

The Charge

What's the greatest responsibility you have been tasked with?

- The movie Hidden Figures follows the career of 3 African-American ladies during NASA's early years in the 60's.
 - Katherine Johnson was ultimately responsible for doing the bulk of the math for space flight!
 - YIKES!
- My cousin recently bought a hay "mulching" business where he has several employees, with the equipment, who travel to mix old & new hay together to allow Ranchers to stretch out their hay stock.
 - The first question he asked the previous owner when they called is "How much do you pay the employees?"
 - They have ¼ million dollar machines & equipment that they're in charge of. He wants to make sure he is getting quality employees!
- When we become a parent that should jump to the top of the list!
 - We are protectors & guiders of our children!

Charge: to lay a command or injunction upon. (Dictionary.com)

I solemnly charge you before God and Christ Jesus, who is going to judge the living and the dead, and because of his appearing and his kingdom: ²Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; rebuke, correct, and encourage with great patience and teaching. ³For the time will come when people will not tolerate sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, will multiply teachers for themselves because they have an itch to hear what they want to hear. ⁴They will turn away from hearing the truth and will turn aside to myths. ⁵But as for you, exercise self-control in everything, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

2 Timothy 4:1-5

Previous weeks... Be Pure. Be prepared for Trouble. Get to know God's Word.

These words are Paul's legacy to the church!

For those of us in ministry...

Preach the Word

- For those who might be interested in ministry...
 - Take your study seriously.
 - Take your responsibility seriously.
 - We are entrusted with souls that we are to watch over!

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account, so that they can do this with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you. Hebrews 13:17 (CSB)

- That's a heavy burden!
 - Pray for your Pastor!

Preach the Word

- "Preaching should afflict the comfortable & comfort the afflicted." - unknown

But as for you, exercise self-control in everything, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. V. 5

- This isn't exclusive to Timothy or to Pastors/Preachers

For all of us who are Believers...

Proclaim Christ.

½ of the world's total population of humanity is alive today! 7 BILLION+ on earth.

- Billions & Billions are not Believers.

Population of El Dorado is 13,300. Maybe 25% have a relationship with Jesus Christ.

- 2000 go to church on any given Sunday.
 - How can we, a church of 125, reach the remaining 11,000 in our community?
 - We need to be having Gospel Conversations.

- 100's of us need to be having 1000's of conversations throughout the year that point people to Christ!
- Not saying go hand out Gospel Tracts at Walmart, I'm saying as you go throughout the day, look for opportunities to introduce & point people to Christ.

*Preach the word; **be ready in season and out of season**; rebuke, correct, and encourage with great patience and teaching. V. 2*

We make the Gospel to complicated. I've been guilty of this myself even....

- I've encouraged you all to INVEST in relationship & then INVITE them to church to hear the Gospel.
 - Nothing wrong with that! BUT...it's not enough. It won't reach people fast enough with the Gospel.
- It also tends to create a Pros & Joe's mentality.
 - You Joe's go out & then bring them to us "Pro's" and we'll handle it from there.
 - The Gospel is too important & the need is too great to limit the spread of it in that way.

The average person has between 20-30 meaningful conversations a day.

- We need to start steering them to the Gospel!

EXAMPLE: I was a Bus Monitor this week & a kid & I had to share a seat.

- His mom & I happen to know each other & so invited him to church & he said that he believed in God but his brother didn't.
 - Then he added... "I heard it said that if you can make God bleed then people will believe."
 - I said, "Well that's interesting because God did bleed."
 - I then proceeded to tell him about Christ, His crucifixion, and ultimately his death, burial, and resurrection.
 - I was able to share the Gospel with him in just a 5 minute conversation.
 - I didn't even directly quote scripture.
- The Gospel isn't complicated.
 - Jesus Christ...
 - Lived a perfect life.

- Died on the Cross
- Buried
- Resurrected.
- If you are a Christian you have a testimony of what God has done in your life.
 - Like what we saw for the baptisms today.

“Timothy should be diligent and alert to use every opportunity to preach the Word, when it is favorable and even when it is not favorable. *It is easy to make excuses when we ought to be making opportunities.*” (Wiersbe)

PROCLAIM CHRIST.

You know my time is coming to an end here in El Dorado but the work that God has in store for this city isn't.

I solemnly charge you before God and Christ Jesus, who is going to judge the living and the dead, and because of his appearing and his kingdom: ²Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; rebuke, correct, and encourage with great patience and teaching. ³For the time will come when people will not tolerate sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, will multiply teachers for themselves because they have an itch to hear what they want to hear. ⁴They will turn away from hearing the truth and will turn aside to myths. ⁵But as for you, exercise self-control in everything, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.
2 Timothy 4:1-5

Preachers & those interested in Ministry... PREACH THE WORD

Believers... PROCLAIM CHRIST.

Preach the Word! (2 Tim. 4:1–4)

“I charge thee” should read “I solemnly witness.” This was a serious moment, and Paul wanted Timothy to sense the importance of it. It was serious, not only because Paul was facing death, but even more because both Paul and Timothy would be judged one day when Jesus Christ appeared. It would do us all good to occasionally reflect on the fact that one day we will face God and our works will be judged.

For one thing, this realization would encourage us to do our work carefully and faithfully. It would also deliver us from the fear of man; for, after all, our final Judge is God. Finally, the realization that God will one day judge our works encourages us to keep going even when we face difficulties. We are serving Him, not ourselves.

“Preach the Word!” is the main responsibility that Paul shared in this section. Everything else he said is related to this. The word “preach” means “to preach like a herald.” In Paul’s day, a ruler had a special herald who made announcements to the people. He was commissioned by the ruler to make his announcements in a loud, clear voice so everyone could hear. He was not an ambassador with the privilege of negotiating; he was a messenger with a proclamation to be heard and heeded. Not to heed the ruler’s messenger was serious; to abuse the messenger was even worse.

Timothy was to herald God’s Word with the authority of heaven behind him. The Word of God is what both sinners and saints need. It is a pity that many churches have substituted other things for the preaching of the Word, things that may be good in their place, but that are bad when they replace the proclamation of the Word. In my own pastoral ministry, I have seen what

the preaching of the Word can do in churches and in individual lives; and I affirm that *nothing can take its place*.

Timothy should be diligent and alert to use every opportunity to preach the Word, when it is favorable and even when it is not favorable. *It is easy to make excuses when we ought to be making opportunities*. Paul himself always found an opportunity to share the Word, whether it was in the temple courts, on a stormy sea, or even in prison. “He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap” (Ecc. 11:4). Stop making excuses and get to work!

Preaching must be marked by three elements: conviction, warning, and appeal (“reprove, rebuke, exhort”). To quote an old rule of preachers, “He should afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted.” If there is conviction but no remedy, we add to people’s burdens. And if we encourage those who ought to be rebuked, we are assisting them to sin. Biblical preaching must be balanced.

God’s speaker must be patient as he preaches the Word. He will not always see immediate results. He must be patient with those who oppose his preaching. Above all else, *he must preach doctrine*. He must not simply tell Bible stories, relate interesting illustrations, or read a verse and then forget it. *True preaching is the explanation and application of Bible doctrine. Anything else is just religious speechmaking*.

Paul gave the responsibility—“preach the Word” (2 Tim. 4:2)—and he also gave the reason (2 Tim. 4:3–4). The time would come (and it has been here for a long time!) when most people would not want the “healthy doctrine” of the Word of God. They would have carnal desires for religious novelties. Because of their “itching ears” they would accumulate teachers who would satisfy their cravings for things that disagree with God’s truths. The fact that a preacher has a large congregation is not always a sign that he is preaching the truth. In fact, it may be evidence that he is tickling people’s “itching ears” and giving them what they *want* to hear instead of what they *need* to hear.

It is but a short step from “itching ears” to turning one’s ears away from the truth. Once people have rejected the truth, they turn to fables (myths). It is not likely that man-made fables will convict them of sin or make them want to repent! The result is a congregation of comfortable, professing Christians, listening to a comfortable, religious talk that contains no Bible doctrine. These people become the prey of every false cult because their lives lack a foundation in the Word of God. It is a recognized fact that most cultists were formerly members of churches.

