

## **The Ten Commandments of Pastors (2)**

<sup>12</sup> Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity. <sup>13</sup> Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.

My very first job was pretty simple. I packed the fridge with cold drinks in a sweet store. It was a simple job, but a cold one, since it was a walk-in fridge, and I was in there for about two hours, to stock all the fridges every day. But not all jobs have such a simple job description.

I wonder how many pastors treat the ministry like that. A job without many requirements and without a clear goal. A. W. Tozer once wrote of the “The Puttering Pastor”:

“The ministry affords limitless opportunity for the lazy man to indulge his talents. Doing nothing can be accomplished more gracefully in the Lord’s work than anywhere else for the simple reason that the minister has no one to check up on him. The average church requires little of its pastor except to mark time decorously; the preacher with a propensity for loafing is strongly tempted to do just that. Many a minister who would be shocked at the thought of doing nothing nevertheless gets nothing done because he has acquired the habit of frittering away his time. Late hours, requiring compensatory late sleeping, several trips to the store, assisting with the family laundry, standing in line to buy a reservation for his wife’s niece who is going on a visit to some place—these things, or others like them, eat up the time and leave him spent and empty at the end of the day”.<sup>1</sup>

That kind of undisciplined living is what gives ministry a bad name. It is what makes people wonder if a pastor works more than one day a week. But that is ministry without discipline, ministry not in submission, ministry without God’s job description. There really is no excuse for that, because 1 Timothy 4, like many other chapters, spell out the job description, and it is no place for loafers.

As we began this section last week, we saw the first three of ten commandments given to pastors. Know and preach sound doctrine, keep the main thing the main thing, and develop disciplined devotion. In our portion today we’ll see the next three on this list. Again, this is not something only for those in or aspiring to ministry. These ten commandments have plenty of application to every Christian’s life, as you’ll see.

### **Commandment 4: Don’t Be A Man-Pleaser**

<sup>12</sup> Let no one despise your youth

Paul says to Timothy, don’t let anyone despise, or look down upon, or scorn your youthfulness. You remember that Timothy was considered young in respect of pastoring this church, even though he wasn’t a teenager. In fact, as we worked it out, Timothy was somewhere from late thirties to early forties. Now how is that youth?, you may ask. Well, youth is often relative to the profession. A forty-year old soccer player would be considered old. A forty year-old CEO of a multinational would be considered fairly young. A forty year-old president or prime minister would be considered very young. In the things of faith, it is often the aged sage who leads. There is a reason that the same word for older man, an elder, is also the word for the spiritual leaders of Israel, and the church. And Timothy would have been ministering to a group of people of differing ages, some of whom might have been tempted to disrespect his office, and scorn his position because he wasn’t decades older.

But how exactly is Timothy to obey this commandment: “Let no one despise your youth”? Is he

---

<sup>1</sup> Tozer, A. W., & Snyder, J. L. (1997). *The Early Tozer : A Word in Season : Selected Articles and Quotations* (pp. 9–10). WingSpread.

supposed to go around managing people's perceptions of him? Is he supposed to rebuke people who despise him? That can't be the meaning.

Does Paul mean something inward? Don't allow yourself to be intimidated if someone frowns upon your youth. Don't allow the wrong attitudes of others toward your youth cause you shame, or fear, or self-doubt. I think that is part of what Paul means.

Does Paul mean something outward? Don't give people a reason to scorn your youth. Don't act in those ways that youth is notorious for: being flippant and light-hearted about everything, recklessness, being foolish in speech, or acts. I think that is also part of what Paul means, because the next part of verse 12 is a contrastive command: "But be an example". That is, to counter anyone despising your youth, live in an exemplary way.

Now when you put these two together, you get this: some people are going to despise your youth for petty, foolish, childish reasons. Other people will despise your youth if you act in all the foolish ways youth are known for. So, because you cannot please all the people all the time, act blamelessly and do not worry what immature or foolish people say or think about you.

Don't be a man-pleaser. Don't live your life trying to impress, perform, placate, please, and satisfy everyone, because you cannot and you will not. So stop living your life controlled by man's expectations and choose to please God. Live the Christian life out (see next command) in an exemplary way.

