

Ministry

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[0 : 0 0] Well, if we could, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling this evening, if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read, Paul's first letter to Timothy and chapter 3.

1 Timothy chapter 3, and we'll just read again at verse 1, where Paul writes, the saying is trustworthy, if anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.

Now this evening I just want us to continue our short sermon series called Marriage, Ministry and Mistakes. Marriage, Ministry and Mistakes.

And as I mentioned last week, my reason for doing this is because the presbytery, a committee of the presbytery, they asked that a paper be written on the subject that covers marriage, ministry and mistakes.

And they wanted it for their use and for their reference. And as the paper that is to be presented at presbytery, as it has to be biblical and confessional, and because I'm involved in writing this paper, I thought that the best thing to do, as I said last week, is just to preach about it.

[1 : 1 8] So to preach on the subject of marriage, ministry and mistakes. And last Wednesday evening we focused upon marriage, and we asked the question, what is biblical marriage? And we saw that marriage is part of creation.

It was a creation ordinance. And then we saw that marriage is a covenant. It's a binding covenant between a man and a woman. And it's formulated and established with the vows.

And it's made in the presence of God and before witnesses. And then we saw that biblical marriage is a picture of Christ, because it portrays to us the marriage relationship that Jesus Christ has with his bride, the church.

And that Christ's faithful marriage relationship to his church, that's what we should seek to imitate and emulate in our marriage. But now this evening we're considering ministry.

And so we're asking the question, what is biblical ministry? What is biblical ministry? Or maybe more specifically, what should the life of a minister look like?

[2 : 2 3] What should the character, conduct and conversation of a minister be like? And I realised that by asking these questions, in many ways I'm preaching the sermon to myself.

But you know, I was thinking, well that's what I have to do every week. I have to preach the sermon to myself before I preach it to you. And so as we consider what biblical ministry is, I want to say, this is what you should expect from your minister.

This is the standard you should expect, because this is the standard that the Bible says. Now I know no one is perfect, no one is without fault. As you all know I'm certainly not perfect, and I have many faults.

But as we shall see, the ministry, or the calling to the ministry, it's a high calling. It's a holy calling. And it should be treated with the reverence and respect that the Bible demands.

And you know, when Spurgeon wrote his book, he wrote a book called Lectures to My Students. And he wrote the book because he believed that he could influence the Church of Jesus Christ beyond his lifetime.

- [3 : 28] He was in the 19th century. And Spurgeon sought to do this by encouraging pastors to trust the Bible, to love people, and to preach the truth fearlessly.
- But in the opening chapter of his book, Lectures to My Students, Spurgeon addresses the subject, the minister's self-watch. The minister's self-watch.
- That the minister must think about his character, his conduct, and his conversation. And of course, every Christian should consider their character, their conduct, and their conversation.
- But more so for the expositor of the Bible. In fact, Spurgeon wrote, Now, Spurgeon, he wasn't emphasising that a minister is better than a Christian, or any other Christian, or other Christians.
- He wasn't saying that he was a better Christian. What he was saying is that more is expected of a minister because of the high and holy calling that he has received. And you know, I find it ironic that we're considering this subject this evening because it's four years to the day since I was ordained and inducted in this congregation.
- [5 : 00] And although it's only been four years and I feel I've just started, I realise that being reminded of what the ministry is, it's important to be reminded of what the ministry is and what the ministry should look like.
- And so this evening we're asking the question, What is biblical ministry? And from this passage, verses 1 to 7, I want us to consider three areas of the minister's life.
- His heart, his home, and his house. So three areas of the minister's life. His heart, his home, and his house. So look first of all at the minister's heart.
- Look at verse 1. Paul says, The saying is trustworthy. If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Now Paul's first letter to Timothy, it's part of a group of letters in the New Testament that are referred to as the pastorally epistles.
- Because the letters to Timothy and then to Titus, they're letters that were written by Paul, who was himself a pastor. And they're written, as you can see, not to a congregation, but to two young ministers who were serving in the ministry.
- [6 : 13] These men, Timothy and Titus. And Timothy and Titus, they were men who were serving the Lord in different places and in different contexts. Timothy was a, you could say he was in an urban church.
- He was in the city of Ephesus. And then Titus, he was in a rural church. He was on the Greek island of Crete. But what both these men had in common was that they both had difficult ministries.
- And Paul wrote these pastorally epistles in order to instruct and guide and exhort and encourage these young men in the ministry. Because at that time, there were many false teachers and there was a lot of false doctrine being taught.
- And that false doctrine, it was more appealing to the crowds. The false doctrine was more appealing to what the Bible had to say. And you know, like it is in our own day, there's this tendency to try and make the church and the message of the gospel more attractive by watering it down.
- But as Paul says to Timothy, that's not what we're to do. Because Paul says to Timothy, we're to stand firm, we're to continue in the faith and we're to keep preaching sound doctrine.
- [7 : 28] And in this pastoral letter in 1 Timothy, Paul encourages Timothy to keep fighting the good fight of faith. He encourages him to keep preaching in season and out of season.
- But more than that, Paul gives Timothy instructions and advice in order to teach the church in Ephesus so that they will implement this in their lives. And Paul highlights, he highlights various issues throughout his pastoral epistle.

