

Ministry Despite the Critics

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Well, the message this morning is titled, "Ministry Despite the Critics," and there is a certain measure of ministry focus and emphasis and purpose in what I have to say today, but at the same time, there is a much broader application to it for all of us in that the things that sustain us in ministry are the very same things that would sustain you in living the Christian life. As affliction and opposition and difficulty comes to you, it's so very critical to understand and to grasp and to meditate upon the motives for which we live the Christian life, and understand, beloved, that one of the wonderful, wonderful things about biblical salvation and biblical living and biblical teaching is that we're not dealing with things that are just a matter of mechanical, external ritual, as though that were something that would please God and would satisfy him, Scripture is filled with abundant evidence of that. In the first chapter of Isaiah, God tells people to put away their blood sacrifices and come and reason with him, to come with their hearts. David in Psalm 51 speaks how God is not pleased with abundant sacrifices but the sacrifice of God is a broken and a contrite spirit, that is what God will not despise. Everything about Scripture is designed to address our hearts. Scripture says that the Lord does not look on outward appearance as a man looks, but he looks upon the heart, and as we contemplate that, you know, these matters of the heart are matters of affection, matters of priority, matters of desire and aspiration. It's all designed to address the reasons for which we live and those reasons for which we live have a transcendent and transcending application to everything that we do and everything that we draw upon to persevere in times of criticism, opposition, and affliction.

And so the things that we're talking about here today are of great surpassing significance, and here's the thing, I was reading just this morning in the preface of Martyn Lloyd-Jones' third volume on his series on Romans, and he talked about the importance of repetition and the fact that so many, as the Athenians in Acts 17:21, only wanted to hear something new all the time; everything needed to be something new to keep them engaged and interested and that's not the way that we teach, it's not the way that we think, it's not the way that you should live your Christian life. Some of these things we have to come back to again and again and again. You can't hear these half dozen things that I'm going to say, these half dozen points for this morning, and think, "Okay, I've mastered that, now what else is new? What else can we come to?" No, these are the things that you come back to again and again and again in different times of blessing, different times of affliction, times of clarity, times of uncertainty, you come back as a Christian to these principles, to these motives again and again and again over the course of an entire

lifetime and it's what the Spirit of God uses you to guide you and to equip you and to make you into what he wants you to be, and so we're looking at transcendent matters today as we consider ministry despite the critics.

Now last Sunday, we introduced this topic, which I first preached last month in a leadership class here at Truth Community Church, and last time we looked at the reality of criticism. It's a matter of being in leadership, it's a matter of being in Christian living, that we will face criticism. We will face unfair and unjust accusations. We will face people who oppose us and seek to discourage us and to turn us away and to tear us down. That's just the reality of being a Christian. We have to realize that. 2 Timothy 3:12 we said last time, "all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." I won't go into all of that, we talked about it last time, but there's an inevitable conflict that a godly man, a godly woman, a godly boy, a godly girl is going to face pursuing godliness in the midst of a world that is dominated by the devil and his underlings. In a world that does not love Christ, it is obvious that there will be opposition to those who do love him. It comes with the territory. We cannot be discouraged by that or surprised when it comes. We strengthen our hearts in the fact that Christ prepared us in advance by saying, "If they hated me, they'll hate you also." And so when it comes, we take it as though it was the force of wind under the wings of a plane that lift us up higher and higher to greater commitment, greater resolution of heart to be faithful to Christ and continue in the path that he's led us into. Criticism is going to come. Someone who refuses that, cannot walk on the path of Christ because it's a narrow path that comes with affliction.

Now, last time also we considered briefly, you know, if we're going to persevere in Christian living, in Christian ministry, in Christian leadership, we have to examine and separate out false motives from our heart and realize that there are things that we have to reject, things that we have to sacrifice in order to have a pure heart that is able to follow after Christ and we just looked at a couple of false motives in ministry. We said that when it comes to a church, a church cannot have as its defining goal trying simply to maximize attendance. That's a false goal in ministry. The first goal, the primary goal, is to be faithful, to be biblical. How people respond to that is in the Lord's hands, and we don't try to manipulate people to stay if they're not interested in biblical ministry. We looked at John 6:53 to 66 where we saw that thousands if not tens of thousands of people walked away from Jesus Christ himself when he confronted them about the reality of what it meant to be a disciple of his. He went from a crowd of 20,000 to a crowd of about 12,000 in no time flat. So obviously, as shown by the example of Christ himself, it can't simply be about keeping everybody around no matter their commitment, no matter whether they're born again or not. That can't be a motive, a primary motive in ministry.

