



St. Timothy, Pastor and Confessor

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1 Timothy 6:11-16

MAKE THE GOOD CONFESSION



What do you like about your pastor? I realize that I'm holding a Divine Call right now to serve another congregation, but this question isn't just me fishing for a compliment. I mean it sincerely not just about me but about any pastor you've had in the past. What have you liked about your pastor?

I would imagine that you would each give a different answer. Perhaps some have liked a pastor's personality. Perhaps he's approachable, or you liked the way he talked. Maybe you liked a certain pastor's preaching style. Maybe you liked the hymns that he picked, or the way he ordered and presided over worship services. Maybe you've appreciated Bible classes, or a pastor's ability to teach. Maybe it's a pastor's relatability to the youth, or maybe to the elderly. There are lots of reasons to like a pastor.

Or maybe, as embarrassing as it is to bring it up, maybe there are things you *haven't* liked about a certain pastor. Maybe you didn't like the hymns he picked or his personality or his preaching style or his teaching or whatever the gifts may be. You're probably thinking a lot about these things these days given that I am deliberating two Calls, one to serve here at Grace in Prairie du Chien and one to serve at Trinity in Marshfield. And again, I don't bring it up to fish for a compliment. I also don't bring it up to bring on myself criticism of one kind or another. I bring it up because it is undeniable that we all have various connections for varying reasons, whether good or bad, with our pastors. And you're not the first Christians to think about these things.

Christians in Bible times also had a connection to their pastors. The apostle Paul is now famous and respected by all Christians, but it was not necessarily always the case. He often had to defend his ministry against opponents who disregarded his teaching and his ministry. And, Paul knew that this would be the case for pastors who would pick up the reins from where he left off. And it's why Paul encourages Timothy, the young pastor to whom he was writing in our text for today, the way that he does. Notice what is most important to Paul about being a pastor. Personality does not come up. Preaching style, teaching ability, relatability, confidence in worship, hymn selection—none of these things are brought up by Paul. What was most important to Paul that Timothy, and other pastors who would follow, had? *"Fight the good fight of faith. Take hold of eternal life, to which you were called and about which you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses"* (12). That's what was most important to the apostle Paul when it came to being a good pastor. **Make the Good Confession.** That is his encouragement to us as well.

Timothy was a young pastor we know a bit about. Our first lesson for today introduced him to Paul when Paul was on a missionary journey. Timothy was spoken well of, had a good head on his shoulders, and was recommended to go along with Paul. And that's what Paul wanted as well. He even showed that he was willing sacrifice some comforts in order to minister to the Jews to whom Paul was sent. That's why Timothy was circumcised, so that the Jews wouldn't become upset or dismiss Paul and his companions without even a hearing. And, their relationship grew, to the point that Timothy became the person who seems to have picked up the reins of

preaching, teaching, and leading many churches after Paul's death. 2 Timothy was perhaps Paul's last letter, at least of the letters that we know about. He knew he was at the end of his life. Church tradition tells us that Timothy was probably there when Paul was finally martyred for his good confession of faith. He was beheaded by the Roman Emperor for being a Christian. And Paul wrote that second letter to Timothy to encourage him to continue to confess his faith, a faith which was nourished and nurtured from early on by his mother and grandmother, Eunice and Lois. Later in 2 Timothy, Paul was encourage Timothy to remain in the Holy Scriptures, in God's Word, because from infancy Timothy knew them and was made wise by them as he learned of Christ Jesus his Savior (2 Timothy 3:15-16).

You see, that was the most important part about Timothy as far as Paul was concerned. It was his confession of faith given to him by God through the Scriptures. It was that he remain faithful in that good confession of the true faith, even if he was opposed by others just like Paul was and just like Paul knew that Timothy would be as well. Paul encouraged Timothy to **Make the Good Confession**.

That was the same encouragement we hear Paul give to Timothy in his first letter to him as well. *"But you, O man of God, flee from these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance, and gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith. Take hold of eternal life"* (11-12). You see, Paul wanted above all else for Timothy to remain faithful to God's Word. That was the fight that Paul entrusted to Timothy. And then Paul references an oath of sorts that Timothy took. In my mind I almost wonder if it wasn't altogether different from our own pastors today taking an oath at their ordination and installation. Our pastors promise to teach in accordance with God's Word and their true exposition as we make clear in the Lutheran Confessions. We promise to remain faithful in these things. And that promise really is a public confession of what we believe and of what we will teach in our congregations. Now, Timothy made that confession long before the Lutheran Confessions were written, but nevertheless he made a promise to remain faithful as he confessed what he believed about God, about Jesus Christ, about sin and forgiveness, about all the things God had given

to the apostles to preach and teach. Timothy carried that on, and Paul charged him with remaining faithful to it. That was the most important quality of being a pastor as far as Paul was concerned.

