

Seminary Graduation

Selected Scriptures

80-170

I am at once greatly honored and feel a great weight of responsibility on this occasion to say what the Lord had once said to these graduates and something that I trust can be memorable and find a place in their foundation as they go out to minister. I do have the opportunity through the school year to speak in chapel to the men, and I cherish every occasion when I'm able to do that and only hope and pray on each occasion that the Lord will allow me to put a brick in the foundation on which their life in ministry will be built. That's what I pray for tonight.

I would invite you, if you will, to turn in your Bible to 1 Timothy chapter 6. This is a passage that is most notable and a favorite of mine. I remember a few years ago when I was invited by the Southern Baptist Convention to address their pastor's conference. The place of that address was the Superdome in New Orleans. There were 25,000 pastors there. I was standing on the 50-yard line of what is usually a football arena, preaching to a grandstand full of 25,000 pastors. And it was there that I addressed them on the subject of a man of God.

As a result of that, the Lord, in His goodness, allowed that message to be taken and be placed in a list of articles that were incorporated in a Bible, which many of those men use, so that message came to be identified with me, and the Dean asked me if I would share it with all of you tonight.

1 Timothy chapter 6, I want to read verses 11-14. "But flee from these things, you men of God, and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance, and gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you are called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. 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, that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ."

This passage contains one of my favorite descriptive phrases in the Bible--"man of God." It is the title there in verse 11 by which Paul identifies Timothy, a simple and yet wonderful enriched designation. What a privilege to be called a man of God, God's man, the man who uniquely belongs to God. No other individual person in the New Testament is given that title, and thus it is uniquely used to identify Timothy, both here and in the Scripture read earlier from 2 Timothy chapter 3, where, in the last verse, again he has identified as a man of God made complete through the Word of God.

And while this particular term is rare in the New Testament, it is quite common, in fact, in the Old Testament, used some 70 times, as a matter of fact, in the Old Testament. Any student of the Old Testament becomes very familiar with the identification of the man of God.

It first appears in Deuteronomy 33:1, where Moses, the great prophet, is the first one ever called the

man of God. It is repeated of him in other places as well. It is used of many others in the Old Testament, including the angelic messenger sent with a message from God to the wife of Menoah, announcing to her the birth of Sampson. It was used to describe a prophet who spoke to God--I should say for God--to Eli, who was the high priest, predicting the severe, divine judgment on his sinful family in 1 Samuel 2. It was even used to identify Samuel, who was called the man of God, the one who spoke for God, Divine truth.

In fact, every time the title man of God is used in the Old Testament, it refers to someone who belonged to God in a unique way for the specific purpose of being His spokesman. It is then a technical term to refer to a preacher, to refer to a proclaimer, a prophet. It was also used of the prophet Shamaya, who was to prophesy against Reabaoam. It was used again for the prophet who spoke the word of God to Jeroboam regarding his being replaced and under judgment. It is used to describe Elijah and Elisha. It is even used of David, who spoke for God. It is used of the prophet who confronted Amaziah and is called the man of God in 2 Chronicles 25. It even identifies the somewhat obscure prophet Igdalia in Jeremiah 35:4.

The sum of all of those uses is convincing that this is a title with technical reference to someone who is set apart and uniquely gifted and called to speak God's Word. The one other New Testament usage confirms this. It is used one other time other than the two times in reference to Timothy, and that is in 2 Peter chapter 1, where it says, "No prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men, moved by the Holy Spirit, spoke from God." Literally men of God, moved by the Holy Spirit, spoke.

God has always had His spokesmen. God has always had His prophets. He has always had His preachers. Man of God, uniquely called, uniquely gifted, given the responsibility to proclaim His words to their generation. And again I remind you, the only other New Testament usage appears in the text that was read earlier and identifies the man of God as being equipped to do that only when the Word of God abides in him--when he has been taught the Word of God so that it has reformed him, it has corrected him, it has trained him in righteousness. Then he has become adequate and is equipped for the work of the man of God, which is the proclamation of that truth. First of all, it must become part of his life. It must take over the fabric of his soul. Once it has captivated his heart and mind and begun to demonstrate itself in the pattern of his living, then he's ready to speak it forth. And so any man of God is perfected by the Word which he must proclaim.

Pilgrim's Progress identifies such men as "the King's champions." They are the men whose lives are listed above worldly aims, who are devoted to Divine service. They are men who belong to the spiritual order with which things temporal and transitory and perishing have no permanent relationship. They are not the world's men; they are God's men. They are raised beyond earthly things. They belong to God for a very special purpose.

