An Appeal to Charismatic Friends (John MacArthur)
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Strange Fire Conference

There isn't really a whole lot that needs to be said at this point. I'm very confident that the folks who planned the conference, and who ministered, and spoke, and preached, and taught, and led the interviews covered the ground that we really desired to cover. And I'm so profoundly thankful to everyone who has been on this platform and I need to express that gratitude to them. They have served us well with diligence, preparation of mind and heart for a long time leading up to this. And we're very grateful. These are men who are fully engaged in ministry all the time, and to add the burden of a conference like this, and all the preparation, and all the thought, and all the prayer, we're grateful. I know that preaching is like the tip of the iceberg. That's what you see, but what you don't know is what lies below that. And we want to express our deep gratitude to all the men who helped us in this conference and whose ministry will go on from here.

You might be interested to know that just yesterday there are 127 countries in the world that were live streaming this conference, just yesterday. There were 25,000 different points at which the conference was being streamed live, and we don't know how many people were at each of those points.

Amazing time to be alive, isn't it? Amazing, amazing time. At some time in history in the past, you could take hundreds of years to spread truth that far. Not too many years ago, it would take maybe a few years, or maybe months, or weeks, but simultaneously, really amazing.

So thank you to all of the speakers. The good news is everything we said has gone around the world. That's a serious, serious responsibility for us. But these men discharge their responsibility with nobility as servants of the Lord. And what was said needed to be said, and was said the way it should have been said, and we're thrilled with that.

I'm also very grateful that you have the book in your hand or somewhere because it's very important that these things be written down. As I said in the Q and A today, when God wanted to communicate, He wrote a book. He didn't make a video. Wrote a book. Because that freezes the truth. That holds it in place.

And you need to take that book and when you read through the book, you're going to refresh the learning experience you've been having here. You're going to be the force of experts to carry this

message to the ends of the earth where the Lord lets you go. We have people here in this auditorium from at least 30 nations of the world, and all across our country in North America, and you're going to be a force to carry this truth. You're going to be aided and helped by the book, which is carefully written and carefully footnoted and documented, and I want you to read it very carefully.

I believe the case that we have made this week can withstand the most intense scrutiny, and I would eagerly invite any who have heard what has been said and find it hard to believe to take a Bible and take the book and measure carefully the arguments against the Word of God. We invite that scrutiny.

This conference is first and foremost to help the church. I don't have any illusions about non-believers understanding what we're talking about. And as we've said, there are many non-believers in this movement. I don't expect them to understand the truth. I don't expect them to have a desire for the truth, a hunger for the truth, or to search out the truth. That's not what unbelievers do unless they're in the midst of being prompted by the Holy Spirit.

But we do want to help the church. We've been speaking to the people who believe the Bible is the Word of God and who believe that God has revealed Himself clearly, and consistently, and without contradiction. This is for the true church, the true church, so that they can discern, so that they can be protected from error, and so that they can be a source of truth for others outside the church. We've been talking to God's people, God's true church in the mixed kingdom, full of wheat and tares.

In response to this conference, over the last number of hours and last couple of days, there have been some attacks back. And we've been really unable to escape them because, as you know, they show up on the Internet and some of you probably have become aware of them. And I just want to address those. I just want to talk to you from my heart a little bit tonight.

And Steve Lawson earlier asked me how I felt about what I was going to say, and I said, "That's hard to answer since I have no idea what I'm going to say." But I am going to say what's on my heart. And I do think it's important to answer the criticisms that have come. And I want to do that by just kind of labeling them with a word and then giving you a brief answer.

The first thing that became obvious was that we were being accused of being unloving, unloving. But I would suggest to you that the most loving thing anybody could ever do would be to tell someone the truth. That is how love acts. It is unloving to leave people in darkness and error. We speak the truth in love, and it's not just talking about the attitude, or the tone of voice in which we speak it. To speak the truth in itself is an act of love to deliver people from error.

