

Main Idea: In 2 Timothy 4:1-5, Paul lays out the expectations in 2 areas in the life of the minister of the gospel.

- I. Here is the minister's public responsibility (1-4).
 - A. This is the task (2a).
 - B. This is the target (2b).
 1. He has something to say to those in error.
 2. He has something to say to those in sin.
 3. He has something to say to those doing well.
 - C. This is the test (3-4).
 1. People won't put up with sound doctrine.
 2. People will find teachers who will tell them what they want to hear.
 3. People will turn from God's truth to man's notions.
- II. Here is the minister's personal responsibility (5).
 - A. He must be sober.
 - B. He must endure.
 - C. He must do the work of an evangelist.
 - D. He must make full proof of his ministry.

Make It Personal: What am I doing with the Word?

1. Do I believe it?
2. Am I staying in it?
3. Am I doing all I can to proclaim it?
4. Is my life consistent with it?

Scripture Reading: 2 Timothy 4:1-5

Stay in the Book. That was the message of God's Word to us two weeks ago, as we meditated on 2 Timothy 3:14-17. "As for you, *continue in what you have learned...the holy Scriptures.*"

And why stay in the Book? Verse 16, because of what it is—*God-breathed*, and what it does—it is *useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness.*

So we're to stay in the Book. We are to be *Bible* men, women, boys, and girls.

But staying in the Book is not an end, so let's not retreat with our Bibles to a monastery. It's supposed to lead to something, something the Bible calls for in the very next passage, our text this morning.

4:1 "In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge:"

"I charge thee," says the AV.

These are solemn words. Paul is writing within weeks, perhaps even within days, of his martyrdom. According to a fairly reliable tradition, he was beheaded on the Ostian Way. As he begins what we know as chapter 4, he pens his final words, his final instructions for Timothy. He begins with a charge--lit. "I affirm solemnly."

What was Timothy supposed to do after Paul was gone? What methodology should he use to advance the cause of Christ after the death of his mentor?

For that matter, what does God expect church leaders to do today? Paul left no room for misunderstanding when he told Timothy.

I give you this charge. The phrase has legal connotations. It means to testify under oath. What Paul charged Timothy to do holds for every man in the ministry, and beyond that to all Christians.

***Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

What makes the charge so serious? Notice the introductory phrase, “In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus.” In the AV, “...before God and the Lord Jesus Christ...”

This isn't just Paul's opinion. This is vital because of the very presence of God Himself and His anointed Son and Savior, the Lord Jesus.

So what does God expect of a minister of the gospel? Yes, he's to be in the Book. But to what end? What is he supposed to do with what he learns from the Book?

Paul didn't leave Timothy, nor us, wondering what's expected. In today's text, 2 Timothy 4:1-5, you'll see nine imperatives: preach, be prepared, correct, rebuke, encourage, keep your head, endure, do the work of an evangelist, discharge (AV 'make full proof'). These nine commands can be summed up in a twofold responsibility for the gospel minister. Or we might say that Book is to shape his life in two spheres. One is public, the other personal.

I. Here is the minister's public responsibility (1-4).

I give you this charge. And here's the charge. Verse 2, “*Preach the Word.*” What did Paul want Timothy to do in his public ministry? It's not complicated. *Preach the Word.*

Unfortunately, we have complicated it. In our day many have concluded that the minister must perform other activities. Music. Drama. Marketing. Program development. Nothing necessarily wrong with these activities, but Paul's charge brings us back to the non-negotiable.

In terms of the minister's public ministry, Paul identifies three things for us. First,

A. This is the task (2a). "PREACH THE WORD."

Paul's motive for saying this is the future of the gospel after his departure. So he charged his associate to PRESERVE the gospel in ch 1. To PARTICIPATE in the ministry of the gospel in ch 2. To PERSEVERE in the gospel in ch 3. And now in ch 4 he finishes with this charge, PREACH the gospel. Don't just hear it. Don't just protect it. Don't just suffer for it. Get out and purposefully preach it!

Again, if we possess something that is God-inspired and sufficient for salvation (14-15), for sanctification (16), and for service (17), and we do (as 3:16-17 explains), then what do you think God would expect us to do with it? Preach it!

That's our task as ministers of the gospel.

"preach"= the Greek *kerusso*, means “to herald a message; to proclaim before the public.” Right there is the basic job description of every minister of the gospel. He is a herald. His task is to preach the Word.

In Paul's day, a ruler had a special herald who made announcements to the people. He was commissioned by the emperor to make his announcements in a loud, clear voice, so everyone could hear. He wasn't to negotiate the message, simply to proclaim it.

