

Living in God's Church Today

The Dos and Don'ts of Christian Ministry

1 Timothy 4:11-16

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Scripture

In his First Letter to Timothy, Paul wanted Timothy to stop the false teaching that was taking place in the churches in Ephesus (1:3-4), and also to teach believers how to behave in the household of God (3:14-15). In chapter 4, Paul set down the qualities of an excellent minister. In today's lesson, we are going to see the dos and don'ts of Christian ministry.

Let us read about the dos and don'ts of Christian ministry in 1 Timothy 4:11-16:

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

Introduction

Charles Haddon Spurgeon was born on June 19, 1834 in Kelvedon, Essex. Spurgeon's formal education has been described as "mediocre." Nevertheless, he loved to read and he often slipped into the attic and read the works of the martyrs, the Puritans, and John Bunyan. At school, he did however gain

some measure of proficiency in Greek, Latin, and philosophy.

Being raised in a Christian home where Bible reading, prayer, catechizing, worship attendance, and the reading of devotional classics were regular practices, he knew the Christian faith. But he was not a Christian. In an 1878 sermon he said, "I distinctly recollect the time when I could not rest because of sin, and sought the Lord, while yet a child, with bitter anguish." Despite these deep impressions, it was not until January 6, 1850, at the age of fifteen, that Spurgeon was converted.

Within a year of his conversion, Spurgeon preached his first sermon, compelled by a friend and unprepared, at Taverham. He was only sixteen. By October 1851, at the age of seventeen, he had become the pastor of Waterbeach Baptist Chapel near Cambridge. His two-year ministry in the thatched-roof Waterbeach Chapel saw attendance grow from 40 to 400.

In 1854, at the age of nineteen, Spurgeon was called to become the pastor of the historic New Park Street Chapel in London. The church began to grow immediately under his preaching. To say he became an overnight sensation is not to overstate the fact. The building was almost immediately expanded to seat 1,500 (with standing room for 500 more), but still the crowds could not be contained. While plans were under way for a larger building, Spurgeon preached at the famous Exeter Hall. In time this building, which seated over 4,000, also became inadequate. Sunday services were eventually held at the Surrey Music Hall, seating 10,000.

By the age of twenty-two Spurgeon had become the most popular preacher of his day, yet he was despised by many in the press as "the boy preacher."

In 1861, Spurgeon preached to the largest indoor crowd ever recorded. He spoke on a national day of fasting and prayer to 23,654 at the famous Crystal Palace. In March 1861, at the

age of twenty-six, the Metropolitan Tabernacle, with a seating capacity of nearly 6,000, was finally opened, debt free. This would be the home of Spurgeon's congregation, and the center of his distinguished pulpit ministry, until his death on January 31, 1892. For thirty-one years, the average attendance for both morning and evening worship services was 6,000.¹

By the time Paul wrote this First Letter to Timothy, he was probably in his mid-thirties. Timothy was given a very difficult task of refuting the false teachers and correcting the problems that had arisen in the church. Apparently, some may have been miffed that they had been passed over by Paul to give leadership to the churches in Ephesus, and they looked down on "young Pastor Timothy." So, in today's lesson, Paul sought to challenge Timothy.

Lesson

1 Timothy 4:11-16 shows us the dos and don'ts of Christian ministry.

Let's use the following outline, and start with the negative first:

1. The Don'ts of Christian Ministry (4:12a, 14)
2. The Dos of Christian Ministry (4:11, 12b-13, 15-16)

I. The Don'ts of Christian Ministry (4:12a, 14)

First, let's look at the don'ts of Christian ministry.

Paul noted two don'ts of Christian ministry.

¹ J. Armstrong, "Spurgeon, Charles Haddon," ed. Timothy Larsen et al., *Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 624–625.

A. Don't Be Intimidated Because of Your Youth (4:12a)

First, don't be intimidated because of your youth.

