



This past Wednesday I went to Monroe County Jail. At the entry door to Plaza South was a nurse with a medical cart. While we waited for the guard to open the door, I asked her how her day was going. The nurse said that she had fifty-two calls to make, twenty-one of which were dental issues, most of which would probably result in a tooth extraction. I said, “That many?” She shrugged her shoulders and said, “When in doubt, pull it out.”

This nurse then proceeded to say something like, “These guys always have this problem or that problem. If they hadn’t screwed up their lives so bad, they wouldn’t even be here.”

I knew this lady was having a bad day, and I’m sure her job in general is a tough one. But in that moment, I thought of two things: (1) I get to care for the spiritual needs of these men just as this nurse is about to address their physical needs. (2) I’m glad our Savior doesn’t meet our needs so begrudgingly. He doesn’t treat us as our sins deserve. The best thing that I could give these men was the word of God. I preached on 2 Timothy 3, and they stayed with me the whole time. God seemed to be working mightily in their hearts.

I left the jail in high spirits, thanking the Lord once again for the transformative power of his all-sufficient Word. It’s so powerful, so precious, so important, that to preach it is the minister’s primary responsibility. We see this in Paul’s final charge in 2 Timothy 4:1-5:

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: <sup>2</sup> preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. <sup>3</sup> For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, <sup>4</sup> and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. <sup>5</sup> As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

Throughout chapter three, Paul has contrasted the “man of God” with “lovers of self” who act religious but don’t possess the power of a godly life because they oppose the truth. They have depraved minds and a counterfeit faith.

But Timothy and every true man of God is not like that. He is grounded in and governed by God’s Word. His walk is consistent with his talk. His aim in life is to please the Lord. When the going gets tough, the “man of God” doesn’t give up but continues to press forward because he has been super-equipped by the Scriptures for every good work.

In Paul’s final appeal at the outset of chapter 4, the last chapter Paul wrote before his execution, the aged apostle emphasizes a key principle:

***Men of God stick with the Scriptures no matter what.***

This principle emerges from three components in the text. Paul begins with a *solemn charge* in verses 1-2, which is essential because of a *spiritual dilemma* presented in verses 3-4, which requires a *steadfast determination* that is delineated in verse 5.

### **A Solemn Directive (vv. 1-2)**

Paul piles up words and employs legal terminology to convey the solemnity of his final charge to Timothy. It's the language of a court summons, a written notice issued *by* the court mandating a person to appear *in* court. A typical first-century summons might have begun, "You are hereby ordered to appear in the court at Hierapolis, in the presence of the honorable judge Festus, chief magistrate." Such is the language that Paul employs as he emphasizes Timothy's accountability to the ultimate Judge, saying, "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: preach the word...." (2 Tim. 4:1).

Early in his ministry, Jesus declared, "the Father judges no one. Instead, he has given the Son absolute authority to judge (v. 22 NLT). Jesus went on to say, "he has given him authority to judge everyone because he is the Son of Man" (v. 27). Thus, Jesus identified himself as the awesome Son of Man in the prophet Daniel's vision. Daniel testified,

He was given authority, glory, and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

- Daniel 7:14 NIV

This is the King to whom we must give an account! James warned, "Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness" (James 3:1).

If you've ever received a summons, you know the sobering effect it has. It quickens the pulse. It causes a rush of adrenaline. No doubt Paul's use of weighty words and legal language is intended "to energize Timothy – to add some voltage to Paul's charge"<sup>1</sup> – which consists of multiple commands in verse 2:

"Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching." "Preach the word" is the primary command. The other imperatives are supporting commands, stipulating *how* to preach the word.

Prior to this charge, Paul emphasized that "all Scripture is breathed out by God" (3:16). The Bible isn't just a good book, it's *God's Book* and is to be preached accordingly. The Greek word for "preach" (*kérussó*) means "to herald" – to publicly proclaim a message on behalf of a superior. The herald's responsibility is to declare the message confidently and completely, without altering it in any way. That's what the man of God is to do with the word of God. He is to "herald the word."

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<sup>1</sup> R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell, *1-2 Timothy and Titus: To Guard the Deposit*. Preaching the Word, edited by R. Kent Hughes (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 266.

But how? The rest of the imperatives in verse 2 tell us. The preacher must “be ready in season and out of season.” He’s to preach the word when it’s convenient and when it’s not. When people are receptive to it and when they are not. He is to preach not for the applause of man but for the pleasure of God.<sup>2</sup>

Earlier in this series on 2 Timothy, I spoke of Hugh Latimer, the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformer who was burned at the stake because of his biblical convictions. On one occasion, he felt uneasy as he began preaching a sermon because King Henry VIII was present that day, and Latimer was about to preach something the king would not like. Latimer proceeded to reveal his thoughts publicly by carrying on a conversation with himself, saying, “Latimer! Latimer! Be careful what you say. Henry the King is here.” Then after a pause he said, “Latimer! Latimer! Be careful what you say. The King of kings is here.”