That's exactly what Paul had done for the past thirty years. Authorized by the King of kings, he journeyed throughout the world preaching the Word. Sometimes he stayed a few weeks. Sometimes a few years. But his task was always the same--to announce the good news about the Person and Work of God's Son, Jesus Christ. Wherever he went, Paul told people the truth--the truth about God, the truth about man's condition, the truth about God's provision for our need in Jesus Christ, and the truth about the response God requires from all of us, to repent and believe.

What Paul did, he expected Timothy to do, even after he was gone.

On October 6, 1535, a man was taken from prison, tied to a stake, strangled, and his body burnt to ashes. Who was this man, and what had he done?

William Tyndale was born in 1484 in Gloucester, England. Very little is known of his childhood. He graduated from the University of Oxford, and then went to Cambridge. In 1520, when Tyndale was 36 years old, he accepted the post of chaplain to Sir John Walsh's household and tutor to his children. While there he preached publicly in nearby Bristol where he was arrested.

The charge? "Spreading heresy in and about the town of Bristol."

What was Tyndale's heresy? Up until his day, the Bible was available only in Greek and Latin. Only the clergy could read it. The Bible was unreadable for the common English speaking people.

Tyndale was committed to placing God's Word in the language of the common people. He is known as the first translator of the New Testament into English from the Greek.

He faced great opposition from the State Church officials who thought it was blasphemous to translate God's Word into the common language. In fact, Tyndale had to smuggle his Bibles into England.

Once, when challenged by a church official, Tyndale replied, "If God spare my life, ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth the plough to know more of the Scriptures than thou doest."

This commitment to publish the Bible in the common English language cost William Tyndale his life. He was condemned by the State Church and the King of England himself, and led out to be burned on October 6, 1536. The last words of William Tyndale were, "Lord, open the King of England's eyes."

Within a year after Tyndale's death, a Bible was placed in every parish church by the king's command.

Brothers and sisters, a great price has been paid so we might have this Book. So we must first, stay in it, and then next, preach it.

Haldor Lillenas said it this way in song...

*The Bible stands like a rock undaunted
'Mid the raging storms of time;
Its pages burn with the truth eternal,
And they glow with a light sublime.
The Bible stands like a mountain tow'ring
Far above the works of men;
Its truth by none ever was refuted,
And destroy it they never can.
The Bible stands and it will forever,
When the world has passed away;
By inspiration it has been given,
All its precepts I will obey.
The Bible stands every test we give it,
For its Author is divine;
By grace alone I expect to live it,
And to prove and to make it mine.*

Refrain:

*The Bible stands though the hills may tumble,
It will firmly stand when the earth shall crumble;
I will plant my feet on its firm foundation,
For the Bible stands.*

So there's the task. We *preach*. We use our mouths so others will hear something. Preach *the Word*. The logos. The revelation of God, sixty-six books, which reveal a person, Jesus the Christ, and what He has done to rescue sinners. We herald that objective, historical, personal message that God has given to us.

What are we after as we proclaim this Word? What's our aim, our goal?

B. This is the target (2b). Paul's next four commands modify the main verb "preach". Verse 2 "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction."

The AV says, "Be diligent in season and out of season." That's another military word. To be diligent means "to stay at one's post." In other words, we are to preach the Word with the diligence of a soldier guarding his post.

And when should we preach this Word? Paul says, "in season, out of season," that is, whether it's convenient or not, whether it's popular or not.

The gospel minister is never off duty. He is always looking for doors of opportunity to proclaim the Word.

So Paul's not just taking about what happens on Sunday morning in front of a smiling congregation. Yes, that's preaching, and yes, those listening need to hear God's revelation and not the preacher's opinions. But this activity of preaching, or heralding, of announcing what God has said, is to be done *in season and out of season*.

Wherever the minister goes, he's looking for opportunities to *preach the Word*, to get more lines in the water, so to speak.

Now, to whom should the minister give the Word? Who needs to hear it? Paul uses the next three commands to identify three groups we need to target.

One, those in error—correct (AV, reprove).

Two, those in sin—rebuke.

Three, those doing well—encourage (AV, exhort).

So the preacher who's equipped with the Word has something to say to three types of people.

1. *He has something to say to those in error.*
2. *He has something to say to those in sin.*
3. *He has something to say to those doing well.*

First of all, God's Word *corrects*. The fact that it corrects indicates there are people listening who are thinking wrongly. They have faulty thoughts. They're clinging to error in their minds, non-truths.