I often think about this. I do. I often think about what the Apostle Paul said in his last letter in 2 Timothy, his last letter chronologically. He said, "Only Luke is with me." Here's this great apostle stopped on the road to Damascus by the Lord Jesus Christ, whose letters we still read today 2,000 years later, uniquely chosen as the apostle to the Gentiles by Jesus Christ, and he comes to the end of his life facing death and who's around him? He says, "Luke's here. Bring the books, bring the parchment, leave the cloak

behind. It gets cold here." Jesus Christ himself said, "The Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." He hung alone after his disciples had fled from him when he was arrested. He hung alone on the cross for our sake. Is it really too much, beloved, for us to endure a little bit of passing criticism and opposition in our lives and our ministry? To have people turn away? If the crowds left Jesus, would we be despairing because some people turn against us privately, publicly, whatever? What's that? What kind of disciple of Christ responds to that preeminently?

It's not about maximizing attendance. In like manner, in a parallel way, it's not about seeking popularity. The prophets were rejected. You read Jeremiah and it's just, you read the book of Jeremiah and you get down to the final chapters after the city has been sacked and there's just a few remnants left. Nobody listened to his ministry. Nobody responded to him. He was tossed into a muddy cistern for a while because they were trying to silence him. And even after all of that, all of his prophecies came true and people were seeing it lived out as people were carried into exile, even the tiny, tiny remnant rejected Jeremiah, went down to Egypt despite his warnings that they should not do so, all kinds of other manner of rejection of his ministry. Jeremiah must have been the most unpopular man among the people of the outward people of God at that time. He wasn't popular. He had no fruit to his ministry, visible fruit at the time, and yet here we pick up our Bible, I happen to have my Bible open to Jeremiah providentially, I didn't plan it that way, here we have 52 chapters of his ministry recorded for us 2,500 years after the fact, it's not about popularity in the moment. You can't measure a life of ministry, a church by the way that it's responded to in the moment. God is working out a purpose that he established before the beginning of time that is working out over the course of millennia of the history of man, which will echo in its reverberations and implications throughout all of eternity. We can't measure life by, we can't measure anything by what's happening in the moment. If you applied that as the measure by which a man's godliness or ministry or a life of faithfulness was being measured, you'd reject Jeremiah, you'd reject Jesus, you would reject Paul. Now we just have to get beyond our ungodly, worldly way of viewing things and start to think biblically if we're going to be faithful Christians. When they came to Paul when he was imprisoned in Acts 28 and he was waiting for trial before Caesar as he was a prisoner in Rome, they came to Paul with this message in Acts 28:22, they were asking him about his teaching and they said, "with regard to this sect we know that everywhere it is spoken against."

And so the simple point that I'm making, made last week, is that our goal can't be popularity. Popularity comes, popularity goes. I've seen it over the years, over the decades with the ministry of John MacArthur. At times, highly esteemed. Now, at the later years of his ministry and on the verge of his birthday tomorrow, so much resistance and opposition. That stuff comes and goes. We cannot tie our ministry and our confidence and all those things in the fleeting, fickle opinions of men. They acclaimed Christ at his triumphal entry in Jerusalem and one week later they were saying, "Crucify him! Crucify him! Crucify him!" And nothing about the nature of man has changed in the intervening 2,000 years. And so all I'm saying, beloved, I'm saying this for the building up and encouragement of people that I believe are marked in this room by a desire to walk with Christ and to honor him. I know that that's true of so many of you and I say

this to build you up and to strengthen you and to defend you against discouragement. We're not always going to be popular. Sometimes maybe, but that's not what we live for. We're not after the applause of man. We're after the approval of God. And those are two very different things, and the approval of God is not mediated through the opinions of carnal and unsaved men. That should be obvious to us if we just step back and think about it.