Note the emphasis on Scripture: “Preach the Word ... with ... doctrine ... They will not endure sound doctrine ... they shall turn away their ears from the truth” (2 Tim. 4:2–4). This emphasis on sound (healthy) doctrine runs through all three of Paul’s Pastoral Epistles, and this emphasis is surely needed today.¹

¹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [*The Bible exposition commentary*](#) (Vol. 2, pp. 253–256). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Chapter 4

The Charge to Preach the Gospel

This chapter contains some of the very last words spoken or written by the apostle Paul. They are certainly the last which have survived. He is writing within weeks, perhaps even within days, of his martyrdom. According to a fairly reliable tradition he was beheaded on the Ostian Way. For about 30 years without intermission he has laboured as an apostle and an itinerant evangelist. Truly, as he himself here writes, he has fought a good fight, finished his course and kept the faith (7). Now he awaits his reward, 'the crown of righteousness' which has been laid up for him in heaven (8). So **these words are Paul's legacy to the church**. They breathe an atmosphere of great solemnity. It is impossible to read them without being profoundly stirred.

The early part of the chapter takes the form of an impressive charge. 'I charge you in the presence of God,' he begins. The verb *diamartyromai* has legal connections and can mean to 'testify under oath' in a court of law or to 'adjure' a witness to do so. It is used in the New Testament of any 'solemn and emphatic utterance' (MM). Paul's charge is addressed in the first instance to Timothy, his apostolic delegate and representative in Ephesus. But it is applicable in a secondary sense to every man called to an evangelistic or pastoral ministry, even to all Christian people.

There are three aspects of the charge to be studied, namely its nature (precisely what Paul is commissioning Timothy to do), its basis (the arguments on which Paul grounds his charge) and a personal illustration of it from Paul's own example in Rome.

1. The Nature of the Charge (verse 2)

Omitting verse 1 for the moment and passing to verse 2, the essence of the charge is in the three words 'Preach the word'. We observe at once that the message Timothy is to communicate is called a 'word', a spoken utterance. Rather it is *the* word, God's word which God has spoken. Paul does not need to specify it further, for Timothy will know at once that it is the body of doctrine which he has heard from Paul and which Paul has now committed to him to pass on to others. It is identical with 'the deposit' of chapter 1. And in this fourth chapter it is equivalent to 'the sound teaching' (3), 'the truth' (4) and 'the faith' (7). It consists of the Old Testament Scriptures, God-breathed and profitable, which Timothy has known from childhood, together with the teaching of the apostle which Timothy has 'followed', 'learned' and 'firmly believed' (3:10, 14). The same charge is laid upon the church of every age. We have no liberty to invent our message, but only to communicate 'the word' which God has spoken and has now committed to the church as a sacred trust.

Timothy is to 'preach' this word, himself to speak what God has spoken. His responsibility is not just to hear it, and to believe and obey what he hears; nor just to guard it from every falsification; nor just to suffer for it and continue in it; but now to preach it to others. It is good news of salvation for sinners. So he is to proclaim it like a herald in the market-place (*kēryssō*, cf. *kēryx* 'a herald' in 1:11). He is to lift up his voice without fear or favour, and boldly to make it known.

Paul goes on to list four marks which are to characterize Timothy's proclamation.

a. An urgent proclamation

The verb *ephistēmi*, 'be urgent', means literally to 'stand by', and so to 'be ready, be on hand' (AG). But here it appears to take on the flavour not just of alertness and eagerness, but of insistence and urgency. 'Never lose your sense of urgency' (JBP). Certainly it is no good preaching in a listless or lackadaisical manner. **All true preaching conveys a sense of the urgent importance of what is being preached.** The Christian herald knows that he is handling matters of life and death. He is announcing the sinner's plight under the judgment of God, the saving action of God through the death and resurrection of Christ, and the summons to repent and believe. How can he treat such themes with cold indifference? 'Whatever you do,' wrote Richard Baxter, 'let the people see that you are in good earnest ... You cannot break men's hearts by jesting with them, or telling them a smooth tale, or patching up a gaudy oration. Men will not cast away their dearest pleasures upon a drowsy request of one that seemeth not to mean as he speaks, or to care much whether his request be granted.'¹

Such urgent preaching, Paul adds, must continue 'in season and out of season'. 'Press it home on all occasions, convenient or inconvenient' (NEB). This injunction is not to be taken as an excuse for the insensitive brashness which has sometimes characterized our evangelism and brought it into disrepute. We have no liberty to barge unceremoniously into other people's privacy or tread clumsily on their corns. No. The occasions Paul has in mind are probably 'welcome or unwelcome' (JB) not for the hearers so much as for the speaker. The translation of the NEB margin emphasizes this: 'be on duty at all times, convenient or inconvenient'. This takes the verb *ephistēmi* in its alternative sense, which is found sometimes in the papyri. It seems, then, that what we are given here is not a biblical warrant for rudeness, but a biblical appeal against laziness.

b. A relevant proclamation

The herald who announces the word is to 'convince, rebuke and exhort'. This suggests three different ways of doing it. For God's word is 'profitable' for a variety of ministries, as Paul has already stated (3:16). It speaks to different men in different situations. The preacher must remember this and be skilful in his use of it. He must 'use argument, reproof, and appeal' (NEB), which is almost a classification of three approaches, intellectual, moral and emotional. For some people are tormented by doubts and need to be convinced by arguments. Others have fallen into sin, and need to be rebuked. Others again are haunted by fears, and need to be encouraged. God's word does all this and more. We are to apply it relevantly.

c. A patient proclamation

Although we are to be *urgent* (longing for people to make a ready response to the word), we are to be 'unfailing in patience' in waiting for it. We must never resort to the use of human pressure techniques, or attempt to contrive a 'decision'. Our responsibility is to be faithful in preaching the word; the results of the proclamation are the responsibility of the Holy Spirit, and we can afford to wait patiently for him to work. We are to be patient in our whole manner as well, for

‘the Lord’s servant must ... be ... kindly to everyone, ... forbearing, correcting his opponents with gentleness’ (2:24, 25). However solemn our commission and urgent our message, there can be no possible justification for a brusque or impatient manner.

d. An intelligent proclamation

We are not only to preach the word but to teach it, or rather to preach it ‘with all teaching’ (*kēryxon ... en pasē ... didachē*). C. H. Dodd has made the whole church familiar with his distinction between *kērygma* and *didachē*, the former being the proclamation of Christ to unbelievers with a summons to repent, and the latter the ethical instruction of converts. The distinction is helpful and important. Yet, as has already been suggested in the comment on 1:11, it can be pressed too rigidly. At least, this verse shows that our *kērygma* must itself contain much *didachē*. Whether our proclamation is intended primarily to convince, rebuke or exhort, it must be a doctrinal ministry.

The Christian pastoral ministry is essentially a teaching ministry, which explains why candidates are required both to be orthodox in their own faith and to have an aptitude for teaching (*e.g.* Tit. 1:9; 1 Tim. 3:2). There is an increasing need, especially as the process of urbanization continues and standards of education rise, for Christian ministers to exercise in the teeming cities of the developing world a systematic expository preaching ministry, to ‘proclaim the word ... with all teaching’. This is precisely what Paul had himself done in Ephesus, as Timothy well knew. For some three years he had continued to teach ‘the whole counsel of God’ both ‘in public and from house to house’ (Acts 20:20, 27; *cf.* 19:8–10). Now Timothy must do the same.

Such is Paul’s charge to Timothy. He is to preach the word, and as he announces the God-given message to be urgent in his approach, relevant in his application, patient in his manner and intelligent in his presentation.

