

A Biblical Philosophy of Pastoral Ministry:

*A Study of the Imperatives  
found in the Pastoral Epistles*

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Music. Youth ministry. Evangelism. Media. Preaching. There seems to be no agreement on what is to be the churches focus. The modern-day pastor hears a surplus of opinions from books and seminars on how to effectively pastor a church. The result is that often a pastor will change his methodology and philosophy whenever a new idea appears more practical. Confusion in the church is the consequence of fluidity of ministry principles. This “chameleon-type” philosophy is a product of being uninformed in biblical principles and commands that Paul outlines in the Pastoral Epistles.

It is readily agreed that there are many responsibilities that make up the Pastoral Epistles. Even with this in mind though, it would be foolish to overcomplicate the divisions. To do so would miss the Apostle Paul’s succinct focus. Timothy and Titus were facing difficulties that Paul knew needed his input. In the face of such problems, these men needed advice and encouragement. A careful study of the Pastoral Epistles and their imperatives therefore show that pastoral philosophy consists of proper conduct, proper teaching, and faithfulness.

The behavior of a pastor is of prime importance in the Pastoral Epistles. Consistently, Paul exhorts his protégés to live upright and godly lives (Titus 2:12). When Paul lists pastoral qualifications (I Tim 3:1-7; 3:8-13; Titus 1:5-9), it is interesting to note that in all three places he does not give a job description but instead describes the character of the pastor. In these lists, the man that appears is one of mature Christian character; one whose faith has a tangible impact on his behavior.

The over riding theme of the pastor’s character in I Tim 3:1-7 is characterized by one word, blameless. ἀνεπίληπτος, “above reproach,” is absolutely necessary in a pastor’s life. Mounce suggests that “not only must the person be without reproach but that person truly deserves to be viewed as irreproachable (Mounce, 170). For Timothy and Titus, this was to set

them apart from the false teachers whose lives were characterized by sin and decadence (I Tim 6:5). Throughout the Pastoral Epistles, Paul stresses the importance of character in four main areas.

Chief among these areas is his moral example. This is the quality that characterizes a pastor's inner man. In II Timothy 2:22, we find that the mature behavior of a pastor is characterized by his pursuit of righteousness, faith, love, and peace (cf. I Tim 4:12; 6:11). The righteousness of the pastor deals with his uprightness in conduct that should follow after he has been made righteous (Fee, 149). To pursue faith is to pursue the consequences of having faith, hence faithfulness (Mounce, 533). Fee adds that faith and love are the supreme Christian virtues that together appear on every such list in the Pastoral Epistles (I Tim 1:5; 2:15; 4:11; 2 Tim 2:22; Titus 2:2) (149). The last virtue, "peace," is to be pursued even though Timothy and Titus were in the midst of strife and division and would have to purge the false teachers from the church. Elsewhere in the Pastoral Epistles, it is seen that a while a minister does have to confront error he is to do it with meekness and gentleness (II Tim 2:24-25). This is especially important since the ultimate goal is reconciliation of these heretical teachers.

This pursuit is presented as a discipline (I Tim 4:7), a discipline whose goal is godliness. Wuest explains.

*Γυμνάζω, "exercise," is a word that speaks of Greek athletes engaging in athletic exercises in the gymnasium. Here, the exercise is not of the physical body but that of one's mind, emotions, will, the spiritual part of man (70).*

*εὐσέβεια, "godliness," in the Pastoral Epistles is a technical term for a life totally consecrated to God, carrying emphasis on the observable aspects of this type of life (Mounce, 251). Therefore,*

a minister is to pursue, as a disciplined athlete, the ultimate prize: a godly life that is clearly seen by all.

Next, the pastor is to be an example with his mind. What a pastor dwells upon will naturally evidence itself in the pastor's life. Therefore, Paul gives the proper truths that a minister is to meditate and be concerned with. A pastor is to meditate upon the moral qualities (righteousness, faith, love, and peace) that he is to pursue (I Tim 4:12; II Tim 4:12). In I Tim 4:15, Paul says to μελετάω, "to ponder," or "to practice. (BAGD, 500). The goal of this meditation is so that the pastor's testimony will be evident to all. Mounce adds, "The linear aspect of the tense ("continually") emphasizes that it must be a day-to-day activity; it must become habitual (264)."

A pastor is also to be a teacher (I Tim 3:2). This statement comes with several assumptions: that the teacher has the inherent mental capacity to teach and that he has the knowledge of what is to be taught. A pastor is not to be someone who has just rhetorical ability; he is to be one who has immersed himself and meditated in the Word and is able to convey those truths accurately.