As Paul writes to Timothy in this text and identifies him as a man of God, of course he reminds him of the great weight of responsibility that he has, because he bears that designation. He also is very aware of the difficulty of his pupil's circumstances. Timothy has to confront Paul's teachers, has to confront sinful leaders in the church and elders who shouldn't be there and pastors who don't belong in that office. He has to deal with doctrinal error and ungodliness in the church. He has to confront sophisticated philosophies existing in his culture. He has to battle his own youthful lusts and his own tendency to be argumentative and to fight. He has to keep his life pure and clean, and that's not easy in the environment in which Timothy had been placed in the city of Ephesus in the church there.

In fact, the whole epistle is a call for Timothy to get things in order in the church, which presupposes that they have to be in order in his own life. He's really no good to the church unless his life is as it ought to be before God. If he is to be the man of God, then, and if he is to be the spokesman who is to be believable and credible and effective and powerful, then he has to address some issues in his own life, and that is the attention which Paul gives in Chapter 6 versus 11 and following, which we read.

Here he is not addressing matters in the church, but he is addressing matters in the life of the man of God. In fact, fulfilling the responsibility of being a man of God is summed up in four features in this text.

First of all, the man of God is marked by what he flees from. Secondly, he is marked by what he follows after. Thirdly, he is marked by what he fights for. And fourthly, by what he is faithful to.

Let's take the first one. The man of God is known by what he flees from. Verse 11: "But flee from these things you man of God." Here is a verb from which we get the English word fugitive. It's a present imperative. It has the idea of keep on fleeing. It's sort of a manner of life. It's sort of a continual pattern. It pictures someone running, and it's used in extra-Biblical literature in the Greek language to speak of someone running from a plague. Or, on one occasion, running from a poisonous serpent, or running from an attacking enemy. Running because there is a grave danger is the idea. It's not a recreational kind of running, but rather a running out of a healthy fear. The man of God learns to run with all his might from certain things, and he is known by what he runs from.

There are a lot of things that a man of God needs to run from. Paul uses this verb elsewhere in the New Testament, such as 1 Corinthians 6:18, where he says, "Flee fornication." Run from sexual sin. He uses it again in 1 Corinthians 10:14 when he says, "Flee idolatry." Run from anything that detracts from the devotion and worship of your heart.

But here, he simply says, "Flee from these things." And immediately we know, he's referring to what he's just been speaking about. Go back to verse-- Well, we could go all the way back to verse 3, where he talks about preaching a different doctrine, unsound words. Then he talks about those who teach false doctrine, being conceited, understanding nothing, being characterized by 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. The one thing the man of God never wants to do is put himself in an environment where he is going to be engaging men of depraved minds who assault the truth.

2 Timothy chapter 2, Paul says the same thing, "Stay away from these, because this is the stuff that eats like gangrene. If you want to be a vessel fit for the Master's use, you have to be separated from those kinds of influences, the influences of liberal theology and heresy and error being taught as if it were true." Then he makes a transition, defining these false teachers in verse 5 the way they're always defined in the Scripture as "those who are interested in gain." Financial gain. They're in it for the money. They suppose that godliness is a means of gain, and therein is a transitional statement that takes us into the main idea--verse 6.

Godliness is actually a means of great gain unaccompanied by contentment. The point being, true

godliness is the greatest gain. False teachers pursue money. You should pursue true gain, which is godliness. He goes on, "We have brought nothing into the world. We can't take anything out of it, either. If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content." You're beginning to get an idea what these things refer to.

He becomes specific in verses 9 and 10. "Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many a pang or sorrow. But flee from these things, you man of God."

Paul has told Timothy specifically to avoid some things. He'll tell him again to avoid some things that have to do with righteousness and virtue in the second epistle as well as in the first, but here what he's talking about is the love of money. Selling out. Prostituting ministry for gain. Greed and all of its associated vices. Getting beyond contentment with food and covering.