2. The Basis of the Charge (verses 1, 3–8)

It has already become apparent in early chapters of this letter both that Timothy was diffident by disposition and that the times in which he lived and worked were—to say the least—unpropitious. He must have quailed as he read the apostle’s solemn charge to him to keep preaching the word. He would be tempted to shrink from such a responsibility. So Paul does more than issue a charge; he adds incentives. He bids Timothy look in three directions—first at Jesus Christ the coming judge and king, secondly at the contemporary scene, and thirdly at him, Paul, the aged prisoner approaching martyrdom.

a. The coming Christ (verse 1)

Paul is not issuing his charge in his own name or on his own authority but ‘in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus’ and therefore conscious of the divine direction and approval. Perhaps the strongest of all incentives to faithfulness is the sense of a commission from God. If Timothy can only be assured that he is the servant of the most high God and an ambassador of Jesus Christ, and that Paul’s challenge to him is God’s challenge, then nothing will deflect him from his task.

The main emphasis of this first verse, however, is not so much on the presence of God as on the coming of Christ. It is evident that Paul still believes in Christ's personal return. He wrote of it in his earliest letters, especially those to the Thessalonian church. Although he now knows that he will die before it takes place, yet still at the end of his ministry he looks forward to it, lives in the light of it and describes Christians as those who love Christ's appearing (8). He is sure that Christ will make a visible 'appearing' (the word is *epiphaneia* in verses 1 and 8), and that when he appears he will both 'judge the living and the dead' and consummate 'his kingdom' or reign.

Now these three truths—the appearance, the judgment and the kingdom—should be as clear and certain an expectation to us as they were to Paul and Timothy. They cannot fail to exert a powerful influence on our ministry. For both those who preach the word and those who listen to it must give an account to Christ when he appears.

b. The contemporary scene (verses 3–5)

Notice the word 'for' or 'because' (*gar*) which introduces this paragraph. Paul is giving a second basis on which to ground his charge. It is another future event, not now the coming of Christ but, before that end point, the coming of dark and difficult days. Although the apostle seems to be anticipating that the situation will deteriorate, it is also plain from this paragraph and from what he has written earlier that such a time has already begun for Timothy. It is in the light of this contemporary scene that he issues further directions.

What are these times like? One characteristic is singled out, namely that people cannot bear the truth. Paul expresses it negatively and positively, and states it twice: They 'will not endure sound teaching, but ... accumulate ... teachers to suit their own likings' (3). They 'will turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths' (4). In other words, they cannot stand the truth and refuse to listen to it. Instead, they find teachers to suit the speculative fancies into which they are determined to wander. It all has to do with their ears, which (in the Greek sentence) are mentioned twice. They suffer from a peculiar pathological condition called 'itching ears', 'an itch for novelty'. AG explain that the expression is a figure of speech for that kind of curiosity which 'looks for interesting and spicy hits of information'. Further, 'this itching is relieved by the messages of the new teachers'. In fact what the people do is stop their ears against the truth (*cf.* Acts 7:57) and open them to any teacher who will relieve their tickle by scratching it.

Notice that what they reject is 'the sound teaching' (3) or 'the truth' (4), and what they prefer is 'their own likings' (3) or 'myths' (4). They thus substitute their fancy for God's revelation. The criterion by which they judge teachers is not (as it should be) God's word but their own subjective taste. Worse still, they do not first listen and then decide whether what they have heard is true; they first decide what they want to hear and then select teachers who will oblige by toeing their line.

How is Timothy to react to this? One might guess that such a desperate situation should silence him. If men cannot bear the truth and will not listen to it, surely the prudent course will be for him to hold his peace? But Paul reaches the opposite conclusion. For the third time he uses those two little monosyllables *su de*, 'but as for you' (5; *cf.* 3:10, 14). He repeats his call to Timothy to be different. He must not take his lead from the prevailing fashions of the day.

Now follow four staccato commands which seem to be deliberately framed in relation to the situation in which Timothy finds himself and to the kind of people to whom he is called to minister.

1. Because the people are unstable in mind and conduct, Timothy is above everything else always to 'be steady'. Literally, *nēphō* means to be sober, and figuratively to 'be free from every form of mental and spiritual drunkenness' and so to 'be well-balanced, self-controlled' (AG). When men and women get intoxicated with heady heresies and sparkling novelties, ministers must keep 'calm and sane' (NEB).

2. Although the people will not listen to the sound teaching, Timothy must persist in teaching it and so be prepared to 'endure suffering' on account of the truth he refuses to compromise. Whenever the biblical faith becomes unpopular, ministers are sorely tempted to mute those elements which give most offence.

3. Because the people are woefully ignorant of the true evangel, Timothy is to 'do the work of an evangelist'. It is not clear whether the reference is to a specialist ministry such as is implied in the only other New Testament passages where the word occurs (Acts 21:8; Eph. 4:11). The alternative is to interpret it of anybody who preaches the gospel and witnesses to Christ. In either case Paul is bidding Timothy: 'make the preaching of the Good News your life's work' (JB). The good news is not just to be preserved against distortion; it is to be spread abroad.

4. Even if the people forsake Timothy's ministry in favour of teachers who tickle their fancy, Timothy is to 'fulfil' his 'ministry'. The same verb is used when Paul and Barnabas had completed the relief work which they went to Jerusalem to do. 'They had fulfilled their mission', Luke writes (Acts 12:25). Just so Timothy must persevere until his task is accomplished.

Thus Paul's four words of command, although different in detail, convey the same general message. Those difficult days, in which it was hard to gain a hearing for the gospel, were not to discourage Timothy; nor to deter him from his ministry; nor to induce him to trim his message to suit his hearers; still less to silence him altogether; but rather to spur him on to preach the more. It should be the same with us. The harder the times and the deafer the people, the clearer and more persuasive our proclamation must be. As Calvin puts it, 'the more determined men become to despise the teaching of Christ, the more zealous should godly ministers be to assert it and the more strenuous their efforts to preserve it entire, and more than that, by their diligence to ward off Satan's attacks'.

c. The aged apostle (verses 6–8)

The third ground of the apostle's charge is yet another coming event, namely his own martyrdom. The link between this paragraph and verse 5 which precedes it is plain. Paul's argument runs like this: 'But as for *you*, Timothy, *you* must fulfil *your* ministry, for *I* am already on the point of death.' It is all the more vital for Timothy to continue and complete his ministry because the apostle's life-work has reached completion and is about to close. As Joshua had followed Moses, and Solomon David, and Elisha Elijah, so now Timothy must follow Paul.

The apostle uses two vivid figures of speech to portray his coming death, one taken from the language of sacrifice and the other (probably) of boats. First, 'I am already on the point of being sacrificed.' Or 'Already my life is being poured out on the altar' (NEB). He likens his life to a libation or drink offering. So imminent does he believe his martyrdom to be that he speaks of the sacrifice

as having already begun. He goes on: 'the time of my departure has come'. 'Departure' (*analysis*) seems to have become a regular word for death, but we need not necessarily conclude from this that its metaphorical origin had been entirely forgotten. It means 'loosing' and could be used either of striking a tent (which Lock favours,² because of the soldier's 'I have fought a good fight' in the following verse) or of 'release from shackles' (which Simpson mentions),³ or of untying a boat from its moorings. The last is certainly the most picturesque of the three possibilities. The two images then to some extent correspond, for the end of this life (outpoured as a libation) is the beginning of another (putting out to sea). Already the anchor is weighed, the ropes are slipped, and the boat is about to set sail for another shore. Now, before the great adventure of his new voyage begins, he looks back over his ministry of about 30 years. He describes it—factually not boastfully—in three terse expressions.

First, 'I have fought the good fight'. The words could equally well be translated 'I have run the great race' (NEB), for *agōn* denoted any contest involving exertion, whether a race or a fight. But since the next phrase clearly alludes to the race or course he has finished, it seems probable that Paul is again combining the soldier and athlete metaphors (as in 2:3–5), or at least the wrestling and running metaphors.

