
A Noble Task

DAVE BAST

If you were counseling a young friend or a child or grandchild about their choice of career, would you urge them to go into the Christian ministry as a vocation? I wonder. Once, that would have been a no-brainer, at least for many Christians; but today I am not so sure. Being the pastor of a church has probably never been an easy job, but nowadays it seems harder than ever. The ministry – what does it mean? Long hours, low pay, lack of respect, church problems, personal criticism – who needs it? And then, just when we are tempted to bag it all, we read this in I Timothy Chapter 3: This saying is trustworthy; whoever aspires to the office of an overseer (a pastor) desires a noble task. Really? Really. Stay tuned.

SCOTT HOEZEE

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is Groundwork, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast, and Scott, we are well launched now on a new series of Groundwork programs on the faithful sayings, we are calling them, these five statements scattered throughout the pastoral epistles, throughout I and II Timothy and Titus, that are all introduced with the phrase: The saying is trustworthy or faithful and deserves full acceptance – to be accepted by everyone.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and as we said in the first program in this series, we believe that these were little catchphrases, little pithy statements, that people, maybe with the help of their pastors, maybe these were quotes from sermons from early Church pastors, who knows, but these were just short, easy to memorize, sayings that helped people carry the essence of the faith with them. As we said before, they had no books, no tracts, they could not look anything up on their smart phones...

DAVE BAST

Right; no Wikipedia.

SCOTT HOEZEE

needless to say... nothing at all written down.

DAVE BAST

Not even a Bible.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right. It was an oral culture. They spoke... A lot of people maybe even could not write in some places because what is the sense? There is nothing to write with. Paper and pens were not all over the place; so, if you wanted to know something you had to carry it in your head; and these faithful or trustworthy sayings were a way to capture the faith in short strokes so that you could share it with your neighbors. These were some of Paul's later letters, so there was development of these faithful sayings by then, so Paul could quote them with approval, back to Pastors Titus and Timothy; but of all the five sayings scattered throughout I and II Timothy and Titus, this one is of a little bit of a different nature because it is much more

nitty-gritty. The first one we looked at was kind of the big global “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners,” and there will be a couple of others in this series that will also kind of hit grand elements of the faith; but this one, the second one, is a little more detailed.

DAVE BAST

Yes, you could say that. It almost seems kind of housekeeping or pedestrian – very matter-of-fact, run-of-the-mill – I mean, on the one hand, you have: Christ Jesus came to save sinners. Later on we will have almost poetry that rises to the level of a confession of faith, and here, in the second saying, Paul says to Timothy in I Timothy Chapter 3: Oh, by the way, you want to be a leader in the church, you want to be a pastor, that is a noble job. There is a trustworthy saying. This deserves to be accepted by everyone. Leadership in the Church is noble – it is a noble task.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I guess we would have to assume... again, this is later in Paul’s life, probably near the end of his days, actually, so the Church has seen some development – it has seen some growth – and it is settling in a little bit. So, you have the book of Acts, where everything is just exploding all over the place, and the Spirit is active, and people all over the world are getting touched by this and that; but of course, things settle down over time and structures start coming into place; congregations started to form in places like Ephesus, where Timothy ministered; and that means you are going to have to have a little more organization, and it could be that they were having some trouble getting organized.

DAVE BAST

Yes, or filling the job. You know, pretty clearly, it seems to me, we are reaching a stage where the Church was big enough that it could afford to have fulltime pastors; whereas, before that was not the case. I mean, Paul never was a fulltime pastor. He was a fulltime evangelist apostle in the sense that that is all that he did, but he worked as a tentmaker in order to earn enough money to live; and now, we are getting to the stage where the Church has grown and they are starting to have offices or jobs, and they are kind of putting out the job description with its requirements, and in a sense, that is the passage that we have today to look at; but, I also wonder whether maybe they were having a problem attracting applicants because it was a thankless job, even back then, you know; it has never been much fun.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and even Timothy no doubt struggled; so part of this is aimed also at Timothy, not just in general to the population at large, but some of this probably was Paul saying to Timothy: Hey, you are in a noble job, Timothy. Do not be tempted to quit. Do not be tempted to give up your ministry. It has been tough – it is tough – and some people say you are too young and inexperienced, and why should they listen to you, wet behind the ears, young, just out of seminary Timothy – but do not quit – do not quit. It is a noble task – and tell that to others as well. That may also be some of the background here. And maybe we should also say, Dave – still here at the top of the program – that ultimately we want to emphasize that this is not only a Groundwork program for ministers or seminarians, but ultimately we are going to see that some of what Paul is talking about here in terms of the characteristics of a leader is really supposed to be for everybody; that we want to see it chiefly in the leader so it can trickle down. So, this applies to everybody, whether you are a pastor, or think you ever will be or not.

