

The Devotion of Church Leaders

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In Acts 6:4, the Apostles verbalize what they must commit to in order to be faithful to the calling that they have received from the Lord. This verse is short in length, pregnant with meaning, and essential for leadership. This verse can function as a banner-verse for all servant-leaders who honor Christ and desire to proclaim Christ with their lives.

Acts 6:4 — ἡμεῖς δὲ τῇ προσευχῇ καὶ τῇ διακονίᾳ τοῦ λόγου προσκατερήσομεν. [*But as for us, we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word.*]

In looking at this verse, I wish to extract four points related to church leaders and what they must be devoted to.

1. It is a devotion for **LEADERS**.

An emphasis arises in the Greek as to who makes this assertion. The context refers to the twelve (6:2) who are the leaders who express their commitment to the Word in this verse. In other words, they declare that they themselves must devote themselves to the work of the Lord. None of the leaders are excluded. In fact, the heightened prominence and repetition of the personal pronoun shows that all the leaders — the Apostles, in this context — had this devotion to this service. None were excluded. This was not simply a statement spoken by one or two leaders. They believed that we ourselves — yes the responsibility falls upon us! — must devote ourselves to these two important ministries. So then, all leaders can learn from the example of the Apostles here. All leaders can (and should) say, as for us, we must devote ourselves to these same cardinal duties as well.

2. It is a devotion with **RESOLVE**.

The leaders made a determined, robust, clear, lucid resolution. Their resolution was to be faithful to the God-given charge that they had received. They cannot neglect God's call; they cannot misunderstand God's charge. They cannot falter on their responsibility of praying, studying, and teaching the Word of God. So they made a resolve. And when the Apostles said that they would devote themselves to these two duties, the Word Luke records in Acts 6:4 is a word that expresses a continual devotion to something (Acts 1:14). The early church constantly devoted themselves to prayer, the Apostles' teaching, the breaking of bread and to prayer (2:42). This word also speaks of those who resolved to meet together regularly in the Temple for worship (2:46). The Apostle Paul uses this word in showing the need for all believers to be devoted to — constant in, frequent in, faithful in — prayer (Rom 12:12). Those who have charge in civil authorities also devote themselves to this work (Rom 13:6). To be devoted in this way also can include a constant watchfulness with an alertness (Col 4:2). Thus, the leaders made it their ongoing, public, continuous, steadfast resolve to devote themselves to two fundamental, primary, foundational, essential tasks in their service to the Lord Jesus Christ. Anything less than this kind of resolve is neglect, disobedience, and sin.

3. It is a devotion to **PRAYER**.

The Apostles asserted that they would devote themselves to prayer. The Apostles put this first in their list of duties to the Lord's work. They must first pray. Prayer must undergird, give power to, and attend all of their

