

# Toward Obedience to His Word

**THEOLOGICAL THEME:** God gives pastors to His church to lead His people in obedience to His Word.

Good leaders are essential in pretty much every organization. Schools need principals. Governments need presidents or prime ministers. Teams need coaches. Businesses need CEOs. Marching bands need directors. Armies need generals. And churches need pastors.



What do you think makes a good pastor?

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## Voices from Church History

“The true shepherd spirit is an amalgam of many precious graces. He is hot with zeal, but he is not fiery with passion. He is gentle, and yet he rules his class. He is loving, but he does not wink at sin. He has power over the lambs, but he is not domineering or sharp; he has cheerfulness, but not levity; freedom, but not license; solemnity, but not gloom.”<sup>1</sup>

—Charles H. Spurgeon  
(1834-1892)

In this session, we will look at significant themes regarding pastors found in key excerpts from Paul’s Pastoral Epistles, his letters to Timothy and Titus. We will see how God gives pastors to His church to lead His people in obedience to His Word. Allow this study to help you obey God’s call to pray for and support the pastors He has given to lead us in our mission of making disciples.

## 1. Shepherds serve God’s people by embodying the truth they proclaim (1 Tim. 4:11-16).

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

In this passage, Paul instructed Timothy to command others (v. 11). This didn’t mean Timothy, or any pastor, was to be a general barking orders to troops. It refers to the confidence Timothy should have in his role as pastor, and in saying this, no doubt Paul recognized his protégé’s nervousness at the task ahead of him.

Timothy was not to beat the sheep with the Word, nor was he to be timid in declaring God’s truth. The God who called Timothy gives commands, not suggestions, and Paul urged his mentee to challenge those he taught to obey the Lord. “These things” refers specifically to the items Paul cited in the previous verses but also extends to the faithful teaching of the Word as a whole.



What are some reasons people might be timid to declare the truth and commands of Scripture to others?

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In verses 12-16, Paul listed what should mark Timothy’s ministry. First, Timothy was to “set...an example.” A vital way pastors lead a church to grow is by the example they set. Timothy may have been considered a younger leader, but his age was not to be an excuse for failing to make himself an example for his church, even to those who were much older. Timothy’s call superseded his age.

“Example” refers to a pattern. My dad worked in a steel mill for over thirty years. In the mill they created patterns, pouring molten steel into them. When the steel cooled, it conformed exactly to the pattern. Timothy was to be a pattern of a life given to Christ. So how was he to be an example?

**First, Timothy was to be an example outwardly and inwardly (v. 12).** Speech, of course, would include communicating clearly the Word of God but also speaking with wisdom instead of speaking in the heat of the moment. Today, this could include refusing to post outrage on social media, choosing instead to speak words of grace and compassion. The same can be said of behavior, acting with wisdom and grace. Paul also exhorted Timothy to set an example inwardly: The traits of love, faithfulness, and purity (both sexual and general integrity) should mark his life.

**Second, Paul emphasized proclaiming the Word (v. 13).** *Public reading* of Scripture has become less common in many churches today, but in the early church, reading the Word had priority. We would do well to consider what we communicate about the weightiness we place on Scripture in our services, our small groups, and in our homes by how much of it we actually read.

*Exhortation*, or preaching, calls the hearer to respond to the truth of the Word with an emphasis on appealing to the will. *Teaching* focuses on delivering the content of Scripture with a focus on application and on the intellect.<sup>2</sup> In the early church, the Scripture was read aloud and preached for the purposes of encouraging obedience and teaching doctrine.

**Third, Paul called Timothy not to neglect his spiritual gift (v. 14).** Each spiritual gift is from God by Jesus through the Holy Spirit, affirmed by the church, and used for a purpose beyond ourselves. Paul’s exhortation shows the importance both of the divine gifting by God and the affirmation of the leaders of the church.