DAVE BAST

But I think this is one of the most timely of all the sayings we are going to be looking at in this series because, you know, let’s face it; today, in our time, the ministry – what we call “the ministry” – has come under fire maybe as never before. Scandals have rocked the Catholic Church in the United States and elsewhere, and Protestants... I don’t think we should look at that and say, “Wow, we are so much better.” We have our own scandals of high-profile leaders who failed spectacularly; but the truth is, I mean, the ministry is no longer the respected profession it once was.

SCOTT HOEZEE

No, and just think in the popular imagination... sometimes those of us who are immersed in the church have a hard time understanding what people who do not usually attend church think about pastors – they probably do not think about pastors much at all, to tell you the truth – but if they do, they might think of some of these cable TV guys who seem like hucksters who are kind of peddling things for money, or they think of only a bad priest in the Catholic Church and forget about all of the wonderful, wonderful priests who are serving; or on TV shows pastors are buffoons or just background characters who need to show up when there is a wedding scene or a funeral scene, but you do not usually get a TV series that seriously looks at the life of a working pastor, that is just not... I mean, doctors, lawyers – oh, medical shows, legal shows, those are exciting. You are not going to find a hit TV series on CBS called *The Parsonage*, I don't think.

DAVE BAST

Right; I don't think so. So, yes, all right; a loss of social esteem and prestige; struggles leading churches today – that churches are kind of locked in survival mode – many of them. It seems like a few big churches keep getting bigger while many sort of regular, ordinary churches dwindle down and the pastors get fired left and right. You put it all together and no wonder there is a serious morale problem among Christian ministers. I mean, all the studies show it: High depression rates, high rates of turnover...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Burnout.

DAVE BAST

Lots of people leaving... yes, burning out. So, wow, it seems like there is bad news, but the passage we want to look at today has some good news as well; so, let's turn to that in just a moment.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and you are listening to Groundwork, and this the second of our series of programs on the faithful and trustworthy sayings that Paul quotes in Timothy and Titus in the New Testament; and Dave, we are looking today at I Timothy 3. I think you are going to read those verses for us.

DAVE BAST

Yes, I have it; verses 1-7: Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer – that is an interesting word; it is *episcopos* in Greek, which means overseer, but it came to be translated later as *bishop*, so, we will talk about that – whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task. ²Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, (literally, the husband of one wife), temperate, self controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach; ³not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.

SCOTT HOEZEE

⁴He must manage his own family well, and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. ⁵If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's Church? ⁶He must not be a recent convert or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. ⁷He must also have a good reputation with outsiders so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.

DAVE BAST

So, pretty daunting list of requirements...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, that is pretty rapid fire.

DAVE BAST

And we will look at those requirements, many of them, before we close the program, but let's start with that faithful saying – that trustworthy saying – whoever aspires to be an *episcopas*, literally, desires a noble task.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So implied there is that the Church is going to need leaders; if it is going to survive, they need people to take charge; and so, these leaders – these overseers: bishop, pastor, somebody who is in a recognized position of some authority in the Church, has to be worthy of respect, and the reason you would be worthy of respect – and again, it is a long list – but the reason is because you as a leader will need to model what you want everybody to have. You need to bear the fruit of the Spirit if you are going to preach to people about bearing the fruit of the Spirit. You need to be a loving, non-quarrelsome person if you are going to teach people how to be like Jesus, who was a loving, non-quarrelsome person. So, it just has to be reflected in you first, because if it isn't then you have hypocrisy, you have hollowness and false fronts, and nothing, I think, can undercut the Gospel more than hypocrisy – than somebody who not only does not walk the talk, but does the opposite, actually. That has historically done tremendous damage to churches everywhere.

DAVE BAST

Right. Let's take a moment, too, to talk about some of the terminology that the New Testament uses for leaders in the Church; and again, this is something that developed over time. Early on, they did not need much in the way of leadership because they had the apostles, and the apostles always come at the top of the list of any description of New Testament Church leadership. Sometimes the word *apostle* is used in a little bit more informal sense, and some churches today might even say: Well, we have apostles. But technically, as the New Testament defines the term, an apostle was an eyewitness; and personally chosen by Jesus, personally commissioned, and they had authority like no other leaders since have ever had. So, in Acts we read that the early Church devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching, and we still have that today; that is what came to be written in the pages of the New Testament. But then there are other offices or leaders mentioned; pastors, we have mentioned this word, overseer or bishop, elders are described...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Deacons, eventually.