Discernment is another important mental characteristic of the minister. Paul tells pastors to not ordain a person to the ministry hastily. Rather, a minister is to carefully evaluate those that seek the office of a bishop to prove whether they are truly called of God and fulfill the qualifications given within the Pastoral Epistles. This is especially important when one considers that a pastor partakes in the victories and failures of those he ordains. If a pastor ordains someone, who is a false teacher or depraved in character, Paul says that this pastor will be guilty of the sinner's iniquity. Mounce comments that the reason a pastor must give time to discern the true character of a man is because some people's sins are not readily apparent and

therefore one must be cautious in his commissioning. Some people's good deeds and potential, though, are also not apparent at first. A cautious attitude will help the pastor find these people (319).

Third, the pastor is to be an example in his domestic life. The main responsibility that a pastor has in this area is to "manage his own house well" (I Tim 3:4; Titus 1:6). Kent says that the way a man controls the home reveals his capacity for leadership and government (123). Guthrie states it even stronger, "Any man unable to govern his children graciously and gravely by maintaining good discipline, is no man for government in the church (81). Paul then gives two tests to know whether a pastor is ruling his children well. The first test is that his children should have as believers have a good testimony. Mainly, these children are to be submissive. If his children are rebellious and out of control, Paul states that a pastor should not be allowed to rule the church. The second litmus test is that he is to bring his children up with σεμνότης "complete dignity." The children's submission should reflect the character of their father's leadership.

Lastly, a pastor is to exemplify Christ in his personality. The outward signs of his inward life should be a shining example of modeling Christ. I Tim 3:3, the verse explains that the pastor should not be violent or quarrelsome. πλήκτης, "striker," speaks of one who literally comes to blows with another while ἄμαχος, "not contentious," is used in a metaphorical sense (Earle, *I Timothy*, 365). This is especially important since a pastor often has to rebuke a congregant's teaching or behavior. When disagreements happen, the pastor is expected to be able to control his emotions. This is especially seen in relationship to correcting those that are his elders (I Tim 5:1). Rather than a strong rebuke from the minister, he is to gently persuade the elder so as to

bring him back to correct doctrine. In every circumstance, a pastor should respond with gentleness and kindness.

A pastor must have restraint from his desires. In I Tim.3:3, Paul explains that a pastor is to not be given to much wine, *πάροινος*, “near wine; tippling.” Also, Paul commands that he is not to be a lover of money. If the minister, is a lover of money it will invariable lead him out of God’s will (I Tim 6:10). These admonitions are given in contrast to the false teachers who represent all of these negative qualities. Rather than be a lover of money, the pastor is to be liberal in his hospitality to strangers (I Tim 3:2).

The practical reason that Paul stresses character to Timothy is a matter of influence. The importance for modeling is seen throughout the Pastoral Epistles and is clearly seen by Paul’s charge to Timothy to not promote someone whose character is not readily apparent to all (I Tim 3:6). If this “novice” is advanced to the position of pastor and then falls into sin, it will bring disgrace upon the church and those who ordained him.

This type of horrible character was apparent in the false teachers and was having a negative impact on the church. Not only were believers being corrupted by the false teaching, but the unbelievers outside the church were blaspheming God because of the ungodliness of the church members (Titus 2:5). The “light” of these churches had been hidden by the darkness of their sins.

This was one reason why the laity at these churches needed proper godly leadership. They needed this so they could see what godly living looked like. More than any other Christian, the pastor should stand forth as a “model of good works” (Titus 2:7). The Greek word, *τύπος*, as found in Titus 2:7 carries the connotation that Titus is to be a mold into which

others can be impressed and therefore bear a likeness to him (Mounce, 413). This need for modeling is seen throughout the Pastoral Epistles (I Tim 4:12).

A pastor's goal is for unbelievers to not have anything to say against the pastor or the church. Mounce points out that it is important to notice that the goal is not to have Cretan society think well of Christians, the goal is for Titus and other church members to behave so that no justifiable charges can be leveled against them (414). Paul's main thrust is that whether inside or outside the church, a pastor is to be an example that his congregation can confidently follow.

The second major area in pastoral philosophy is proper doctrine. A pastor is to be a man who accurately handles the Word so that he will be God-approved (II Tim 2:15). Much of the Pastoral Epistles was written to combat error and false doctrine. Therefore, it was important that Paul detail the source, content, and opponents of Christian doctrine.

The pastor is to be committed to the Scriptures. Paul tells Timothy to "follow the pattern of sound words that you have heard from me" (II Tim 1:13). These sound words refer specifically to the gospel. In a pastor's ministry, he must hold fast to the gospel and preach it with faith and love. This supports the frequent idea that correct doctrine breeds correct conduct. A pastor should learn and be convinced that the Scriptures are true through his experience in learning and practice (cf. II Tim 3:14).