That's what Paul went on to say, *"I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who made a good confession as a witness before Pontius Pilate, that you keep this command without spot and without fault, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which he will make known at the proper time"* (13-15). Paul charged Timothy with **Making the Good Confession** of his faith, the faith God had given him.

That's a tall order! And it's not one that only Timothy had to be faithful to! Paul would give us the same charge. He wouldn't expect only our pastors to make a good confession but the rest to just slide by without much thought in their faith-life. Paul would charge any one of us to **Make the Good Confession** before others. He charges us with remaining spotless and faultless. Now, in general, of course that can be taken as holding to any of God's commands in Scripture. Yes, Paul has in mind that we keep the Ten Commandments. That's part of making the good confession, and sadly that alone is enough to disqualify any one of us not just from public ministry as pastors but even from being believers. Who of us can say, *"Yep, I've made the good confession in keeping the Ten Commandments; my life is perfectly in line with my faith"*? None of us is perfect to that degree. And Paul is talking about something more than just our way of life. Paul is demanding that we be faithful to all of Scripture, that we be faithful in confessing our faith that ought to be perfectly in line with everything Jesus himself has taught and upheld through the prophets and apostles who recorded his Holy Word for us. And who of us has done that? Who of us *could* do that? Many times we falter and fall flat on our faces when it comes to confessing our faith before others. We go back on the good confession that we once made. What damage to the gospel is done when we become faithless, and that much more so for pastors! That's what Paul is talking about here.

But you notice when it comes to making a good confession whom Paul brings up? He doesn't just charge Timothy as though it all depended on him. If it did, the church would have fallen apart long

before Timothy ever stepped into a proverbial pulpit. Even if it were left up to Paul, the great apostle and missionary, to keep the Church together, then it would have all fallen apart. But it didn't depend on those things or those people. It depends on Christ and on Christ alone. *"I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who made a good confession as a witness before Pontius Pilate"* (13). You see, Paul brings Jesus into this conversation precisely because he knows that at times Timothy would fail. Before God, in all his holiness and splendor, Timothy could not on his own remain perfectly faithful in carrying out his good confession of faith. There would be times that he had fallen prey to Satan's temptations to give up on his faith or to falter and waver when he confessed to others. Yet there was one also in God the Father's presence who did not falter or waver in his good confession. That one was Jesus Christ. He made a good confession before the world when he was on trial not for his sin but for the world's sin. And on trial before Pontius Pilate, what did Jesus confess? He confessed his holiness given for the world's sin. He confessed forgiveness given to those who do not deserve it. He confessed his power from the Father given to redeem the whole world from their bad confessions and made knew, blameless, faultless, spotless, cleansed, perfect, and holy in God's sight. You see, we were made that way by Jesus who confessed perfectly and completely in our place. We were made that way by Jesus who gave his life for ours on the cross, and who raised his life from the dead in order that we too would rise to live forever in heaven when Jesus returns. **That was Jesus' Good Confession, and it is our Good Confession too.**

That was also Timothy's good confession. He went on to faithfully proclaim God's Word as a pastor and bishop in the early church. He even, according to tradition, went on to have another opportunity to give a lasting confession of his faith and what he believed when he was put to death just for confessing the truth of God's Word. And he was found faithful. He was found **to Have Made the Good Confession** by God's grace alone in Jesus Christ. Early church tradition says that Timothy was in Rome with Paul when Paul was granted a martyr's death, and then went to Ephesus in Asia

Minor where he stayed as bishop over several churches until he was also granted a martyr's death at the end of the first century A.D. **God Made a Good Confession** through his faithful pastor and servant, St. Timothy.

And God continues to **Make Good Confessions** through us as well. What is it that makes a good pastor? It isn't personality or abilities or preaching styles or teaching gifts or numbers or results. None of that plays a role in how faithful a pastor is. What makes a good pastor is his faithfulness to the good confession that God has given us to confess in the Word. And by God's grace we have made that good confession. Yes, I mean *we*, not just *me*. You have also made that good confession. Have you ever noticed that when a member stands up before our congregation to join our church or to confirm their faith through confirmation, that their vows and promises are very similar to the vows and promises made by a pastor at his installation? That's because we all believe the same thing. We all confess the same faith in the same Jesus Christ, who saved us all from our sins. God has brought from our lips and from our hearts a good confession that we take God at his Word when he tells us that Jesus has given his life for our lives and forgiven our sins. That's the good confession, and it's the confession God makes through us.

God grant that this be our confession all throughout this life and into the life to come, that eternal life that we too have obtained, not by our own merits but by Christ's, just as Paul encouraged Timothy as well. *"I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who made a good confession as a witness before Pontius Pilate, that you keep this command without spot and without fault, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which he will make known at the proper time—the blessed and only ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or is able to see. To him be honor and power forever! Amen"* (13-16). Let this be our good confession, Lord Jesus. Amen.