For Timothy, it was youth. But there are other areas one could be despised in. Older age. Appearance. Ethnicity. Speech or accent. Academic achievements. Wealth. A man pleaser always has the suspicion that people are despising him for that thing.

Man-pleasing is a terrible god to serve, because it is always changing, is never satisfied, and has to be fed all the time. If you live to please others, your life will be a roller-coaster of highs and lows, soaring when people like you, and diving and crashing when they don't. Proverbs 29 tells us "the fear of man brings a snare" - a trap. Living to be accepted by others, to fit into the group, to be liked by a certain person, to get the approval of someone is a trap. You chase after it, but it soon snares you, traps you, and you are in a kind of bondage to whether or not you are liked.

Now for a pastor, this is a real temptation. The ministry is one where you are trying to win people's trust, otherwise why should they listen and follow? You are trying to be hospitable, and love people. Not only so, but there is a relationship of financial dependence between a pastor and his people. So if a pastor doesn't obey this command, he becomes a prisoner of people's expectations, and even worse, he could become a mercenary for money. If he is terrified that he will offend with his sermons, or afraid of being direct when counseling, or obsessed with why so-and-so hasn't been smiling at me recently, he will be a nervous wreck, and fail to teach the Word of God. He will become that milksop parson, like Mr Collins in *Pride and Prejudice*, an inveterate flatterer, sponge, social climber.

Now man-pleasing in some pastors manifests in the exact opposite direction. Some become man-pleasers by becoming man-offenders every chance they get. They insult, offend, and contend in just every way imaginable, trying to show how invulnerable they are to man's opinions. But this is just man-pleasing in mirror form. The man is still serving the idol of what people think of him; he's just decided that he wants people to think of him as fearless and beholden to no man.

But the one who is no longer man-pleasing is neither trying to please everyone, nor trying to offend everyone. He has to find this balance that Paul commands: live blamelessly, so that reasonable

people won't despise you for any reason, and when people do, don't worry about it.

The only way to break out of fearing man is when you come to fear God more. <sup>15</sup> Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you. (Titus 2:15)

Pleasing God becomes more important to you than what people think of you. You're living by faith, not by sight. Don't give people a real reason to scorn you or your ministry; and if there are still people who do, don't lose sleep about it. Humble yourself to the place where you forget about yourself, and are not caged, and chained and imprisoned by pleasing man. Please God, and serve your neighbour.

### **Commandment 5: Be An Example of the Whole Christian Life**

but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity

Here's the contrast to man-pleasing: being exemplary. Instead of being a bad example, so that people despise your youth for good reason, instead of being tormented by perverse people despising your youth for no good reason, you be an example to the believers.

Being exemplary is the right kind of "caring what people think". Like we said, some people go from the ditch of being flatterers and Yes-men and chameleons to the other ditch of being abrasive, offensive, pugnacious. And they sometimes say, "I don't care what people think, I just preach." But we should care on some level, otherwise this verse doesn't make sense. The point of being an example is so that it affects people: they see something in you, they agree with it, they like it, they are drawn to it, and they copy it. That doesn't tend to happen if you just offend everyone all the time.

But there is another danger here of more man-pleasing. If you try to be an example on purpose all the time, then you go from being a practitioner of the Christian life to being a performer. You start to smile for the camera all the time. And when you become over-conscious that people are watching you and that you are supposed to set an example, you can ironically become fake, insincere, trying to be better and more spiritual than you are. This is probably where pastors get the reputation for speaking in other-worldly tones, having oily smiles and unnatural social interactions, because they want to appear as something that they are not quite sure what.

But to succeed at being an example is to become aware that people are watching you, and then to just get on with it. Live the Christian life the best way you know how. You're being watched, so it matters what you do. But don't focus on the fact that you're being watched.

