

EXCELLENCE IN MINISTRY

Starting Strong—Doing What’s Right in the Work of Ministry

What’s a Pastor to Do?
1 Timothy 1:1–11, 18–20



LET’S BEGIN HERE

First Timothy, the flagship of Paul’s “pastoral” letters, defines the role of the pastor and the function of the church. Our goal is to learn from this first-century epistle about some of the concerns and pitfalls of ministry and apply God’s instructions to the twenty-first-century church. This study offers insight on the theology of ministry based on biblical guidelines—as opposed to human experience, opinion, prejudice, culture, or personal preference. Let’s keep a keen eye on what is written in God’s Word and then do our best to let it shape our thinking.



LET’S DIG DEEPER

1. Warm Words to a Close Friend (1 Timothy 1:1–2)

Paul was a Jewish apostle, one who had seen the resurrected Christ and was commissioned by Him for service. Timothy was the son of a Greek father and a Jewish mother (Acts 16:1). After being circumcised, Timothy accompanied Paul when he left Lystra (16:3). From that time on, Timothy became Paul’s spiritual son—Paul’s *genesios* or genuine son in the faith—and helped Paul evangelize Macedonia, Achaia, and Ephesus (17:14–15; 18:5; 19:21–22).

2. Wise Counsel from a Seasoned Veteran (1 Timothy 1:3–11, 18–20)

Paul’s first letter to Timothy is filled with practical advice for ministry and ministers. And Paul wasted no time in dispensing words of wisdom to the young pastor in Ephesus, giving him five commands applicable for pastors today.

- Stay at the task.



Quotable

Stay at the task.

*Communicate
the truth. Watch
your target.*

*Remember the
standard. Obey
God’s commands.*

—Charles R. Swindoll



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- Communicate the truth.
- Concentrate on the target.
- Remember the standard.
- Obey the command.



A CLOSER LOOK

Handed Over to Satan?

Paul’s ministry was not easy. From the moment of his conversion, after he was struck blind on the Damascus road, to the moment he was beheaded in Rome, Paul knew hardship. He provided a graphic pen portrait of his ministry in 2 Corinthians 11:23–33. Some of the hardships Paul faced included “dangers among false brethren” and “the daily pressure . . . of concern for all the churches” (2 Corinthians 11:26, 28). Paul was on the front lines of opposition.

Some of the most troubling opposition came from Hymenaeus and Alexander (1 Timothy 1:20). Alexander likely joined in the teaching of Hymenaeus’ heresy, which was just old-fashioned Gnosticism. Greek philosophers viewed the soul as immortal and the body as the soul’s temporary prison. The bodily resurrection of Christ and Christians, therefore, was not only foreign to the Greek mind, it was foolishness. Hymenaeus probably taught that the spirit was resurrected at conversion or at baptism but that believers shouldn’t look forward to a bodily resurrection.

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So, when Hymenaeus and Philetus—and presumably Alexander—taught that “the resurrection has already taken place,” they denied the bodily resurrection of Christ (2 Timothy 2:18). But Paul made it clear in 1 Corinthians 15 that if Christ did not rise in bodily form, then our salvation is in vain.

Presumably, Paul tried to correct Hymenaeus and Alexander, but they “rejected” sound doctrine and the testimony of their consciences and thereby “shipwreck[ed] . . . their faith” (1 Timothy 1:19). Because their teaching and example would have been dangerous to the church at Ephesus, Paul “handed [them] over to Satan” (1:20). This is a curious phrase. Paul didn’t mean he handed them over to Satan literally. Rather, Paul meant he excommunicated them from the church, exposing them to the realm of satanic influence. Those outside the church are not under the spiritual protection of the body of Christ and, in this way, are exposed to the dangers of sin. Paul used a similar phrase in 1 Corinthians 5:5. In both cases, the intent of the disciplinary measure was to bring about repentance and return to true fellowship (1 Timothy 1:20).



LET’S LIVE IT

Hymenaeus and Alexander serve as warnings to all in ministry—failure to heed Paul’s five commands can lead to disillusionment and disaster. Those who lean on myths and listen to persuasive but ignorant teachers who espouse heretical doctrines will find their lives and their ministries thrown into confusion. But those who lean on Christ Jesus, our hope, and listen to His Word will find their lives and their ministries filled with confidence. Confusion or confidence—it all depends upon who you trust and who has your ear. Therefore, *be very careful where you lean and to whom you listen.*

On whom do you lean and to whom do you listen for spiritual advice? Do the individuals you listed adhere to Paul’s five commands for ministry? How so? If not, how might God have you respond?



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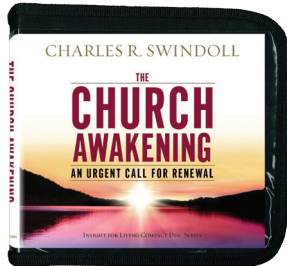
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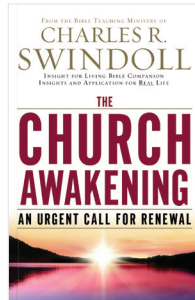
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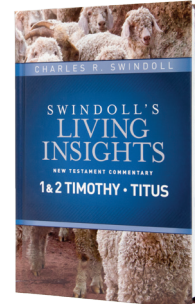
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