I guess one of the laws of seminary is that you make sure that's not possible while they're at school. (*Laughter*) It becomes possible when they leave. This is the sin of the false teachers. This is the sin of the liars. One of the ways you can always recognize a false teacher is the preoccupation with money and wealth and materialism. It's characteristic of those who pervert the truth, who make merchandise of people, who seek filthy lucre, who preach for money. From Balim, the prophet who was bought by the highest bidder, to Judas the apostle who sold the Son of God for 30 pieces of silver. From the false prophets of Israel who were greedy dogs that never had enough and were concerned every one for his own gain, Isaiah says. And the covetous prophets and priests of Jeremiah's time, the prophets of Ezekiel's time who could be bought by handfuls of barley and pieces of bread, the prophets who divined for money, of whom Micah speaks. The false prophets who spoke good words and gave fair speeches to the Romans to deceive the innocent for the satisfaction of their own bodies. All the way to the unruly and empty talkers and deceivers of Crete, who subverted whole households, teaching things which ought not to be taught for filthy lucre's sake. Believe me, the love of money has perverted many, many.

Peter says, "False teachers will come and in greed they will exploit you." And he reminds the true shepherds not to do what they do for filthy lucre. Paul was so careful to avoid this. When he went to Corinth, he worked to earn his own living, because he was afraid that somebody might misconstrue his motivation for the proclamation of the Gospel. It was typical in the Gentile world that wherever false teachers went, they went to make merchandise of people. There were enough people in Corinth who would accuse Paul and did accuse Paul of being in it for the money and for what he could gain from the people that he shunned that even though he had a right to it. He writes in 1 Corinthians chapter 9 that he had a right to be supported by his ministry and that they who preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel, meaning that they should be supported for it. He knew well about that support, because he wrote to Timothy and said, "The faithful elder and pastor is worthy of double pay," especially if he works hard in the Word and doctrine. Paul understood that. "The ox should not be muzzled while he treads. The soldier doesn't fight in the war and isn't supported."

He knew he had a right to that, but he set it aside, because he was so fearful of being falsely accused. He told the Ephesian elders, you remember in Acts 20, "I have coveted no man's silver. I have coveted no man's gold. I have coveted no man's apparel." He told the Thessalonians that he was willing to work with his hands, not only to support himself but everybody around him, just so nobody would misconstrue his intention, because he was almost alone. In fact, at first he was

absolutely alone in a world of false teachers.

And so I remind you, gentlemen, you may be a preacher, you may be a pastor by title, but if you have love for money, you're not a man of God. You can't be God's man and belong to money. Jesus said, "You cannot serve God and money." Never put a price on your calling. Never put a price on your ministry, or you have devalued yourself to nothing. A man of God is known by what he flees from--the love of money and all that goes with it.

Secondly, the man of God is known by what he follows after. Verse 11 goes on, "But flee from these things, you man of God, and follow after"--literally, pursue. Here we see him fleeing from something and fleeing toward something. Again, it's a present imperative of continual pursuit. We're always fleeing, and we're always fleeing hopefully in the right direction. The negative we flee from, the vices attendant to love of money. We flee toward virtue.

The Christian life is not only an effort to run away from evil, but it is to pursue what is good and noble and right. Proverbs 15:9 says, "The Lord loves him that pursues righteousness." Note what he pursues--righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance, and gentleness. If we were to get you into a corner and get you to be real honest with us as you embark upon your ministry, what are you pursuing? What occupies your mind? Success? Size of church? Esteem? Promotion? Comfort? What are you really after?

The man of God is known because he pursues these things. And he is fulfilling in a sense what Jesus said when he said, "Seek ye first--" what? The Kingdom of God and His righteousness and everything else folds in. God is most concerned that you seek to be the man you need to be. He'll take care of the rest.

The first two are general, really, don't need much definition. Righteousness. The remnant of the faithful in Israel were called by Isaiah with this designation--"you that follow after righteousness." Isaiah 51:1. What a wonderful designation of those faithful ones. The writer of Hebrews says, "The only people who will ever see the Lord are those that follow after holiness." Hebrews 12:14. And the righteousness that Paul is talking about here is a righteousness you have to pursue, and therefore, it is not the imputed righteousness that Christ granted to you at your salvation, but rather the practical righteousness that comes by virtue of sanctification.

Pursue doing what is right before God. Pursue doing what is right in terms of attitude, word, conduct, behavior. In other words, pursue sanctification. Of course, the model of righteousness is Jesus Christ, Who fulfilled all righteousness. Pursue Christ's likeness. This is the pursuit of your life. I've told you before, and I say it again, I've never studied a Bible passage to get a sermon. I've always studied a Bible passage to understand the Word of God in my own heart. I can always think of something to say having done that.