tasks as God's leaders. Sadly, however, many today relegate prayer to a lesser priority so that when everything is accomplished and performed, if there is time, a man may devote himself to prayer. But not the Apostles! They knew the importance of prayer. They knew how desperate they were to do God's Work, God's way with God's Word and so they had no other option but to devote themselves *first* to prayer. Prayer is the life of the preacher's ministry. Prayer is the blood that must circulate through the entire system of his ministry for there to be life and vigor. To neglect prayer is to be powerless. To neglect prayer is to be prideful. To neglect prayer is to perform ministry as practical atheists. The Apostles set the example, laid the standard, and boldly resolved to prioritize prayer in their service to the Lord. No man ever wastes one moment when he prays to the Lord. Nothing can move heaven and earth so much as a man who prays. Any ministry not bathed in prayer is a ministry performed in the strength of men. God's leaders must pray (1) for themselves. A man of God must confess his sins, his inadequacy, his insufficiency, his self-sufficiency, his lack of love for Christ, his lack zeal for the lost, his lack of treasuring of the gospel, and his lack of living out what he preaches. The leader must pray and repent. He must confess and lay his heart open, naked, and bare before the Omniscient One. God's leaders must also pray (2) for the Holy Spirit's illumination. The man of God must depend on the Spirit of God to grant insight into the text he is studying so that he can rightly divide the Word of Truth. The man who does not pray in the biblical interpretation process is a man who thinks he can understand God's truth without God's help. The eternal riches, the layers of depth, the God-intended meaning, the manifold applications can only be found through a humble, prayerful, seeking, diligent study. God's leaders must also pray (3) for the Holy Spirit's unction. This refers to the powerful presence of God the Holy Spirit in and through His Word as the messenger faithfully dispenses the truth to the hearers. Without the Holy Spirit's wind, the boat will not sail very far. But when the Spirit blows, no one can stop or resist this wind. Preaching is powerless apart from the unction of the Spirit. The preacher has no authority in and of Himself. All authority resides in the Word. All authority resides from the God of the Word. So the man of God must desperately pray and humbly beg the Spirit of God to awaken dead souls to new life and to sanctify saved souls to further Christlikeness in and through the proclamation of the Word. God's leaders must also pray (4) for those in his flock by name. Just as a shepherd knows the sheep in his fold, so a spiritual shepherd must know the sheep God entrusts to his care. He must bring God's sheep to the Lord in frequent prayer. The shepherd knows he can do no good nor can he bring about any lasting spiritual good without divine assistance. Thus, the man of God must beg for the Lord to do a mighty work through God's mighty Word. God's leaders must also pray (5) for God's help to live out precisely what he preaches. If a man undoes out of the pulpit that which he preaches in the pulpit, he brings shame to Christ, to the gospel, to His church, and shame to himself. A man must live what he preaches. He must do in his own life what he tells his hearers to do. He must apply to his own mind and heart that which he tells his hearers to do. Additionally, God's leaders must also pray (6) for holiness of heart and holiness of life. Without holiness, no one will see the Lord. The man who serves the Lord as a leader of God's flock must be above reproach. He must be blameless. He must zealously pursue Christlikeness. A holy life begins with a holy heart. A holy heart comes about as the man of God exposes himself consistently and tenaciously to the sanctifying Word of God. And finally, God's leaders must also pray (7) for the filling of the Holy Spirit. Without the filling of the Spirit, all human efforts prove to be vanity — a chasing after the wind. The man of God is filled with the Spirit as he is controlled by the Spirit. Just as a worldly man would find himself controlled by alcohol by drunkenness, so the man of God must find himself controlled by the Spirit of God as he daily bathes in the Word of God, is exposed to the truth of Christ, meditates on the gospel of grace, and is empowered to serve the Lord. The Godly leader prays for this Spirit-empowered control in his thought-life and in his practical outworkings. Truly, the man of God does well to learn from the Apostles who devoted themselves to frequent, fervent, and faithful prayer.

4. It is a devotion to the WORD.

One of the highest duties that God entrusts to His leader is to give themselves to the ministry of the Word. The Apostles in the early church made it their aim to minister the Word. The Godly man learns from the example of the Apostles who not only consumed the Word but they allowed the Word to consume them. The ministry of the Word includes a number of crucial elements. First, the ministry of the Word is a God-given gift. It is the opportunity to serve others through the God-given responsibility and through the God-appointed means to dispense God's Word to God's people. The highest privilege that a man of God has is to faithfully impart the very Word of God through verbal proclamation to people. Second, the ministry of the Word consists of the constant feeding of God's people with the truth of God's Word contained in the Scriptures. The source of the preacher's proclamation must be the Bible. God must speak to His people and in so far as the man of God relays the message of God from the Word of God, it is the very voice of God that is heard through the mouth of the man. Third, the ministry of the Word must incorporate the full counsel of God. Church leaders must devote themselves relentlessly to the entire Word of God. All the doctrines should be understood. All the books of Scripture should be the object of meditation. The sixty-six books of holy Scripture contain the full revelation of God to human beings. The greatest privilege in the universe is for God to allow humans to devote themselves to His holy Book so as to know it, apply it, practice it, and then preach it. The Apostles devoted themselves to the Word of God. To minister the Word requires that one can interpret the Word rightly. It demands careful study of the Word and diligent application of the Word to his own heart and life. It can hardly be overstated how blessed and joyous the privilege is of devoting oneself to the Word of God. The Apostles did this. Preachers today must do this. The Apostles exemplified this. All church leaders must follow their example.

Perhaps it could be rightly stated that church leadership is a devotion. This devotion is for all leaders and it is incumbent upon all those who serve in shepherding positions of Christ's church to apply these principles in following the example of the Apostles in the early church. They were men of devotion. They were men with resolve to follow Christ, to invest in Scripture, to live humbly, to serve prayerfully, and, of course, to study and preach tirelessly. All servant leaders who are undershepherds must prayerfully take hold of God in prayer and persistently devote themselves to the grace-given ministry of the Word so that God will be honored, Christ will be proclaimed, and the Spirit will attend the proclamation of the Word with great power and unction.