

A CALL FOR PASTORAL TRAINING IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

Key Passage

2 Timothy 2:2 ESV – and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.

Observations

2 Timothy 2:2 is one of the clearest, most succinct passages in the Bible on the process God uses to pass down Gospel ministry to leaders in the church (i.e. training pastors). Therefore, along with other key passages informing it (i.e. 1 Tim 3:1-7; Tit 1:7-9; etc.), we extrapolate several key principles for training pastors in the church (see below).

In the context, Paul is facing the imminency of the end of his life and ministry. Timothy is facing the threat of false teachers in the church. With this heightened sense of urgency, Paul calls to Timothy faithfully carry out his Gospel ministry and to equip others to do the same.

The primary action Paul calls Timothy to carry out is to “entrust.” The verb, “to entrust,” comes from the aorist middle imperative, παρατίθημι, which means to lay something before someone in a way that you are entrusting them to guard it and use it appropriately (i.e. like a deposit or investment in a financial sense; see 1 Tim 6:20 and 2 Tim 1:14).

What are “the things,” πάντα, to be entrusted to the people in view? Paul says the entrusted things are “what you have heard from me...” In the context, it is clear that Paul is referring to the Gospel (2 Tim 1:8, 10, 13). Timothy was to “guard the good deposit entrusted” (1:14) to him in his ministry by keeping the gospel pure with “sound words” as he taught it to others. Likewise, in 2 Tim 2:2, Timothy is to entrust the Gospel and its purity to others.

This entrusting process was not to be given to just anyone. Paul specifically mentions “faithful men,” πιστοῖς ἀνθρώποις, as the recipients. The emphasis on their faithfulness refers to the character of the men who will be faithful in carrying out Gospel ministry to others. These “faithful men” were to show the kind of character that had been transformed by the power of the Gospel and therefore would not be hypocritical, teaching one thing and showing the opposite of their teaching by poor conduct (i.e. Titus 2:8). Godly character in pastoral leadership is paramount (1 Tim 3:1-7; 5:22; Tit 1:6-9).

Finally, Paul places an emphasis on the recipients of pastoral training being “able to teach others also.” This statement has two implications. The first is that Gospel ministry must be carried out by those who have received the proper gifting by the Holy Spirit as Timothy had (1:6). Second, their ability to teach others implies that these men must have an adequate knowledge of the Gospel in order for them carry out their teaching ministry.

Principles for Pastoral Training

1. Pastoral training through this Gospel entrusting process is essential for the churches health and

survival. The Gospel is what God uses to save sinners and strengthen the church (Rom 1:11-17; Col 1:28). But, the Gospel is always under threat of being either abandoned or distorted. Therefore, the local church must be committed to equipping its members in the Gospel. But, along with this, the local church must prioritize training men who will be the next generation of corporate equippers, committed to spreading and protecting the Gospel in its purest form. This is essential because the Gospel alone has the power to save and sanctify.

2. The content of pastoral training must never be human wisdom, worldly principles on leadership, or even an excellent moral lifestyle to be emulated. Even the emphasis of understanding Biblical truth, isolated from the Gospel, is insufficient. The content of pastoral training must be the Gospel.¹ Pastoral training must teach recipients the truth of the Gospel in its depths. Biblical truths (i.e. Biblical and Systematic Theology) must be taught in a way that they are tethered to the Gospel. Leadership principles must relate to the Gospel. A wrong emphasis in the content of pastoral training could lead to a polluted or false Gospel in the church.

3. Candidates for pastoral training must be “faithful,” meaning they must be growing in godly character that evidences the Gospel in their lives. They must be seen as progressing in the character qualifications in 1 Tim 3:1-7 and Tit 1:6-9. Men who show themselves to be qualified will be faithful to the Gospel ministry to which God is calling them.

4. Candidates for pastoral training must show that they have the proper gifting and commitment to that gifting. The Holy Spirit distributes the gifts in the church for His sovereign and good purposes (1 Cor 12). So it is important that those called to pastoral ministry exhibit the gifts that the Holy Spirit gives for their calling. Explicitly, Paul mentions the gift of teaching (1 Tim 3:2; 2 Tim 2:2; Tit 1:9). Therefore, pastoral training recipients must be affirmed in this gifting.

5. Candidates for pastoral training, throughout the process, also must exhibit a growth in their knowledge of the Gospel and must show an adequate understanding of the Gospel as presented and explained in the Scriptures so that they might “rightly handling the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15) and “may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it” (Tit 1:9).

¹ By “Gospel,” I do not mean a truncated form of the Gospel, but the work of Christ for the salvation of man in all its facets and implications as revealed in the Scriptures.