So my question in light of those things is how then do we strengthen our hearts to persevere with joy despite the critics? Personally? Corporately? How do we strengthen our hearts? What are the affections that keep us moving forward? What are the priorities that guide our thinking, even if friends and family turn against us? Well, today we're just going to refresh our hearts in the basic reasons that we all live as Christians, and when it comes to ministry, these transcendent things are simply an application in ministry of the things that each one of us need to know that we would glorify God and aim our hearts in the right direction. So we have the positive task today, the refreshing task today of reinforcing and redirecting our motives in a true and right direction because, beloved, if you and I are conscious and embrace the enduring reasons that we live as Christians and that we minister as a church, it will be far easier for us to endure passing criticism, opposition, and rejection as we do. And I'm just going to give you six motives for ministry, six motives for living in what we're about to see.

We'll go through these far too quickly but the first one that I want to bring before you is this, it is the ultimate and supreme. We start at the pinnacle today and the supreme reason, the supreme motive for which we live is number 1, the glory of God. The glory of God. If you are taking notes and I encourage you to do so, we consider and we live for the glory of God. Beloved, how could it be any other way? If you and I are genuinely blood-bought Christians, if you and I genuinely have been the objects of eternal love before the beginning of time, Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, Christ is keeping us by his Spirit, Christ will glorify us in the end and he's bestowed all of that grace upon us when we did not deserve it, when we were a rebel against his will and we're now in this position of blessing and grace. Beloved, I ask you, in light of Scripture, how could our motive for living be anything other than supremely aimed at the glory of God? We live, we lead, we minister to please God, not men, because God and God alone, Christ in his mercy, is the one who saved our souls. Your soul has no greater friend than the Lord Jesus Christ, and therefore you have no greater obligation of loyalty than to him. We sang it earlier, "Let goods and kindred go/ This mortal life also/ His kingdom is forever."

And so we live for the glory of God, and Scripture tells us this repeatedly. If you want to jot down a couple of Scripture references, 1 Corinthians 10:31, "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." Everything in life, everything in life as a young person, as a young Christian, as you aim out for your aspirations and plans for education and a career and family and a spouse, if God gives you that, everything is about the glory of God. It's not the job. It's not the spouse. It's not the marriage. It's certainly not the children, which I just like to say something provocative like that on Father's Day. You can't live for those earthbound horizontal things as the preeminent goal

of your life. The preeminent goal is the glory of God, of obedience to God, of faithfulness in developing a love and a devotion to him. That's what matters. That's why we live as Christians. And these other things are just avenues by which we do that. Eating, drinking, whatever you do, there is to be this overarching defining fundamental motive that what I live for today, what I choose to pursue in life, it's all for the glory of God. Does he withhold blessings that I want? Does he bring adversity rather than ease to me? "I accept that," you say to your heart. "Shall we accept good from God and not accept adversity," Job asked. Well see, beloved, that is springing from a heart that desires to glorify him. It's not about the outward circumstances. It's not about blessing. It's not about adversity. It's not about do I have what I want? Am I longing for something I don't have? Do I have something I don't want? Are people breaking my heart? Am I facing challenges that I just don't know what to do? All of this is brought under the surpassing motive to glorify God in it. In like manner in Colossians 3:17 we read, "whatever you do," do you see how comprehensive it is? Whatever you do. Whether you eat or drink, whatever you do. Again and again Scripture brings us back to this point that everything in life, "whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

And so we have as our aim the glory of God. We have as our aim that as we go through the circumstances that he has appointed for us and the relationships that he has given to us or withheld from us, we have our aim to ascribe glory to God, to give thanks to him in all things, as is keeping with his great inherent worth and the fact that we are blood-bought servants of his. We aim for the glory of God and if we live out the glory of God in the midst of some rejection, in the midst of some opposition, in the midst of some criticism, that's incidental to the greater purpose.