DAVE BAST

And deacons, right; and those offices may have been the same people. Again, it depends on what tradition you are part of how this continued to evolve down the centuries of Church history; but at this point anyway, they are probably interchangeable, more or less; that the overseers were the pastors were the bishops were the elders.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And probably in small churches, the pastor – the parson – the priest – is everything to everybody. I mean, you do end up doing all the work yourself. As things get larger and more differentiated, even in Acts, you know, very early on the Apostles said: Look, we have to preach and pray. We cannot be busy doing things that absolutely need to be done, like bringing food to people. We need deacons, we need servants who can wait on tables, was literally what they said early on; but in smaller settings you have to be a utility player as a pastor as well.

DAVE BAST

And let's focus on the main point here. What is the trustworthy saying? What is the summary of the Gospel? What is the takeaway, the basic thing we want to get back to? That is, this is a noble task – this is a great and important calling – this is something that is needed and necessary, and that is how God sees it. So, in the midst of... You know, you work in the church you can become disillusioned, you can become burned out. It is not always fun and encouraging, but we come back to this because the reason Church leadership is noble is because the Church is important, and God's purposes in the world are caught up and tied together with the Church and its mission. God is working in and through it; and therefore, God is working in and through its

leaders.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I think Paul knows that – he sensed early on already – the leader of any church is going to need to be transparent to Jesus. People are going to connect the dots to the savior, who is the head of the whole Church; and you do not want to be a bad reflection of Jesus – you do not want to be a distorted picture of Jesus – and so, how important it is to be as transparent to Jesus. You know what is striking, and this is almost in the verses that we read a moment ago, Dave, twice Paul refers to the devil. The devil has traps set for people in this profession; the devil has a stake in making them conceited or tripping them up or messing up their families. Again, he does not spell it out, but I think implied there is: The stakes are high here. This is an important position; so important, the devil would just as soon bring you down. We have to be on guard against that.

DAVE BAST

Well, let's take a look at those qualities, then, and some of them are a little bit problematic. I mean, all of them put together you would say: Well, who can do that? Even the Apostle Paul does not match up; but we will address that when we take a closer look at the passage in just a moment.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to Groundwork, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we are looping back here, finishing this program on the second of five trustworthy, faithful sayings from the early Church; pieces of wisdom that went to core Gospel and Church matters; and so, we have been in I Timothy 3, where the saying is a little different than some of the other ones, as we have observed, Dave, because it is about being a leader in the Church and what a noble and important thing it is to be both a leader, but also a really solid leader with a very nearly peerless reputation.

DAVE BAST

Yes, exactly; and a lot of the characteristics that Paul runs through have to do with reputation – with how other people see you or perceive you; and the idea is not that, well, you can do whatever you want in private as long as you present this veneer or façade of sanctity – of holiness. The idea more is you should be the kind of transparent, faithful person who is striving to be Christ-like; so much so that even in the community your reputation is solid because it is going to reflect on the Church.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is just true leadership. I am thinking of a story that a friend of mine who teaches at Calvin College told me recently, and he was saying: You know, at any given moment wherever you live there is maybe somebody in your neighborhood, somebody down the street, somebody in your part of the city, maybe somebody in your church – a man who has cheated on his wife, let's say; and that is a terrible thing, but in a lot of those cases it is also a private thing and a private agony and the family goes through it; but my friend said that some years ago, not long after President Clinton had gone through a very terrible scandal involving that young White House intern, my friend was in the Middle East, four or five thousand miles away from home, and he had stopped at a roadside glass shop because there was just all this broken glass and mirrors sparkling in the Middle Eastern sunshine, so he wanted to take some pictures. The guy who owned the shop came out, found out my friend was from America, picks up a particularly sharp piece of glass and says: Here, you bring this to Hillary so she can punish Bill. So, my friend said: Well, there you go. So, the guy down the street has an affair, it is a terrible, private agony, but it is private; a leader has an affair and a guy five

thousand miles from home knows about it; and that is why leadership is so important. We need our leaders to do it better because it affects more people when they don't; and particularly in the Church, it is also bringing Jesus down into the dirt of our scandals. That is why the bar is set so seemingly impossibly high here.

