

The Marks of the Faithful Preacher



2 TIMOTHY 4:1-5

TEXT, EXPOSITION AND PRACTICAL HELPS

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Marks of the Faithful Preacher ([2 Timothy 4:1-5](#))

[2 Timothy 4:1-5 \(NASB\)](#)

¹ 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:

² preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.

³ 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,

⁴ and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.

⁵ But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

The final section of **2 Timothy**, which begins with this passage, contains the last inspired words penned by Paul, who knew that his earthly life was nearing its end. “**I am already being poured out as a drink offering,**” he wrote, “**and the time of my departure has come**” ([v. 6](#)). With that bittersweet prospect in mind (cf. [Philippians 1:23](#)), in his final charge he beseeched his beloved Timothy to be faithful in his ministry to the Lord Jesus Christ.

[Philippians 1:23 \(NASB\)](#)

²³ **But I am hard-pressed from both *directions*, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for *that* is very much better;**

In what had been an exemplary church at Ephesus, some believers, including men in positions of leadership, had begun to defect, just as Paul predicted ([Acts 20:28-31](#)). Timothy had been placed by the apostle as defender of the faith in that congregation, where sound doctrine and godliness had lost their primacy.

[Acts 20:28-31 \(NASB\)](#)

²⁸ **“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.**

²⁹ **“I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;**

³⁰ **and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.**

³¹ **“Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.**

Empire-wide persecution of the church was well under way and doubtless was responsible for much of the defection. Those who were loyal in easier times deserted when discipleship became costly.

In this second letter, Paul already has admonished Timothy "to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands" ([2 Timothy 1:6](#)). As with every genuine preacher of the gospel, Timothy did not choose his ministry but was appointed to it by God. The Lord had set him apart for the preaching and teaching of His Word. He ministered under divine authority and divine obligation. Just as God had sovereignly called Timothy to salvation, He also had sovereignly appointed him to preach the gospel. Timothy could say with his mentor, "I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel" ([1 Corinthians 9:16](#)).

Paul **did not focus** on the visible success of Timothy's ministry **but on** the excellence of his service. He **focused not** on Timothy's opportunities **but on** his commitment, **not on** his personal prominence **but on** his character. He expressed no concern for the young pastor's acceptance or reputation but great concern for his faithfulness and godliness. He did not emphasize the size, wealth, or influence of the church at Ephesus but rather its spiritual life and health under Timothy's care. He did not concentrate even on Timothy's spiritual gifts, important as those were, but on his spiritual life and his spiritual service. His advice to Timothy could be summarized in his charge to believers in Corinth: "Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" ([1 Corinthians 10:31](#)).

Regardless of how things may appear to the world, to the rest of the church, or even to ourselves, God's Word assures us that the best of life belongs to those who know Christ as Savior and Lord and who give themselves up for His service and His glory. The central truth of the Beatitudes could be condensed to "Blessed, happy, and satisfied are those who love and serve the Lord."

Unfortunately, many Christians, including some pastors and other leaders, seek for success rather than excellence. But success focuses on the external rather than the internal, on the temporal rather than the eternal, and is measured by human standards rather than by divine. Desire for success comes from pride, whereas genuine desire for excellence comes from humility.

In his book *Christian Excellence*, John Johnstone rightfully maintains that success and excellence are competing ideals and that everything a believer does, whether consciously or not, is devoted to one of those ideals or the other. It is not that excellence in a believer precludes every form of outward success but that any success that comes from the pursuit of excellence is incidental. Success is not to be sought or to be gloried in if it is achieved.

Success is attaining cultural goals that elevate one's importance in the eyes of society and generally is marked by power, prestige, wealth, and privilege, according to Johnstone. Excellence, on the other hand, is the pursuit of the highest quality in one's work and effort, whether others recognize and approve it or not. Success is measured in relation to others, whereas excellence is measured by one's own God-given potential and calling. Success seeks to please men; excellence seeks to please God. Success rewards only a few, whereas excellence is available to any believer who is willing to pay the

price. Success pertains to possessions and reputation, whereas excellence pertains to character. Success can be cheap, attained by shortcuts, lying, and stealing. The price of excellence is never discounted, never available for anything less than full price. (*This paragraph is adapted from Johnstone.*)

Although directed first of all to Timothy, Paul's commission in [2 Timothy 4:1-5](#) applies to every minister of the gospel in every age, every place, and every circumstance. In a broader way it can be applied to every faithful believer, because it is essential for every congregation to know and understand this charge. Churches are responsible, under God and with God, to hold their pastors accountable to these divine precepts.