Next, he writes, 'I have finished the race'. Some years previously, speaking to the elders of the very Ephesian church over which Timothy was now presiding, Paul had expressed his ambition to do just this. 'I do not account my life of any value,' he had declared, 'nor as precious to myself, if only I may accomplish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus ...' (Acts 20:24). Now he is able to say that he has done so. Both the verb and the noun he uses are the same. 'What had been a purpose was now a retrospect,' comments N. J. D. White.¹ He could use the perfect tense in each of these three expressions, as Jesus had done in the upper room, because the end was so clearly in sight.

Thirdly, 'I have kept the faith'. This may conceivably mean 'I have kept faith with my Master'. But in the context of this letter, which emphasizes so strongly the importance of guarding the deposit of revealed truth, it is more likely that Paul is affirming his faithfulness in this respect. 'I have safely preserved, as a guardian or steward, the gospel treasure committed to my trust.'

So the work of the apostle, and to a lesser extent of every gospel preacher and teacher, is pictured as fighting a fight, running a race, guarding a treasure. Each involves labour, sacrifice and even danger. In all three Paul has been faithful to the end.

Now nothing remains for him but the prize, which he terms 'the crown (or better 'garland') of righteousness', which is 'laid up' for him and which will be given him at the winning post 'on that Day'. Though intrinsically valueless, being made of evergreen leaves rather than of silver or gold, the garlands won by victors in the Greek games were greatly prized. 'Many a little town in those days', writes Bishop Handley Moule, 'took down a piece of its white wall in order that its son, crowned with the crown of the isthmus or of Olympia, might enter it *by a gate unused before*.' The crown which Paul anticipates he calls 'righteousness' (*dikaïosynē*). From his pen the word would most naturally mean 'justification'. But perhaps here it has a slightly different legal connotation, and is in deliberate contrast to the sentence he is expecting any day to receive from a human judge in a human court. The Emperor Nero may declare him guilty and condemn him to death, but there will soon come a 'magnificent reversal of Nero's verdict' when 'the Lord, the righteous judge', declares him righteous.

The same vindication by Christ also awaits ‘all who have loved his appearing’. This is not, of course, a doctrine of justification by good works. It is hardly necessary to emphasize Paul’s continuing conviction that salvation is a free gift of God’s grace, ‘not in virtue of our works but in virtue of his own purpose and ... grace’ (1:9). The crown of righteousness is awarded to all those who ‘have set their hearts on his coming appearance’ (NEB), not because this is a meritorious attitude to adopt but because it is a sure evidence of justification. The unbeliever, being unjustified, dreads the coming of Christ (if he believes in it or thinks about it at all). Being unready for it, he will shrink in shame from Christ at his coming. The believer, on the other hand, having been justified, looks forward to Christ’s coming and has set his heart upon it. Being ready for it, he will have boldness when Christ appears (1 Jn. 2:28). Only those who have entered by faith into the benefit of Christ’s first coming are eagerly awaiting his second (*cf.* Heb. 9:28).

This then is ‘Paul the aged’, as he has described himself a year or two previously in his letter to Philemon (verse 9). He has fought the good fight, finished the race and kept the faith. His lifeblood is on the point of being poured out. His little boat is about to set sail. He is eagerly awaiting his crown. These facts are to be Timothy’s third spur to faithfulness.

Our God is the God of history. ‘God is working his purpose out, as year succeeds to year.’ ‘He buries his workmen, but carries on his work.’ The torch of the gospel is handed down by each generation to the next. As the leaders of the former generation die, it is all the more urgent for those of the next generation to step forward bravely to take their place. Timothy’s heart must have been profoundly moved by this exhortation from Paul the old warrior who had led him to Christ. Who led you to Christ? Is he growing old? The man who introduced me to Christ is now living in retirement (though an active one!). We cannot rest for ever on the leadership of the preceding generation. The day comes when we must step into their shoes and ourselves take the lead. That day had come for Timothy. It comes to all of us in time.

So then, in view of the coming of Christ to judgment, of the contemporary world’s distaste for the gospel and of the imprisoned apostle’s imminent death, the latter’s charge to Timothy had a note of solemn urgency: *Preach the word!*²

THE SERIOUSNESS OF HIS COMMISSION

I solemnly 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: (4:1)

Paul first points out the seriousness of Timothy’s divine commission. **Solemnly charge** translates a form of the verb *diamarturomai*, which here carries the idea of giving a forceful

² Stott, J. R. W. (1973). [*Guard the Gospel the message of 2 Timothy*](#) (pp. 105–116). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

order or directive. The apostle has twice before used the verb to admonish Timothy (1 Tim. 5:21; 2 Tim. 2:14; cf. 1 Tim. 6:13). The aged warrior of the faith, whose godly life was totally committed to the service of Christ, again seeks to capture Timothy's undivided attention for what he is about to say. The devotion of Paul himself was not unlike that of John Knox, who prayed, "Give me Scotland or I die," yet who, when later compelled to preach, locked himself in his room and wept for days because of the fearful seriousness of that calling. The apostle's deepest desire for Timothy was for him to share that seriousness and devotion.

The solemnity of Paul's **charge** is drawn from the fact that it is tied directly to the awesome majesty of the One who commissions men to divine service. Those who are called to proclaim and interpret the Word of God have the most profound responsibility that the Lord places on any man. It is for that reason that James warns, "Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment. For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well" (James 3:1–2). No human being apart from Jesus has ever spoken perfectly, not even the prophets or apostles, except when recording God's revealed Word. James readily included himself ("for we all stumble") among those who speak imperfectly and who therefore must take special care to prevent their imperfections from clouding their testimony and besmirching their Lord's name.

That responsibility is especially fearsome in that it is carried out **in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus**. The Greek construction also allows the rendering "in the presence of God, *even* Christ Jesus." That wording seems especially appropriate in this context because of Paul's following reference to Christ as Judge. Jesus said, "Not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son" (John 5:22; cf. vv. 26–27). It is not, of course, that a believer ever lives or ministers apart from the presence of the Father and the Holy Spirit. But Paul here emphasizes the believer's unique accountability to the Son—not as Savior and Lord but as Judge. The point of the first half of the sentence is that every minister who is called by **Christ Jesus**, the Son, constantly ministers under the omniscient scrutiny of His divine **presence**.

The phrase **in the presence of** parallels a common format used in Roman courts and legal documents and would have been familiar to Timothy and others of that day. A typical summons might have begun: "The case will be drawn up against you in the court at Hierapolis, in the presence of the honorable judge Festus, chief magistrate."

Service of **Christ Jesus** not only is done before His constant watchful eye but also will be subject to the judgment of this infinitely greater Magistrate, **who is to judge the living and the dead** (cf. Matt. 25:34–41; Acts 10:42; 17:30–31).

In the New Testament, *krinō* (**to judge**) has numerous shades of meaning, ranging from the broad and usually positive sense of forming an opinion or of resolving an issue (As in Luke 7:43; Acts 4:19) to the immeasurably more serious and negative sense of condemning or damning (As in John 12:48; Acts 13:27; 2 Thess. 2:12).

The New Testament reveals three distinct judgments of human beings that Christ will conduct: the bema seat judgment of believers only (1 Cor. 3:12–15; 2 Cor. 5:10); the sheep and goats judgment of the nations, in which believers will be separated from unbelievers (Matt. 25:31–33); and the great white throne judgment of unbelievers only (Rev. 20:11–15).

In the present text, Paul's focus is on the Lord's judgment of believers, all of whom one day will "appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his

deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10; cf. 1 Cor. 3:12–15). And the emphasis is not so much on the preacher’s proclaiming that truth to others, although that idea is implied, as on the excellence of his own ministry in light of that judgment.

In marked contrast to human courts, in the bar of divine judgment—whether for reward, separation, or condemnation—there will be no argument, no new evidence to be revealed, no cross-examination, no witnesses to call, no excuses, no jury of peers, and no appeal. In the most absolute way, the Judge’s decision will be final.