In Acts 20, you remember, Paul met with the Ephesian elders and he said to them, "I have not ceased for the space of three years to warn you with tears. Knowing that, knowing that, both from the outside and the inside, perverse, deceptive men will rise up to lead you astray." In fact, to be a pastor, an

elder in the church, you have the duty, according to Titus 1, the qualifications of the pastor, of being able to point out error and to give biblical arguments against it. This is how you care for the sheep. This is how you protect them.

We have also been accused of being divisive. I would agree with that. Truth by its very nature is divisive. That's why Jesus said, "I came to bring a sword, to divide people, divide families." Truth by very nature is separated from error, and it is far more important to be divided by the truth than united by error. I understand that truth is divisive.

I remember years ago when I wrote the book The Gospel According to Jesus, a leading evangelical preacher that you would all know took me to lunch and said, "You have divided the body of Christ." And I said, "May I ask you a question?" He said, "Yes." I said, "Is what I wrote true? Is it true?" That's the only question I have. Of course the truth divides. It immediately separates error and reality.

A third criticism has come, and I read about this one today, that the issue is not clear in the Bible and that a conference like this and disagreement with us from some well-known folks and some even well-known Bible scholars, demonstrates that the Scripture is not clear on this issue. And I would like to say in response to that, that if the issue is unclear as some are claiming, it has only become unclear under the influence of false teachers.

It was clear to the apostles. It was clear to the early church fathers, and you'll read quotes from them in the back of the book. It was clear to the reformers. We learned that. It was clear to the Puritans. It is clearly delineated in creeds like the Westminster Confession. It has been clear to erudite, noble, reformed theologians who have been quoted, like B.B. Warfield. It was clear to Spurgeon. It was clear in a more modern area to Jim Boice. It was clear to R.C. Sproul. Has it now become unclear because of Aimee Semple McPherson, Kathryn Kuhlman, Jimmy Swaggart, Jim Bakker, Kenneth Copeland? That's a ludicrous idea. In the true and historic stream of sound doctrine, this issue has always been crystal clear.

Another accusation has been that we are talking about something that is only true of the extreme lunatic fringe of the movement. That is patently not true. There is error in this movement that sweeps through the entire movement. As we heard today in the Q and A, 90 percent of the people around the world connected to the charismatic movement take ownership of the prosperity gospel. Twenty-four or twenty-five million of them deny the Trinity. A hundred million of them are Roman Catholics. As Nathan said, "Do the math." This is not some fringe. This is the movement, and it is growing at a rapid rate.

Others have said, "You're attacking the movement that has given us such rich worship." That this music that has come from the charismatic movement is enriching the worship of the church. Well, I would beg to differ with that. I'm convinced that the contemporary style of charismatic music is the

entry point for charismatic theology into churches. If you buy the music, the theology follows, because all of a sudden you're singing the same songs, you're listening to the same artists, you're experiencing the same emotions, experiencing the same feelings. Church may be a non-charismatic church, but all the music, the style is exactly the same as in a charismatic church. That's the entry point.

Show me a church that has a strong doctrinal statement, strong doctrinal statement, historic doctrinal statement, and I'll show you a church reluctant to embrace even the music. Show me a church that loves great hymns, great theology put to music, I'll show you a church that's reluctant to embrace the music of the charismatic movement. And because the music doesn't come in, the theology doesn't, either. That's the seductive entry point.

I'm not talking about specific things because there is contemporary music that's beautiful and we should and we can sing that. But when it is uncritical, and when it is music that is not about the mind, but is about the flesh, when it's not about truth understood, but it's about emotion felt, it induces the same kind of feelings that are consistent with the charismatic movement, and opens the door.

If we're all singing the same music, then how can we divide each other? I think that the charismatic movement has significantly diminished worship. It has taken it out of the area of truth, out of the mind, and reduced it to feelings of the flesh.