Ultimately, the man of God preaches before an audience of one – the Lord God. Because his word is always timely, it is to be preached in all seasons. So, the man of God must always be ready. He is always on duty.

That duty includes preaching against sin. This is indicated by the words “reprove” and “rebuke.” To *reprove* is to speak to those who are in error or doing wrong and to attempt to convince them from Scripture why this is so. To *rebuke* is to tell those who are doing wrong to stop it. In listing the qualifications for an elder in Titus 1, Paul wrote, “He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine *and also rebuke those who contradict it*” (v. 9, italics mine). Preachers who fail to address sin and false doctrine are neglecting their duty and will be judged accordingly. Showing people where they’re wrong and telling them to stop it is not easy. That’s probably why Paul lists these two commands first. The preacher cannot “be a people pleaser or popularity seeker – and certainly not a flatterer.”<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, the preacher shouldn’t enjoy setting people straight. A shepherd tends the sheep, he doesn’t attack them. So, the two negative imperatives (reprove and rebuke) are followed by a *positive* imperative: “exhort,” which carries the idea of encouragement. He’s to commend them when they do what’s right, affirm their spiritual progress, and cheer them on their way – always looking for opportunities to build them up in the Lord. And he does so “with complete patience and teaching,” knowing that spiritual maturity takes time. Parents spend years raising their children, teaching them, and watching them grow. At times our kids test our patience, and we’re tempted to lash out at them, to treat them harshly. Sometimes we parents have sinned when addressing our children’s sin. That’s why both parents and pastors need to lean on the Lord.

After emphasizing the priority of preaching through his sobering directive in verses 1-2, Paul proceeds to explain *why* this is so important.

### **A Spiritual Dilemma (vv. 3-4)**

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<sup>2</sup> Tony Merida, *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*, edited by David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2013), 204.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 270.

“For the time is coming 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” (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

Why must we “preach the word”? Because people naturally move away from the truth. Due to their sinful appetites, they have a hankering for unhealthy teaching – teaching that is unhealthy for their soul and unhealthy for life.<sup>4</sup>

Paul uses a graphic analogy to describe this spiritual dilemma – that of an itching ear. Paul says literally that they’re “tickled in their hearing.” One of the most satisfying things to do when you have an itch or tickle in your ear is to get a Q-tip and go at it. That’s why Q-tips are packaged by the hundreds. We love to use them!

In the same way, people who love themselves accumulate for themselves teachers who tell them what they want to hear. These teachers never reprove or rebuke them. They never address their sin. They never *talk* about sin, hell or the coming judgment. Their messages are always affirming. They’re filled with heart-warming anecdotes that make people laugh, cry, and feel good, mixed in with pop psychology and practical tips from self-help gurus, and delivered by a smooth-talking man wearing a \$7,000 suit and a million-dollar smile.<sup>5</sup>

Sometimes the teacher has less sheen, which makes him more appealing to those who see through the thin veneer of prosperity preachers and want something with more grit and intellectual substance. Enter Jordan Peterson. One commentator writes,

Today, Jordan Peterson, a moral prophet, dazzles his acolytes with *Twelve Rules for Life*. Several of them echo biblical morality, but Peterson’s Jungian analysis of Scripture treats the Bible as *spiritually*, but not *literally*, true. For example, Peterson opines that the account of Jesus’ death conveys the principle of substitution, not as *atonement* for sin, but as a tragic reality: when one person sins, *others* must pay for it. In this account, biblical narratives (myths) are fascinating tales that contain a kernel of truth.<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, in an article titled “Jordan Peterson and His Useful God,” Dani(elle) Treweek writes on the Australia Edition of The Gospel Coalition (TGC) website that

for Peterson, the story of Abraham is the story of one man’s commitment to optimize himself by embarking “*on an adventure*.” It’s the story of a man who had everything he needed for a comfortable and contented life. But actually, this meant he *didn’t* have everything he needed, because what Abraham *really* needed was not to stay where he was. Abraham needed to go on that uphill journey. So, according to Peterson, this is a story of human optimization through adventure. It’s an archetype that speaks of the need to leave what is known and

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<sup>4</sup> R. C. H. Lenski, *Rhw Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus, and to Philemon*. Commentary on the New Testament (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998),

<sup>5</sup> Adapted from *Got Questions* [online] at <https://www.gotquestions.org/Joel-Osteen.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel M. Doriani and Richard D. Phillips, *2 Timothy and Titus*. Reformed Expository Commentary, edited by Philip Graham Ryken and Richard D. Phillips (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2020), 105.

comfortable so that one might become more than one currently is. What is the place of God in that story? He was quite simply the necessary tool by which that call of adventure came to Abraham.<sup>7</sup>

Yet Scripture presents the account of Abraham as a story about God and his covenant love towards fallen humanity (Gen. 12:1-3; 15:1-6). It's the story of God's proactive commitment to make Abraham's descendants into a great nation and to bless all the peoples of the earth through them. The blessing of Abraham finds its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ, the "seed" of Abraham (Gal. 3:16) and the Savior of the world.