I named a rule to kind of help my mind work through these things and the longer you go in life, the more you see these things; on the front end, you don't see it nearly as clearly. My rule was the Irv Jezik rule. I doubt if Irv Jezik is still living and I wouldn't expect any of you to know his name; that makes it easy to say this. But back in the days of my former career, I had a client named Irv Jezik and he, in my young days, it just seemed to me like he was impossible to please. And you'd call him up on the phone and he'd answer in this very gruff voice, "Jezik." You know, and you're just intimidated away from even wanting to say anything to him. "I think I got the wrong number here." Let me call him back. He was one of my clients and I had a lot of cases with him and it seemed in my heart at the time I could never make him happy with anything that I did and I lost so much sleep worrying about what Irv Jezik thought, what Irv Jezik was going to say. And then he moved on, I moved on, he was out of my life and now what Irv Jezik thinks means absolutely nothing to me. What a waste of my time that in those days I was so consumed with what a client thought about me and let that cloud my vision of the purpose of serving the glory of God and to the glory of God. Irv Jezik, he seemed so big, so important at the time in my life, and yet now he's less than a wisp of smoke in the things that concern me. It was all so passing and yet I ascribe to him an importance that he did not deserve, and I'm sure he didn't even want. You know, the whole problem was within me. But when you are captivated by the glory of God, when you realize that the glory of God is the purpose of living, when God is big, then men become small and that

enables you to walk with courage going through trials and difficulties and resistance because you're confident in God and he is the object of your affections and he is the one that you hope to please.

We have to work these things out. You don't hear something like this in five or ten minutes of preaching and then say, "Okay, I got it." No, you have to work it out in everything that you have a misplaced affection, a misplaced priority, a disappointed relationship. "Yes, this sorrows me. Yes, this is difficult. Yes, this is unfair. But you know what? I'm living for a principle that transcends all of that, it's the glory of God." And day by day, week by week, year by year, we have different occasions to implement that in our affections and have our hearts refined and focused on the glory of Christ in what we do.

The glory of God helps us to minister and to live despite the critics. Second point, and for this I invite you to turn to 1 Corinthians 4. As you're turning there, I'll give you the second point. 1 Corinthians 4. We need to consider the stewardship of God. The stewardship of God, by which I mean the stewardship that God has given to us in our respective areas of life, the stewardship of God that we must fulfill and give a good account of. Scripture, let me remind you, Jesus said that, "He who is faithful in a little will also be faithful in much." This is a principle that applies regardless of the matters of which we speak. God gives us opportunities, God gives leadership to men, God gives children to mothers as a stewardship that is to be cultivated and developed to his glory and for his purposes, not that they would become an end in and of themselves. Family is never meant to be an end in and of itself. God gives you children that you would raise them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord that to the extent that it's within your power they would live to the glory of God, not simply that the children would be the highest objects of your affection or the most important thing in your life. Children are not the most important thing in your life, Christ is. Children did not die for your souls, Christ did. Children are not the ones to whom you're going to give an account, Christ is. And the more and the sooner that we get that developed in our minds, only then can we begin to handle the stewardship that God gives us in a right and proper way.

Within the church, God gives leadership to men in order to serve and protect the truth. The church is the pillar and fortress of the truth, it says in 1 Timothy 3:15. Here in 1 Corinthians 4, let me read the first two verses as you see Paul's perspective on his own ministry and how he wanted people to consider him in ministry. He says in 1 Corinthians 4:1 and 2, "This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy." The goal of stewardship is that we would realize that what we have, whatever we have, is something that God has given to us to develop, to protect, to serve his interests with rather than our own. That's why ministry could never be about becoming personally popular, legitimate ministry, biblical ministry. It could never be about becoming personally popular, because that's not the goal of the stewardship. It could never be about maximizing attendance, that's not the goal of stewardship. The goal is to be trustworthy. The goal is to be faithful, to take what God has given us, and as we'll see later in the

message, to reproduce it, to replicate it to the next generation, chronologically the next generation of believers.

In Jude, verse 3, the writer says, "Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints." The faith here being not the subjective exercise of faith by an individual, but the faith as the content of revealed truth that God has given to the church to defend and to uphold. Jude says, "This faith has been delivered to the saints." Now follow me here, beloved. This is really important in the context of ministry and why we do what we do. This faith is delivered to the saints and it is something for which we are to contend. We are to defend it against attack, defend it against those who would undermine it, defend it against those who would contradict it, go after those who would stray from it, having once professed it, and not simply wave as they walk away from saving truth. No, you don't do that. You have a stewardship that you are to contend for, Jude says to us and so he appeals and he says, "Realize what's been delivered to you and contend for it." The very verb "contend" suggests that there will be resistance and conflict in the process at times and that's our stewardship, that's what we protect, that's what we've been entrusted with, that's the mina that's been given to us, in the language of one of the parables of Christ.