The Bible is not there for you to manipulate into clever sermons. It's there to change your life. Gentlemen, you are embarking upon the most privileged of lives, because you will devote your life to the study of the Word of God, which means you should be far ahead of most in the process of sanctification. Jesus himself said, in His great high priestly prayer in John 17, "Father, sanctify them by Thy truth. Thy word is truth."

Nothing to me is more horribly tragic than an unrighteous man of God. What a waste of privilege. What a waste of opportunity. If I am not a better man after every month of my time in the Word of God, then I have failed to take hold of my opportunity, have I not? As the months go by and the years go by, we ought to be more and more conformed to the image of Christ, and yet how tragic it is to see someone who's been in the ministry a long time demonstrate a pattern of iniquity that even shocks the people who sit under their ministry who have not near the privileges they have had.

That's because of a very frightening reality, "The same sun that melts the wax hardens the clay." If you can train yourself to study the Bible with indifference, you can trade yourself into iniquity.

Secondly, he mentions godliness. I think this moves inside and talks about the character of a man, directing our thought to what he is on the inside, to his heart. Behind that right conduct and that right thought pattern and that right speaking and that right behavior is a right-heart attitude, a worshiping heart, a reverent heart, a heart that fears the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom. He has learned to live his life in the conscious presence of God. "He is serving God acceptably, with reverence and Godly fear," as Hebrews 12:28 puts it.

By the way, godliness is a keyword in the Pastoral Epistles. It appears nine times in these three little letters. He is a man who is willing to let you look into his heart. He is a man who can say this. Paul is such a man, and these are his own words. This is what he said. "To me, it is a very small thing that I should be examined by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even examine myself. I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted, but the One Who examines me is the Lord."

There is a man of integrity who will say, "I'm not afraid for you to examine my life, because I know you're not going to find anything to discredit me. I am willing to search the darkest recesses of my own heart and open them up to God and myself. I am even willing to ask God to render His judgment on my heart."

He said, "Do not go on passing judgment before the time. Wait till the Lord comes. He'll bring to light the things hidden in the darkness, disclose the motives of men's hearts. Then each man's praise will come to him from God."

It ought to be that at any time you want to open your whole heart and life to anybody who asks, and most of all, to God. Watch your heart, watch your motives, because that's what drives your conduct. Remember what we learned in our study of 2 Corinthians, how the Apostle Paul was being assaulted and his reputation was being destroyed, in this massive, all out, onslaught on him by the Corinthian false teachers. And when he wants to appeal to the highest court he can appeal to, to defend himself, he doesn't say, "Well, I asked some friends who know me to write some letters of recommendation." He doesn't say, "There's a committee that's examined me, and they're going to tell you that I'm really a faithful man."

He doesn't do that. He appeals to the highest human court, 2 Corinthians 1:12, "Our proud confidence is this, the testimony of our conscience that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world and especially toward You." He says, "My conscience is clear." And conscience knows you better than anybody. Gentlemen, I submit to you that if you lose the battle of conscience, you will lose the battle. If you

lose the battle on the inside, you lose the battle on the outside. Don't be an unsanctified preacher. As _____ said, "A congregation that has an unsanctified preacher is like somebody hunting with a dead dog."

Richard Baxter said, "Many a tailor goes in rags that makes costly clothes for others. Many a cook scarcely licks his fingers when he has dressed for others the most costly dishes." Don't let it be so with you. Paul of course was so concerned with matters of godliness. In 1 Corinthians chapter 9, he said, "I have to beat my body to bring it into--" what? Submission. "Lest in preaching to others I myself should be ad documus, tested and found unqualified."

He knew his sinful tendencies. We all do. He articulates them in graphic terms in Romans chapter 7, saying he even does those things he doesn't want to do and doesn't do things he wants to do and sees his own wretchedness. And does all he can, as he notes in the next chapter, to mortify or kill sin that is in him. He reminds the Corinthians to perfect holiness in the fear of God.

Gentlemen, people will feel the power of a godly life. They'll feel the power of righteousness. John Flavell, the Puritan, wrote, "It is easier to cry against a thousand sins in others than to mortify one sin in your own life." John Owen wrote, "A minister may fill his pews, his Communion roll, the mouths of the public, but what he is on his knees in secret before Almighty God, that he is and no more." The man of God then pursues what is right to the glory of God, and he is moved by the motives of godliness in his heart.