There are others who criticize by saying - and this came pretty early in this conference, "You're attacking brothers. You're attacking brothers." I wish I could affirm that. We said this one way or another already this week. This is a movement made up largely of non-Christians, non-Christians.

A few years ago, I was doing an interview with NBC and there was a huge scandal in the evangelical world, and this reporter on NBC television here was talking to me and he said, "Why do you let this stuff happen? Who - " this is his question. "Who polices your movement? Who polices your movement?" He couldn't process the fact that evangelicalism was this free-for-all that didn't have to answer to any authority, or any centrality.

And I said, "Well, really nobody polices the movement." And that's sad. Who should police the movement? I'll tell you who should police the movement. Every faithful pastor, and every faithful elder, and every faithful theologian, and every faithful preacher and teacher of the Word of God. And I will say this. If reformed leaders who know the truth, and know the gospel, and know the Word of God don't police this movement, the spiritual terrorists will dominate.

It's like Islam. We keep hearing, "Wow, the terrorists. They're just a small minority on the lunatic fringe." And we all keep saying, "Why, then, don't conservative Muslims come together openly in mass and reject the terrorists?" They don't. I think there's a heavy burden that weighs on the back of

all men who know the Word of God to rise up and denounce this movement. But you don't hear that.

So people say, "Ah, MacArthur, he's fixated on this. He's a one-trick pony. He's a one-ring circus. He's always haranguing about the charismatics."

Well, if you're a part of Grace Church, you'd know better than that. We've spent over 40 years going verse-by-verse through the New Testament. I don't think we're fixed on one thing. I came here in 1969, and since 1969 we've had one conference on the charismatic movement, and this is it. And it's come too late, really. It's come too late. We lanced a wound that should have been lanced long ago. But we've tried to exercise patience. I'm not fixated on this. And by the way, they were accusing me of that yesterday when we were only two days, two days out of 45 years. There are other issues who have occupied us, like the exaltation of Jesus Christ, and every other thing in the Word of God.

And then we have been accused of offending people and hurting their feelings. I don't want to purposely do that. I was introduced by a charismatic leader once at a book sellers convention who introduced me as, "This is my friend, John MacArthur, who is much nicer in person than he is in his sermons." I hope that's always true. I hope that I hold the truth with kindness. I hope I hold the truth with love. But when I open the Word of God, it must speak. And to be honest with you, I do care about the feelings of people. I do care about offending them. But not nearly as much as I care about offending God.

This is an alien movement. It is an alien movement. I don't want to get into all the history of that, but I've been thinking about this a lot lately. There is a stream of sound teaching, sound doctrine, sound theology that runs all the way back to the apostles. It runs through Athanasius and Augustine, and it runs through Luther and Calvin, and it runs through the great reformation and the reformers, and it runs through, as we were hearing last night, the Puritans, and everything seemed to clear to them. And it runs through the Westminster Divines, and runs through the pathway of Charles Spurgeon, and David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, and it keeps running. And it runs through people like S. Lewis Johnson, and Jim Boice, and names that we've used. And it runs down through today to the R.C. Sprouls and others, and that's the stream of sound doctrine.

The heroes of this generation of people in that stream, we know who they are. You've been hearing about them this week. Our heroes run back down through that same stream. We go back to the John Rogers. We go back to the 288 Marion martyrs. We go back to Foxe's Book of Martyrs, and we shed tears on the pages of that book when we see what was done to the people who carried the truth to the next generation at such a great price. We have a deep and abiding love for a person like William Tyndale for what he has done. Those are our heroes.

But you have to understand, this other stream of evangelicalism goes back about to 1966, 1966, when the hippies came out of San Francisco, showed up in Orange County, joined Calvary Chapel,

and we had the launch of an informal, barefoot, beach, drug-induced kind of young people that told the church how the church should happen, how it should act. Hymns went out. Suits went out. For the first time in the history of the church, the conduct of the church was conformed to a sub-culture that was born in LSD and marijuana in San Francisco, migrated to Southern California.