A pastor can have confidence in the Scriptures because of its source. Timothy is able to teach the word authoritatively because it is from God (II Tim 3:16). Because it is God's Word, it is therefore profitable for Timothy's ministry.

Not only is it profitable; it is also sufficient for all good works of the ministry. Mounce states that v. 17 is not an afterthought tagged on to show the result of v. 16b. *iva*, "in order that,"

introduces the ultimate purpose of Scripture's inspiration (570). That purpose is sanctification. Scripture was given so as to reveal God and change mankind. Paul's main point here for the pastor is that the sufficiency of Scripture is able to provide the knowledge and direction for Timothy's ministry.

The means to instruction is clearly seen within II Tim 3:16. There are four prepositional phrases that form two groups, the first dealing with doctrine (orthodoxy) and the second with behavior (orthopraxy) (Mounce, 570). Paul's point is that Scripture is sufficient to cover the teaching and conduct of believers. The pastor does not need to go outside of the Scriptures to find absolute religious truth nor does he need to for human ethics. The Bible is sufficient in both areas.

Secondly, Paul delves into the content that the pastor is to preach. First and foremost, the pastor is to herald the gospel (II Tim 4:5). He is to be an example to the flock of a consistent witness (II Tim 4:2). Whether it is convenient "in season" or inconvenient "out of season," the pastor is to be ready to give a clear and bold presentation of the gospel. εὐκαίρως and ἀκαίρως is best translated when it is opportune or inopportune. The pastor should always be prepared to preach and perform his ministry (Mounce, 573). The pastor is always to be about his task regardless of the situation.

The pastor is also to preach godly living. In Titus 2:11-14, Paul states that the natural outwork of the gospel is holiness. The free gift of salvation should naturally come with the cost of obedience to the Word of God. While salvation does not necessitate sanctification, it should follow it.

Paul does not leave this area general. Rather, he goes on to specify what this godly living should look like in regards to different classes of people. In I Tim 6:17-18, Paul seeks to

instruct the wealthy members of the Ephesians congregation. His admonition to the rich centers on five imperatives: do not be haughty, do not set one's hope on riches but on God, do good, be rich in good works, be liberal and generous (Mounce, 365). The reason for this is because God's only obligation to mankind is food and clothing. Their riches are a gift from God and are only given to them in stewardship (I Tim 6:17). When one understands this principle, the result is that they will be generous with their riches understanding that they are laying up eternal riches in heaven (I Tim 6:18-19).

Paul also speaks to different groups within the church on how godly living applies to each of their respective situations (Titus 2:1-10). He divides these according to age and sex. The older men are to clear-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, love, and endurance. Rather than the expected "hope" in the last triad of virtues, endurance is promoted. This endurance is not patience in the face of affliction since no affliction is mentioned in this letter; this is patience waiting for the fulfillment of the hope of good works (Bassler, 193). The pastor is to teach the older men to be upright examples of dignity and wisdom while pursuing faith and love to the end of their race on earth.

Paul is also to instruct the older women. They are to be "reverent in behavior." Saarinen says that this phrase is taken from *ἱεροπρεπής* which relates to the priesthood or "what is fitting for a priest" (179). This behavior for older woman is specified by the commands to not be gossips or drunkards.

The older women are also to be the teachers of the young women or more specifically newly married women (Titus 2:3-5). To train the young women is the duty, not of Titus, but the older women, qualified to do so by position and character (Hiebert, 436). Also in regards to teaching, this does not refer to official teaching position in the church but rather to informal one-

on-one encouragement (Mounce, 410). These principles that older women are to be teaching are primarily focused on the domestic sphere. The main emphasis from this teaching are that the wives are to carry the primary responsibility for the day-to-day care of their homes and children while being submissive to their own husbands, supporting their husbands' leadership role in the family.

The young men also have a role in the pastor's instruction. The pastor is to teach and exhort them to be self-controlled. Guthrie states that this command carries with it the implication that young men need constant moral reminders (194). Hiebert elaborates further, "Since young men are inclined to be somewhat impetuous and unrestrained in conduct, their basic need is to be "self-controlled," cultivating balance and self-restraint in daily practice (437).

Thirdly in the Pastoral Epistles, Paul stresses the importance of combating false teaching with doctrine. With all the needs and responsibilities of pastoring, it is imperative that one does not waste his time in meaningless pursuits. In fact, this area is particularly emphasized by Paul as a great means for a pastor to show his maturity.