We lay ourselves on the line for that and don't let people or error just run across it. No, we have a stewardship. We have an accounting to give to God that will, in principle, be something like us appearing before him one by one, him saying something like, "I gave you this, what did you do with it?" "Well, Lord, you know, I wanted to be popular. People started to resist, and so I watered it down to keep them in the..." No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. No. That's not the account that we want to give and this idea of stewardship involves far more than the time that I can give to it this morning but let me quote the good doctor again, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, and listen as he speaks. "I am a very poor minister if I do not realize that one of my first calls is to be a steward of this mystery, a guardian of this deposit, one to whom God has entrusted his own word." He goes on to say, "But the Scriptures have been entrusted not only to ministers but to all. You as Christian people, as members of the Christian church, are to defend this truth as the word of God and to contend for it. We must busy ourselves with these things because it is the word of God that God has entrusted to us. Obviously, it has been entrusted to us not simply that we should keep it and guard it, but that we should teach others." You see, beloved, to be a Christian, to have truth entrusted to you is to have been given, you've been given a stewardship, whether you realized it before now or not, and that you have a responsibility to stand for, to stand with, to defend, to contend for, to learn, to teach this truth which God used to save your soul and deliver you from eternal damnation for the righteous judgment that your sins deserved. We're under obligation. We have a responsibility.

From time to time, I remember reading stories like this as a kid, not so much anymore, but there was a sense where if someone had saved your life, the attitude and response used to be, "You know, I've got to serve that person who served me and, you know, I'll spend my life repaying you for what you did to save me from physical death. You know,

you raised me up when I was drowning." The doctor that delivered you from sickness. The police officer who intervened. Whatever the case may be. There was a time where people realized that there was an obligation, a debt that went with that act of sacrifice, that act of intervention that meant that there was a response of loyalty that was given, a response of service that was given. Well, whatever people think about those things today in our selfish culture, we as Christians realize, we understand Christ has intervened, Christ has saved us, Christ has loved us, Christ has been kind to us. What else can I do except to give my life to the defense of the Scriptures that teach me about that? How could I stand idly by and let that which was the means of the deliverance of my own soul, how could I ever stand by and let that be mocked, contradicted, diluted, and me stand by silently while it happens? What kind of loyalty is that to such a gracious Master as him? We have a stewardship for which we will give an account to God.

Now, thirdly, another motive in addition to the glory of God, in addition to the stewardship of God, we need to think about, and I've already alluded to it today in the flowing of the way my mind works when I'm in a pulpit, thirdly, the judgment of God. The judgment of God. People, men in church leadership serve as those who will give a strict account. I'll focus on them, although the principle goes more broadly to our elders, to our deacons, to those that aspire after an office of church leadership. Let me remind you of what Scripture says in James 3:1, "Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness." We who teach will be judged with greater strictness. There will be an accounting for all of us. There will be a bar set. I don't know exactly how God works this out, I'm just speaking in broad general principles here. There's a bar set judged according to the account of the word of God, and then those who have taught, those who have had spiritual leadership in the church, the bar is going to be raised higher. There's a higher standard for you to meet. There's a higher bar that you have to jump over. Greater strictness. And Scripture tells us these things speaking not simply to – oh beloved, obviously, obviously speaking not simply to individual teachers and pastors and elders with this principle, but speaking to churches that teach the word of God and thereby giving responsibility and overflow shadow responsibility to all of us that would identify with a Bible teaching church that is serious about proclaiming the word of God; we will all give a greater account for what we have done in response to these things.

Now look, I know that nothing in culture cultivates in you a serious sober mind about anything. I know and realize that you can dial through Instagram and Tik Tok and YouTube videos and just flash things through your mind and never take anything seriously and never come to grips with anything of any consequence. I realize that. I realize that it's a challenge to take these things and to take them deeply to heart but that doesn't change the fact that we are going to be judged by God and give an account to him of what we've done with his truth and may the Spirit of God somehow in some of you, many of you, instill in you a sober, serious mind that says, "I need to take this seriously." And especially for young people, teenagers, pre-teens, just coming out of college, that are setting the course and the pattern and the habits that will determine the future of their lives, this becomes a defining central principle by which everything else is determined and judged. "I'm going to give an account to God in judgment. I better get serious about

life, about his word, about obedience, about repentance, because while the world may laugh along with me all the way to my deathbed, God isn't laughing." There's a time appointed and listen, beloved, listen as we turn to Scripture and the sobriety that Scripture imposes upon us. You know, these things really do all fit together. You preach these things and uphold these things, superficial people are not going to be interested in staying around. This is not what they want to hear. People who just want to laugh and joke and fornicate and drink their way through lives aren't interested in this. It doesn't change what God requires.