He talks about the false teachers, he talks about the need for prayer, he talks about the role of women in the church, he talks about, as we see here, the qualification for elders and deacons in the church.

And then he also talks about the responsibility of church members and their membership to the church. Paul squeezes a lot into this one pastoral epistle. But above all, Paul's pastoral heart is that both minister and congregation will progress in their faith and continue to serve the Lord where they are.

And you know, what's interesting about Paul's three pastoral epistles is that in them, he repeatedly uses the phrase, the saying is trustworthy.

[8 : 38] That's how he opens the chapter, or this is a faithful saying. And Paul repeats these sayings or these phrases five times throughout these pastoral epistles.

You can find the other four for yourself. But in the opening verse of this chapter, Paul says, the saying is trustworthy. If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.

And Paul uses this phrase here, this saying, the saying is trustworthy. He uses that phrase because Paul wants to emphasize the solemn responsibility of those who have been entrusted with an office in the church of Jesus Christ.

And as we read in this chapter, Paul draws attention to the two offices that exist in the church because there are only two offices that exist in the church, the office of an elder and the office of a deacon.

And you know, what we have to be clear of in our minds is that these offices are not a hierarchy. These offices are not stages of advancement. They're not stages of qualification.

[9 : 46] They're not stages of knowledge. They are two separate offices with two distinct functions because the deacons' court, you could say, their concern is with the temporal welfare of the congregation.

But the elders, the kirksession, their concern is with the spiritual welfare of the congregation. And as Paul stresses in this passage, both are equally important.

And I want to make this absolutely clear. There's no hierarchy in the church of Jesus Christ because Jesus, he is the king and head of the church. He's the king and head of his church, not the elders, not the queen, not the pope.

Jesus is king and head and he appoints elders and deacons to serve the people of his church. And this is why Paul says, this is a trustworthy say.

Not only to emphasize the accuracy and the genuineness of what he's about to say, but also to stress the truth and the solemn responsibility of those who hold an office in the church of Jesus Christ.

[10 : 51] Now the word overseer that he uses here, it literally means elder. If you're using the authorised version, you'll have the word bishop. But the Bible, it uses the terms bishop or presbyter, overseer and elder.

The Bible uses all these terms interchangeably, which highlights that there are just two offices in the church of Jesus Christ, elder and deacon.

Now, as I said, although there's no hierarchy in the church of Jesus Christ, the Bible does distinguish between a teaching elder and a ruling elder. And we find this where Paul writes to the Ephesians.

He differentiates between the types of ministry that the church is involved in. And Paul said that Jesus Christ has given elders who are to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers, and their role is to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.

And what Paul made very clear was that there are only two kinds of elder. There are those who are called to the office of teaching elder and those who are ordained into the office of ruling elder.

[12 : 05] And, you know, that's exemplified in the practice of our church because the church examines the call of a teaching elder, but the church doesn't examine the call of a ruling elder.

The church practices the laying on of hands for the ordination of a teaching elder, but the church doesn't practice the laying on of hands with regards to the ordination of a ruling elder.

And this teaching and these practices, they draw attention to the difference between a teaching elder and a ruling elder. And so as a minister, I'm just an elder. I'm a teaching elder because I've been called and trained to teach.

And according to the practice of the church, I've received the laying on of hands from the presbytery. But that doesn't mean I'm above any of the other elders. I'm not more important than any of the elders.