Further, faith is brought up. What does that mean? Loyalty to the Lord? It could be translated faithfulness. It's a confident trust in God for everything that produces an unswerving devotion to God's power, God's purpose, God's plan, God's provision, God's sovereignty. In other words, he lives in the light of God's promises and God's sovereign purposes. No frustration. No panic. No forcing. No manipulation. Just diligent, faithful trust.

As we have discussed on a number of occasions, the reason men experience what is often called burnout in the ministry is not because they work hard. Hard work doesn't create burnout. What creates burnout is personal ambition and unrealistic expectations for what you might achieve, rather than total submission to the sovereignty of God. Be content to put your trust in God and let Him unfold His purposes in your life.

Then he mentions love, agape, that volitional, unrestricted and unrestrained love toward God and man that must mark the man of God. He is a lover of God and a lover of men.

Then lastly he mentions perseverance and gentleness. Endurance, the ability to hang in there over the long haul, to run the marathon that ministry really is, to get through the whole thing and be standing at the end and still faithful, still enduring. He also talks about that marvelous characteristic of meekness or gentleness, which really embraces the concept of humility.

Well, all of those things you understand. I emphasize the first two, because they're the most-notable things. Where there is a godly heart and a righteous life, faith, love, endurance, and humility flow out of it. Richard Baxter says this: "When we have studied for them (the congregation) and prayed for them and exhorted them and beseeched them with all earnestness and condescension, and given them what we are able and tended them as if they had been our children, we must look that many of

them will requite us with scorn and hatred and contempt and account us their enemies, because we told them the truth. Now we must endure patiently, humbly, lovingly. Trusting God, in meekness instructing those that oppose, if perhaps God will grant them repentance."

So the man of God is known by what he flees from and what he follows after. Thirdly, he is known by what he fights for. Verse 12, "Fight the good fight of faith." And I think it's essential for us to recognize, if even briefly tonight, that the man of God is a fighter, he's a contender, he's a battler, he's a soldier, he's a protagonist. We heard that in the music--"Soldiers of Christ arise." The men know what it is they're saying. They understand that they have engaged themselves for a life of warfare against the kingdom of darkness, that ministry is war, ministry is battle. Paul came to the end of it and he said, "I have fought the good fight."

We battle the world. We battle the flesh. We battle the devil. We battle sin in and around us. We battle the kingdom of darkness. We battle lies. As 2 Corinthians 10 says, "We assault the massive fortresses of human ideologies that are born out of influences from seducing spirits and doctrines of demons." These massive edifices that have been raised up against the knowledge of God.

It's an ideological war. The strategy is not to attack the demons. You understand that. The demons run at the power of the truth. The idea of spiritual warfare is not to formulate some kind of exorcistic lines that we can address the powers of darkness with. The idea of spiritual warfare is to smash false ideologies concocted by seducing spirits, smashing them to the ground by the truth of the power of the Word of God. That's what we do.

And when all is said and done in the end, nobody is going to mark out your life because of your administrative skill. Nobody's going to leave the notable record that you were a nice person to converse with. The epitaph will be written with regard to the power and the impact of your teaching and preaching.

Did God use you to smash all those stone fortresses raised up against the knowledge of God? It's a battle. Paul has to tell Timothy that he needs to expect it, that all who live godly in this present age will suffer persecution. And he tells in 2 Timothy 2, "You have to suffer hardship along with me as a good soldier of Christ Jesus." That goes with the territory. It's war. It's exhilarating war, because the victories are so sweet and so permanent.

"Fight," he says. "Fight the good fight of faith." Aganizami the Agone. It's all about agonizing. It's all about striving. It's like 1 Timothy 1:18, "Be always battling." What are you battling? You're battling error, false ideologies. You're battling sin. The term here is borrowed from the world of athletics and describes the concentration necessary, the effort coupled with discipline and conviction required of a winning athlete. A very familiar metaphor to the Apostle Paul.

One commentator on the Greek texts says, "Paul liked to think of himself as a boxer." He mentions that in 1 Corinthians 9. "And we find that the gloves of the Greek boxers," he writes, "were fur-lined on the inside. But on the outside, they were made with ox hide left very rough, not polished and refined and tanned and made shiny. And lead and iron was sewn into the ox hide. Also, the loser in the boxing match had his eyes gouged out."