Treweek concludes her article by saying,

Contra Peterson, the story of Scripture was not written in philosophical abstracted metaphor, but in real time, space, and blood. It is not ultimately concerned with the earthly "optimization" of created man, but the eternal glorification of the Son of Man.<sup>8</sup>

Yesterday I came across a quote from Old Testament scholar Dennis Kinlaw, who said,

Satan disguises submission to himself under the ruse of personal autonomy. He never asks us to become his servants. Never once did the serpent say to Eve, "I want to be your master." The shift in commitment is never from Christ to evil; it is always from Christ to self. And instead of his will, self-interest now rules and what I want reigns. And that is the essence of sin.<sup>9</sup>

And *that* is the spiritual dilemma we face today: "The masses prefer myth to truth."<sup>10</sup> Lovers of self crave teachers who tell them what their itching ears want to hear. This problem is nothing new, it's simply history repeating itself. Jeremiah lamented, "The prophets prophesy falsely ... my people love to have it so, but what will you do when the end comes?" (Jer. 5:31).

That's the question that should occupy every person's mind, and it must occupy every preacher's mind if he would be a man of God. People's eternal destinies are at stake. Satan is ensnaring people with lies, and only the truth can set them free. That is why men of God must preach the Word *patiently, pastorally, persuasively, and persistently*.

### **A Steadfast Determination (v. 5)**

"As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry" (2 Tim. 4:5). Throughout this letter, Paul has been drawing a sharp contrast between Timothy and false teachers, between a follower of Christ and a fake Christian, between a man of God and a lover of self. Now, once again, Paul distinguishes Timothy as a true minister and tells him to persist in the things that God has called him to do.

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<sup>7</sup> Dani Treweek, "Jordan Peterson and His Useful God." *TGC Australian Edition*, 12 July 2022 [online]. Retrieved on 22 June 2024 from <https://au.thegospelcoalition.org/article/jordan-peterson-and-his-useful-god/>.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Dennis Kinlaw, *This Day With the Master*, November 14 (n.p.).

<sup>10</sup> Hughes and Chapell, 271.

“As for you, always be sober-minded”: Don’t be deluded by human speculation or opinion or man-centered thinking. Exercise sound judgment. The present imperative indicates that Timothy has been sober-minded, and Paul wants him to stay that way.

“Endure suffering”: This has been a recurring theme throughout 2 Timothy. We remember that Paul is writing from jail, awaiting execution for his faithful proclamation of the gospel.

“Do the work of an evangelist.” Tell others the good news – that though our sins have separated us from God and have incurred his righteous condemnation, God in his great love sent Jesus to live a perfect life in our place, take the punishment for our sins on the cross, and rise from the dead so that we can be forgiven and have eternal life. Don’t give people self-help tips. “Preach the word,” for all Scripture is a testimony to Christ.

“Fulfill your ministry”: Serve the Lord faithfully. Live out your calling. Make your life count for Christ. Obey all these imperatives. Make them your priority. Don’t leave before the job is done. “Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain” (1 Cor. 15:58).

### Conclusion

On a bookshelf in my office I keep a painted carving of myself that an older gentleman made for me twenty-five years ago, when we bid farewell to our beloved congregation at Wittenburg Baptist Church in Nova Scotia, Canada, to serve the Lord at First Baptist Church in Weymouth, Massachusetts.

There I am in my gray suit that I wore so many Sundays, standing behind the solid, hand-crafted Wittenburg pulpit, with the Bible in my hand lifted high. Next to that carving is a framed quote by Matthew Simpson in his book, *Lectures on Preaching*, published in 1879. There in his book, Simpson presents a verbal portrait of “The Pastor-Preacher,” saying,

*His throne is the pulpit.  
He stands in Christ's stead.  
His message is the Word of God.  
Around him are immortal souls.  
The Savior unseen, is beside him.  
The Holy Spirit broods over the congregation.  
Angels gaze upon the scene,  
and heaven and hell await the issue.  
What associations, and what vast responsibility!*

No wonder Paul charged Timothy with such solemnity to “preach the Word.” That’s what men of God do. They stick to the Scriptures no matter what, and the congregation should expect nothing less.

This passage in 2 Timothy is for the people in the pew as much as it is for preachers in the pulpit. For just as I bear responsibility before God to “preach the Word,” so you bear responsibility before God to *embrace God’s truth* and to ensure that I, along with every other pastor and elder at Webster Bible Church preaches the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help us God.