## 99 Essential Christian Doctrines

### 3. *Inspiration of Scripture*

The inspiration of Scripture refers to God’s direction of the human authors of the Bible so that they composed and recorded His message to humankind in their original writings (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:19–21). Occasionally this inspiration was achieved through dictation, where God spoke directly to the original authors. Most of the time, however, this inspiration was achieved through the supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit through the personalities of the authors so that their writings can be considered the very words of God.

**Fourth, Paul appealed to Timothy to continue to grow as a believer (vv. 15-16).** “Practice these things” has the idea of a consistent routine. Paul exhorted Timothy to develop healthy routines and follow them to foster growth. And the church would be able to see his continual growth.

How can we relate Paul's instructions to Timothy to our own lives, even if we are not pastors?	What are some ways we can encourage pastors and leaders as they live out and proclaim God's Word?

## 2. Shepherds serve God's people by preaching truth, even when it is costly (2 Tim. 4:1-8).

*<sup>1</sup> I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: <sup>2</sup> preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. <sup>3</sup> For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, <sup>4</sup> and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. <sup>5</sup> As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.*

*<sup>6</sup> For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. <sup>7</sup> I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. <sup>8</sup> Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.*

Paul was not playing here. He knew his end was near, and the urgency of his exhortation weighed heavily in his words. “I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus” was about as serious a way to get Timothy’s attention as possible.

Paul offered five exhortations in verse 2 that apply to every pastor:

- “Preach the word.” Pastors are to preach and teach the Word of God faithfully, consistently, and passionately.
- Persist in the preaching of the Word “in season and out of season,” whether convenient or not. Pastors are to proclaim the Word consistently whether they feel like it or they don’t.
- They are to “reprove” the negligent or belligerent.
- They are to “rebuke” those who speak or live out of line with Scripture.
- And they are to “exhort” the flock to live holy lives for the glory of God.

Why did this matter? Why focus on this stuff in what was probably Paul’s last letter? Because Paul knew we don’t drift into health. If you don’t pay attention to what you eat, in a world of processed and fast food, you will drift into larger clothes and need bigger belts. If you don’t focus on disciplining your children, they will drift toward rebellion rather than obedience. Paul knew that people drift toward self-centeredness rather than gospel-centeredness.

So, Timothy was to be serious about all these important things. He was to “endure suffering” with perseverance, understanding that shepherding deals with the reality of stubborn and wandering sheep.

Paul also reminded him to “do the work of an evangelist”—pastors are to set the example for soul-winning in their congregations. I remind my students that one of the most practical ways to develop an evangelistic culture in a church is for pastors simply to mention the people with whom they are sharing Christ.

Paul ended this section by exhorting Timothy to “fulfill [his] ministry,” the very thing Paul did without losing focus (see Acts 20:24).



### Voices from Church History

“It belongs to your calling of God as a minister, that you should have a taste of the various spiritual trials which are incident to the Lord’s people, that thereby you may...know how to speak a word in season to them that are weary; and it is likewise needful to keep you perpetually attentive to that important admonition, ‘Without me ye can do nothing.’”<sup>3</sup>

—John Newton (1725–1807)



How have you been rebuked, corrected, or encouraged by a pastor or leader that proved helpful?

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Employing athletic and military metaphors, Paul reminded Timothy that it's not how you start in ministry but how you finish that matters most. Paul "fought the good fight," he "finished the race," and he "kept the faith." Don't get confused by Paul's use of metaphors here. He was not calling for needless arguing with people in the church or getting into fistfights! Pastors are not to be theological snobs who believe rightly but are jerks about it when preaching, teaching, and talking with others. Instead, Paul was calling on Timothy to have an unambiguous conviction regarding faithful doctrine. Teaching the Word faithfully means we don't have a choice to waver in our convictions when they contrast with those of the culture.