Paul commands that pastors that are middle aged or younger are not to get caught up in unprofitable discussions. In fact, Paul states that this is a particular pitfall for "youthful pastors" and their passions (II Tim 2:22).

*Paul is not so much speaking of sensual passions as he is of those kinds of headstrong passions of youth, who somewhat love novelties, foolish discussion, and arguments that all too often lead to quarrels (Fee, 263).*

It is difficult for "youthful" pastors to avoid arguments and be gentle in instruction especially since pastors deal with religious and philosophical subjects that are more naturally speculative

and debatable. But yet, that is what Paul states should be a major characteristic of a godly pastor.

When one tries to develop of a systematic presentation on the Pastoral Epistles, he immediately comes into difficulties in trying to synthesize the commands to rebuke and avoid heresy. It can be confusing to try to develop a clear cut method for the various situations that present itself in the church. A solution though does present itself when one separates the engagement of the ideas from the result of the ideas.

In the Pastoral Epistles there are two types of teaching that produce division. The first is centered on its attack of the gospel (I Tim 4:3; 6:3; Titus 1:13-16). These false teachers denied Paul's instruction that salvation is only through faith in Jesus Christ and instead focused on law keeping. Paul's instruction to Timothy and Titus concerning these men was for them to severely rebuke them in the presence of the whole church. Since the gospel has primacy in the church's teaching, a pastor was to directly engage these men because of the harmful effects they produced: Paul rebuked Peter when the gospel was at stake (Gal. 2:11). These false teachers are even more dangerous because they are not even believers, rather Paul speaks of them as detestable and disobedient.

The second type of divisive teaching centered on discussions that were mere babble. Paul speaks of this teaching as old wives tales, fables, foolish controversies, and ignorant speculations. There arguments Paul states are just a quibbling over words that are empty and unprofitable (II Tim 2:15). Because of the empty nature of such arguments, a pastor is to avoid these discussions since they do not produce godliness (II Tim 3:5). In this verse, ἀποτρέπω carries with it the sense of to avoid with horror (BAGD, 101). Because of the harmful effect

these disputations were having on the congregation, Timothy was to continually avoid getting caught up in it.

This does not mean a pastor is not to deal with these issues. It is clearly seen that these men were having a very negative effect upon the church in the Pastoral Epistles (II Tim 2:14). It is just that when there is not a practical benefit in a gospel-centered sense of proving someone wrong, the best thing is to avoid the discussion. Paul's advice to Timothy is to center his rebuke therefore on the result of the teaching which is division. These fruitless arguments lead only to ungodliness and discussions of them must be avoided (II Tim 2:16). The man of God is to confront these heretical teachers for their deplorable conduct (Titus 2:15).

It is not just enough for a pastor to teach correctly; he must also be training others to teach and uphold proper doctrine (II Tim 2:2). This is a pastor's true legacy. Just as Paul trained many young men to continue his ministry once he was gone, so pastors should guide others into ministry and train them to be competent and faithful ministers of the gospel. The qualification for this training is faithfulness, by which Paul means faithfulness in character. It is essential that pastors train men of character to uphold the gospel.

The third major area in pastoral philosophy that Paul deals with is the matter of faithfulness. In II Timothy as Paul sees the end of his life fast approaching, he takes time to write an entire letter to his protégé in the faith regarding perseverance. Throughout the Pastoral Epistles, Paul consistently urges Timothy to continue in the fight (I Tim 6:12; II Tim 2:1, 3). Timothy is to fight the good fight (I Tim 6:12). This imagery is one of athletic virtue and not militaristic (Mounce, 356). It speaks not of conquering but of pursuit of eternal life. This theme of perseverance is seen in three areas inside the Pastoral Epistles: faithfulness in conduct, doctrine, and suffering.

The importance of faithfulness in conduct is readily seen in the linear aspects of the Greek words used in Paul's exhortations. *διώκω*, "to aspire, strive for, pursue," in I Tim 6:11 denotes the aspect of continual pursuit after the godly traits of righteousness, faith, love, and peace (Kent, 191). Timothy is to always be on guard for his testimony and is train himself for godliness (I Tim 4:7). The purpose of this watchfulness is so that the name of Christ and his church are not blasphemed among the heathen (Titus 2:5).

As an encouragement, Paul uses himself as an example to Timothy of one who has been faithful to the end (II Tim 4:7). Paul does this to spur Timothy on, to continue in the faith so he too can receive a crown of righteousness (II Tim 4:8).