2 Timothy 4, we read in verse 1, Paul speaking to Timothy says, "I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom." "Oh, Timothy, there is a judgment coming, a judgment on the living and the dead. He's going to appear, his kingdom, in the presence of Holy Almighty God, in the presence of Shekinah glory, in the presence of Christ Jesus our Lord, crucified and risen from the dead. I have something to say to you. I have a responsibility to lay upon you." You can almost picture Timothy getting it in a letter form and his hands start to tremble reading this. The presence of God, the presence of Christ, judgment of the living and the dead. Yeah, yeah, you know, we serve in a fear of God. We serve in a fear of God and that's what Paul is reminding Timothy of.

So what is it that I'm to do? My heart has been conditioned toward compliance in light of the judgment of God. What does Paul say to the church? What does Christ say to the church through his chosen apostle? "Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming," we could say today, "and now is, when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths." Paul says, "Timothy, attendance may go down." Paul says, "Timothy, this isn't going to be popular but, Timothy, you do it anyway. You do it without regard to the horizontal response of men because you have a vertical responsibility that has come down from heaven and been laid upon your shoulders to preach the word in season and out of season. Reprove and rebuke whether they listen or not."

Verse 5, "As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come." The great Apostle Paul says, "Timothy, it's time for me to step off the stage. My exit has arrived. Now it's up to you. Do what I tell you in the presence of Christ Jesus, our Lord."

Drop down to verse 11 as Paul said this, I just want you to see. He says, "Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry." Here's Paul, he has one friend at his side and he's committing to Timothy the charge that upon which the next generation of the church depended. The judgment of God motivates us and purifies our motives, conditions our fear and love and obedience to him in a way that the reactions of men are very, very secondary.

Fourthly, what else do we remember as we go through life together, as we practice ministry together? Fourthly, we remember the battle with Satan. The battle with Satan. Scripture calls us by faith to see the unseen battle with the devil, that as we do these things, beloved, as church ministry takes place, as the word of God is preached from a platform in your personal evangelism, as you're sharing with your children, to understand, Scripture calls us to understand that there is a spiritual battle at work. Jesus said in the parable of the sower that some of the seed falls down and a bird comes and eats it, and he says it's like that. That's what Satan does, he comes and plucks the word out of the heart as soon as it's heard so that it doesn't take root, it doesn't bear fruit. We're in a battle with the devil. There are unseen spiritual forces far greater than our power that are seeking to hinder the work and hinder the advancement of it. You can't trifle with this. You can't laugh your way through a battle with a roaring lion who prowls about looking for someone to devour. This is serious. This is serious.

Paul says in Ephesians 6:10 to 13, speaking to the church broadly, not just an individual like he was speaking to Timothy. Here he's speaking to the church at Ephesus, probably in a circular letter that's designed for many churches to read. This is for all the people of God to hear, not just a pastor, not just an elder. This is for all of you who name the name of Christ, and is to define the way that you approach life and he says, "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." Beloved, that's the battle that we face, cosmic powers, present darkness, spiritual forces of evil and so he says in verse 13, "Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm."

What do those verbs mean, beloved? Take up the armor. Withstand in the evil day. Stand firm. What does it mean except that we are to expect resistance not simply of a humankind, but of a supernatural evil kind of resistance. That recognition causes us to recognize that we do not have any power to succeed on our own. It casts us on the strength of Christ, on the help of the Holy Spirit, and that purifies our motives saying, "I cannot be concerned with just how men respond to my life, to my ministry, how my children respond to biblical discipline and correction. I can't be motivated by the response horizontally. I can't. I can't. I can't."