When we stand before our omniscient Lord, He already will know, far better than we ourselves can know even in our most honest moments, exactly how faithful and godly our life has been. Not a year or a month, not an hour, minute, or second escapes His notice or His judgment. Paul could say with complete honesty, “I am conscious of nothing against myself.” Nevertheless, he went on to say, “Yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord. Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men’s hearts; and then each man’s praise will come to him from God” (1 Cor. 4:4–5).

The grammatical construction of 2 Timothy 4:1 suggests the idea of immanency, that **Christ Jesus... is about to judge** momentarily, and gives a second reason for Paul’s solemn charge to Timothy.

As already noted, this particular judgment will be the bema seat judgment of all believers, both **the living and the dead**, after **Christ Jesus** takes them to be with Himself at the Rapture (1 Thess. 4:13–8). The apostle exults a few verses later that “there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing” (2 Tim. 4:8). It was in light of that same judgment and reward that, in his previous letter, Paul admonished Timothy to “keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Tim. 6:14). In his letter to Titus, written perhaps a year before 2 Timothy, the apostle wrote, “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus” (Titus 2:11–13).

A preacher’s ultimate accountability is not to a board, a local church, a denomination, or any other human institution, no matter how doctrinally sound and godly it may be, but to the Lord, who has called and empowered him and who one day will judge him. Paul both preached and lived in the light of that truth. He could therefore ask Galatian believers rhetorically, “Am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ” (Gal. 1:10). For the sake of example, a faithful minister is concerned about the things in his life and ministry that others can see. But he is supremely concerned about the things that only the Lord can see. And probably more often than not, the quality of the things that only God can see will eventually become evident in the quality of the things that men can see.

When the French sculptor created the magnificent Statue of Liberty as a gift from his own country to the United States, there were no airplanes or helicopters. Yet he made that statue in such complete detail that even the top of its head was perfectly sculpted. Little did the artist know that one day tens of thousands of people a year would fly over the statue and be able to

appreciate the full excellency of his work. It was such concern for excellency that motivated Paul's ministry, a concern which he desired his beloved Timothy to share.

Epiphaneia (**appearing**) literally means "a shining forth" and was used by the ancient Greeks of the supposed appearance of a pagan god to men. William Barclay notes that it also was used of Roman emperors. "His accession to the throne of the Empire was his *epiphaneia*; and in particular—and this is the background of Paul's thought here—it was used of a visit by the Emperor to any province or town. The emperor's appearance in any place was his *epiphaneia*. Obviously when the Emperor was due to visit any place, everything was put in perfect order" (*The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1957], 233).

In the New Testament, the noun *epiphaneia* is found only in the letters of Paul. He uses it once of Christ's incarnation (2 Tim. 1:10) and once of His coming to destroy Antichrist at the end of the Great Tribulation (2 Thess. 2:8). In all four of the other instances, he uses it of Christ's taking His saints to be with Himself at the Rapture (Here; in 1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 4:8; and Titus 2:13).

This particular judgment also will have a special relation to Christ's earthly **kingdom**, His thousand year reign, which will begin after the Great Tribulation and the Battle of Armageddon and ultimately merge into the eternal state. At that time, the Lord's resurrected, raptured, and rewarded saints will return with Him to establish His millennial **kingdom**. "He who overcomes," He promises, "I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne" (Rev. 3:21). When they stand before the Lamb on His heavenly throne, the four creatures and the twenty-four elders will sing, "And Thou hast made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth" (Rev. 5:10).

THE CONTENT OF HIS COMMISSION

preach the word; (4:2a)

The faithful minister of Jesus Christ is commanded to **preach the word**, which focuses on the content of what is proclaimed. **Preach** translates the first of nine imperatives Paul uses in this passage, five of them in verse 2 (Preach, be ready, reprove, rebuke, exhort) and four in verse 5 (Be sober, endure, do, fulfill).

Preach is from *kērussō*, which means to herald, to proclaim publicly. In New Testament times, the herald, acting as imperial messenger, would go through the streets of a city to announce special events, such as the appearing of the emperor. His duties also included public announcement of new laws or government policies and actions.

Paul himself not only was appointed an apostle but also, like Timothy, was appointed a preacher (1 Tim. 2:7; cf. 2 Tim. 1:11). But because of Timothy's timid spirit, that task was especially challenging for him. He did not have the naturally strong and aggressive personality or constitution of his mentor. He also may not have had the formal training or intellectual skill to argue successfully on a human level with more sophisticated and experienced errorists in and around the church. He doubtless felt inadequate and intimidated when they presented arguments for which he had not yet developed a successful apologetic or polemic. And in the eyes of some believers in Ephesus, he also was handicapped because of his youthfulness,

although Paul had earlier counseled him to disregard such criticism (1 Tim. 4:12). In addition to resistance within the church, Timothy faced growing hostility from unbelieving Jews and from the Roman government. It was persecution by those enemies that had put Paul in prison.

There were other reasons why Timothy might have been tempted to muffle his proclamation, especially that of evangelism, which Paul mentions in verse 5. Timothy realized that the idea of salvation solely through God's grace runs totally counter to the thinking of natural men and is often met with anger or indifference. But when preaching to unbelievers, whether Jew or Gentile, Timothy was to be like Noah, who "was a righteous man, blameless in his time; [and] walked with God" (Gen. 6:9; cf. Heb. 11:7). Timothy also was to be like Noah in being "a preacher of righteousness" (2 Peter 2:5). Long before God made His covenant with Abraham, before He made His covenant with Israel and gave them the law at Sinai, and still longer before He made the final and perfect covenant through His Son, Jesus Christ, Noah preached God's righteousness to the ever more wicked antediluvians. As far as we know, Noah was not persecuted, but we do know that his preaching for a hundred years while he was building the ark fell on completely indifferent ears, because not a single soul outside his immediate family trusted in God and was saved.

Like every preacher of God's truth to unbelievers, Timothy also was to be like Jonah, who declared to the wicked pagan city of Nineveh, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown" (Jonah 3:4). In great contrast to that of Noah, however, Jonah's preaching produced an amazing response of repentance and faith in the true God. "The men of Nineveh shall stand up with this generation at the judgment," Jesus declared, "and shall condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah" (Matt. 12:41).

Timothy was to be like "John the Baptist [who] came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand' " (Matt. 3:1-2), and who then proclaimed "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

By **the word**, Paul doubtless means the entire written Word of God, His complete revealed truth, which the apostle also calls "the whole purpose of God" (Acts 20:27) and which he has just referred to as "the sacred writings" and the "Scripture" (2 Tim. 3:15-16).

A preacher cannot continue to faithfully **preach** and teach God's **word** unless he carefully protects its truth. "O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you," Paul had warned in his previous letter, "avoiding worldly and empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called 'knowledge' " (1 Tim. 6:20). Near the beginning of this second letter he admonished, "Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus," and, "Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you" (2 Tim. 1:13-14). He also implored Timothy to handle "accurately the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15), because truth that is poorly retained, guarded, and handled inevitably will be poorly taught.

After declaring the marvelous truth first proclaimed by the prophet Joel (2:32) that "whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved," Paul asks rhetorically in his letter to the church at Rome, "How then shall they [unbelievers] call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent?" Again quoting from the Old Testament, this time from Isaiah 52:7, the apostle then exults, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring glad tidings of good things!" (Rom. 10:13-15).

Of his own preaching Paul said,

I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations; but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ. And for this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me. (Col. 1:25–29)

There are gifted orators who can sway an audience with the power of their persuasive rhetoric. There are men who are erudite, knowledgeable, well-trained, and worldly wise, who can cause other men to change their minds about certain matters. There are men who can relate moving stories that tug at a hearer's heart and move him emotionally. Throughout the history of the church, including our own time, God has chosen to endow some ministers with such abilities. But God also has chosen not to bless every faithful preacher in those particular ways. Nevertheless, He charges them with the same task of preaching His Word, because the spiritual power and effectiveness of preaching does not rest in the skill of the speaker but in the truth.