I'm not more important than any of you. I'm to serve alongside all the other elders who are ruling elders. And they're ruling elders because their responsibility and their concern, like mine, is for the spiritual welfare of the congregation.

[13 : 15] And so, you know, we have to get over this idea that the minister is above the elders and above the people. Because it's not true. And it's certainly not biblical. Yes, you should respect the office that the Lord has appointed.

But the office is an office of service. That's why I'm called a minister. I'm one who serves. A minister is a servant. The Lord's servant. Yes, but a servant of the people. And that's what an elder is too.

They're ministers. They're servants. They're not above the people. And the only reason I stand in a pulpit is not to be above the congregation. It's so that the Bible is above the congregation.

Because the Bible is always to be above us. The Bible is to enlighten us. And we are to humbly submit ourselves under its authority because it's God's inspired, infallible, and inerrant word.

And so, being a minister or an elder, it's not about status. It's about service. And Jesus is to be the example we follow whether we're an elder, a deacon, a Christian, a minister, whatever we are.

[14 : 19] Because the example of Jesus is that he came not to be served, but to serve. And so, the minister's heart is to be a heart of service. That's why Paul says that if someone desires the office of an overseer, the office of an elder, he desires a noble task.

And what Paul means by this is that ministry is not for someone who is lazy. It's a noble task. It's hard work. It requires commitment and dedication.

Because ministry, it's not about honour. It's about humility. It's not about status. It's about service. It's not about position. It's about pastoring. And that's what should govern the minister's heart.

That's what should govern his heart. But what about his home? What should the minister's home be like? That's what we see secondly. So his heart and his home.

His home. Look again at verse 1. The saying is trustworthy. If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore, an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.

[15 : 42] You know, it was Robert Murray McShane. He was the minister of what is now the Free Church in Dundee. And he was the minister there during the 19th century. As many of you know, McShane, he died at the age of only 29.

But he was a godly young man who often emphasised the importance of the minister's personal life. And he said, he said about his own congregation, my people's greatest need is my personal holiness.

My people's greatest need is my personal holiness. And what McShane meant by that is that his personal life as a minister is to be an example to other Christians.

Of course, every Christian is called to follow Christ's example. That's the basic truth of discipleship. We're to deny ourselves, we're to take up our cross, and we're to follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

But when it comes to the life and conduct of a minister or an elder, he is not only called to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, he's also called to be an example to his congregation.

[16 : 49] And this is so that others who follow him will find themselves following Christ better. And you know, I was studying this today, and one of the best books I've ever read about ministry was a book written by Derek Prime and Alistair Begg.

And between these two men, between Derek Prime and Alistair Begg, they have over 70 years of experience in the ministry. And together they wrote this book called *On Being a Pastor*.

And in the book they cover every area of the pastor's life, from his calling to his family life, to his prayer life, to his preaching. But there's one chapter on the pastor's life and conduct.

And it's there that Derek Prime and Alistair Begg, they state that whatever else a shepherd and teacher provides for God's people, he says he is to give them an example to follow, because God's people require examples if they are to be effectively shepherded and taught.

And you know, what they say there is just what Paul said to the Philippians. Paul, as Paul brought his letter to a close in Philippians chapter 4, he said to the Philippians, finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

[18 : 13] And then Paul says, what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things and the God of peace will be with you.

Paul knew that as a minister, his character, conduct and conversation was as important as the gospel he preached. And you know, it's a solemn responsibility to be a minister.

And in these verses, Paul sets out for Timothy the requirements of the life and conduct of a minister. And it's clear from these verses that Paul doesn't call for ministers to have this academic qualification.

The requirements for being a minister, as we said, and well, would be expected of every Christian, I suppose, is that the minister is to be an example to the congregation.

The minister is always to be an example. There was one commentator who states, the people of God ought to be able to look at their spiritual leaders and say, that's the kind of Christian I ought to be.

[19 : 20] And that's what Paul is saying here in 1 Timothy 3, that what goes on in the home of a minister is so important because what a person is in public must also be what a person is in private.

And you know, I always find these words so, so challenging because the first thing that Paul says about a minister is that he must be above reproach. Of course, that doesn't mean that a minister is sinless and faultless.

As I said, you all know that I'm full of sin and I have many faults. But what Paul does mean here is that a minister must have a blameless reputation. There should be nothing in a minister's character, conduct, or conversation that should cause concern or criticism.