DAVE BAST

Right. A lot of the qualities mentioned have to do with the ability to teach and to work with people – to kind of manage people – so, a leader should not be quarrelsome; they should not be a lover of money, greedy, in it for themselves; able to communicate well; so there are some leadership skills, as we call them, that are mentioned here, too; but maybe the interesting one that we should zero in on is that phrase, “The husband of one wife.” The version that I read translates it as, “faithful to his wife,” but literally, Paul says, a leader in the Church needs to be the husband of one wife. In fact, interestingly, I have traveled a good bit in Uganda, I know you have too, Scott. The pastors whom I have met there often will introduce themselves and they will say a little something about who they are and their family, and almost invariably they will say, “I am the husband of one wife.” I thought it was kind of funny and amusing at first, but in an African context, they mean it literally. They mean to say: I don't have two wives, I don't have three; I am not a polygamist.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and therefore, you have to assume, and of course, we could get into all kinds of issues – does this mean women are excluded from ministry? Well, probably not, but certainly in a culture where men were more in leadership positions more readily than women, in a patriarchal culture, Paul would naturally address men more than women in this kind of a setting; but we also have to assume that there must have been some polygamy – some unfaithfulness – some husband of more than one wife situations that Paul said monogamy and fidelity in marriage is one of the things that we are called to as followers of Christ, so you cannot have a leader who does not even do that.

DAVE BAST

Right; which is why, maybe, it is appropriate that the NIV that we read translates this phrase as “faithful to his wife.” Now, that is an interpretation...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, it is a dynamic equivalent, as we call it.

DAVE BAST

And I think it is probably a good interpretation because again, if you push it too literally, does that mean you cannot have any ministers who are unmarried?

SCOTT HOEZEE

No.

DAVE BAST

Or you cannot have any women leaders? Many of us would say no, it does not mean that. Paul himself was not married. So, again, there is another phrase later on that has to do with family relationships. He has to be a good manager of his own household or his children. Again you ask, well, does that mean the preacher's kids all have to be exemplary and no bad behavior? Are we to hold them to this, too? No, again, it is not that, but I think it is trying to get at a general picture of a personality and a character.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; the main things that come forward here, and here is what we said earlier in the program, but this applies, really, to everybody in the Church, which is why we want it to trickle down from the leader down to everybody else: The picture here is of a gentle soul; of somebody who is not always trying to start arguments; of somebody who is full of the fruit of the Spirit: Kindness and compassion, gentleness, a peace-loving person. This is what we all are called to do as Christians, whether we are leaders in the Church or volunteers in the Church, we are all called to that; and it sure helps all of us... because we all struggle with it, right?

Everybody struggles with that. None of this comes naturally in a sinful world where we still struggle with the “old self,” as Paul writes elsewhere in his writings; but it sure helps if at least we have leaders who are people we can aspire to be like; and it sure hinders the rest of us, who are trying to be more Christ-like if we have leaders who pull us the other way by their example.

DAVE BAST

Well, you know, I look at this list and I am tempted to think who could possibly measure up? In fact, I remember years ago reading... This was actually in our denomination’s magazine, it was an advertisement in the back – sometime’s they have these classified ads from churches looking for a pastor. I actually wrote it down, it struck me: Pastor wanted. One hundred eighty member church seeks pastor strong in preaching, youth counseling, calling, administration, and evangelism. What else do you want?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Somebody with thirty years’ experience who is 28 years old.

DAVE BAST

And I remember thinking: You know, if somebody really was strong in all those areas, they probably would not be the pastor of a one hundred eighty member church – more like eighteen hundred; but it is not about drawing up this list in this kind of a way; it is more about a person whose heart mirrors the heart of Jesus, who loves people and wants to lead them to the Lord.

SCOTT HOEZEE

There is a great line from Billy Graham, who is one of the most famous leaders and evangelists of our time. Somebody said: What is the core of being an effective evangelist? Billy Graham’s answer was very simple: The main thing is prayer and study of the word backed by a life of personal integrity. Those are just the basics; and go back to the basics, and that is a noble thing, Paul would say.

DAVE BAST

Well, thanks for joining our Groundwork conversation. We are your hosts, Dave Bast with Scott Hoezee. We would like to know how we can help you continue digging deeper into scripture. Visit groundworkonline.com to tell us what topics or passages you would like to dig into next on Groundwork.

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