It's a completely different stream. That launches the informal, culturally-driven, culturally-defined, give them what they want kind of church that ends up in the seeker-friendly church, takes a branch in the Vineyard, and the Vineyard leads to the excesses of the contemporary charismatic movement. That's a completely different stream. That's not our stream. Those aren't our heroes.

I don't go back to Lonnie Frisbee, who led the Jesus Movement and died of AIDS as a homosexual. I don't go back there. That's not my stream. But that's the stream that has produced the culturally-bound, culturally-driven, seeker-driven church movement. And while there are good, and bad, and better, and best, and worst elements of it, that's where it comes from.

We're very different, very different. Our heroes are very different. We know who our people are, and if you're safe you say you're on this side, and you are on this side, then you have a responsibility to be faithful to this marvelous history. If anybody is going to police this movement, it has to be the people here.

This concerns me so much that if you haven't seen it already, I wrote a 12th chapter in the book - don't open the book. I want you to read the book. But in the opening chapter, the title of the chapter is "An Open Letter To My Continuationist Friends," "An Open Letter To My Continuationist Friends."

Who are my continuationist friends? People who are my friends, real friends of mine whom I respect, who have made great contributions to the church, the body of Christ, who've taught all of us, who've taught me, who've ministered alongside me, hand-in-hand with me, with whom I've prayed, sometimes for hours and hours, with whom I've spoken, and talked, hammered out convictions. But they call themselves "continuationists" because they want to give place to the charismatic movement.

I want to suggest that they're not helping, they're not helping. We need them to help police the movement. And in that final chapter, "Open Letter To My Continuationist Friends," I give 8 important statements as to why they must help us.

Number one, the continuationists' position gives an illusion of legitimacy to the broader charismatic movement. If you say, "I'm a continuationist," you've just given credence to that movement. You may want to contain that a little bit. You may want to control that. But when theologically respected conservative continuationists, who represent a very small minority in the charismatic movement, when they give any credibility to the movement, the whole movement gets respect because of who they are.

And then you have this young generation of young, restless, reformed young people coming along and attaching to their heroes, who are open to this charismatic movement, and affirming the continuation of the signed gifts, and so they follow their heroes and either embrace that idea of continuation, or are open to that idea, which is essentially one and the same.

When notable continuationist scholars give credence to charismatic interpretations, or fail to directly condemn unbiblical charismatic practices, they provide theological cover for a movement that is deadly dangerous.

Secondly, the continuationist position degrades the miraculous nature of the true gifts that God bestowed upon the first century church. And we're summing up with these statements what you heard this week. The second point again, continuationist position degrades the miraculous nature of the true gifts that God bestowed upon the first century church.

We know God was giving revelation during the time of Christ and the apostles. And the gifts, signs, and miracles were to validate those who were proclaiming and writing that revelation. Hebrews 2:3, the gospel "at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness, both with signs and wonders and various miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His will."

Now listen, that text is meaningless – meaningless - if the signs and wonders and miracles and tongues and prophecy and healing belong to everybody and everybody's experience today. It's meaningless. It isn't any sign of anything.

Furthermore, when continuationists use the terminology of the New Testament gifts but then define them to mean something else, they depreciate the remarkable character of the real thing. They diminish the glorious way in which the Holy Spirit worked in the foundation of the church. If the gifts practiced in charismatic churches today are equivalent to the gifts described in the New Testament, then those original gifts were nothing special, and so the era was nothing special. Hijacking New Testament terminology and redefining biblical gifts essentially degrades what was genuinely miraculous and what God was doing in the first century. Reformed continuationism aids this misrepresentation.