Intellectually brilliant as he was, the apostle testified to believers at Corinth: "Brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God" (1 Cor. 2:1–5). In his next letter to that church, he said, "We do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor. 4:5).

By far the most reliable and effective way to proclaim all of God's Word is to preach it expositively. In his book *The Ministry of the Word*, the nineteenth-century Scotsman William Taylor writes,

By expository preaching, I mean that method of pulpit discourse which consists in the consecutive interpretation, and practical enforcement, of a book of the sacred canon.... Exposition is the presentation to the people, in an intelligible and forcible manner, of the meaning of the sacred writer.... It is the honest answer which the preacher gives, after faithful study, to these questions, "What is the mind of the Holy Spirit in this passage?" and "What is its bearing on related Christian truths, or on the life and conversation of the Christian himself?" ([Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975], 155, 157, 159)

Like countless men before and after his time, Taylor preached expositively because he wanted to know the mind of the Spirit, because he wanted to know how one Scripture truth bore upon another, and he had to carefully understand what God desired for his people.

For many reasons, faithful and full proclamation of **the word** is the only right way to **preach**. First of all, such preaching lets God speak rather than man, because it declares God's own Word. And it is an incredibly thrilling privilege to give voice to God!

Second, preaching **the word** is the only right way to **preach** because it brings the preacher into direct contact with the mind of the Holy Spirit, the author of Scripture. It is for that reason that the preacher of the Word finds the process of study and discovery to be even more rewarding than the preaching that results from it, gratifying as that can be.

It is tragic and puzzling that so many preachers who recognize Scripture to be God's own Word spend more time investigating and interacting with the limited and imperfect minds of other men than delving into the infinite and holy mind of God. Part of the reason, of course, is that many hearers do not really want to delve into the depths of God's righteousness and truth, because it exposes their own shallowness and sin. Paul already has warned Timothy about the danger of those who hold "to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power" (2 Tim. 3:5). Later in the present passage he will warn again that "the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine;... and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths" (2 Tim. 4:3-4; cf. Acts 20:29-30).

Third, preaching **the word** is the only right way to **preach** because it forces the preacher to proclaim all of God's revelation, including those truths that even many believers find hard to learn or accept.

Fourth, preaching **the word** is the only right way to **preach** because it promotes biblical literacy in a congregation, not only through what is learned from the sermon itself but also through the increased desire to study Scripture more carefully and consistently on their own. The faithful pastor, and all other faithful believers, love to learn God's Word because they love the God of the Word.

Fifth, preaching **the word** is the only right way to **preach** because it carries ultimate authority. It is the complete and perfect self-revelation of God Himself and of His divine will for mankind, which He has created in His own image.

Sixth, preaching **the word** is the only right way to **preach** because only that kind of preaching can transform both the preacher and the congregation.

The final and most compelling reason that preaching **the word** is the only right way to **preach** is simply that it is His own Word, and only His own Word, that the Lord calls and commissions His preachers to proclaim.

In the book mentioned above, William Taylor writes, "Let it never be forgotten, then, that he who would rise to eminence and usefulness in the pulpit, and become 'wise in winning souls,' must say of the work of the ministry, 'This one thing I do.' He must focus his whole heart and life upon the pulpit. He must give his days and his nights to the production of those addresses by which he seeks to convince the judgments and move the hearts and elevate the lives of his hearers" (p. 7).

THE SCOPE OF HIS COMMISSION

be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. (4:2b)

In order to be effective, a faithful preacher must understand the scope of his commission, which Paul here summarizes.

Like any other effective worker, he must **be ready**. This is the second command Paul uses in verse 2 and translates *ephistēmi*, which has a broad range of meanings as determined by tense, mood, and voice. It often connotes suddenness, as in Luke 2:9 (“suddenly stood before”) and Acts 12:7 (“suddenly appeared”; cf. 1 Thess. 5:3); or forcefulness, as in Luke 20:1 (“confronted”) and Acts 4:1; 6:12; 23:27 (“came upon”). In the aorist active imperative, as here, the word carries the complementary ideas of urgency, preparedness, and readiness. It could be used of a soldier who is ready to go into battle on a moment’s notice or of a guard who keeps continually alert for any threat of infiltration or attack by the enemy.

For the faithful preacher, **be ready** carries similar meanings of gravity and vigilance. He should feel like Jeremiah, who felt under divine compulsion to prophesy. “If I say, ‘I will not remember Him or speak anymore in His name,’ ” he testified, “then in my heart it becomes like a burning fire shut up in my bones; and I am weary of holding it in, and I cannot endure it” (Jer. 20:9; cf. 5:14).

While Paul stayed in Caesarea for a few days on his way back to Jerusalem after his third missionary journey, the prophet Agabus “took Paul’s belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, ‘This is what the Holy Spirit says: “In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles,’ ” ... the local residents began begging him not to go up to Jerusalem.” But Paul’s immediate reply was, “What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 21:11–13).

Such a sense of readiness and willingness to serve the Lord at any cost and at any time not only should characterize every faithful preacher but also every faithful Christian. Peter exhorted his readers, most of whom were suffering severe persecution from Rome, “Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence” (1 Peter 3:15). Writing to believers in the church where Timothy now was ministering, Paul implored, “Be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil” (Eph. 5:15–16).

In his classic *Lectures to My Students*, Charles Spurgeon wrote, “What in a Christian minister is the most essential quality for securing success in winning souls for Christ?... earnestness. And if I were asked a second or third time, I should not vary the answer.... Success is proportionate to the preacher’s earnestness” ([Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1955], 305).

Only continual study of God’s Word, fellowship with Him in prayer, and submission to His Holy Spirit can keep alive a sense of exhilarating eagerness to preach. Apart from the Word and from prayer, the most gifted and orthodox preaching will grow spiritually stale, for the preacher and for the hearers. In the book just cited, Spurgeon said, “He, who at the end of twenty years ministry among the same people is more alive than ever, is a great debtor to the quickening Spirit” (*Lectures*, 309).

The faithful preacher must be ready **in season and out of season**, when it is convenient and when it is not, when it is immediately satisfying and when it is not, when from a human perspective it seems suitable and when it does not. His proclaiming God’s Word must not be dictated by popular culture and propriety, by tradition, by esteem in the community (Or even in the church), but solely by the mandate of the Lord.

Of the next three commands—**reprove**, **rebuke**, and **exhort**—the first two are negative, and third is positive.

Reprove and **rebuke** are closely related in meaning and are the third and fourth imperatives in this passage. Paul has just declared that all Scripture is “profitable for... reproof” (3:16). As noted in the previous commentary chapter, *elegmos* (Reproof) carries the idea of correcting misbehavior or false doctrine. Reproving may have more to do with affecting the mind, with helping a person understand that what he believes or is doing is wrong. **Rebuke**, on the other hand, may have to do with the heart, with bringing a person under conviction of guilt. To **reprove** is to refute error and misconduct with careful biblical argument; to **rebuke** is to bring the erring person to repentance. The first discloses the sinfulness of sin, whereas the second discloses the sinfulness of the sinner.

The first call of the gospel reflects this reproof by calling for men to repent from sin. In preparing the way for the Messiah, John the Baptist declared, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 3:2). He not only preached against sin in general but against particular sins of particular people. “When Herod the tetrarch was reprovved by him [John the Baptist] on account of Herodias, his brother’s wife, and on account of all the wicked things which Herod had done, he added this also to them all, that he locked John up in prison” (Luke 3:19–20).

Like John the Baptist, Jesus began His public ministry by calling sinners to repentance. After being baptized by John and spending forty days and nights in the wilderness being tempted by Satan, “from that time Jesus began to preach and say, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand’ ” (Matt. 4:17). Although Jesus mentioned God’s love on several occasions, He never preached a message on that theme. But He preached countless messages on God’s condemnation of sin, on His judgment of sinners, and on the sinner’s need for repentance. The unrepentant sinner has no hope in the love of God, because God’s love is inseparable from His holiness and justice. A person who refuses to be cleansed of his sin by God’s grace has no prospect of being accepted into heaven by His love.