There's something far too great at play here. There's a battle with Satan. There's coming judgment of God. There's an account for the stewardship, the glory of God. These things help us to view criticism in its right perspective as an incidental side matter to the case at hand. Now beloved, let me say it this way: the Christian life, ministry within the church, simply cannot be rightly lived with an eye on how men think and how men respond. We have to come to the word of God, let it shape our thinking and understanding, let it shape our motives and aspirations, and interpret the circumstances around us by what we see, and if there's resistance, well, of course there's resistance. If it's difficult, of course it's difficult. It could be no other way. Christ told us to expect that. Paul told us to expect that. The devil is real. We're going to have very difficult, severe circumstances. You

know, when those valiant men were defending freedom in World War II and they were storming the beaches of Normandy, they were being mowed down in defense of freedom. They had to press forward in the battle. It was their duty. They gave their lives for it. Well, in defense of eternal truth, for the sake, not of General Eisenhower, but for the sake of the Commander Jesus Christ, could we really refuse a battle, lay down our weapons, and let the forces of Hitler, the forces of Satan, roll over because we laid down our arms and said, "No, this is too hard. I don't like being criticized. I want to maximize my friends." A soldier's valor is not displayed in a victory parade. The valor of a soldier is tested and proven in battle, beloved, and we need to think that way about our Christian lives. May God help us be valiant soldiers for Christ, and those of you with military backgrounds, military experience, you of all people should resonate with that word picture that Scripture uses. We rise to the battle. We rise to the occasion. We fight against the foe. Our foe is an evil supernatural fallen angel who seeks to distract us through human means. Now, we see through the fog of battle and we realize this is life and death and this soldier, you say to yourself in the mirror, this soldier doesn't back down. This soldier mans the station. This soldier storms the beach. This soldier will raise the flag on the mountain of victory.

Well fifthly, a fifth thing that we need to consider is the future generation. The future generation. Beloved, in church, in life, as a parent, as a friend, you live life, you lead, you conduct yourself in a manner that is conscious of the fact that there will be others coming behind you who will follow in your steps, either for good or for evil, for strength or for weakness. Your life and example, your teaching can either strengthen the people to come to be better, more valiant soldiers for Christ than you were, or your backsliding, selfish, carnal way of living can encourage them to go even more deeply into sin than they otherwise would do. We can't avoid the implications of the life that we live. And you don't need to turn there because it's not an easy book to find in the Bible, but in the book of Joel, even, Joel opens his prophecy with these words. He says, "Hear this, you elders; give ear, all inhabitants of the land! Has such a thing happened in your days, or in the days of your fathers?" This is Joel 1:2 and 3, and as he's about to give his prophecy about the coming day of the Lord, he opens it by telling his readers this in chapter 1, verse 3. He says, "Tell your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children to another generation." Multiple generations. You, first generation, tell your children, generation number 2. They tell their children. Then those children tell another generation. Four generations. Joel says, "Take my words, hear them, and realize that this needs to echo through a generation yet to be born." Paul said similar things in 2 Timothy 2. 2 Timothy 2, when he said, "my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, 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." Psalm 18 says, "Tell it to a generation yet to be born," actually Psalm 22:31 is what I'm thinking of.

Beloved, living life, conducting ministry in a way that is only concerned selfishly with how it affects me and how I'm perceived and received and what I get out of it, is such an unthinkable betrayal of the responsibility that we have. We're not doing this just for ourselves. We realize that there are people coming after us that will need the truth delivered to them in as pure a condition as we can possibly do so and we're more

concerned with the needs of a future teachable generation than we are about a present circle of resistant people who do not want the truth. Paul and the apostles were taught by Christ to shake their coats, shake the dust off their feet if people rejected them, and to go and then to teach the Gentiles who would listen.

We uphold biblical principle to clear the path for future believers. Those of you with any biblical books in your library whatsoever should have a majority of your books that have been written by men that are dead, that have proven their faithfulness, the Puritans from the 16th and 17th century, men like Spurgeon, men like Martyn Lloyd-Jones, and as you benefit from their writings, and as I benefit from their writings, we realize that in part, God used their ministry for us. God used their ministry to help us and we have the benefit because they did not bow to pressure and the Puritans had pressure on them, so did Martyn Lloyd-Jones, so did Spurgeon, the point is they did not bow to the pressure and compromise the truth in order to get some temporary relief from their contemporaries. They stood like men. They held to the truth and now you and I have the benefit of their faithfulness, which you trace all the way back to the Lord Jesus Christ being faithful and going all the way to the cross.