Thirdly, the continuationists position severely limits the ability of its advocates to confront others who fall into charismatic confusion. What are they going to say to people who plunge into chaos and confusion? In the book, you're going to read some of the most bizarre things that have been basically proffered as spiritual experiences by some of the very most well-known charismatics, one of whom was even here today. You're going to read about the most bizarre kind of things that should be wholesale denounced. And we keep waiting for the denunciation to come from the continuationists

you would think would know better.

But it doesn't come. They have given up the high ground and they can't speak because they allow for it. So by what criteria do they then discredit the claims?

Number four, by insisting that God is still giving new revelation to Christians today, the continuationist movement opens the gates to further confusion and error. I mean, this is just another way of saying what we're saying. They say there's prophecy today, but it can be wrong. There's tongues today, but it's not languages. There's healing today, but it's not like the healings in the time of Christ and the apostles.

The continuationist position, then, invites any Christian to interpret anything as from God. Any kind of gibberish, any kind of supposed spiritual experience, or impression, or notion, or idea that floats into the head can be considered prophecy. It removes the authoritative, objective standard for questioning the legitimacy of anybody's claim to revelation.

Continuationists, by allowing for any of it, end up allowing for all of it, because they don't have any criteria to decide what is and what isn't accurate. The very idea that Christians should expect extra-revelation, extra-biblical revelation from God, mystical experiences, words of prophecy just creates a theological train wreck. When you get beyond the Word of God, you can't contain the error.

Number five, by insisting that God is still giving new revelation to Christians today, the continuationist movement tacitly denies the doctrine of Sola Scriptura. I don't need to camp on that because Steve made an unforgettable case for that last night. And I'll tell you this, none of my friends, none of my reformed continuationist friends would deny the closing of the canon. They wouldn't deny that. They certainly wouldn't deny there are 66 books in the Bible. They wouldn't deny the authority of Scripture. They wouldn't deny the sufficiency of Scripture. Yet they default on the very thing they deny because they teach believers to expect extra-revelation. There's so many ways that can be abused. And I'll tell you who abuses it most, people in positions of power who want you to think they speak for God.

Number six, by allowing for irrational tongues speaking even as a private prayer language, continuationists open the door to a mindless ecstasy of charismatic expression. They will admit that tongues is not a language today, so what is it? It's this simple. If the prophecy today isn't like the biblical prophecy because today's prophecy is fallible, if the tongues isn't like the biblical tongues because it's gibberish and not a language, if the healings aren't like the healings of Christ, they're not continuationists. They're closet cessationists. They've just said it's not what it was, so what have they done? They've simply accepted a counterfeit. You can't be proud about that. That's not a noble posture to accept a counterfeit. And it's a counterfeit by their own admission.

Number seven, by asserting the gift of healing has continued to be present, the continuationist position affirms the same basic premise that undergirds the fraudulent ministry of charismatic faith healers. If you say the gift of healing is still around, and you say it whimsically, there's no evidence it's around, either experimentally or biblically, but if you say it's still around, then you have just validated healers.

Who would want to do that? Are they not the lowest of the low? Are they not the worst of the worst? They don't go to hospitals. They prey on the most desperate, the most severely ill, the most hopeless, the most destitute, very often the poorest, telling them lies and getting rich. Who would want to do anything to aid and abet them?

And finally, the continuationist position ultimately dishonors the Holy Spirit by distracting people from His true ministry, enticing them with counterfeits. Is it not enough to have the indwelling Spirit and the fullness of the Spirit? Is it not enough to have the gifts of the Spirit, to have the fruit of the Spirit, to be graced by the Spirit? Is it not enough to have all the promises of the Spirit? Do I need to come to God and say, "Give me more, give me that other thing"? I want that. What kind of deficiency are you accusing the Spirit of?

You have dishonored the Holy Spirit. And you have enticed people toward counterfeits, rather than heart-felt, all-consuming gratitude for the fullness of all that the Spirit has given us. And He gives not His Spirit by what? By measure. The continuationist position, I think, sends stumbling blocks into the path of sanctification, spiritual growth. For two reasons. One, it makes people think they don't have what they need. And two, it makes people think there's something they need to chase. It's really sad.