The role of the preacher in Christ's church is vital, and God has ordained that His people be taught and shepherded by Spirit-gifted, Spirit-led, and Spirit-empowered men. The spiritual life and faithfulness of a congregation always is closely related to the spiritual life and faithfulness of its pastor.

Scripture is not nebulous about what the Lord expects of those He calls to preach, teach, and pastor His people. Among the many other qualifications and standards for such men given in the New Testament, **are the eight** which Paul mentions in the present text: **the seriousness (v. 1), content (v. 2a), scope (v. 2b), urgency (vv. 3-4), attitude (v. 5a), cost (v. 5b), extent (v. 5c), and goal (v. 5d).**

The Seriousness of His Commission

[2 Timothy 4:1 \(NASB\)](#)

¹ 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:

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 order or directive. The apostle has twice before used the verb to admonish Timothy ([1 Timothy 5:21](#); [2 Timothy 2:14](#); cf. [1 Timothy 6:13](#)).

[1 Timothy 5:21 \(NASB\)](#)

²¹ **I solemnly charge** you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of *His* chosen angels, to maintain these *principles* without bias, doing nothing in a *spirit* of partiality.

[2 Timothy 2:14 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁴ Remind *them* of these things, and **solemnly charge them** in the presence of God not to wrangle about words, which is useless *and leads* to the ruin of the hearers.

[1 Timothy 6:13 \(NASB\)](#)

¹³ **I charge you** in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate,

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](#)).

John 5:26-27 (NASB)

²⁶ **“For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself;**

²⁷ **and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is *the* Son of Man.**

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. [Matthew 25:34-41](#); [Acts 10:42](#); [Acts 17:30-31](#)).

[Matthew 25:34-41 \(NASB\)](#)

³⁴ “**Then the King will say to those on His right**, ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

³⁵ ‘For I was hungry, and you gave Me *something* to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me *something* to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in;

³⁶ naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.’

³⁷ “Then the righteous will answer Him, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You *something* to drink?

³⁸ ‘And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You?

³⁹ ‘When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’

⁴⁰ “The King will answer and say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, *even* the least of *them*, you did it to Me.’

⁴¹ “**Then He will also say to those on His left**, ‘Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels;

[Acts 10:42 \(NASB\)](#)

⁴² “And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God **as Judge of the living and the dead.**

[Acts 17:30-31 \(NASB\)](#)

³⁰ “Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all *people* everywhere should repent,

³¹ because He has fixed a day in which **He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed**, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.”

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 Thessalonians 2:12](#)).

[Luke 7:43 \(NASB\)](#)

⁴³ Simon answered and said, “I suppose the one whom he forgave more.” And He said to him, “**You have judged correctly.**”

Acts 4:19 (NASB)

¹⁹ But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, **you be the judge;**

John 12:48 (NASB)

⁴⁸ "He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is **what will judge him at the last day.**

Acts 13:27 (NASB)

²⁷ "For those who live in Jerusalem, and their rulers, recognizing neither Him nor the utterances of the prophets which are read every Sabbath, **fulfilled these by condemning Him.**

2 Thessalonians 2:12 (NASB)

¹² in order that they all **may be judged** who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness.

The New Testament reveals **three distinct judgments** of human beings that Christ will conduct:

- 1) the bema seat judgment of believers only (**1 Corinthians 3:12-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10**);

1 Corinthians 3:12-15 (NASB)

¹² Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,

¹³ each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is *to be* revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work.

¹⁴ If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward.

¹⁵ If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

2 Corinthians 5:10 (NASB)

¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

- 2) the sheep and goats judgment of the nations, in which believers will be separated from unbelievers (**Matthew 25:31-33**); and

Matthew 25:31-33 (NASB)

³¹ "But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne.

³² "All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats;

³³ and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left.

- 3) the great white throne judgment of unbelievers only ([Revelation 20:11-15](#)).
[Revelation 20:11-15 \(NASB\)](#)

¹¹ Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them.

¹² And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is *the book of life*; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.

¹³ And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one *of them* according to their deeds.

¹⁴ Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.

¹⁵ And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

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 Corinthians 5:10](#); cf. [1 Corinthians 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 Corinthians 4:4-5](#)).

