

Preach the Word! **(2 Timothy 4:1-8)**

In uncertain times we need a sure foundation. Ideologies change like the weather, it seems. But there is a reliable source of truth, one that's stood the test of centuries—the Bible. The Bible stands alone. It's far superior in its content, its historical accuracy, its plan of salvation, its textual integrity, and its influence. The Bible is God's book. It describes itself as a lamp that guides (Psalm 119:105), a mirror that reflects (James 1:23-25), water that cleanses (Ephesians 5:26), milk that nourishes (Hebrews 5:12-13), bread that sustains (Deuteronomy 8:3), meat that strengthens (Hebrews 5:14), honey that pleases (Psalm 19:10), rain that produces fruit (Isaiah 55:10-11), fire that ignites (Jeremiah 20:9), a hammer that shatters (Jeremiah 23:29), a sword that pierces (Ephesians 6:17), gold that's precious (Psalm 19:10), silver that's pure (Psalm 12:6, and seed that's life-giving (1 Peter 1:23). No wonder Paul exhorted his protégé Timothy, "Preach the Word!" God's Word transforms our lives and gives us confidence for the future.

Preach the Word—we have a responsibility to uphold God's truth (4:1-5).

One of the most important responsibilities of a pastor is to preach God's Word. The proclamation of the truth is at the core of any effective Christian ministry. But the command to preach the Word of God isn't limited to pastors and church leaders. This command applies to every Christian. Every Christian is an everyday missionary and can proclaim the truth of God. We all have a responsibility to uphold God's truth.

Proclaiming God's Word is a solemn responsibility (4:1).

Having stated that all Scripture is inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16), Paul went on to exhort Timothy to preach God's Word. He couches this exhortation in the framework of a solemn charge. Paul emphasized the importance of this charge to Timothy by his word choice ("solemn witness") and by including the witness of God the Father and Jesus Christ. Paul further described Jesus as the one who will soon judge both those who are living and those who have died. This same Jesus is coming again to establish His kingdom on earth. So Paul's charge to Timothy was based on the authority of God the Father and God the Son who will soon return to judge all people in anticipation of His earthly kingdom. Paul took the responsibility of proclaiming God's Word seriously, and so should we!

Proclaiming God's Word is a constant responsibility (4:2).

The content of Paul's charge to Timothy was pointed and powerful. "Preach the Word!" The word "preach" isn't limited to pulpit ministry but simply means to proclaim a message with authority. Such proclamation can take place in both public and private settings where God's people declare the truth of God's Word. God's Word, of course, is the inspired Scriptures. These Scriptures focus on Jesus Christ and the good news of His redemptive work. Paul further defines the work of preaching God's Word by adding four more imperatives—be prepared, correct, rebuke, and encourage. God's people must "be prepared," literally to "stand by" in seasonable and even unseasonable opportunities. That is to say, we must be ready at all times to speak up for Jesus Christ. At times we'll need to "correct" others, pointing out erroneous thinking. We may even need to "rebuke" others for their misled practices, all based on the truth of God's Word. Finally, Paul tells us to "encourage," a word that includes the ideas of exhortation coupled with comfort. However we proclaim God's truth, we must do so "with all longsuffering (patience) and teaching (instruction)." In other words, our proclamation of the truth should be characterized by patient love and positive instruction rather than a harsh, judgmental tone.

Proclaiming God's Word is an essential responsibility (4:3-4).

The reason Paul was so forceful in his exhortation for Timothy to preach the Word is that error is ever present both inside and outside the church. Paul warned that a time was coming (and had likely already shown signs of its presence) when people would no longer uphold sound teaching. Sound, or healthy, teaching is founded on the truth of God's Word which so often rubs against our selfish desires. For this reason people tend to gravitate toward teachers who say what they want to hear. Paul said that people "heap up" for themselves such teachers who will satisfy their own sinful desires and "tickle" the ear. The image of rubbing a dog behind the ears comes to mind. Paul warned that people will turn away (a verb used at times in a medical context for the dislocation of a limb) from hearing the truth. They'll readily turn, instead, toward myths—false teachings that satisfy their personal desires. We might see this today in some of the teachings of the prosperity gospel which claims that those who follow God will become financially wealthy. Since people crave wealth, they welcome teachers who promise these things. In other settings some teachers will endorse sinful patterns as acceptable because of our cultural milieu, or deny that Jesus is the only way of salvation because an exclusive gospel is unacceptable according to contemporary thinking. It's essential that God's people proclaim God's truth, even—and especially—when that truth goes against our natural, sinful perspectives and desires.