When Paul talks about being a battler and a boxer, he's not talking about slapping people around

with big, puffy gloves. He's talking about something deadly serious in his imagery. He understood the nature of the ministry: high intensity, great danger, and an incessant battle for the truth. The fight for the faith is a lifelong battle, and you've just signed up, but it brings the greatest rewards.

Go back to verse 12 for a moment. Let me show you. In order to fight effectively for the faith, the truth, the Word of God, it is essential to do something. "Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses." It's kind of an interesting statement. At first, it might not become exactly clear what it is he's saying.

If I can summarize it, what he is saying is the only way you're going to commit yourself to a lifelong war like this is if you can get a grip on the fact that this is a matter of eternal life that you're involved in. You might fight to protect your home. You might fight to protect your possessions. I know you'd fight to protect your wife or your children. Will you fight to protect the souls of men and women? Do you understand the eternal implications? Get a grip on the eternality of this issue. Your task is not like that of anybody else in the world. Not anybody.

When he says to Timothy, "Get a grip on eternal life," he's not telling him to get saved. He already is. He's not telling him to look for heaven. He's already doing that. He is saying grasp the reality of what you're engaged in. Get a grip on eternal things. Set your affections on things above and not on things on the earth. Recognize that what you do has permanent consequences.

In 1 Timothy 4:10, Paul says, "We labor and strive," and he uses two verbs to speak of effort and exhaustion. Why? Because we have fixed our hope on the living God, Who is the savior of all men. In other words, we're serious about what we do, and we work hard at it, because we're involved with the living God and His saving enterprise. You certainly can't give a halfhearted effort to that. You will be divorced from the temporal, transitory, and passing world. You will be engaged in a battle the likes of which only you will understand.

I think our people do their best understand the battle we're engaged in, but no one really understands it who's not in it, the relentlessness of it, the incessant nature of it, the unending turns and twists as we hold up the truth and call people to live it. Timothy was called to eternal life. At the time of his salvation, he made a good confession. He confessed Jesus as Lord. He confessed with his mouth that God had raised Christ from the dead. He did that before many witnesses. Paul is saying, "You came in that way. You established your commitment to eternal life. You made your confession. We all heard it. You understand what it's all about. You understand that this is an eternal salvation in which you partake, and now you've got to get a grip on the eternality of what you do from here on." This kind of life really matters for eternity.

One last point. "The man of God is known by what he is faithful to." What he is faithful to. What he flees from, follows after, fights for, and is faithful to. Verse 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, that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ."

What he's saying to him is, "Be faithful clear to the end." Clear to the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. That in my mind, is a gilt-edged text to indicate that Paul believed in imminency. How else could he say, "Keep this commandment until the appearing of Jesus Christ," if he didn't believe it

could have happened in his lifetime? For all he knew, Jesus would come before Timothy died. "To the end, Timothy, keep the commandment. Guard it."

How do you guard it? By obeying it. What is meant by this commandment? Well, much has been suggested. Some have said the Gospel. Some have said the teaching of this epistle. Some have said the whole teaching of the new covenant. Some have said the commandment would refer, perhaps, to the prophetic Word from God at Timothy's calling to the ministry, to which Paul refers.

I sorted my way through all those options and concluded that it is purposely broad, because I think that anything that God has revealed falls under the category of the commandment. I think it's like the treasure. It's the revealed Word of God. There's no way to limit it, and I'm not going to limit it. It could be translated, "keep this commission." And what is his commission? As a man of God, to proclaim the truth.

Whatever way you look at that, he's saying, "Be faithful to proclaim the truth as you've been called to proclaim it." All the way to the end. Preserve the truth intact. He tells them to guard this down in verse 20. "Guard what has been entrusted to you." That's the commandment.

Over in chapter 1 of 2 Timothy, "Guard through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us the treasure entrusted to you." It's the truth. He is to be a guardian of that truth, not only proclaiming it but protecting it. And he lays this responsibility to faithfulness on him about as powerfully as he can, because he says in verse 13, "I charge you in the presence of God." It's beyond me. He says, "Don't do it for my sake. Do it because God is watching." And remember that God is the source of all life. And do it because Christ Jesus is watching. And it was Christ Jesus who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate. And he is assuming there that there will be times in the life of Timothy, as there are the lives of all of us, when it might be easier to compromise the truth. It might be easier not to say what ought to be said, not to proclaim what ought to be proclaimed, because there might be a price to pay of reputation or respect or fame or acceptance or even freedom or even life.