An Olympic athlete trains, competes, and sacrifices for years to be able to represent his or her country. Some do so to compete in a race that literally lasts seconds. Why? There is a level of honor and satisfaction knowing that the sacrifice of years brings with it the title of Olympian. But pastors serve Jesus and the church their entire life and do so sacrificially and with joy because they know a "crown of righteousness" far greater than Olympic gold awaits. They know that rather than standing on a podium to receive their reward, they will have the honor of kneeling and offering it right back to the King of kings.



What are some theological convictions that are becoming harder for us to hold faithfully in our culture?

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How can we hold on to sound doctrine while maintaining love and compassion for unbelievers?

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### 3. God's people follow the shepherd by submitting to God's Word (Titus 2:11-14).

*<sup>11</sup> For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, <sup>12</sup> training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, <sup>13</sup> waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, <sup>14</sup> who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.*

In this passage, Paul first reminded Titus of a fundamental conviction of Scripture: Salvation is available for all people by the grace of God. What this means is that salvation is available to anyone who believes—no matter his or her ethnicity, socio-economic status, language, or any other factor.

What does this grace of God that brings salvation do? We know it secures forgiveness of sin and a new, living relationship with God, but Paul focused here on the practical, daily impact of this grace-filled salvation. The gospel of Jesus Christ changes the way we experience daily life—physical, emotional, relational, financial, and vocational. Paul wanted Titus to understand that instruction about salvation through the Word of God leads to practical and daily changes in how we live.



How will submitting to God's Word in Titus 2:11-14 change the way we live each day in our homes, church, work places, neighborhoods, and beyond?

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The gospel carries with it both negative and positive aspects, and we do well to emphasize both. Negatively, the gospel compels us to “renounce ungodliness and worldly passions.” The grace of God reminds us that God's way is better than giving in to any of our worldly, fleshly, sinful desires, no matter how appealing they may seem to be.

But positively, because of Christ, we *can* deny godlessness and worldly lusts, but we can go even further and *live* in a way that is sensible. Christianity is true, and that is enough, but Christianity also *works*. Christianity is truly the best way to live, and because of Christ's work to save us, the Spirit within us changes and empowers us to make sensible choices each day.

 What would it look like to be a pure person zealous for good works in the name of Jesus Christ?

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 Why should Christ's return and future redemption of all things frame how we live in the present age?

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## Conclusion

God has given the church pastors to model God's Word, to proclaim God's Word, and to call on us to submit to God's Word under the authority and leadership of Christ. While pastors are a blessing from God to the church, the church should also strive to be a blessing to their pastors as we seek to love, encourage, pray for, and support them. Take some time to consider how you can encourage your pastor(s) and leaders in the church, and then pour into them as they pour into you.



### Voices from Church History

"Concerning the Hearer: that those hearers who are instructed in the Scriptures should examine what is said by the teachers, receiving what is in conformity with Scripture and rejecting what is opposed to them."<sup>4</sup>

—Basil of Caesarea  
(circa 329-379)

**CHRIST CONNECTION:** Near the end of his life, Paul wrote letters to Timothy and Titus, two of his most trusted children in the faith. Paul instructed them to follow the model of the Good Shepherd—Jesus—who guides His people into the knowledge of truth. Because Jesus died to serve the church, pastors and leaders are called to live to serve the church.

# HIS MISSION, YOUR MISSION

**MISSIONAL APPLICATION:** God calls us to pray for and support the pastors given to us by God to lead us in our mission of making disciples.

1. Identify one way your group will work to encourage your pastor(s) and leaders, and plan out the steps you will take to follow through on this action.

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2. What are some ways you can grow in your knowledge and understanding of the truth in order to stand up for it with faith and conviction?

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3. How can your group/church help encourage one another to be eager to do good works in the world in the name of Jesus Christ?

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2. Martin Luther, *A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (London: For Mathews and Leigh, 1807), 58.
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**SPECIAL SESSION—EASTER**

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3. Mark Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, vol. 2B in *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B&H, 2014) [WORDsearch].
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**SESSION 5**

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3. Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012) [eBook].
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**SESSION 6**

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