**Bethel Christian Fellowship**

**Fair Lawn, NJ**

**The Message Of 2 Timothy (14): “The Charge To Preach The Word”**

**2 Timothy 4:1-5**

**July 23, 2023**

The verses before us today are the very last words written by the Apostle Paul. He is writing within weeks, perhaps even days, of his martyrdom. He has labored long and hard as an ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ. He has fought a good fight, finished his course, and kept the faith, as he himself writes (4:7). Now he awaits his reward, “the crown of righteousness,” which has been laid up for him in heaven (4:8). Thus these are words that comprise Paul’s last will and testament for the church.

They begin with his final charge to Timothy. In a day and age when people *will not* endure sound teaching and *will* turn away from listening to the truth, Timothy must persist in teaching it. The same should be true for us. “The harder the times and the deafer the people, the clearer and more persuasive our proclamation must be” (Stott). Difficult days, in which it is hard to gain a hearing for the gospel, should never silence us. They should spur us on to teach and preach the truth all the more. Hence Paul’s final charge: “*Preach the Word*” (4:1-2).

There are three parts to this charge, and each is worthy of its own study: **(a)** the seriousness of the charge (On what basis is Paul issuing this charge?); **(b)** the nature of the charge (What precisely is Paul commissioning Timothy to do?) **(c)** the reason for the charge (what are the incentives that Paul is using to motivate Timothy to preach the Word?).

**A. The Seriousness of the Charge (v. 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 . . .*”

What’s striking about this opening verse is that Paul is not issuing his mandate in his own name or in his own authority. (He certainly could have, as an apostle of Christ.) Rather, he is acutely aware of being in the presence of God the Father (who sent His Son to redeem lost sinners) and of Christ Jesus, who not only died for sinners, but is the Judge of “the living and the dead.” To Him every person must some day give an account. Christ’s ministers, in particular, will be held accountable for their faithfulness in proclaiming God’s Word, clearly and accurately (Cf. 2:15). Without question, this was intended to impress upon Timothy the utmost seriousness of the charge.

The basis of Paul’s charge is also in view Christ’s “appearing” (His Second Coming), and the consummation of His kingdom: “It is evident that Paul still believes in Christ’s personal return,” writes John Stott. “Although he now knows that he will die before it takes place, yet still at the end of his ministry he describes Christians as those who love Christ’s appearing (v. 8) . . . Now these three truths – the appearance, the judgment and the kingdom – should be as clear and certain an expectation to us as they were to Paul and Timothy . . . For both those who preach the word and those who listen to it must give an account to Christ when He appears” (Guard the Gospel).

**B. The Nature of the Charge (v. 2):** “*Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction*.”

The *essence* of Paul’s charge is simple enough; “preach the word” (v. 2a). There’s no need for him to specify it further, as Timothy would know that this is the doctrinal instruction that he has heard from Paul and which Paul has now committed to him to pass on to others (2:2). It’s the “pattern of sound teaching” (1:13) and the “good deposit” (1:14) that’s been entrusted to him. Here in the fourth chapter, it’s equivalent to “the sound teaching” (v. 3), “the truth” (v. 4), and “the faith” (v. 7). It also consists of the Old Testament Scriptures (God-breathed and profitable), which Timothy has known from childhood (3:14-15), along with the teaching of the apostle which Timothy has “followed,” “learned,” and “fully believed” (3:10, 14).

The way that Timothy is to go about this is the same way every minister and faithful Christian is to go about proclaiming God’s Word. It’s not easy, but it is essential:

