

Armagh Baptist Church – 27th June 2010
The Life and Times of Timothy 10
1Timothy 4:11-16
A Word to the Minister (part 2)

Introduction

Last Sunday we began to look at the subject of what makes for a Good Minister of the Gospel. I said I would spread it over two weeks, so that I wasn't just preaching at myself. This may have been for Pastor Timothy originally, but as well as being for Pastor Ian today, it is also for Pastor Andrew, as he is about to take up a new pastorate in Millisle in a few weeks time.

Today we have set Andrew & Carolyn apart for the work of the Gospel in Millisle. We are sending them back out into the harvest field to serve the Lord in another part of his vineyard. Millisle is actually the church that set me apart for Christian ministry back in March 1991.

Last week we found 3 pointers as to what makes for a good minister:

1. He must be able to point out false doctrine and correct it with the truth (1-6)
2. He must keep physically fit, but remember that spiritual fitness is even more important. He must train himself to be godly (7-8)
3. He must put all his energy into the work of the Gospel (9-10)

As it says in v.10 *'For this we labour and strive'*.

Paul was talking about the desire that every good minister of the Gospel should have – that of seeing men and women come to trust in the Saviour. This morning I have 3 more things to add, about what makes a good minister:

4. Set such a good example for people that they won't be able to look down on you even if you are younger than them! (vs.11-12)

There will always be people in a church who will be older than their minister – by the law of averages that's almost inevitable. The question is, how will such people treat their minister, if he is younger than them? Will they look down on him and despise him for the things that he says, because he has less experience of life than they have? Or will they carefully weigh up what he is saying, and if it is God's Word that he is bringing to them from the pulpit, or in personal counsel, will they respond to it and put it into practice in their lives?

Dear help the older person who refuses to listen to it, or accept it, just because it's coming from a younger man. It is still God's Word, and ultimately it will be God who will hold each one of us accountable for what we have heard and for what we have done with God's Word that was preached to us!

C.H. Spurgeon was only 21 years old when he took up his first pastorate of a large Baptist Church in London. One day a lady was shaking his hand at the

door at the end of the service and she said, *"Mr Spurgeon, your ministry is so helpful and it does my soul good to hear you preaching the Gospel with such power, but, oh, you are so young!"* Spurgeon is supposed to have said back to her, *"Well, madam, I suppose if you give me time, I will grow out of that!"*

Andrew Roycroft and I have something in common with C.H. Spurgeon. Not that we could be described as 'the Prince of Preachers' like he was, but we both started out as pastors when we were in our early twenties. I was 23 when I became a pastor! And I think Andrew was a similar age when he came here.

Paul told Timothy, that the way to combat people looking down on you because you were young, was to try with God's help to set an example for believers of all ages to follow, in terms of his speech, in terms of his life, in terms of his love, in terms of his faith and in terms of his personal purity.

That is a verse that has been precious to me ever since I started out in ministry. I remember the first Sunday of my student assistantship in Ballycrochan Baptist Church in Bangor. I remember shaking hands with people at the door that morning, and one man stopping me to ask, *'What age are you anyway?'* I said I was 20. That's all I was at the time. He walked out that morning, thinking, *'What would he know?'* But before the year was out, I have to say, the same man came back to me and said, *'Well, you've certainly proved yourself here this year!'* People might look down on us if we're younger than them, but age is not the issue. Set an example for the believers, by what you say, by how you live, by your love for the Lord, by your faith and confidence in God to do great things, and by your personal purity, and when you've done all that, they'll not have a word to say about you. After that, you can leave your critics to the Lord to deal with!

What else does a good minister need to pay attention to?

5. Attend to your duties, and make full use of your gifts (v.13)

Throughout the N.T. the most important aspects of Christian ministry are stressed as giving yourself to "The Word of God and Prayer". Paul makes that clear to Timothy as well, here in vs.13 & 14.

Timothy was to be sure to use whatever gifts God had given him. Now we don't know exactly what those gifts were, but we get a clue in v.13.
*'Until I come, devote yourself to **the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching, do not neglect your gift.'***

Whatever other ways Timothy may have been gifted, these were the most important that he had to pay attention to. He was not to neglect the Word of

God. He was to devote himself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. So whatever else a pastor gets done in the course of his week, it is of secondary importance compared to this.

Visitation is important, getting out and about and meeting people is important, but if we fail in our public handling of the Word of God, then we would be useless as ministers of the Gospel. We would not be good ministers.

In Timothy's day, many people couldn't read for themselves, so as well as preaching the Gospel and teaching God's Word to believers, Timothy was also to give himself to reading the Scriptures publicly so that God's Word might simply be heard for what it was.

Recently I went onto the internet at home and discovered that the 1901 and 1911 censuses are now available on-line. Obviously that was before partition, so it is the Irish Government that has made these records available. I was able to do a search and find the records for my Granda, Robert Campbell, who was a boy of 2 in 1911. But I was also able to go back one further generation to his father-in-law, William McKibbin, my great-grandfather who started Monkstown Baptist Church in his own home. He was 20 at the time of the 1901 Census. It was interesting to find on the original census forms for just 100 years ago in this country that there was a column for Education, and in that column beside each name the words were entered: Either 'Read & Write' or 'Cannot Read'. It just reminds us that even in this country up until relatively recently many people could not read or write. And it was just the same, and probably far worse in Timothy's time. So how did people know what God's Word said? They had to have it read to them. And that was part of Timothy's job as a good minister of God's Word. He was to devote himself to the public reading of Scripture.