Proclaiming God's Word is a fulfilling responsibility (4:5).

While there will always be opposition to God's truth, proclaiming His Word is necessary, right, and rewarding. Paul instructed Timothy to "be sober" in all things, that is, to keep a clear head, to be self-controlled rather than swayed by fads and faulty ideas. He was to endure hardship because spiritual leadership always includes extensive challenges. Paul also instructed Timothy to "do the work of an evangelist." Timothy was a pastor who was probably not gifted as an evangelist—otherwise he would not have needed this reminder from Paul. But even those who are not gifted evangelists have an evangelistic responsibility. We're all to share the good news about Jesus with others as His everyday missionaries. Paul concludes this series of exhortations by telling Timothy to "fulfill" his ministry, to be faithful in carrying out his responsibilities as a spiritual leader. When we fulfill our ministry responsibilities we discover that ministry is fulfilling. Therefore, "Preach the Word!"

**Finish the race—we have a reward that
motivates us to live faithfully to the end (4:6-8).**

Coupled with the responsibility of proclaiming God's Word is the guarantee of eternal reward for serving Jesus Christ. Paul went on to describe his anticipated death and ultimate reward in heaven. He lived well, and he would finish well.

Serving Jesus Christ involves irretrievable sacrifice (4:6).

Paul wanted Timothy to be ready to take his place as a leader in the early church. Because Paul knew that his time was short he challenged Timothy to fulfill his ministry responsibilities, saying, "For I am already being poured out." The idea behind this phrase involves that of a drink offering as described in Numbers 15:1-10. The worshipper was to pour wine over a sacrifice as an irretrievable offering. Paul considered his life of ministry to be a drink offering, a total and irretrievable sacrifice for the sake of the gospel. He used the same phrase in Philippians 2:17, at which time he expected to be released from prison. But during his second imprisonment in Rome, the time at which he wrote 2 Timothy, Paul expected to be executed as a martyr. "The time has come for my departure," he wrote. The word translated "departure" was used for striking camp or weighing anchor, a euphemism for death itself. Paul willingly sacrificed his life for the work of the Lord.

Serving Jesus Christ requires intense perseverance (4:7).

In a poetic and passionate exclamation Paul stated, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." The "good fight" (compare 1 Timothy 6:12) could

portray either a military or an athletic image. But the next statement speaks about an athletic contest—finishing a race—and the following verse refers to an athletic victor’s crown, so an athletic image seems to be prominent in Paul’s thinking. Like a wrestler, Paul had fought (“agonized”) the good fight. Like a runner, Paul had finished the course. He had kept the faith—remaining faithful to his calling and obedient to the rules of life’s contest. Paul was finishing well. He never let up. He never gave up. He demonstrated intense perseverance in his work for the Lord.

Serving Jesus Christ guarantees immeasurable reward (4:8).

As a consequence of his well-run race, Paul was confident that a “crown of righteousness” was set aside for him in heaven. The word “crown” refers to a victor’s crown, generally a laurel wreath, in contrast to a royal crown. The word “righteousness” here might refer to that ultimate state of righteousness that believers will receive, the crown being righteousness itself (compare Galatians 5:5). On the other hand, the “crown of righteousness” might refer to the reward granted to those who live a righteous life in Christ, the crown earned through living a lifestyle consistent with the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ (compare 2 Timothy 3:16). Since other New Testament references to crowns as rewards are linked to the Christian’s behavior, it’s preferable to understand the crown of righteousness as a reward for righteous living (compare 1 Corinthians 9:25; James 1:12; 1 Peter 5:4; Revelation 2:10). In either case Paul anticipated a rich reward from the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord, who Himself is the righteous judge, would award Paul this crown “in that day,” that is, the day of judgment.

However, Paul wouldn’t be the only one to receive such a crown. He assured Timothy and all who might read this epistle that such a crown is available for “all who love” Christ’s appearing. This may refer to all believers, since all true followers of Jesus Christ love the anticipation of Jesus’ return (and the crown would be righteousness itself). Or the phrase may specify certain believers who focus on Jesus’ return (and display their anticipation through righteous living). Again, in either case we can look forward to an immeasurable reward from our Savior and Judge, Jesus Christ. Therefore, we’re motivated to live faithfully for Him to the very end of our lives. We want to preach the Word and we want to finish well. God’s Word transforms our lives and gives us confidence for the future.