Timothy, pastor, Christian, be an example. That is, be a pattern that others can trace over. <sup>7</sup> in all things showing yourself *to be* a pattern of good works; in doctrine *showing* integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, (Titus 2:7)

Be a model they can look at and paint. Be an instructional manual for them to assemble their Christian lives. Be an instructor whose moves they can copy, a teacher whose technique they can copy.

There are some things in life that can be learnt by information alone, by words, or numbers. But the most important things, the things that are most human, are learnt by example. A boy learns to be masculine by watching his father, and other men. A girl learns to be feminine by watching her mother. We learn how to be affectionate, courteous, respectful, considerate by seeing it done. We learn tones of voice, appropriate postures, greetings, social space by example. We learn discernment by seeing and hearing it done by people we trust. We learn wisdom by watching the skill of another

person applying truth to life. We learn how to analyse people and situations by watching it done. We learn leadership by being around leaders. We learn parenting in the presence of godly parents.

And the Christian life is one of those areas which needs example to fill it out, flesh it out, make it clear. Someone who attempts to live out Christian doctrine without example is very likely to have an eccentric, eclectic, and very idiosyncratic take. Example is what connects the doctrinal dots into a picture we can see, example is what colours in the black and white outline for us; example is taking the printed sheet music of doctrine and playing it with the live instrument of someone's life.

Paul tells Timothy to be an example in six areas, which are really like a summation of the whole Christian life.

*Word* = Be an example in word. In speech, be exemplary. What you talk about, how you talk about it, what kind of language you use. Show believers what Christian speech is like.

*Conduct* = Be an example in your way of life. Your work ethic, your family life, how you treat material possessions, your entertainments and recreations, your body and health, how you spend money, how you spend your time, how you deal with problems, how you deal with suffering.

*Love* = Be an example in love. Since love is the most misunderstood thing, show believers what a life of love for God. Show them what it is like to love God together corporately, give them examples of loving God as an individual. Show what love looks like from a husband to a wife, from a father to children, from a Christian man to his Christian brothers, and Christian sisters. Show how you love unbelievers, how you love your opponents and your critics.

*Spirit* = In your whole inner character, and attitude, your affections and devotions. Be an example of what it is to be Christlike in spirit, neither veering to being stoic and cold, nor hysterical and sentimental.

*Faith* = Show the believers what it is like to place your trust in God and live that way. Lead the pack in trusting God for great things, for continuing to believe during suffering, for praying and stressing the importance of prayer. Show the believers that faith in God is never misplaced.

*Purity* = Show the believers how to live unpolluted by the world. That applies to the sexual mores of the culture, what the world chooses to celebrate and glorify and exhibit.

Being an example does not mean being perfect, it means being mature and competent. It is not Christian perfection, but it should be, as we've seen, blameless, stable, consistent Christianity.

And importantly, it has to be visible and public. If he arrives in his bulletproof limo, is escorted by bodyguard to the front row and then slips out the back at the end of the service in the same way, no one can ever see him. If his home is closed and never open, if his office door is always shut, if his email or numbers are impossible to come by, then no one can see the example.

Being an example also helps many people all at once. A pastor is one man, and his family one family. He cannot provide all the hospitality, or fellowship, or counsel, or ministry. Whether it is word, conduct, love, faith, spirit or purity, he can't supply it all for everyone. The whole church is meant to do that. But if he sets an example, then the church will pick up on the way those things can or should be done, and imitate.

### **Commandment 6: Prioritise the Public Reading and Teaching of Scripture**

Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.

Paul doesn't mean do this until I come and then stop. He means don't stop doing these things, because that's what I will do when I'm there.

So, till I come, Paul says, pay special, close attention to this thing. Give yourself to it, be devoted to it, make sure it is being done. What must be done? Reading, exhortation, doctrine. Those are three inseparable things.

By reading, Paul doesn't mean Timothy's private reading and study. He's coming to that in one of the other commands. Here the word is means the public reading of Scripture. The word is used only three times in the NT, and it refers each time to when the Scriptures were read publicly.

<sup>15</sup> And after the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, "Men *and* brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say on." (Acts 13:15)

It was the practice in the synagogue for the Scriptures to be read, and often enough a man would then get up and give something of an impromptu exhortation, a few words of explanation and encouragement to obedience.