A lot more can be said about that, and you're going to read a lot of detail about it in the book. But I'm convinced that the broader charismatic movement has opened the door to more theological error – listen - more theological error than any other doctrinal aberration in this modern day. Liberalism was bad. Psychology was bad. Ecumenism was bad. Pragmatism was bad. Mysticism was bad. Nothing is as bad as charismaticism cause of its extensive impact. And once that kind of experientialism gets a foothold, there's no brand of heresy or wickedness that will not ride it into the church.

So that charismatic theology then becomes the strange fire of our generation and evangelical Christians have no business flirting with it at any level. And I think this is the time for the true church to respond. This is a time for the people who now stand on the shoulders of the reformers in every area of their theology to be faithful to reformation theology to its full rich intent. If we claim allegiance to the reformers, then we ought to conduct ourselves with the same level of courage. Don't call yourself a charismatic Calvinist. John Calvin would reject that. John Calvin did reject that. You'll have to drop the "Calvinist" part.

I’m concerned because I think these good and godly friends could make a massive difference in what this young generation and next generation believes about this movement, if they would take a stand where they need to take a stand.

Now, you might think I’m done, but I’m not. I want you to open your Bible to the last chapter of 1 Timothy. And I’m not going to take a lot of time with this, but there’s one other thing I need to say, and it is this. If I did not take this stand and if these other men did not take the stand they’re taking with me, we would be unfaithful to our pastoral calling.

This isn’t a pet peeve of mine. This isn’t a personal issue with me. This is a discharge of my duty as a pastor, and I will be held accountable before God for the discharge of this responsibility. As Paul winds down his life, as Conrad was saying to us earlier, he writes to Timothy. He’s passing the baton. He’s passing the mantle.

He reminds Timothy in 1 Timothy 6 that it’s been a fight. It’s been a fight, “a good fight,” he calls it, faith. It’s been a battle. And then he tells Timothy 6:20, “O Timothy,” “O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you.” What’s he talking about? What do you mean “what’s been entrusted to you”?

Literally, “guard the treasure.” What’s the treasure? Divine revelation. Divine revelation. Guard what has been deposited into your mind, divine truth, and “avoid worldly and empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called ‘knowledge’ - which some have professed and thus gone astray from the faith.”

That’s a final signoff in the first epistle that he writes to Timothy as he passes the baton. The last word “guard the treasure of the truth, avoid the worldly, empty chatter, the arguments of false ‘knowledge’ - which some have professed and gone astray from the faith.” This is a foundational responsibility of the man of God is to be a guardian of the treasure, to protect the treasure in his time and to pass it on for subsequent times.

Paul’s very concerned about Timothy. So after writing to Titus, which is the next to the last Pauline letter, he writes a final letter to Timothy, that’s 2 Timothy. Look at it. A final letter. He’s very concerned about Timothy, very concerned. Verse 6 he says, “Kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.” He was ordained into the ministry for the preaching of the Word of God. And he had allowed that to fall into disuse. He was intimidated by people in the church who were giving him difficulty. He was intimidated by the threat of persecution outside the church, the intimidation from within, the intimidation from without was pushing him into silence. This was cowardice.

In verse 7, “God has not given us a spirit of cowardice, but of power and love and discipline.” This is scary time for Paul because the baton will be passed to Timothy, and Timothy is looking weak.

“Don’t be ashamed of the truth,” is what he’s saying in verse 6. Don’t be ashamed to preach and proclaim the truth through the gift that is yours and was confirmed by the laying on of the hands of the elders. Don’t be a coward. In verse 8, “Don’t be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord.”

