be necessary.

[36:42] We need to be busy with that today. People say, oh, I don't think I can do that. Just tell them what God has done in your life.

Tell them what Jesus has done in your life. And let the Holy Spirit do His work. But don't manipulate. I wrote a book one time called Manipulative Evangelism. The only problem is I wrote it in my head.

It was a great book. It had a wonderful outline. But I never reduced it to a pen and ink. You know, I can manipulate a lot of people. But we're not to be into Manipulative Evangelism.

Tell them what the Lord has done for you. And then let God, the Holy Spirit, do His work of salvation. The Holy Spirit, do His work of salvation.