Paul wrote to Timothy in verse 12a, **“Let no one despise you for your youth.”** Timothy was still a relatively young man, perhaps in his mid-thirties, so Paul had to instruct him not to let anyone despise him for his youth. Paul understood that Timothy had been called to pastoral leadership beyond his years. His responsibility to “command and teach these things” (v. 11) was in danger of being undermined by his youthfulness, and by the signs that some were not receiving his ministry. As commentator John Stott said, “Paul is not concerned now with error (and how it could be detected and rejected) but with truth (and how it could be commended and so accepted).”²

When I was fresh out of seminary, I served as an assistant to a senior pastor. I am sure that my youth and inexperience were overlooked because my senior pastor covered for me. When I assumed my first solo pastorate, I was still in my mid-thirties. I don't recall that I got any pushback because of my youth, perhaps because I had some experience under my belt and also because I was willing to call older and more seasoned colleagues for advice. Young leaders sometimes face rejection because of their youth. The proper response is not assertive or aggressive behavior. Paul will go and list several ways in which Timothy must serve as one who is a young leader.

B. Don't Neglect Your Spiritual Gift (4:14)

And second, don't neglect your spiritual gift.

² John R. W. Stott, *Guard the Truth: The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 118.

Paul wrote in verse 14, **“Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you.”** Here was yet another way in which Timothy should commend his ministry and gain acceptance for it. Timothy must exercise his spiritual gift. Paul was referring to what today we would call Timothy’s “ordination” to the ministry of word and sacrament. There were three parts to Timothy’s ordination. First was the **“gift”** that he had received. Paul did not specify what exactly the gift was but it presumably was the necessary gift for pastoral ministry, most likely a teaching gift. Second was the **“prophecy.”** Again, Paul did not elaborate on the content of the prophecy but it was presumably some statement that God was calling him to pastoral ministry. And third was the **“council of elders”** who laid their hands on Timothy. This was a sign of the church’s confirmation of God’s call and gift to Timothy.

Today, men who are called to serve as elders must have a *subjective* call and an *objective* call. They will have an inner desire to serve God’s people. Over time it will grow to the point where they sense that they cannot do anything but serve God’s people by leading and feeding them. However, that subjective call is not enough. There must be a testing of the man’s gift to see whether he has the requisite gifts to serve as an elder. And then, if the church agrees that he has the requisite gifts and character qualifications, and if he has a call to serve as an elder in some church or ministry, then the other elders will set him apart by laying their hands on him and ordaining him to serve the people of God.

II. The Dos of Christian Ministry (4:11, 12b-13, 15-16)

And second, let’s look at the dos of Christian ministry.

There are five dos of Christian ministry.

A. Teach Biblical Truth (4:11)

First, teach Biblical truth.

Paul wrote in verse 11, **“Command and teach these things.”** The expression **“these things”** (*tauta* in Greek) occurs 8 times in this letter (3:14; 4:6, 11, 15; 5:7, 21; 6:2, 17). It summarizes Paul’s instructions to Timothy that he was to keep passing on to the churches of Ephesus. It was a summary of the gospel, which was in turn a summary of Biblical truth. Timothy was to proclaim Biblical truth with clarity and boldness. He was to point false teachers to the truth of God’s word.

Pastors today are in danger of accommodating the culture. As Pastor Harry Reeder says, “They want a seat at the table of the culture and so they modify what God’s word says to get that seat at the table.” But that is precisely what ministers must not do. They must boldly and clearly teach Biblical truth.

B. Set a Godly Example (4:12b)

Second, set a Godly example.

Paul wrote in verse 12b, **“...but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.”** Paul exhorted Timothy not to let anyone despise him because of his youth. But how does one do that? One way by doing that is by setting the believers **“an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.”** People would then admire his example rather than despise him for his youth. It seems to me that this is what enabled Charles Spurgeon to have such a powerful ministry at such a young age. The apostle Peter also urged elders to do the same thing, “not domineering over

those in your charge, but being examples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:3). Both Paul and Peter were following the teaching of Jesus, who set the supreme example of servant-leadership.

Paul urged Timothy to pay attention to his example in the area of **“speech”** and **“conduct,”** that is in word and deed, in the way he spoke and in the way he behaved. He was to pay attention to **“love,”** the pre-eminent Christian virtue, to be shown to all people. He was to exercise **“faith,”** which could mean either trust in God or it could refer to trustworthiness, or both. And finally, he was to be an example in **“purity,”** which has to do with self-control in every area of his life.