Are you kidding? You mean Timothy, after all those years with Paul, after seeing all the triumph of Paul’s ministry, could be caving in and becoming ashamed of the testimony of the Lord and ashamed of being identified with Paul? Apparently this is a fearful time, I think, in Paul’s life, and he’s fearful for Timothy.

How serious is it? Verse 13, “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.” I get it today. There are all kinds of people whose stock in trade is their communication ability. They’re cool, glib, clever, captivating audiences, but the instruction from Paul to Timothy is about retaining sound words and guarding the truth as a treasure.

Ministry is a guardianship. We not only proclaim the truth, we protect the truth. Paul’s heart is really broken at the end of his life. He says to Timothy in verse 15, “You’re aware of the fact that all who are in Asia turned away from me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes.” Everybody had abandoned him. He was alone. Just amazing. Except for “the house of Onesiphorus, who often refreshed me and wasn’t ashamed of my chains.”

Everybody had abandoned Paul. The price was too high. Paul is at the end of his life, “Please, Timothy, I’ve given you the treasure. Guard the treasure. Retain sound words.” Chapter 2, he carries on the same cry. “Be strong in the grace that is Christ Jesus. The things you’ve heard from me, - ” this is the treasure, revealed truth that came through the apostle Paul, “ - you heard it in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” There’s four generations: Paul to Timothy, to faithful men, to others, also. You’re in the relay.

Now it grieves me all the time to see these sort of quasi-churches that pop up that identify themselves as being isolated from anything in the past. This is not your grandfather’s church. This is not your grandmother’s church. We don’t have an organ. Come as you will. Anything to create some kind of image that is completely isolated from anybody’s experience of a church.

Paul says, “I gave you the truth. You give it to the next generation so they can give it to the next.” It’s all about being faithful to retain what has been handed to you. Not about creativity. Then he says, “Suffer hardship, like a good soldier of Christ. Don’t entangle yourself in the affairs of everyday life. Complete like an athlete.” He just goes through all of those pictures: The athlete, the farmer, the soldier, the teacher. Verse 9, after saying, “Remember Jesus Christ,” He’s your model of faithfulness. “I suffered hardship even to imprisonment; but the Word of God is not imprisoned.”

This is the ultimate, ultimate word for any young minister. From the apostle, who is about to put his head on a block, an ax head will flash in the sun and sever it from his body and he'll be with the Lord, and the next generation is going to be in the hands of Timothy.

I think about that when I look at the character and the style of many of these men who are pastors. What will the next generation be like if what they receive is in their hands? What must Timothy do? Verse 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. But be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who doesn't need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth." There it is. Retain sound doctrine, guard the treasure, handle the truth accurately. That's the mandate.

Avoid again, "avoid worldly empty chatter. It just leads to further ungodliness, and that kind of talk spreads like gangrene - " it does great damage, leads people away from the truth.

Then in verse 20, as we just kind of move through here, "in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but vessels of wood and earthenware, some to honor and some to dishonor." Can I be a little bit crude for a minute? Every house in ancient times had these kind of vessels. Didn't have the advantage of plumbing to bring the water in or take the waste out. So they had vessels of gold and silver. Vessels of gold and silver were for honorable things. Put the food on it, you serve the food on it. Vessels of wood and earthenware were for dishonorable things. Took out the garbage. You took out the waste. What do you want to be? You want to be a privy pot, as it was called? Or do you want to be a golden platter?

"If someone cleanses himself from these - " what? What do you mean "these"? The influence of empty worldly chatter that leads to ungodliness and talk that spreads like gangrene. "If you cleanse yourself from - " the influence of unbiblical things, " - you will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work. Flee from youthful lust and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. Refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing they produce quarrels."

I mean, all of this goes down the same path, doesn't it? The same path. And we heard from Conrad so ably today, stick with the Scripture. Down in 3:15, they are "able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, training in righteousness; so the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."

And remember that everything you do is "in the presence of God in Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom - " and then the command " - preach the Word - " all the time, even in a " - time when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have

their ears tickled, will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires."

