

July 14, 2024 at St. Matthew, Port Washington, WI

The Lord Sends Ministers to Bless His People

By living right

By teaching right

It is not a tradition. At the beginning of our worship, we have an invocation, “In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” We invoke, or call upon, the name of our Triune God. It is not a tradition. It is filled with meaning. The worship leader is announcing that he is not going to be doing his own thing during the service. Everything that is said or sung will be in accord with what our Triune God has revealed in the Bible. The minister is acting as God’s representative. He is speaking “in the name of” the Triune God. Before Jesus ascended into heaven, he told his disciples to make disciples of all nations. Since his physical presence is gone from the earth, the Lord sends ministers to bless his people. Ministers are a blessing to God’s people by living right and by teaching right.

By living right

As you know, the Apostle Paul started many mission congregations. Some of them were on the island of Crete in the Mediterranean Sea. Titus was a young pastor who was serving on the island of Crete. Paul wished he could visit and help Titus, but that wasn’t possible. So, he sent a Titus a letter. There were a number of small churches on the island of Crete that Titus was to oversee. They needed leaders. That explains what Paul said in verse 5, “**The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town** [that had a church], **as I directed you.**” When a group of believers come together, it is important that they have a leader to guide them in God’s Word. In these verses, Paul refers to the leaders as elders and overseers. The most common term we use is “pastor,” which means “shepherd.” As a shepherd takes care of sheep, so a pastor is to take care of the people in the church.

If you were adding a room onto your house, you could not just hire anyone to get electricity to your addition. You would need someone who knew how to hook up wires to switches and sockets. You would need someone who was certified, qualified, trustworthy. If someone is going to share God’s Word, they need to have some qualifications as well. Paul lists several of them for Titus. Let’s take a quick look at them in verses 6-8. Paul says that ...

An elder must be blameless. No one is perfect, of course. We all sin. But a leader in a church should not be known as someone who lives a sinful lifestyle. Someone who has a record for armed robbery would not make a good role model.

Faithful to his wife. If a pastor is married, he should have eyes only for his wife and demonstrate that he cares for her. Paul does not state it specifically here as he does in other places, but it’s understood that the leader of the church should be a man. It’s not that Paul, or God for that matter, is a male chauvinist. Paul is simply stating that different genders have different responsibilities in God’s kingdom work.

A man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. No child is perfect, but if the pastor’s children are known for constantly rebelling, it’s not going to say much about the pastor’s leadership ability.

⁷Since an overseer manages God’s household, he must be blameless—not overbearing. It should be clear that the pastor is eager to serve the people, not treating the people as his servants who he bosses around.

Not quick-tempered. If I quickly screamed and yelled when someone did something wrong or something did not go the way I wanted, you would not like it. A pastor is to be a shepherd, to lead the sheep, not scare them.

Not given to drunkenness. If you think of the pastor as someone who always has a beer in his hand, or lets alcohol control him, then who’s going to listen to him?

Not violent. I’m not going to punch someone if they say something I don’t like.

Not pursuing dishonest gain. My desire for being a pastor should not be to get as much money as I can, maybe even stealing some money from the offering pouches. Bad. Really bad.

⁸Rather, he must be hospitable. Literally, it means caring for strangers. How could I share the gospel with people if I did not care about them?

One who loves what is good, what is morally good and right.

Who is self-controlled. Do the work a pastor is supposed to do instead of playing video games or spending too much time with hobbies and other things.

Upright, holy and disciplined. Someone who would be a good example of what it means to live a Christian life.

Our Seminary does not just teach the students facts. They also observe the students, especially during their vicar year, to see if they match up with these qualifications. Sometimes, students are told that they can not continue because they don’t have what it takes. I often tell the Seminary students that they should be so dedicated to God’s Word and involved with the ministry and caring for people that even if there was not a Seminary with a Call Day, their congregation would ask them to be their pastor because they’ve earned their respect.

These qualifications that Paul gives to Titus are things that every believer should strive for. No Christian wants to be controlled by alcohol or violent or pursuing dishonest gone. But to be a leader of God’s people, the pastor should be known for these things. These qualifications are not about putting the pastor on a pedestal. Not at all. He, more than anyone else, knows that he is a sinner who is saved by grace. These qualifications are all about respect for God’s Word. You would not buy a car from someone who was known for cheating people. If a pastor does not have these qualifications, people are not going to trust him when he shares God’s Word. The Lord sends ministers to bless his people and therefore, they need to live right.