The grammatical construction of [2 Timothy 4:1](#) suggests the idea of imminency, 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 Thessalonians 4:13-18](#)).

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 (NASB)

¹³ **But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope.**

¹⁴ **For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.**

¹⁵ **For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.**

¹⁶ **For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.**

¹⁷ **Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.**

¹⁸ **Therefore comfort one another with these words.**

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 Timothy 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 Timothy 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” (Galatian 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 Timothy 1:10**) and once of His coming to destroy Antichrist at the end of the Great Tribulation (**2 Thessalonians 2:8**).

2 Timothy 1:10 (NASB)

¹⁰ but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel,

2 Thessalonians 2:8 (NASB)

⁸ Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming;

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 Timothy 6:14**; **2 Timothy 4:8**; and **Titus 2:13**).

1 Timothy 6:14 (NASB)

¹⁴ that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ,

2 Timothy 4:8 (NASB)

⁸ in the future 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.

Titus 2:13 (NASB)

¹³ looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus,

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" ([Revelation 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" ([Revelation 5:10](#)).

The Content of His Commission

[2 Timothy 4:2 \(NASB\)](#)

² **preach the word; be ready** in season *and* out of season; **reprove, rebuke, exhort**, with great patience and instruction.

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**).

[2 Timothy 4:5 \(NASB\)](#)

⁵ But you, **be sober** in all things, **endure** hardship, **do** the work of an evangelist, **fulfill** your ministry.

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 Timothy 2:7](#); cf. [2 Timothy 1:11](#)).

[1 Timothy 2:7 \(NASB\)](#)

⁷ For this **I was appointed a preacher** and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying) as a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

[2 Timothy 1:11 \(NASB\)](#)

¹¹ for which **I was appointed a preacher** and an apostle and a teacher.

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 Timothy 4:12](#)).

1 Timothy 4:12 (NASB)

¹² **Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but *rather* in speech, conduct, love, faith *and* purity, show yourself an example of those who believe.**

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](#).

2 Timothy 4:5 (NASB)

⁵ **But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.**

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" ([Genesis 6:9](#); cf. [Hebrews 11:7](#)).

Hebrews 11:7 (NASB)

⁷ **By faith Noah, being warned *by God* about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.**

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**" ([Matthew 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'”** ([Matthew 3:1-2](#)), and who then proclaimed “**the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!**” ([John 1:29](#)).

2 Timothy 4:2 (NASB)

² **preach the word**; be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.

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 Timothy 3:15-16](#)).

2 Timothy 3:15-16 (NASB)

¹⁵ and that from childhood you have known **the sacred writings** which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

¹⁶ All **Scripture** is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;

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 Timothy 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 Timothy 1:13-14](#)).

He also implored Timothy to handle “**accurately the word of truth**” ([2 Timothy 2:15](#)), because truth that is poorly retained, guarded, and handled inevitably will be poorly taught.

2 Timothy 2:15 (NASB)

¹⁵ **Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.**

After declaring the marvelous truth first proclaimed by the prophet Joel ([Joel 2:32](#)) that “**whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved,**”

Joel 2:32 (NASB)

³² “**And it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the LORD Will be delivered;** For on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem There will be those who escape, As the LORD has said, Even among the survivors whom the LORD calls.

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!”** ([Romans 10:13-15](#)).

Romans 10:13-15 (NASB)

¹³ for "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED."

¹⁴ How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?

¹⁵ How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, **"HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!"**

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”.** ([Colossians 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 Corinthians 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 Corinthians 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.

2 Timothy 4:2 (NASB)

² **preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.**

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 Timothy 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 Timothy 4:3-4](#); cf. [Acts 20:29-30](#)).

Acts 20:29-30 (NASB)

²⁹ "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;

³⁰ and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.

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

2 Timothy 4:2 (NASB)

² **preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.**

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](#); [Acts 6:12](#); [Acts 23:27](#) ("came upon").

[Luke 2:9 \(NASB\)](#)

⁹ And an angel of the Lord **suddenly stood before** them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened.

[Acts 12:7 \(NASB\)](#)

⁷ And behold, an angel of the Lord **suddenly appeared** and a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter's side and woke him up, saying, "Get up quickly." And his chains fell off his hands.

[1 Thessalonians 5:3 \(NASB\)](#)

³ While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will **come upon them suddenly** like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape.