I mean, do you get the tone of all of this? You know, from the time that I was a young man when my father gave me the first Bible I began to preach out of, he wrote in the front of it, "Dear Johnny, Preach the Word." And he passed the mantle to me. Preach the Word.

It didn't take me long to find out that the command to preach the Word had a context, and that context we just looked at, and that I had an accountability to God to be faithful to the Word. And what that meant was faithfulness to sound doctrine, to guard the treasure that had been entrusted to me.

Paul closes out his life, really, by reminding Timothy again, "I fought the good fight, - " There he says it again. It's been a fight. " - finished the course, kept the faith; - " the faith, the body of truth that constitutes the Christian faith. And I'm going to go onto my reward.

It hasn't been easy for him. All who are in Asia forsake him. Verse 10, "Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me." Imagine everything that he had done, and he's all alone, and he's lonely, and it's only Luke, and he asks for Mark to come for fellowship, and for a coat, and for some parchments.

"At his first defense - " verse 16 " - no one supported me," he said. "But everybody deserted me. May it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was rescued out of the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen."

It's going to be like that. You know, I'm surrounded by wonderful people. I'm so blessed. I can't say with Paul, "Everyone has forsaken me." I'm blessed. Not everyone has forsaken me. But I think any of us who takes stands on issues like this know what it is to be vilified, and falsely accused, and attacked, and assaulted. And at the end of the day, we just say, "The Lord strengthen me." You're going to have to do that. You may find yourself isolated in a situation trying to take a stand on this issue. The Lord will strengthen you and He will reward you for your faithfulness.

What a heartfelt letter to Timothy. If you wonder how Timothy responded, the answer to that comes at the end of Hebrews when the writer of Hebrews writes this, Hebrews 13:23. "Take notice that our brother Timothy has been released." From where? Prison. Timothy was in prison. He was released. Timothy had let his gift go silent to avoid that. He was a coward when Paul wrote. This was what he was trying to make sure didn't happen. He got that letter. I think it gripped his heart. I think he became bold and he went to prison. But he was released. Just a small word, I'm glad it's there. I'm so glad it's there.

Paul’s letter changed the course of Timothy’s life. And may it do the same for you, for all of us. May we guard the treasure, retain sound words, study to show ourselves approved unto God, workmen needing not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word, and then having rightly divided the Word, may we preach the Word faithfully. And if no one stands with us, so be it. The Lord will not forsake us.

Father, we thank You for our time together in these days. It has been beyond a blessing. We feel like we have been to the mountain. We’ve come close to the glory, and it should be our feelings, should be our attitude, because we have, because we’ve been intently focused on You and Your Word, and that is where the glory resides. For it is in Your Word that You are revealed as the all-glorious one.

Thank you for the fellowship we’ve enjoyed. Thank You for the fresh new friendships we’ve made. And, Lord, we’ve endeavored to offer You an offering of service in this conference, to lift up before You our minds and hearts, to be prepared for a new level of service, a new level of usefulness to You who, in our own small way, individual by individual, stem the tide that brings dishonor to You.

God, our Father, Christ our Savior, and blessed Holy Spirit our strengthener, our Helper. All of this is for Your glory and Your honor, all of it. And we have offered it humbly, knowing the best we can give is far short of what You’re worthy. All our words, all our thoughts, all our insights, all our efforts, whether speakers or listeners, all that we have brought to this, we have done to give You glory. May it be only the beginning, only the start of lives that are committed to this for Your glory.

May we feel the pain when You were dishonored. And may You use us, Lord, as instruments to snatch brands from the burning and to help believers to escape unnecessary deception.

We offer this week up to You as the truth reverberates from this place around the world. Take it where You will. Use it as You desire, and that’s all we can ask. And we rejoice and rest in what You do with what we have placed on the altar. Be glorified, O Lord, we pray. Amen.

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