"Just be reminded that when Jesus Christ's life was on the line," he says, "and He was standing before Pontius Pilate, who had in his hand, as it were humanly speaking, the power of life and death, Jesus testified the good confession." He was faithful to speak the truth when his life was on the line. He's saying to Timothy, "Timothy, with God watching, with Christ watching Who made the right confession when His life was on the line before Pilate, you keep the commandment without stain or reproach. You be faithful to speak the truth always until the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ."

Faithfulness. I like the word loyalty. Loyalty to the Lord, loyalty to the truth, uncompromising. Let Jesus be your model. He never hesitated to speak the truth, though it cost Him His life. So it should be with us, the same unflinching courage. You don't know what kind of circumstances you're going to find yourself in. Sometimes it'll be individuals in a church trying to back you down from the truth. Sometimes it'll be boards. Sometimes your future in the church might be threatened. Some of you will be on a mission field in a hostile environment, where persecution could become severe. You hold onto the truth. Don't bend. Don't stain that truth or reproach that truth. And do it all the way till Jesus comes. Faithful till the very, very end.

That's the picture of the man of God that Paul gives us here, and it suits us so well on this occasion.

What kind of man does it take to fulfill this? I think it takes a man first of all who understands what's at hand, a man who knows his resources are to be found in the Word. Gentlemen, every day of your life you ought to thank God for your training. You ought to thank God that you're not in an identity crisis, and you're not looking for a standard of truth you can cling to. You have one. You know what to believe, and you know what to preach.

What's it going to take? Well, here are some suggestions. Somebody wrote this, and I don't know if they had a particular pastor in mind, but it's interesting. Here's how to make a successful pastor.

"Fling him into his office. Tear the office sign from the door and nail on the sign *Study*. Take him off the mailing lists. Lock him up with his books and his computer and his Bible. Slam him down on his knees before texts and broken hearts and the lives of a superficial flock and a holy God. Force him to be the one man in our surfeited communities who knows about God. Throw him into the ring to box with God until he learns how short his arms are. Engage him to wrestle with God all night long and let him come out only when he's bruised and beaten into being a blessing. Shut his mouth forever spouting remarks and stop his tongue forever tripping lightly over every nonessential. Require him to have something to say before he dares break the silence. Burn his eyes with weary study. Wreck his emotional poise with worry for God. Make him exchange his pious stance for a humble walk with God and man. Make him spend and be spent for the glory of God. Rip out his telephone. Burn up his attendance sheets. Put water in his gas tank. Give him a Bible. Tie him to the pulpit, and make him preach the Word of the living God.

"Test him, quiz him, examine him. Humiliate him for his ignorance of things Divine. Shame him for his good comprehension of finances, games scores, and politics. Laugh at his frustrated effort to play psychiatrist. Form a choir and raise a chant and haunt him with it night and day, 'Sir, we would see Jesus.'

"And when at last he dares enter the pulpit, ask him if he has a word from God. If he doesn't, dismiss him. Tell him you can read the morning paper. You can digest the television commentaries. You can think through the day's superficial problems, and you can manage the community's weary drives and bless the baked potatoes and green beans better than he can. Command him not to come back until he has read and reread, written and rewritten until he can stand up worn and forlorn and say, 'Thus saith the Lord.'

"Break him across the board of his ill-gotten popularity. Smack him hard with his own prestige. Corner him with questions about God. Cover him with demands for celestial wisdom. And give him no escape until his back is against the wall of the Word. Sit down before him and listen to the only word he has left, God's Word.

"Let him be totally ignorant of the down-street gossip, but give him a chapter and order him to walk around it, camp on it, sup with it, and come at last to speak it backward and forward until all he says about it rings was the truth of eternity. And when he's finally burned out by the flaming Word, when he's consumed at last by the fiery grace blazing through him, and when he's privileged to translate the truth of God to men and finally transferred from earth to heaven, then bear him away gently and blow a muted trumpet and lay him down softly. Place a two-edged sword on his coffin, and raise the tomb triumphant, for he was a brave soldier of the Word. And ere he died, he had become a man of God."

Let's pray. It is our prayer, our God, that You will build men of God from these young men. And Lord, I know what they feel even now, a combination of conviction and fear, feeling inadequate for such a calling. We all feel that. Paul said, "Who is adequate for such things?"

Lord, we cast ourselves on You. We aren't adequate, but You called, You gifted, You prepared, and now we're in Your hands. Use these men mightily for Your glory. In Christ's name. Amen.

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