The next area in which perseverance is important is in regards to doctrine. Paul especially concentrates on urging Timothy to hold onto the doctrine he has received from Paul, specifically in regards to "the gospel." Paul argues that the gospel is centered on the resurrection and that Timothy is to meditate upon it (II Tim 2:8). II Tim 1:13 states that Timothy is to, "Follow the pattern of sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus." Paul sees the many attacks that are being waged against "the gospel" and urges Timothy to not give up this teaching. Rather he is to follow them because they are sound and from Christ Himself.

*...Paul has not forgotten the ongoing threat of the false teachers and the havoc they have been generating...The appeal begins by urging Timothy to fan into a flame his gift of ministry by the Holy Ghost. Then Paul urges loyalty to his own ministry and the gospel; and again he is to do so with the help of the Spirit (Fee, 233).*

Paul also exhorts Timothy to persevere with the help of the Holy Spirit, to rely on Him (II Tim 1:14). As is clearly seen in the Pastoral Epistles, Paul stresses that this doctrine must be held

onto “in faith and love” (I Tim 1:13). It is not sufficient to merely hold to the gospel; Timothy must be sure that his ministry is characterized by faith and love.

This gospel that is characterized in faith and love is clearly seen by its evangelistic use. Paul exhorts Timothy to do his good work, that of an evangelist, so that others will come to know Jesus Christ (II Tim. 4:5).

The main area that requires a pastor to persevere is while he is in the midst of suffering. The modern day pastor faces many difficulties. He is responsible for teaching the Word, counseling families, managing the church and its programs, and comforting the sick just to name a few. These responsibilities require significant amounts of energy and no doubt wearies many pastors. But, when a trial of suffering is added to the load, it can often become unbearable. Timothy no doubt was facing just such a trial, and Paul, a man who understood suffering, had an encouragement.

Paul states that a pastor needs to remember that if he lives a godly life, persecution will be the result (II Tim 3:12). εὐσεβῶς, “godly,” is a technical term in the Pastoral Epistles describing the goal of Christians to be totally consecrated to God with an emphasis on outward piety (Mounce, 558). Paul’s life is a tribute to the theology in this verse. Paul strove to live a godly life and had the marks to prove it (II Cor 11:25-28). It is important for those that are pastors to accept and plan for future persecution and suffering. This acceptance is highlighted in II Timothy as Paul states that he is ready to be offered to the Lord through death and leave this world (II Tim 4:6-7).

Paul’s next admonition is to stand strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus (II Tim 2:1, NKJV). If one is to continue and endure in ministry while suffering, it is important that one does it in God’s grace. God is the agent of this empowerment which is seen by the linear passive

imperative, ἐνδυναμόω, “be made strong” (Mounce, 503). This ongoing strengthening is needed if one is going to fulfill his pastoral responsibilities.

Thirdly, a pastor should not only recognize that suffering will happen but embrace and glory in it (Rom 5:3). While at first that seems the talk of a foolish man, suffering truly is glorious because we are able to follow in the Lord’s steps. Paul says in II Tim 1:8, “To not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord...but to share in the suffering for the gospel by the power of God.” Mounce comments on the propensity for one to be ashamed of the gospel.

*It was the message of a failed prophet, rejected by his people, executed by the world’s power, and preached by a collection of fishermen and other undesirables. The message they proclaimed was foolishness in the world’s eyes, based on assumptions that ran counter to the generally accepted norms of Greek philosophy (480).*

Rather than shame, Timothy is called to embrace the gospel and suffer with others for its sake.

The stigma that Timothy faced still stands today. The modern world continues to look with contempt upon Jesus Christ. Pastors, therefore, should remember the words spoken by the apostle Paul to “share in the suffering” (II Tim. 1:8).

Encouragement is a key theme and is easily seen in the passages where Paul speaks of perseverance. The expectation for reward is prominent in II Timothy. As Paul nears the end of his life, the promise of his reward in heaven strengthens him to finish his course (II Tim 4:7-8). Paul uses his own life, his trials and victories, in these verses to remind Timothy that while the righteous will suffer, God will rescue and reward them who desire to live a godly life in this present world.

Paul also encourages Timothy to persevere by reminding him that God's elect will stand fast (II Tim 2:19). Paul uses this verse to drive home the point again of proper conduct. Each believer should consistently walk in holiness because God has saved them.

Character. Doctrine. Faithfulness. These three are the pillars of a pastor's responsibility to God and the church. In a time when pastors are focusing on so many other issues, the pastor that follows a biblical philosophy of ministry will stand out from the crowd. If he is faithful in character and teaching, a pastor can rest assured that when he finishes his race he will hear, "Well done though good and faithful servant."

*Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen. (1Ti 1:17, KJV)*

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