And if there is, it brings the cause of Christ into disrepute. And needless to say, as I said, this applies to all of us. There should be nothing in our character, our conduct, or our conversation that should cause concern or criticism.

We're to be above reproach. We're to be above reproach within the church community and out with the church community. But, as Paul goes on, he explains what it means to be above reproach.

[20 : 33] And he explains that a minister must be, he says, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent, but gentle, not quarrelsome, and not a lover of money.

And what Paul makes clear is that the minister's failure to be these things leaves him in danger of bringing his ministry and ultimately the cause of Christ into disrepute.

And you know, the need for a minister to be above reproach, it was so important for Paul. It was so important that he mentions it to the other young pastor whom he's writing to, Titus.

Paul said to Titus, chapter 1, verse 5, Paul said, appoint elders in every town of Cyprus as I directed you. And this is the direction Paul gave.

He says, an overseer must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.

[21 : 41] He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught so that he may be able to give instruction and sound doctrine and also rebuke those who contradict it.

And what Paul was saying was that a minister must practice what he preaches because if he's to herald the gospel, then he must live out the gospel.

If he's to be an ambassador for Christ, then he must live a Christ-centered life. If he's to be a biblical expositor, then he must also be a biblical example. A minister must practice what he preaches.

He must practice what he preaches. I was reading an article called The Costly Discipline of a Godly Minister. And it was by a man I'm very fond of.

He's called Steve Lawson. Some of you know this. And Steve Lawson, he was writing this article, The Costly Discipline of a Godly Pastor. And he was writing it in reference to Paul's letter to Timothy.

[22 : 44] And he says, In this letter, Paul is saying to young Timothy and to every spiritual leader today, that what we are is more important than what we do. Our godliness is more important than our giftedness.

What we are before God takes precedence over what we do before men. Our private life takes priority over our public life. How we live is more important than where we labour.

Our walk with God is more important than our work for God. The size of our hearts is more important than the size of our church. Our maturity is more important than our platform.

Our purity is more important than our programmes. Our integrity is more important than our ministry. Our soul is more important than our success. This is the character, says Steve Lawson.

Every man who preaches the gospel must discipline himself for the purpose of godliness. If not, our knowledge, our books, and our theology are worth little to nothing.

[23 : 47] And you know, this is what Paul is emphasising in this passage, that the minister's heart and the minister's home is so important because everything he is in his heart and in his home, it affects the house in which he ministers, God's house.

And that's what I'd like us to consider last of all. We're asking, what is biblical ministry? And in this passage, we're confronted with three areas of the minister's life, his heart, his home, and his house.

His heart, his home, and his house. So lastly, his house. Look at verse four. It says, he must manage his own household well, with all dignity, keeping his children submissive.

For if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.

Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil. Now, what Paul writes in these verses, it may seem very strict, but he writes these things with good intentions, because Paul knows how difficult the ministry can be.

[25 : 02] He knows how much of a strain is put upon a minister's personal life, and his family life, and even his congregation's life. And what we have to notice about these statements that Paul makes in verses 4-7 is that Paul says they are non-negotiable.

Paul says three times that this is what the minister and the elder must be. He emphasises the must. He says he must manage his own household well.

He must not be a recent convert, and he must be well thought of by outsiders. But Paul, he doesn't just give demands. He also gives an explanation.

He says that a minister must care for his own household well by teaching discipline and respect. Because if he can't, if he can't teach discipline and respect to his own children, then how is he to care for God's house?

How is he to teach God's children discipline and respect for God? And for Paul, this was crucial because God's house is precious to God, and God's family is precious to God.

[26 : 12] Therefore, they ought to be precious to God's servant who serves in God's house. But you know, when we consider the last two statements that Paul makes, in verses 6 and 7, you know, they're solemn statements.

Because he says that a minister must not be a recent convert, and he must be well thought of by outsiders. Now, Paul wasn't saying that it's only older men who should be ministers, because Timothy and Titus, they were both young men in the ministry.

But Paul was referring to spiritual maturity and the danger of pride in the ministry. And yes, there's a danger of pride. There's a danger of thinking that, well, I'm doing such a good job, and that sermon was brilliant.

