

A Good Minister

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In 1 Timothy 4:6 the apostle Paul declared at least one trait of all who would be “good ministers of Christ Jesus”:

If thou put the brethren in mind of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished in the words of the faith, and of the good doctrine which thou hast followed until now.

Let us briefly analyze this verse:

- Paul described Timothy as a “minister of Christ Jesus.” The Greek word for “minister” here is diakonos (meaning servant, attendant, or minister), from which we derive our English word, “deacon.” Scripture uses diakonos in both a general and a specific sense. Specifically, it applies to men in each congregation who meet specific qualifications (1 Tim. 3:8–13) and who are to serve the church in an “official” capacity because of their spiritual maturity. Timothy was in Ephesus, when Paul wrote this “good minister” charge (1 Tim. 1:1–3), however, there is no evidence that Timothy was a deacon in the Ephesian church. Generally, the Sacred Text applies diakonos to various ones (e.g., national rulers, Phoebe, Paul—even to Christ Jesus (Rom. 13:4; 15:8; 16:1; 1 Cor. 3:5)). We thus misuse minister when we capitalize it and equate it with “preacher” or “evangelist.” The New Testament never thus uses the word. Paul was simply telling Timothy what he must do to be a good servant (not deacon) of Christ in his work.
- Timothy must “put the brethren in mind of these things.” What “things”? The preceding 5 verses give a vigorous, explicit warning of an approaching apostasy. Only if he warned the brethren of this tragedy would Timothy be a good servant of Christ. What does this say of those today who deny the apostasy and digression that has destroyed hundreds of congregations over the past half century? What does this say of those who are leading and reveling in said apostasy? What does this say of those who label as “negative,” “prophets of doom,” and brotherhood watchdogs” those who dare warn of the alarming departures the church has suffered and continues to suffer? What does it say of those who no longer respect the Bible doctrine of fellowship? What does it say of those in the pew who stop their ears and refuse to hear such warnings when faithful men issue them? Such are not good servants of Christ!
- Warning the brethren would be proof that Timothy was “nourished in the words of the faith, and of the good doctrine.” Had Timothy failed to sound the warnings he would demonstrate his failure to feed on the faith and the good doctrine. Those who love and cherish the doctrine of Christ and who feed upon it cannot be silent about the rampant digression in our midst. Knowledge of and love for the Truth force us to sound the warnings. Those who will not sound or receive such warnings prove that they feed upon and delight in the doctrines of men rather than in the “good doctrine.”

There is more to being a good servant of Christ than sounding warnings of error and sin, but those who refuse to do this necessary work surely fail to serve Christ well, be they preachers or any others.

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