And the third word is doctrine or teaching, which means a more specific, prepared teaching of the Word. Some churches in church history have carried this out literally: reading the Scriptures, doing a short exhortation from them, and then later on doing a longer, sermonic teaching. Churches like ours see the exhortation and the teaching as two aspects of the same thing. When we preach, we exhort, and we teach. In chapter 6:2, Paul is going say, these things exhort and teach.

What this amounts to is, prioritise and centralise the public reading and teaching of Scripture. Don't ever let your church have its own "vision" separate from Scripture. Don't let your pulpit be a place to show off your own creativity or imagination, Timothy. Read the Word. Explain the Word.

One of the reasons we do this in every service is because of this command in Scripture. We are supposed to publicly read Scripture. Not just a verse at the start of a sermon, but whole portions, whole chapters. In every service, we either read an Old and New Testament reading related to the sermon, or a reading of the Law and a reading of the Gospels, or a consecutive chapter as we read through Scripture. We take it seriously enough to train those who read the Scriptures to do it well. Why? God wants His Word publicly read.

<sup>16</sup> Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea. (Colossians 4:16)

<sup>27</sup> I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read to all the holy brethren. (1 Thessalonians 5:27)

Now we can see the ministry of reading and explaining nicely illustrated for us in an incident after the exile. Judah is back in the land, back in Jerusalem, the wall has been rebuilt, and now the Word is going to be taught.

<sup>2</sup> So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men and women and all who *could* hear with understanding on the first day of the seventh month. <sup>3</sup> Then he read from it in the open square that *was* in front of the Water Gate from morning until midday, before the men and women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people *were attentive* to the Book of the Law. (Nehemiah 8:2–3)

<sup>8</sup> So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped *them* to understand the reading. (Nehemiah 8:8)

There is a one-sentence summary of what good preaching does. It helps you to understand the

reading. Scripture is read to you, and then the preacher takes you through that reading one verse at a time, explains the meaning of the words, the sentences, the paragraphs, the sections, the whole book, and the book in light of the whole Bible. A sermon is not a spiritual TED talk, or a man waxing eloquent on his own themes. A sermon is unpacking, unfolding, what is there on the page of the Bible.

But if the preacher is explaining the text, he should be saying, look down at your Bibles, and see what I'm saying. The main point of every text should be the main point of every sermon. The structure of the text should be the structure of the sermon.

Commandment six is Paul saying, Timothy make sure Scripture is at the centre of the church's worship and gathering.

Now we're more than halfway through these commandments to a young pastor. Now listen to these six, and ask yourself if you could be a puttering, lazy pastor and obey them:

- 1) Know and teach sound doctrine.
- 2) Keep the main things the main things.
- 3) Develop disciplined devotion.
- 4) Don't be a man-pleaser.
- 5) Be an example of the whole Christian life.
- 6) Prioritise the reading and teaching of God's Word.

Any man who imposes on himself those six already has a full and robust job description, with plenty to do everyday. When A.W. Tozer was ordained into ministry, he wrote a kind of pledge, in the form of a prayer. Here is a portion of that prayer that sums up much of what we've seen today:

“Lord Jesus, I come to You for spiritual preparation. Lay Your hand upon me. Anoint me with the oil of the New Testament prophet. Forbid that I should become a religious scribe and thus lose my prophetic calling. Save me from the curse that lies dark across the modern clergy, the curse of compromise, of imitation, of professionalism. Save me from the error of judging a church by its size, its popularity or the amount of its yearly offering. Help me to remember that I am a prophet – not a promoter, not a religious manager, but a prophet. Let me never become a slave to crowds. Heal my soul of carnal ambitions and deliver me from the itch for publicity. Save me from bondage to things. Let me not waste my days puttering around the house. Lay Your terror upon me, O God, and drive me to the place of prayer where I may wrestle with principalities and powers and the rulers of the darkness of this world. Deliver me from overeating and late sleeping. Teach me self-discipline that I may be a good soldier of Jesus Christ.”