* “*Be prepared in season and out of season*,” or “*press it home on all occasions, convenient or inconvenient*” (NEB). Heralds of the gospel know they are handling matters of life and death, and should be on duty at all times. (The “office hours” during the week, or “days off” on Mondays, or “Sabbaticals” for time served would have been completely foreign to the thinking of Paul!)
* “*Correct, rebuke, encourage*. . .” A good minister knows there are different strokes for different folks. As difficult as this may be, a preacher must remember this and be able and willing to do this. God’s Word can and should always be applied in ways that are relevant to the individual needs and problems that arise within the fellowship.
* “*With great patience* (or longsuffering) *and careful instruction*” Our responsibility is to be faithful in preaching the Word; the results are the responsibility of the Spirit of God, and all we can do is wait patiently for Him to work! It’s also important to remember that the pastoral ministry is primarily a *teaching* ministry, which is why elders must be “able to teach” (Titus 1:9; 1 Tim. 3:2). This is precisely what Paul had done in Ephesus, as Timothy well knew. For close to three years, he had continued to teach “*the whole counsel of God*” both in public, and from “house to house” (Acts 20:20, 27; Cf. 19:8-10). Now Timothy is called to do the same careful instruction.

**C. The Reason for the Charge (vv. 3-5):** “*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 number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.* *They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry*.” It is plain from these verses, and from what Paul has written earlier, that these difficult times have already begun for Timothy. The scene that Paul is describing is a contemporary one for the first century church and for every subsequent generation of Christians.

The one characteristic which Paul singles out in such times is that people *cannot bear to hear the truth*. He expresses this both negatively and positively, and he expresses it twice: **(a)** “*they will not* put up with sound doctrine” . . . “but *will* gather . . . teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear;” **(b)** “they *will turn away*” from listening to the truth . . .”and wander into myths.” They are not only determined to reject the truth, but also are determined to listen to anything but the truth.

It all has to do with their “itching ears.” This expression is figure of speech for a kind of curiosity that leads people to look for something new. What they do is close their ears against the truth and open them to any teacher or preacher who will relieve “their tickle” by scratching it (giving them what they want to hear). In the words of one commentator, “The demand creates the supply. The hearers invite and shape their own preachers. If the people desire a calf to worship, a ministerial calf-maker is readily found” (Marvin R. Vincent, Word Studies in the New Testament**).**

**Q.** How, then, should Timothy respond? **A.** Not by holding his peace, or by compromising his message. It’s just the opposite. Timothy is called to be different; “*But as for you . . .”* (Cf. 3:10, 14). What follows is a continuation of the previous charge (Cf. v. 1), now peppered with “four staccato commands” (Stott).

* “*Be sober in all things*” (NASB), or “*always be sober-minded*” (ESV). In a day and age when people become intoxicated with fanciful myths, innovative heresies and sparkling novelties, ministers (and all faithful Christians) must keep “calm and sane” (NEB). Think, for example, of how many Bible teachers are anything *but* sober-minded when it comes to the doctrine of the Lord’s return (as in the “Left Behind” series).
* “*Endure hardship*” (NASB, NIV), or “*endure suffering*” (ESV). Whenever the truth becomes unpopular, and people will not listen to sound doctrine, ministers (and faithful Christians) are tempted to “trim” their message to suit their listeners. How? By cutting out the parts of the message that give the most offense. (Instead of presenting the Savior as the “Bread of Life,” far too many are picturing Him as just plain “Wonder Bread.”) But if we refuse to compromise the truth, then we must be prepared to “*endure suffering*.”
* “*Do the work of an evangelist*.” The full scope of evangelism is to teach the gospel message to the unconverted, and then to disciple those who are newly converted. It’s not either/or, it’s both/and. This is always an ongoing challenge for any Bible-believing local church fellowship!
* “*Fulfill your ministry*” (NASB, ESV) or “*discharge all the duties of your ministry*” (NIV). It doesn’t matter if some forsake Timothy’s ministry in favor of teachers who “tickle their fancy,” or tell them what they want to hear. Timothy (and all faithful Christians) is to stay the course and continue to do what God has called him to do.

Timothy was called to be faithful in his generation, and we are called to be faithful in ours. We are called to *guard* the gospel, as a precious deposit entrusted to us (1:13-14). We are called to *suffer* for it, for those who are loyal to the gospel should not expect an easy time (2:1-3). We are called to *continue* in it, because it is the inspired truth of God (3:10, 14). We are also called to proclaim it, because it is the good news of salvation, and the final safeguard against apostasy (4:1-5). Nothing is more needed by Christians in today’s church than to stand firm in the truth, and to resist the pressures of conforming to the spirit of this age!