So the preacher of God's Word exposes error. He reproves wrong thinking. Doctrinal error must be confronted in the church. I must not confront doctrinal error by my opinion, but by the Word. We must use the Scriptures to reprove those in error.

Wiersbe hit the nail on the head when he said, "True preaching is the explanation and application of Bible doctrine. Anything else is just religious speechmaking."¹

Paul elaborated on how the preacher is to do this ministry of *correcting* back in 2:24-25, "And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must *gently instruct*, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth."

But it's not just those in error. There are also those in sin, and the preacher has something to say to them, too.

Secondly, *rebuke*. God's Word serves as a scalpel. As a skillful surgeon uses his scalpel to remove deadly cancer cells from a patient, so the man of God must use the

¹ Wiersbe, p. 254.

scalpel of God's Word at times to rescue a brother from the cancerous effects of sin. So at times we must *rebuke* people who have sin in their lives.

That's never pleasant to do, any more than to receive. But it's so essential. We are all sinners, even if we've been redeemed. So we need the loving rebuke, not only of the Word, but of people who love us enough to speak the Word into our context.

To quote an old rule of preachers, "He should afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted."²

Then thirdly, and may we never forget this third group, the preacher must use the Word to *encourage*. Thank God for people who by God's grace, are thinking right, and living right! But they need something too.

What do they need? They need the preacher to *exhort* them. That's the Word in the AV. They need a word of "encouragement" to keep on keeping on. And how do we encourage someone who is already doing well? By giving them more of what has enabled them to be doing well in the first place, the Word.

God's Word does all this. With it we can correct. With it we can rebuke. With it we can encourage.

But how does it happen? For starters, we read the Book. Paul told Timothy in his first letter to give public attention to reading the Scriptures (4:13). But then he says also, "to preaching and to teaching."

Here he says *preach* the Word. Hearing the Word isn't enough. We don't always understand what we're hearing. And even if we understand the truth of it, we resist applying that truth to our own hearts and lives ("he's talking to the guy in the pew next to me now, not me").

But when we *preach* the Word we've just read, we're helping our hearers connect the dots. So in our text Paul says to preach the Word, correct, rebuke, and encourage *with great patience and careful instruction*.

The AV says, "with all longsuffering and doctrine." So ministering God's Word is not like shooting bullets, but more like planting seeds. And it takes *great patience* (seeds don't grow overnight) and *careful instruction* to get the crop we're after.

Notice the words "careful instruction." The AV says "doctrine." Doctrine is received truth that become believed truth, and it takes careful instruction for that to happen.

As you know the Lord brought Sherry and me to begin our ministry here in 1987. I can't tell you how many times I've heard statements like, "You're a teacher more than a preacher." Or, "It's like you're teaching more than preaching." Or, "It's almost like you're trying to teach us."

The reason this stands out, at least in part, is because in the Appalacian region, the church has not been known for careful teaching. Reading the Bible? Yes. But explaining it? Not so much. The Bible reading launches into stories, personal testimonies, tugging at emotions, and so forth.

But as this text and others make clear, the pastoral ministry is primarily a *teaching* ministry. Preaching (heralding the truth) and teaching (explaining and applying the truth) go hand in hand (see 1:11). Keep in mind that Paul called this gifted church leader the "pastor-teacher" in Ephesians 4:11.

If I can bear my heart further, it grieves me when I see what has happened in our day, for many have turned the pastorate into a profession. They have forgotten that it's a

² Said by many, quote found in Wiersbe.

calling, a divine commissioning. It's a *ministry*, a stewardship, a way of serving the Body of Christ.

So our society offers perks for ministers (clergy credit cards, clergy discounts, clergy tax incentives). I'm not saying those are necessarily wrong. But the water is muddled so that we view ministry as a job, a profession.

Add to that the fact that our society places high cultural expectations on "ministers"--to do weddings, to serve on community service boards, to act as CEO's of church programs. But God's Word authorizes none of those tasks to the pastor. Those are cultural expectations.

That doesn't make them wrong necessarily, but here's what happens. Men go into the ministry with wrong expectations. And congregations feed those wrong expectations.

We are seeing this morning what God expects, and it's what we should expect of the minister, as Paul did of Timothy.

Preach the Word. And when you preach it, use the Word to *correct, rebuke, and encourage*. So in every message, you should have something to say to *those in error, to those in sin, and to those who are doing well, by God's grace.*

And do it *with great patience and careful instruction.* It takes time for the ministry of the Word to unfold, and bear fruit. So the minister must be patient as he puts seed into the hearts of those God has entrusted to him.