Immediately after Peter’s sermon at Pentecost, his hearers “were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brethren, what shall we do?’ And Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’ ” (Acts 2:37–38).

The preacher’s continuing responsibility is to expose, **reprove**, and **rebuke** sin. Sin is that which totally separates unbelievers from God and which temporarily separates believers from close fellowship with their Lord. Paul therefore counseled believers in Ephesus, “Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them” (Eph. 5:11).

He warned Titus about those sinners who infiltrate the church: “There are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach, for the sake of sordid gain.... For this cause reprove them severely that they may be sound in the faith” (Titus 1:10–11, 13).

Sin must be addressed among believers as well. In his first letter to Timothy, Paul commanded, “Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also may be fearful of sinning” (1 Tim. 5:20).

Paul next gives Timothy the positive imperative to **exhort**, which is from *parakaleō*, a common New Testament word that can range in meaning from simply calling out to someone to admonishing, which is clearly the meaning in this context. It also carries the idea of encouragement. After having reproved and rebuked disobedient believers under his care, the faithful preacher is then to come alongside them in love and encourage them to spiritual change.

That is the spirit in which Paul himself pastored those under his care. He reminded believers in Thessalonica, “You know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children, so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory” (1 Thess. 2:11–12; cf. Col. 1:28). Later in the letter he counseled those believers to do as he had done, saying, “We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all men” (5:14).

Not only are the things a preacher says and does important but also the way he says them and does them. He is to reprove, rebuke, and exhort **with patience**. *Makrothumē* (**patience**) means literally to “abide under” and therefore is often translated “endurance” (See, e.g., Luke 21:19; 2 Cor. 6:4; James 1:3) or “perseverance” (See, e.g., James 1:12; 2 Cor. 12:12). But here Paul is speaking specifically of **patience** with people, with members of a flock who may have been persistently stubborn and were resisting their pastor’s admonitions. But the shepherd is not to become exasperated or angry, remembering that he himself is firmly but lovingly and patiently held accountable by the Great Shepherd, our supreme example of **patience**. Paul cautioned believers in Rome, “Do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment upon those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?” (Rom. 2:3–4). If the perfect Son of God is so kind, forbearing, and patient with sinners, how much are His people obliged to have those attitudes?

Although mentioned at the end of the verse, *didachē* (**instruction**) is foundational to preaching, reproof, rebuking, and exhortation. It is only through careful teaching of the Word that those tasks can be successfully carried out by a pastor. An unbeliever will not be convicted of his sin and come to salvation apart from some **instruction** from God’s Word about his lost condition and his need for saving faith in Jesus Christ. Nor will a believer be convicted of his sin and brought to repentance and restoration apart from the work of the Word in his heart.

It is not by a preacher’s personal authority or persuasiveness—no matter how well he knows Scripture or how highly he is gifted—but solely by the authority and power of Scripture itself, illuminated and applied by the Holy Spirit, that any ministry or Christian service can be spiritually effective and pleasing to the Lord. In 4:2 Paul essentially reiterates what he has just declared, namely, that “all Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (3:16–17).

THE URGENCY OF HIS COMMISSION

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths. (4:3–4)

After calling Timothy to excellence in preaching and teaching, Paul now informs him about the opposition he eventually will face because of that preaching and teaching. For the second time in this letter (See 3:1–5; cf. 1 Tim. 4:1–3), the apostle prophesies about the end times, saying, **For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine.**

Because there is no antecedent for **they**, this pronoun possibly could refer to the unbelieving world, which, of course, is opposed by nature to God's truth (cf. 1 Cor. 2:14; 2 Cor. 4:4). But Paul's reference to **the time will come** implies a change of mind, from once enduring to not enduring, in which case **they** refers to unbelievers who become nominal believers in the church, whose profession of faith was only superficial. **They** are men and women whose hearts are rocky and in whom the seed of God's Word does not produce fruit. In the words of Jesus' parable, the seed immediately springs up in their lives, but because there is no depth of belief there is no spiritual root. Therefore when they are tested by the heat of the ungodly world, their superficial profession is "scorched" and quickly withers (Matt. 13:5–6). That describes the urgency of Timothy's commission: Many nominal believers (**they**) in the church at Ephesus eventually would come to reject his faithful preaching of the Word, a pattern repeated through the centuries.

Kairos does not refer to chronological but epochal **time**, a period or era of **time**. It is the same word Paul uses in the previous chapter in regard to "dangerous times" that would come "in the last days," and doubtless refers to the same period of time as here.

Jesus gave a similar warning early in His ministry:

Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; therefore be shrewd as serpents, and innocent as doves. But beware of men; for they will deliver you up to the courts, and scourge you in their synagogues; and you shall even be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. And brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents, and cause them to be put to death.... And you will be hated by all on account of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved. (Matt. 10:16–18, 21–22)

Near the end of His ministry, as He shared the Last Supper with His disciples, Jesus again warned, "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me" (John 15:18–21; 16:1–2).

Because of what lay ahead for Timothy, the need for his fearless, uncompromising preaching of the Word became all the more compelling. The time would come, perhaps not long off, when he would have less and less opportunity to preach and less and less response to the truth he proclaimed.

Anechō (**endure**) has the basic idea of holding up or holding onto, especially in face of difficulty, and also can be rendered “tolerate.” Many people in the church at Ephesus would become intolerant of the unadulterated word, of **sound doctrine**, and of Timothy’s preaching of it. **Sound** translates a form of the verb *hugianō*, which means to be healthy, and is the term from which we derive “hygiene.” It is rendered “safe and sound” in the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:27). Timothy would face increasing resistance to **doctrine** that was spiritually healthy and nourishing, that was true to God’s Word—to “the sacred writings” (3:15), to God-breathed “Scripture” (v. 16).

In his first letter, Paul reminded Timothy that men and women who are “lawless and rebellious,... ungodly and sinners,... unholy and profane,... murderers and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers” live lives that are “contrary to sound teaching” (1 Tim. 1:9–10). It is because **sound doctrine** is a stinging rebuke to ungodly living that it is unacceptable and intolerable to those who persist in sin. Those who live contrary to **sound doctrine** resent and resist the teaching of **sound doctrine**.

Later in that letter, the apostle commanded, “If anyone advocates a different doctrine, and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain” (1 Tim. 6:3–5). It was in face of that danger that, near the beginning of this second letter, Paul admonishes Timothy: “Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you” (2 Tim. 1:13–14; cf. Titus 1:9, 13; 2:8).

After the Lord asked Isaiah, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?” the prophet responded, “Here am I. Send me!” (Isa. 6:8). But God warned His willing messenger that the people, His own chosen people, would “keep on listening, but... not perceive; keep on looking, but... not understand,” that “the hearts of this people [would be] insensitive, their ears dull, and their eyes dim, lest they see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and return and be healed” (Isa. 6:8–10).

Timothy soon would face a similar prospect. The more faithfully he proclaimed God’s Word, the more faithless some people in the church would prove themselves to be.

That also is the situation in much of the church today. Even in churches that once were genuinely evangelical, where the Bible was the divine standard for belief and for living, God’s Word is compromised. Sometimes it is stripped of its clear meaning or is relegated to a place of secondary authority behind personal “revelations” claimed to be from God. In many churches who once preached **sound doctrine**, evils that God’s Word plainly and repeatedly condemns are touted as acceptable. Women are ordained to ministries the Bible restricts to men, and radical feminists even reject the idea of God as heavenly Father. Homosexuals not only are welcomed without reproof or repentance into church fellowship but also are welcomed into the pulpit.

Instead of receiving **sound doctrine**, such churches fiercely reject it, **wanting** rather **to have their ears tickled** with unbiblical notions that raise their comfort level, justify or overlook their sins. They also reject as unloving anyone who presumes to hold them accountable to doctrinal

beliefs and moral standards they deem outmoded and irrelevant. Consequently the preacher whom they least like to hear brings the message they need most to hear.