Beloved, I can't speak for any of you, I can't decide this in the heart for any of you but I really want to leave something behind that after I'm gone, future believers, grandchildren, great grandchildren will benefit from. I care more about them than I do about present opposition. That's just the way it is. I want people in the present to believe. I want them to follow. I welcome support. I'm not courting opposition. But if it must be a choice between compromising to critics and leaving behind something that will benefit generations yet to be born, that's not a choice to me. That's already decided. And Scripture teaches us to think that way. They shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn that he has done it. We have to be motivated by more than what happens in our generation. We have to think ahead and give to those who come a benefit from our lives just as we benefit from those who served Christ and are now in glory. And if we do that, you know what we'll do in the process? Point number 6, we'll be faithful to the souls of men around us. These first five principles ultimately condition us to live, to teach, to minister in a way that is good for the souls of men. The souls of men. That's our sixth and final point here.

Beloved, in everything that I've said, give me a Christian, give me a Christian who lives to the glory of God, give me a Christian who's conscious of having a stewardship from God, give me a Christian who lives in fear of the judgment of God, give me a Christian who's serious about the battle with Satan, give me a Christian who is concerned to leave something spiritual for the future generation, and you know what I'll show you? If you give me those five principles, you know what I'll show you? I'll show you a Christian that's good for the souls of men now. You see, beloved, the title of this message is "Ministry Despite the Critics." We love men and women, not by pleasing them and doing what they want us to do, we love them by being faithful to God. We love them by a vertical fidelity, not by chasing after their fickle opinions because as we bring the word of God to people, that's what God will use to bless them, to keep them, and if we betray God for the sake of a momentary reconciliation or momentary affiliation, relationship with

someone, and silence the gospel, hide Christ just because they'll reject him and reject us if we hold him out, that's unthinkable and that's not loving. That's the thing that's so hard for people to understand in this generation. It's not even loving men to do that, to dilute and compromise the gospel, to contradict truth just so someone won't be mad with us or resist us or oppose us or leave us. That is so unloving and ungracious because we're teaching them that truth doesn't matter and that they can reject Christ and reject salvation by faith alone and it's not really that important. Just as long as you and I get along. That's unthinkable and it's not loving. Better to be faithful to God and have someone reject you than superficially preserve a relationship. to their detriment and to the violation of the glory of God, the judgment of God, the stewardship of God, the battle with Satan and future souls.

I ask you, beloved, especially those of you that are associated with our church, I ask you to think deeply about these things and meditate on them often in the days to come. This needs to sink in very deeply for the sake of the souls of men. In 1 Timothy 4:16, Paul says to Timothy, "Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers." John MacArthur says, "By careful attention to his own godly life and faithful preaching of the word, Timothy would continue to be the human instrument God used to bring the gospel and to save some who heard him. Though salvation is God's work, it is his pleasure to do it through human instruments."

There's much more that could be said that should be said, but our time is gone. These few six principles are only illustrating a bigger point, beloved. In your individual life and in church ministry, we look beyond contemporary opinions, we look beyond passing rejection and resistance, because, beloved, as Christians, we serve higher principles than that. We serve higher purposes than that. We serve eternal, not earthly priorities. We seek eternal approval from God, not earthly approval from men. We seek reward from God, not recognition from those around us. It's those higher motives, beloved, that enable you and I to live despite resistance, it's those higher motives that enable a church to minister and for men to lead despite the critics.

Let's pray together.

Our gracious Lord, you certainly knew the resistance of men in your earthly life. They hated you. They crucified you. And yet you never flinched. You set your face like flint toward Jerusalem. You went to the cross. You paid the price. Now you're glorified in heaven. Help us to follow in that worthy train that you have left behind. Thank you for the men who have preceded us in prior generations, from the earliest apologists in the second century, from the apostles through those early apologists, through the martyrs, through the Reformation, through faithful men in more recent centuries. O God, O God, if you do nothing else for each man, woman, and child in this room, let us walk in that path, let us follow in that wake that our lives might be given over as well, like theirs, to the glory of God and for gratitude to your great and holy name. For the sake of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

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