This applies to Timothy yes, and to pastors, yes. But as we extend the application of this text, it speaks to every Sunday School teacher, and children's worker, and youth leader in this church. Make sure you are giving those under your care what God has said. *Preach the Word* to them.

Here comes the question, "What can I expect if I embrace this kind of ministry?" That's a good question, and that brings us to Paul's third point concerning the minister's public responsibility. His task? Preach the Word. His target? To those in error, to those in sin, to those doing well. Now his test.

C. This is the test (3-4). "For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. ⁴They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths."

Here's the test. Paul guarantees three things are going to happen. For the time will come, he says.

1. *People won't put up with sound doctrine.*
2. *People will find teachers who will tell them what they want to hear.*
3. *People will turn from God's truth to man's notions.*

Now one at a time...

Guarantee #1--People will not endure sound doctrine. Most of you are here today because you have a love for the truth. You hunger to hear and know and live the truth of God's Word.

But that wasn't always the case for you, nor me. Until God in His grace gave us a new heart. And even those with new hearts can get calloused. Or to change the metaphor, if you just ate three bags of potato chips and drank a bottle of pop, you wouldn't be too hungry for a nutritious home-cooked meal, and the problem isn't with the meal or the cook.

Not everybody finds the teaching of God's Word appealing, particularly if we've stimulating our taste buds with other substitutes. People have a tendency to be fascinated with the sensational. Satan whispers in the ear, "The Bible is boring. That S.S. teacher is dry and outdated. You need something else..."

NASB "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 according with their own desires."

Back in the 1930s, the majority of churches in Germany actually supported Hitler and the Nazis, with the slogan, "Better Brown (the Nazis) than Red (the Communists)."

Guarantee #2--People will get teachers to tell them what they want to hear. Watch carefully. Paul didn't say the time would come when people would quit going to church. Rather he said that people would quit going to church to hear the Word of God.

There are two types of people in great danger this morning. First, there's the person who right now is at home, slouching in front of Sports Center, with his can of Bud in one hand, and his iPad in the other. No doubt he's in great danger spiritually, for he's not interested in God's Word.

But there's second type of person. Right now he's actually in church somewhere, but he's not interested in hearing the Word. There are other things that bring him to church. Or sadly, he's in church but not a Bible-loving church. So he's not hearing God's Word taught. Instead his ears are being tickled by a nice little talk someone's giving. Not, "Thus saith the Lord," but an inspirational talk about how to live life better.

So which person is in greater danger this morning? In John Bunyan's classic "Pilgrim's Progress," Evangelist warns Christian of Mr. Morality. He's dangerous, and subtly so. Why? Because he sounds good at first. His behavior is impressive. But he has no room for the God of grace and the grace of God in his life. He's a do-gooder.

Guarantee #3--People will turn from God's truth to man's notions. This is the sixth time in this letter that Paul has referred to the "truth" (2:15, 18, 25; 3:7, 8). The characteristic of people living in the last days is that they are "ever learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth" (3:7).

I'm learning that people don't always want to hear the truth. The truth may be painful. It may disturb them. They'd rather hear something that would make them "feel good."

Paul warned that people would be attracted by "fables" (=myths; man-made legends). Novelty. The tragedy is this. They don't even realize they've lost the truth. The verb "turn away" means "to deviate from the true course" (like a ship blown off course).

And here's the tragedy. There will always be teachers who will give me what my depraved heart wants to hear. So what I need is someone who will give me what I *need* to hear, what God *wants* me to hear. Which is why Paul gave this counsel to Timothy, and to us.

Preach the Word.

What does God expect of a minister of the gospel? Here's the essence of his public responsibility. *Preach the Word.* Look for ways to preach the Word. Live in ways that make the Word attractive. Make relationships so as to open doors to preach the Word. And when the opportunity comes, use it, not to share your opinions, but the message of God Himself.

But there's another side to ministry, and here it is. Not just public, but personal.

II. Here is the minister's personal responsibility (5).

In verse 5, Paul spells out four responsibilities for Timothy, and they have to do with what he is and does *personally*.

"But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry."

A man can preach the Book powerfully and undermine his ministry if these personal elements are missing.

A. He must be sober. The NIV says, “But you, keep your head in all situations.” Watch in all things, says the AV. Literally, “Be sober.”

Of course, sobriety means you’re not under the control of something else. Alcohol. Drugs. Food. Pornography. Timothy was not to be intoxicated with craving for whatever is sensational or sentimental in ministry. Like a trained athlete, he must keep his emotions and passions and nerves in check.

