Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Pastor's Priorities
Scripture: 2 Timothy 4
Code: BQ9210

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: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. (2 Timothy 4:1–3)

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, is the one Paul mentions in the present text: the content of his commission, **preach the word;** (4:2)

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 *kerusso,* 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.

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).

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.

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