The great temptation for leaders today—young and old—is to respond to opposition by behaving like those who oppose us. The tendency is to shout louder and be more brash or to become more assertive. However, that is contrary to Paul’s exhortation. I recall a young pastor who was experiencing a great deal of opposition to his ministry. When I heard the kinds of things that were being said in opposition to him, I cringed. I am not sure that I would have responded as my friend did. He said to me that he was committed to them for the long haul and that he would respond to their meanness with kindness and love. Certainly, Paul would have approved of his response in a very difficult situation.

C. Devote Yourself to Biblical Worship (4:13)

Third, devoted yourself to Biblical worship.

Paul wrote in verse 13, **“Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.”** Here was another way in which Timothy should commend his ministry and gain acceptance for it. Timothy must have a thoroughly Biblical ministry. Timothy’s authority

for ministry was not grounded in himself. It was grounded in the authority of God's word. Timothy was to read God's word to the people of God. This was done in the synagogues and Timothy was to continue that practice in Christian worship. After reading the word of God, Timothy was to give himself to exhortation and to teaching of that word. There was to be an exposition and an application of the word of God.

We have a wonderful example from Justin Martyr in his *First Apology* about what was done in the ancient church. He writes, "And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to 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 verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things."³

Public reading of Scripture continues today. Pastors today follow Paul's instruction and the ancient example of reading God's word and then explaining and applying its meaning to the people of God.

D. *Immerse Yourself in Ministry (4:15)*

Fourth, immerse yourself in ministry.

Paul wrote in verse 15, **"Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress."** Here was still another way in which Timothy should commend his ministry and gain acceptance for it. Timothy must immerse himself in ministry. Paul had urged Timothy to commend his ministry in the area of his example, his teaching, and his gift.

³ Justin Martyr, "The First Apology of Justin," in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 186.

Now Paul urged Timothy to keep working at these things. He was to **“immerse”** himself in them. He was to be completely absorbed in them. He was not to play at them but they were to be front and center of his life's work and calling.

Christian leaders must constantly make progress in their walk with the Lord. They never “arrive.” They must constantly learn and grow. As the people of God watch their leaders they must be able to observe growth in their leaders from year to year. Some leaders give the impression that they are perfect. However, that is simply not true. Such leaders are hypocrites. No leader is perfect and to pretend to be so is sheer hypocrisy. Furthermore, such pretense discourages the people of God because they see leaders who seem to have it all together and never struggle. Even the Apostle Paul stated that he had not yet arrived at perfection when he wrote in Philippians 3:12a, “Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on....” Similarly, Christian leaders are always pressing on and making progress in their walk with the Lord.

E. Watch Your Words and Deeds (4:16)

And finally, watch your words and deeds.

Paul wrote in verse 16a, **“Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching.”** Here was still another way in which Timothy should commend his ministry and gain acceptance for it. Timothy must watch his life. He was to watch his life in two ways. First, he was to watch his deeds. And second, he was to watch his words. He was to pay equal attention to his own conduct and also to his teaching of others. He must not pay so much attention to his own soul that he neglected the instruction of others. Nor must he be so busy teaching others that he neglected his own life and soul.

Paul then said in verse 16b, **“Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.”** Paul did not mean that Timothy could save himself or his hearers. He knew that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. What he was teaching is that perseverance (**“Persist in this”**) is an evidence of God’s grace in his life. Moreover, God uses human instruments to proclaim and adorn the truth of the gospel. By watching his life, God would be pleased to use Timothy to bring others to himself in salvation.

What a challenge this is to Christian leaders today! We must watch our words and deeds. We must pay most careful attention to our deeds. It is much more likely that we will fail in our deeds than in our words. I know men who have had very effective teaching ministries but then their lives came crashing down when they fell into some gross sin. They did not pay attention to their deeds and it eventually cost them their ministry. And who knows how much damage it did to the flock for which they were responsible.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed Christian ministry in 1 Timothy 4:11-16, let us pray that elders pay attention to the dos and don'ts of Christian ministry.

The high calling of Christian ministry is not to be undertaken lightly. It calls for men who will pay careful attention to every area of their lives. Yet, if they do so, God will use them to represent him and shepherd the flock of Christ for his glory and their eternal good. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

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