My friend, if have got an ego problem, stay out of the ministry until you get it in check. It's too easy to use the ministry to feed your ego, to bolster your personal ambition.

Paul spoke frankly to Timothy, "You watch yourself in all things."

The goal in preaching is not to get a crowd, not to make people like you, not to get a following. Frankly, you can get a crowd by preaching popular things, telling stories, and manipulating emotions helps.

But no Timothy. Keep your head in all situations. No matter what others do, you be sober. That’s not synonymous with serious, but it does mean you grasp what’s important and are serious about that.

B. He must endure. “Endure hardship.” Bible preaching is not popular in a world that does not love the true and Living God. Bible preaching reminds people that they're building their mansion on a sand bar, and that's not what they want to hear. So like a cornered mother bear, people attack the preacher who says such things.

And when that happens, the preacher a choice. Change the message, or endure the attack.

But this speaks to other things. In his personal life, the preacher must endure, just as in his preaching. He will be tested in many ways, by people who let him down, by a body that’s breaking down, by a budget that won’t budge at times. So he needs to be strengthened by God’s grace (2:1), and endure hardship.

C. He must do the work of an evangelist. “Do the *work*.” This is work. It’s not easy and doesn’t come naturally. “Of an *evangelist*.” Not just preach evangelistic sermons, but do the work of an evangelist.

Build relationships with lost people, and share the gospel with them. Equip believers so they can do the same.

There are some who are gifted to do this. They’re called *evangelists* in Ephesians 4:11. But here Timothy is told to do the *work* of an evangelist. You don’t have to have the gift to do the work.

All believers are to engage in the work of evangelism, one beggar telling other beggars where we found some bread. The church leader, like Timothy, must pave the way.

Notice the balance in 4:1-5. Tim was to preach the Word--that's careful Bible teaching. He was also to do the work of an evangelist.³

³ It's tough for a church to keep a balance when it comes to evangelistic preaching. Our problem is rooted in history. Centuries ago pastors focused on careful Bible teaching in church. Then in frontier America, evangelists came to town and were used of God in a mighty way. The pastors liked what they say the evangelists do, and decided to do likewise. They too began to evangelize in their pulpits, week after week. It became the task of the people in the pew to bring in unsaved people so the pastor could evangelize them. But fewer and fewer came. So guess what happened, and still happens in churches today? The pastor evangelized the evangelized week after week! He preached evangelistic messages TO CHRISTIANS Sunday after Sunday. And the sheep stifled. Why? They were starving for food which they never received.

D. He must make full proof of his ministry. That's the language of the AV. The NASB says, "Fulfill your ministry." The NIV, "Discharge all the duties of your ministry."

What's Paul telling Timothy? Essentially, this. Timothy, you've started well, and you've been running well for fifteen years. Now, keep going. Put your shoulder to the plough and never look back until your ministry is finished.

We need people with that fortitude in ministry today.

A young preacher once complained to Charles Spurgeon, the famous British preacher of the 1800's, that he did not have as big a church as he deserved. "How many do you preach to?" Spurgeon asked. "Oh, about 100," the man replied. Solemnly Spurgeon said, "That will be enough to give account for on the day of judgment."⁴

Make It Personal: What am I doing with the Word?

Let's ask ourselves four personal questions.

1. *Do I believe it?* Here's where it starts. Eliza Hewitt said this in her hymn, "My Faith Has Found a Resting Place."

*My faith has found a resting place,
Not in device or creed;
I trust the ever living One,
His wounds for me shall plead.
I need no other argument,
I need no other plea,
It is enough that Jesus died,
And that He died for me.*

And then, verse 3...

*My heart is leaning on the Word,
The living Word of God,
Salvation by my Savior's Name,
Salvation through His blood.*

So the question is, is that true *of me*? Do I believe it, which means, do I believe in the person of whom it speaks, Jesus the Savior?

2. *Am I staying in it?* Am I placing myself in the Word on a daily basis, and then in it when it's taught as my church gathers? Then...

3. *Am I doing all I can to proclaim it?* That's today's message. A person told me recently she had just recommitted her life to Christ, and the first thing she knew she needed to do was tell her father, an unsaved man, and mutual friend of ours. And she did. She proclaimed the Word. Am I doing all I can to proclaim it? Who needs to hear it from my lips this week?

4. *Is my life consistent with it?* If I proclaimed the message of Jesus to someone who knew me well, would they say my life verifies what I'm saying? Jesus is not just the Lord, but He indeed is *my* Lord. If my life is *not* consistent with what the Book says, how so? What needs to change in my life, by God's grace, starting today?

⁴ Wiersbe, 254