By teaching right

When a pastor lives right, people will listen to him. And so, he’d better make sure to teach right. Paul explained to Titus in verse 9, “**He [the pastor] must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others**

by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.” Notice that Paul calls the message of the Bible **“trustworthy.”** It is not the word of some opinion poll or scientists or doctors who only “practice” medicine. Two-hundred years ago, doctors would cut people who were sick to get drain out the “bad blood.” We now know that does not help them recover. Medicine, science, changes as we learn more. The Bible, God’s Word, has not changed because it is trustworthy. Everything it says is true and no part of it, even historical things, has ever been proven wrong. The Bible is the foundation for our view of life here on earth and life after death in heaven. It is sad that so many in our society think of the Bible as just some sort of ancient philosophy or legend. The Lord wants his people to know the truth of the Bible so that they might be saved. And if someone is not teaching God’s Word correctly, the pastor needs to recognize that and warn his people. False teaching never strengthens faith.

Our sinful nature rebels against anyone who tells us what to do. We all have an ego and we instinctively want things our way. When a pastor points out that people are sinners who need a Savior, they can rebel against him just like people rejected Jesus. When I tell people that God, who granted them all their blessings, has something to say about how they spend their money and that he expects that we honor him with a generous offering that reflects our faith, some people don’t like to hear that. When I gently tell someone that I am concerned about the things they are doing and the direction they’re going in life and that they haven’t been to worship in a long time, I often get attacked, just like Jesus. People have barked at me, “Who are you to tell me what to do? That’s not the way I see it and I’m not going to change.” It breaks my heart when people get so stubborn in the face of God’s Word. They are only hurting themselves. The devil, of course, also does all he can to mess with the ministry. If you don’t like something about our church, the devil wants you to get hyper-critical and then, since I’m up front, to criticize and condemn me. I also confess that the devil sometimes tempts me to complain about you at times as well. We are all sinners. I hope you’ve noticed that I face the altar with you when we confess our sins. We are all sinners who are tempted and sin, but rejoice in Jesus as our Savior.

It is no small thing to speak in the name of the Triune, to stand before a group of fellow sinners and announce a message from the high and holy king. Hearing that your sins are forgiven is the only message that can save you. It gives and strengthens faith. You do not hear that message when you turn on the news or some other show. You do not hear that message by taking a walk and listening to nature or studying the stars. And yet, it is the most important message we could ever hear. Just think of it! God loves the unlovable sinner that you are. Jesus had nothing to gain by coming to be your Savior but he did it anyway. He spent his entire life resisting temptation and then gives you credit for his perfect life. He suffered unspeakable pain and anguish as he endured the reality of hell as he hung on the cross and paid for your sins so that you don’t have to. Your sins are forgiven. Jesus did it all for you. He broke the chains of death when he rose on Easter morning so you could know that there is physical life after death for you who are connected to him. You do not need to go through life worried that you aren’t good enough or “hoping” that God will let you

into heaven. You can smile and rejoice because you have already been saved. No amount of money and no amount of work can earn you what Jesus gives to you for free. There is a better life waiting for you in heaven. Don’t get discouraged, don’t despair, don’t doubt. Celebrate the salvation that is revealed to us in the Bible.

There’s a part of me that would like to make a rule that every member needs to go through a detailed Bible history class as well as a doctrinal class, like the Catechism on steroids. I want all of you to grow in grace and knowledge of your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I want you to see how God dealt with his people through centuries and millennia and what we can learn for our own lives. There is so much good stuff in the Bible that I want you to know about. But I also realize that making a law is not going to help. Only the Holy Spirit working in your hearts can lead you to want to spend more time with God’s Word.

If the Lord wanted to, he could rip the roof off of this church and shout, “I love you. I forgive you.” That might seem a little scary, though, don’t you think? And so, in his infinite wisdom and love, the Lord sends ministers to bless his people. As a fellow sinner, I can relate to you. I understand what it’s like to be frustrated with yourself as you stumble into the same sin again. I understand what it’s like to be frustrated with others and have to get alone with them. I understand what it’s like to worry and hurt. I understand what it’s like to contemplate my own mortality. I also find joy in knowing that after this body dies and decays and turns to dust, it will be revived and restored and in heaven forever. As I look back over my life, I thank God for the faithful ministers who have been such a blessing to me throughout my life. I thank God for the humble privilege of being the pastor here and sharing God’s Word with you. I thank God for your love, prayers and support. I thank God that through the ministry, we are all blessed and saved eternally. Amen.