

## Ministry in the Pastoral Epistles

### Introduction

First Timothy, along with 2 Timothy and Titus, is part of a collection of Pauline letters known as the Pastoral Epistles. They are called this primarily because they were written to persons with pastoral responsibility in the early church. Paul is writing to his ministry colleagues to whom he had given the responsibility of raising up leaders and guiding churches through difficult times.

Paul and Timothy had a special relationship. Paul called him his spiritual son. He sent Timothy on several difficult assignments such as in Berea (Acts 17:14) and Corinth (Acts 18:5; 2 Cor 1:19). He co-authored with Paul 2 Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and Philemon. No one in the early church knew Paul's thought more than Timothy. Paul sent Timothy to guide the church in Ephesus.

Paul calls Titus his "true child according to a common faith" (Titus 1:4). Titus was instrumental in taking up the offering for the saints in Jerusalem described in 2 Corinthians. Paul commissioned Titus to strengthen the church in Crete.

There are many valuable lessons for ministers found in these letters. Here are just a few that I hope will challenge you to become a better pastor. I will organize these around the well-known Four C's.

### Context

First, it is important in our ministry to study and know our context. Being students of context will help us know the issues facing the church. Ephesus was one of the great cities of the ancient world and a melting pot of religions and philosophies. People there were open to new ideas. The believers in Ephesus faced the threat of false teachings. These teachings involved speculations about myths and endless genealogies, interest in controversies, quarrels about words, and distortion of the truth of the gospel (1:4, 4:7; 6:4). The false teachers had rejected their conscience (1:19) and were apparently teaching for financial gain (6:5). Fully one-third of 1 Timothy deals with problems related to the false teachers (1 Tim 1:3). This problem persisted into the writing of 2 Timothy (2 Tim 2:16-17, 23-26; 3:6-9).

Titus likewise deals with the threat of false teachers in Crete who shared some similarities with Judaizers who were infiltrating other early churches in Paul's mission (Titus 1:10-16). They were disrupting whole households with legalistic doctrines and demands for money. Their heretical teachings were leading churches astray. If these situations were not corrected, the influence of false teachings would seriously hamper the mission and lead to misunderstandings of the gospel.

In response to the problem of false teachers, Paul's goal for Timothy and Titus was to develop ethically- and theologically-sound leaders in the Ephesian and Cretan house churches. (1 Tim 3:14-15; Titus 1:5-9).

One of our mission strategies as pastors today must be to raise up qualified lay leaders in every context. Leadership development must be a high priority to resolve the confusion that many believers have today because of the diversity of voices crying out for attention.

## **Content**

Paul's answer for the early church is found in the second "C": content. A reoccurring theme in these letters is the call to know the truth of the gospel. Paul reminds Titus that "when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:4-7). There can be no compromise to this central truth. Paul reminds Timothy that his ministry must be firmly based upon the truths of Scripture. This would allow him to teach, rebuke, correct, train in righteousness, and equip the Ephesians for good work (2 Tim 3:16-17).

Good ministry should be defined not by business models but by diligence with learning and teaching the Scripture. It takes wisdom to distinguish the interesting but trivial from the important and nonnegotiable. As ministers of the gospel we must experience its transformation in our own lives. Integrity and spiritual maturity are more important than ability. Proper teaching will lead to an ordered life of ministry. Ministry is always relational, and so we bring others with us as we grow deeper into truths of the gospel.

## **Character**

The third "C" of character describes the personal nature of these letters. Paul urges Timothy and Titus to watch their personal lives and maintain a firm commitment to God's calling. They are to set an example for others in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity (1 Tim 4:12).

The leadership qualities Paul encourages will be unattainable without the core value of love from a pure heart confirmed by a clean conscience and supported by a sincere faith (1:7). Love is the primary measure of effectiveness in ministry.

Paul's call is to personally participate in the mystery of God in Christ and this will be evidenced by godly living. It is crucial that right belief, orthodoxy, be united with right living, orthopraxy.

Good ministers will make godliness their goal. Success in ministry comes not from personal abilities but openness to divine resources. Paul found his source of strength in Christ (2 Cor 11:16-12:10; Phil 3:7-14).

It is far too easy for ministry leaders to get caught up in the doing of ministry and forget the most important element of personal soul care. The moral integrity of spiritual leaders will influence how they lead. They may fulfill their job duties with excellence. But unless they have godly integrity, their influence may eventually destroy the mission of the church.

Leaders' relationship to their families is a high priority in the lists of qualifications in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Maintaining strong family relationships is crucial to effectiveness in ministry leadership. As pastors, we must protect and nurture our families and marriages. The place to begin is by pursuing righteousness, faith, love and peace, and a pure heart (2 Tim 2:22).

## Competency

The final "C" is competency. This is really the end result of the other three qualities. Paul set the example for Timothy and Titus of effective ministry and they could pass this on to the leaders in Ephesus and Crete, who would in turn strengthen the church.

When we live out love in godliness and holiness, we may use our spiritual authority to speak into the lives of others and administer the affairs of the church.

One area of crucial competence for Paul was handling the word of truth correctly. In our language, this involves practicing good hermeneutics. The Pastorals offer us many opportunities to practice our interpretive skills. For example, 1 Timothy 2 has been notoriously challenging.

Good handling of the word here will require

- a. A vision of the whole and eyes for the details;
- b. Careful investigation of the historical and cultural contexts; and
- c. An understanding of the rhetorical issues.

Knowing Scripture well will allow us to speak into the lives of people, training and correcting when necessary. Clear and orthodox preaching will lead to quality spiritual growth in the church.

Part of Timothy's preparedness involves maintaining his own health. Rest, exercise, and good nutrition keeps the tool of self sharpened, tuned, and ready for the Master's use. Those who are worn out physically are more open to burnout, depression, and even to forsaking their calls.

In conclusion, Paul came to the end of his life with the assurance that he had fulfilled his calling. In spite of all the troubles he had faced, he had kept the faith. His personal faith in Christ was shown in faithfully carrying out his duty as Christ's witness. His goal was the edification of the church and the growth of the mission. He passed the mantle of responsibility on to Timothy and Titus who were in turn to pass it on to a new generation of leaders.

Strong leadership and knowledge of the truth of the gospel can guide the church through these murky waters. The church needs pastors who will follow in the shadow of Paul, Timothy, and Titus and preach the word faithfully.