[Luke 20:1 \(NASB\)](#)

¹ On one of the days while He was teaching the people in the temple and preaching the gospel, the chief priests and the scribes with the elders **confronted Him**,

[Acts 4:1 \(NASB\)](#)

¹ As they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple *guard* and the Sadducees **came up** to them,

[Acts 6:12 \(NASB\)](#)

¹² And they stirred up the people, the elders and the scribes, and they **came up** to him and dragged him away and brought him before the Council.

[Acts 23:27 \(NASB\)](#)

²⁷ "When this man was arrested by the Jews and was about to be slain by them, I **came up** to them with the troops and rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman.

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.

[2 Timothy 4:2 \(NASB\)](#)

² preach the word; **be ready** in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.

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" ([Jeremiah 20:9](#); cf. [5:14](#)).

Jeremiah 5:14 (NASB)

¹⁴Therefore, thus says the LORD, the God of hosts, "Because you have spoken this word, Behold, I am making My words in your mouth fire And this people wood, and it will consume them.

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”** ([Ephesians 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).

2 Timothy 4:2 (NASB)

²preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.

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.

2 Timothy 4:2 (NASB)

² **preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.**

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**” (**2 Timothy 3:16**).

2 Timothy 3:16 (NASB)

¹⁶ **All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;**

As noted in **2 Timothy 3:16**, *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**” (**Matthew 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'**” (**Matthew 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](#)).

2 Timothy 4:2 (NASB)

² **preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season; **reprove, rebuke, exhort**, with great patience and instruction.**

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"** ([Ephesians 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 Timothy 5:20](#)).

2 Timothy 4:2 (NASB)

² **preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, **exhort**, with great patience and instruction.**

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 Thessalonians 2:11-12](#); cf. [Col. 1:28](#)).

Colossians 1:28 (NASB)

²⁸ We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.

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 everyone” ([1 Thessalonians 5:14](#)).

2 Timothy 4:2 (NASB)

² preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great **patience** and instruction.

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 Corinthians 6:4](#); [James 1:3](#)) or “perseverance” (see, e.g., [James 1:12](#); [2 Corinthians 12:12](#)).

Luke 21:19 (NASB)

¹⁹ “By your **endurance** you will gain your lives.

2 Corinthians 6:4 (NASB)

⁴ but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God, in much **endurance**, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses,

James 1:3 (NASB)

³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces **endurance**.

James 1:12 (NASB)

¹² Blessed is a man who **perseveres** under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which *the Lord* has promised to those who love Him.

2 Corinthians 12:12 (NASB)

¹² The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all **perseverance**, by signs and wonders and miracles.

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?” ([Romans 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?

2 Timothy 4:2 (NASB)

² **preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.**

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 **2 Timothy 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” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).**

The Urgency of His Commission

2 Timothy 4:3-4 (NASB)

³ **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,**
⁴ **and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.**

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 **2 Timothy 3:1-5**; cf. **1 Timothy 4:1-3**), the apostle prophesies about the end times, saying, **For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine.**

2 Timothy 3:1-5 (NASB)

¹ **But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come.**
² **For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy,**
³ **unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good,**

⁴ treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,

⁵ holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these.

1 Timothy 4:1-3 (NASB)

¹ But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons,

² by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron,

³ *men* who forbid marriage *and advocate* abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth.

2 Timothy 4:3-4 (NASB)

³ 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,

⁴ and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.

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 Corinthians 2:14](#); [2 Corinthians 4:4](#)).

1 Corinthians 2:14 (NASB)

¹⁴ But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

2 Corinthians 4:4 (NASB)

⁴ in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

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 ([Matthew 13:5-6](#)).

Matthew 13:5-6 (NASB)

⁵ "Others fell on the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil.

⁶ "But when the sun had risen, **they were scorched**; and because they had no root, they withered away.

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.

2 Timothy 4:3-4 (NASB)

³ 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,

⁴ and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.

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." ([Matthew 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](#); [John 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.

2 Timothy 4:3-4 (NASB)

³ 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,
⁴ and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.

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 *hugiainō*, 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](#)).

Luke 15:27 (NASB)

²⁷ "And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back **safe and sound**.'

Timothy would face increasing resistance to **doctrine** that was spiritually healthy and nourishing, that was true to God’s Word—to “the sacred writings” ([2 Timothy 3:15](#)), to God-breathed “Scripture” ([2 Timothy 3:16](#)).