Sadly today, it's not that people *can't* read, it's just that they *don't* read today! So strange though it may seem, we still need to give attention to the public reading of Scripture as pastors in our day and generation!

e.g. We could put the Bible reading up on the Overhead Screen, but it's far better if you would bring your own copy of the Scriptures with you to read it for yourselves as it is publicly read from this pulpit.

e.g. We could have an OT reading as well as a NT one in each Sunday morning service, which is something I used to do, and I may well start doing it again in September. (We could read a Psalm each Sunday).

But the point is that whatever else we do as ministers in the course of a week we must be faithful in getting God's Word out to those who need to hear it. That might involve reading the Scriptures at someone's bedside in a hospital

ward, or it might be reading it to them in their own home. The important thing is getting God's Word out there, not just keeping it for Sunday Services.

But as well as devoting ourselves to the public reading of Scripture, we must also as good ministers, devote ourselves to our preparation for preaching and teaching, whether that be at various Bible Studies or in terms of our preparation for preaching on Sundays. And I can assure you, and I know Andrew can vouch for this, that takes up a good bit of our time!

If God has called us and gifted us in preaching and teaching his Word, then we are told in v.14: *'Do not neglect your gift!'*

Andrew and I have something else in common: both of us stepped out of pastoral work for a while to go into mission. I left Cavan in 2005 to go to work as the SIM Ireland Director, and Andrew left the pastorate of Armagh in 2007 to go to Peru with Baptist Missions. I can honestly say that the 4 years I spent with SIM, serving in mission, where some of the happiest and most rewarding of my life, and I saw God at work in special ways during those years. But the one thing I wasn't doing during those years was the consecutive preaching and teaching of God's Word on any regular basis, and that's what I missed, because that was my primary calling! Paul says, *'Do not neglect your gift!'* I know Andrew has missed the consecutive preaching of God's Word too, and it has been a joy to listen to him recently preaching from this pulpit again, getting back into his stride as far as preaching is concerned. He certainly hasn't lost his gift, and I know the folks in Millisle are looking forward to his preaching ministry when he gets there in a month's time.

But you know, stepping out of the pastorate for a while is no bad thing, because it allows you to look back at your ministry, from a distance, and to re-evaluate it. And it allows you to come back into it with a renewed focus. I came back into the pastorate in Armagh, telling you very clearly what my focus was going to be. My top 3 priorities would be: Mission, Discipleship and Expository Preaching. 14 months on, I still believe those are the most important priorities in local church ministry. Keeping Mission (at home and abroad) top priority - that's what the church is supposed to be all about. Then, being ready, willing and able to disciple those who do believe. Not just to preach the Gospel and to see people born again, but actually being ready to lead them on from that point, to disciple them in their understanding of God's Word. And then thirdly, feeding the whole church on the whole counsel of God's Word, preaching verse by verse, chapter by chapter, book by book, to present 'the big picture' of God's revealed Truth for every area of our lives.

Andrew, can I encourage you to make those your top 3 priorities in ministry too? You don't need me to tell you that all kinds of things happen in local

church life that will try to distract you from the priorities you set for yourself. In fact the devil does all in his power to try to fill your time with all those other distractions – but don't let him! Get back to those 3 things, keep your eyes on those 3 things, devote yourself to them, and you'll not go too far wrong! Mission, Discipleship and Expository Preaching – that's what it's all about!

But there's one final thing I want to share with you from this passage, about how to be a good minister of Christ Jesus:

6. Continue to make progress in your own spiritual life as well as in your doctrine (vs.15-16)

Right at the end of this chapter, aimed at Timothy himself as a minister, Paul tells him to watch **his own life** and **his doctrine** closely. Those are the two areas that the Devil will try to attack you on, and those are the two areas that your people could criticise you on, perhaps more than anything else: Your own personal and family life; and your own walk with God.

Just as the other elders were to watch these areas of their lives in ch.3, so a good minister needs to do so as well. If the Devil defeats you here, then he knows he has you 'finished' in the Lord's Work completely! So *"Take heed to thyself!"* as the AV puts it. But notice it says that first, before it gets to the point about your doctrine. There is no point having all your doctrinal T's crossed and all your doctrinal I's dotted, if your own life, and walk with the Lord, is in a shambles. So *"take heed to thyself" (AV)* or *"watch your life closely" (NIV)*.

But also, *"Watch your doctrine closely"* because that of course was the very problem that Timothy had been sent to Ephesus to sort out – to stop the bad doctrine in the teaching of the elders who had gone off the rails, and to replace them with godly men, who were better equipped to lead the church.

Conclusion

Why are all these things so important for a good Christian minister to pay attention to? Well Paul tells us in the closing words of this chapter:-

"Be diligent in these matters, give yourself wholly to them" - Why?

"So that everyone may see your progress."

Yes. But not only that, look at v.16:-

"Persevere in them, because if you do,

you will save both yourself and your hearers."

Why? Because the Christian minister has a tremendous responsibility: not just for himself, but also for the people of his congregation - the people who listen to him week after week. If he gets it wrong; he leads them astray too. It's one thing to be lost yourself, but it's another thing to be the cause of your people being lost also! So watch your life and your doctrine closely, and God bless!