Not surprisingly, therefore, such false Christians **will accumulate for themselves** ungodly **teachers in accordance to their own** ungodly **desires**. Noted Bible scholar Marvin R. Vincent wrote insightfully, “If people desire a calf to worship, a ministerial calf-maker is readily found” (*Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol. 4 [New York: Scribner’s, 1904], 321).

That sad truth was verified repeatedly throughout the history of Israel. Through Jeremiah, the Lord lamented, “An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule on their own authority; and *My people love it so!*” (Jer. 5:30–31, emphasis added). Not many years later, the Lord told Ezekiel, “They come to you as people come, and sit before you as My people, and hear your words, but they do not do them, for *they do the lustful desires* expressed by their mouth, and their heart goes after their gain. And behold, you are to them like a sensual song by one who has a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument; for they hear your words, but they do not practice them” (Ezek. 33:31–32, emphasis added). Apparently this prophet was a captivating speaker to whom the people liked to listen purely for his impressive oratory. But they totally rejected what he had to say, being determined instead to fulfill their “lustful desires” and pursue “their gain.” They were not interested in learning the truth but were much like “all the Athenians and the strangers” whom Paul confronted with the gospel in Athens, who “used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new” (Acts 17:21).

It was the self-will of Adam and Eve, **their own desires**, that led to the Fall, and it is that naturally transmitted self-will that has driven their descendants ever since. It is to please their own desires that so many people today flock to preachers who proffer God’s blessings apart from His forgiveness, His salvation apart from their repentance, His acceptance as their Savior but not as their Lord. Because they love the “ungodliness and unrighteousness” that manifest **their own desires**, the unsaved “suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom. 1:18). In doing so, they **turn away their ears from the truth**.

The compound verb **will turn away** is from *apostrephō*, meaning “to cause to turn away” and is active. **Will turn aside** is from the closely related *ektrepō*, meaning “to cause to turn aside” but is passive. The verse therefore can be literally rendered, “And *will cause themselves* to turn away their ears from the truth, and *will be caused* to turn aside to myths.” *Ektrepō* sometimes was used medically to refer to a dislocated joint. The minds and hearts of those who reject God’s truth become spiritually dislocated, knocked out of joint, as it were. Paul used the same verb in his first letter to Timothy of those who had “already *turned aside* to follow Satan” (1 Tim. 5:15, emphasis added).

“If our gospel is veiled,” Paul explained to the church at Corinth, “it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Cor. 4:4). When God’s **truth** is knowingly rejected, Satan’s falsehood is inevitably, though often unknowingly, embraced. In other words, deliberate rejection of God’s **truth** makes a person vulnerable to Satan’s **myths**.

Many churches today are filled to overflowing with those who want their ears tickled with the **myths** of easy believism and the many variations of selfism and so called positive thinking. They come to have their egos fed and their sins approved, not to have their hearts cleansed and

their souls saved. They want only to feel good, not to be made good. Tragically, such **myths** serve to religiously insulate people from the true gospel and drive them still further from the Lord.

THE ATTITUDE OF HIS COMMISSION

But you, be sober in all things, (4:5a)

The faithful preacher is to **be sober in all things**. **Be sober**, the sixth imperative in this passage, is from *nephō*, which literally means to be free of intoxicants. Here, however, it is used metaphorically like its English counterpart, of being levelheaded, well-balanced, and in control of one's faculties. By extension it includes the ideas of being stable, unwavering, steadfast.

The **sober** preacher is like the diligent athlete, who “exercises self-control in all things,” who, like Paul himself, runs “in such a way, as not without aim,” boxes “in such a way, as not beating the air,” and buffets his body to make it his slave, lest, after having “preached to others, [he himself] should be disqualified” (1 Cor. 9:25–27). In the midst of a changing world, a changing church, and even a changing gospel—which is not really the gospel but a distortion of “the gospel of Christ” (Gal. 1:7; cf. 2 Cor. 11:4)—he remains committed to the changeless truth of God's Word.

The faithful preacher refuses to be trendy or compromising, to be an ear-tickler and men-pleaser rather than a God-pleaser. He can declare with Paul, “For our exhortation does not come from error or impurity or by way of deceit; but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men but God, who examines our hearts. For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed” (1 Thess. 2:3–5). He also could say with the apostle, “For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ. For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man” (Gal. 1:10–11), “for we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord” (2 Cor. 4:5).

THE COST OF HIS COMMISSION

endure hardship, (4:5b)

Paul's seventh command to Timothy was to **endure hardship**. The verb *kakopatheō* (**endure hardship**) literally means to suffer evil and was used by Paul earlier in this letter to describe his own suffering for the Lord (2:9). A few verses earlier, the apostle had used a closely related verb in asking Timothy to “suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus” (v. 3). At the time he wrote these words, he was “already being poured out as a drink offering” (4:6). For many years he had suffered countless hardships. “[I was] beaten times without number,” he said,

often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. (2 Cor. 11:23–27)

Not only that, but, “apart from such external things,” he also suffered “the daily pressure upon [him] of concern for all the churches” (v. 28).

There is no such thing as a faithful ministry that is not costly. A painless ministry is a shallow and fruitless ministry.

Although Paul probably did not write the letter to the Hebrews, the author of that epistle also knew and loved Timothy. He rejoiced “that our brother Timothy has been released [from prison], with whom, if he comes soon, I shall see you” (Heb. 13:23). Because Hebrews likely was written soon after 2 Timothy, this young pastor must have been arrested and jailed while he ministered in Ephesus, soon after he received the letter. The time quickly came (See v. 3) for him to **endure hardship** in service of His Lord.

THE EXTENT OF HIS COMMISSION

do the work of an evangelist, (4:5c)

Poieō (do the work), is the eighth imperative that Paul here gives to Timothy. The noun *euangelistēs (evangelist)* is used only three times in the New Testament, always in reference to a specific office of ministry. In his letter to the church at Ephesus, Paul tells us that Christ “gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers” (Eph. 4:11). The only person specifically called an evangelist is Philip (Acts 21:8), who was among the first deacons chosen in the church (6:5) and was used by the Lord to bring to salvation the Ethiopian official as he returned from worshipping in Jerusalem (8:26–38).

But the related verb *euangelizō (To evangelize)* and its compounds are used 54 times, and the noun *euangelion (Gospel, good news)* is used 76 times. Both words are used not only in relation to evangelists but also in relation to the call of every Christian to witness for Christ and of the responsibility of every preacher and teacher to proclaim the gospel of salvation.

It is important to note, therefore, that Paul does not call Timothy an evangelist but rather calls him to **do the work of an evangelist**. In other words, proclaiming the gospel of salvation was an important part of, but was not all of, Timothy’s ministry. As he preached, taught, and pastored those who already belonged to the Lord, he also was to con-front the lost—in particular, nominal Christians within the church—with their need of a Savior.

It is also important to note that the purpose of evangelization—whether by an ordinary Christian to a neighbor, by a pastor to the unsaved in his congregation, or by an evangelist to the general public—is to carefully but simply help unbelievers become aware of their sinfulness and lostness and to proclaim Jesus Christ as the only Savior and Lord. Any human manipulation in that process, no matter how well intentioned, always becomes a barrier to genuine belief.

THE GOAL OF HIS COMMISSION

fulfill your ministry. (4:5d)

Finally, Timothy was to **fulfill** the unique **ministry** given to him by the Lord. *Plērophoreō* (**fulfill**) is the ninth and final imperative and carries the basic idea of giving full measure or bringing to completion. In relation to a person's work, it also carries the ideas of eagerness and wholeheartedness.

That was the way Paul sought to fulfill his own ministry. He assured the congregation at Colossae,

Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, *that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God*, that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations; but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ. *And for this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.* (Col. 1:25–29, emphasis added; cf. 1 Cor. 9:24–27)

The apostle wanted Timothy also one day to be able say what he himself was about to say: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:7).³

³ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1995). [*2 Timothy*](#) (pp. 166–185). Chicago: Moody Press.