2 Timothy 3:15-16 (NASB)

¹⁵ and that from childhood you have known **the sacred writings** which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.
¹⁶ All **Scripture** is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;

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 Timothy 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**.

(See [1 Timothy 6:3-5](#)).

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 Timothy 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 Timothy 1:13-14](#); cf. [Titus 1:9, 13](#); [Titus 2:8](#)).

[Titus 1:9 \(NASB\)](#)

⁹ holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.

[Titus 1:13 \(NASB\)](#)

¹³ This testimony is true. For this reason reprove them severely so that they may be sound in the faith,

[Titus 2:8 \(NASB\)](#)

⁸ sound *in* speech which is beyond reproach, so that the opponent will be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us.

After the Lord asked Isaiah, “**Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?**” the prophet responded, “**Here am I. Send me!**” ([Isaiah 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**” ([Isaiah 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.

2 Timothy 4:3-4 (NASB)

³ 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,**

⁴ and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.

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!**” ([Jeremiah 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**” ([Ezekiel 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**” ([Romans 1:18](#)).

Romans 1:18 (NASB)

¹⁸ **For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,**

2 Timothy 4:3-4 (NASB)

³ **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,**
⁴ **and **will turn away their ears from the truth** and will turn aside to myths.**

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 Timothy 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 Corinthians 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

[2 Timothy 4:5 \(NASB\)](#)

⁵ **But you, be sober in all things,** endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

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 level-headed, 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 Corinthians 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**” ([Galatians 1:7](#); cf. [2 Corinthians 11:4](#))—he remains committed to the changeless truth of God's Word.

[Galatians 1:7 \(NASB\)](#)

⁷ which is *really* not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.

[2 Corinthians 11:4 \(NASB\)](#)

⁴ For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear *this* beautifully.

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 Thessalonians 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**” ([Galatians 1:10-11](#)), “**for we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord**” ([2 Corinthians 4:5](#)).

The Cost of His Commission

2 Timothy 4:5 (NASB)

⁵ But you, be sober in all things, **endure hardship**, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

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 Timothy 2:9**).

2 Timothy 2:9 (NASB)

⁹ for which I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal; but the word of God is not imprisoned.

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” (2 Timothy 2:3)**.

At the time he wrote these words, he was **“already being poured out as a drink offering” (2 Timothy 4:6)**.

2 Timothy 4:6 (NASB)

⁶ For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come.

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 Corinthians 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” (2 Corinthians 11:28)**.

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” (Hebrews 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.

Hebrews 13:3 (NASB)

³ Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, *and* those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body.

The Extent of His Commission

2 Timothy 4:5 (NASB)

⁵ But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, **do the work of an evangelist**, fulfill your ministry.

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**” ([Ephesians 4:11](#)).

The only person specifically called an evangelist is Philip ([Acts 21:8](#)), who was among the first deacons chosen in the church ([Acts 6:5](#)) and was used by the Lord to bring to salvation the Ethiopian official as he returned from worshiping in Jerusalem ([Acts 8:26-38](#)).

Acts 6:5 (NASB)

⁵ The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and **Philip**, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch.

Acts 8:26-38 (NASB)

²⁶ But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, "Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a desert *road*.)

²⁷ So he got up and went; and there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship,

²⁸ and he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah.

²⁹ Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go up and join this chariot."

³⁰ Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

³¹ And he said, "Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

³² Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this: "HE WAS LED AS A SHEEP TO SLAUGHTER; AND AS A LAMB BEFORE ITS SHEARER IS SILENT, SO HE DOES NOT OPEN HIS MOUTH.

³³ "IN HUMILIATION HIS JUDGMENT WAS TAKEN AWAY; WHO WILL RELATE HIS GENERATION? FOR HIS LIFE IS REMOVED FROM THE EARTH."

³⁴ The eunuch answered Philip and said, "Please *tell me*, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?"

³⁵ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him.

³⁶ As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch *said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?"

³⁷ [And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."]

³⁸ And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him.

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 confront 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

[2 Timothy 4:5 \(NASB\)](#)

⁵ But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, **fulfill your ministry.**

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.*” ([Colossians 1:25-29](#), emphasis added; cf. [1 Corinthians 9:24-27](#))

[1 Corinthians 9:24-27 \(NASB\)](#)

²⁴ Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but *only* one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win.

²⁵ Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then *do it* to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.

²⁶ Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air;

²⁷ but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

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 Timothy 4:7](#)).