Everyone should listen to it. But you know, there's also the other extreme. There's the other extreme for a minister where there's no encouragement. And it leads to depression and despondency.

And you know, it's a difficult balance. But one commentator states, the church must exercise caution to ordain men who have the spiritual maturity necessary to provide spiritual oversight of God's people.

[27 : 22] Because having gifts for ministry is not the same thing as being ready to take up the ministry. ministry. And it's so true because, as Paul solemnly reminds us here in these verses, we have an enemy.

And we have an enemy that puts out many snares that we can fall foul of. And ministers are not exempt. If anything, they're more under attack because they are preaching the message that has crushed the devil.

Therefore, a minister must be careful. He must be alert. to the schemes and temptations of the devil. So that he will have a good reputation with those who are outside the church.

A minister must be consistent. Because, you know, it's easy to act piously on a Sunday morning from a pulpit. But the life of a minister is, as it is with every elder, every Christian, the life of a minister is to be consistent, a consistent witness every day of his life.

The minister holds a respectable position. And therefore, he must have the respect of his community as well as his congregation. And he must guard it, because the devil is always waiting to destroy it.

[28 : 42] And so this evening we're asking, what is biblical ministry? And in the passage we see three areas of the minister's life. His heart, his home, and his house.

His heart, his home, and his house. But in conclusion, I just want to give the last word to Spurgeon. In his book, again in his book, the lectures to my students, Spurgeon states, holiness in a minister is his chief necessity and his goodliest ornament.

Mere moral excellence is not enough. There must be a higher virtue, a consistent character, anointed with the sacred anointing oil that makes him most fragrant to both God and man.

So may the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. Gracious God and loving Heavenly Father, we give thanks to thee for the church of Jesus Christ, that Jesus is the king and head, that he rules over and he overrules in all its affairs, and help us, Lord, as thy people, always to bow the knee before him and to kiss the son, to realize that he is our king, he is our Lord, he is our shepherd, and that we would take all our guidance and our direction from him.

We thank thee, Lord, that thou art the one who has appointed a structure for thy church, for elders and for deacons, for those to rule in the eldership and those to teach. And Lord, we pray that every one of us would be faithful, faithful to the calling that thou hast given to us, that as thy word reminds us that we are those who have been brought from darkness unto thine own marvelous light, that we might show forth the praises of him.

[30 : 33] And Lord, help us to do so. Help us to live lives that are worthy of the gospel. Help us to live lives that bring glory to thy name, that we would let our light so shine before men, that they would see our good work, that they might glorify our Father who is in heaven.

Oh, Lord, make us faithful, make us faithful witnesses for thee. And Lord, keep the evil one from us. We know he goes around like a roaring lion. We know he seeks to devour us.

But Lord, that thou wouldest grant to us to put on the whole armour of God each day, to fight this good fight of faith, to keep pressing on towards the mark of the high call of God in Christ Jesus.

Lord, we faint and fail, but like the psalmist our testimony is, that God doth fail me never. Lord, keep us, we ask, bless us, we pray, continue with us then, we ask thee, and go before us in all that we seek to do for thy glory and for the extension of thy kingdom.

In Jesus' name we ask it and for his sake. Amen. We shall conclude our service this evening by singing again in that psalm, Psalm 103.

[31 : 49] Psalm 103. Psalm 103. Psalm 103. Psalm 103. We're singing from verse 19.

Down to the end of the psalm. The Lord prepared hath his throne and heavens firm to stand, and everything that being hath his kingdom doth command.

O ye his angels that excel in strength, bless ye the Lord, ye who obey what he commands and hearken to his word. O bless and magnify the Lord, ye glorious hosts of his, ye ministers that do fulfil whatever his pleasure is.

O bless the Lord, all ye his works, wherewith the world is stored in his dominions everywhere. My soul, bless thou the Lord. These verses of Psalm 103.

To God's praise. Amen. The Lord prepared and hath his throne in heaven's firm to stand, and everything that kingdom of his kingdom doth command.

[33 : 16] O ye his angels that excel in strength, bless ye the Lord, ye who obey what he commands and hearken to his word.

O bless and magnify the Lord, ye glorious hosts of his, ye ministers that do fulfil what heaven his pleasure is.

O bless the Lord, all ye his works, wherewith the world is stored in his dominions everywhere.

my soul, bless thou the Lord. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore.

Amen.