



## **I Charge You...Preach the Word**

*Series: 2 Timothy: The Final Charge From a Faithful Apostle*

2 Timothy 3:16-4:5

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As we return to this last letter that we have from the pen of Paul before he was martyred for his unwavering faithfulness to Jesus Christ, I want for us to remember where we are in the flow of things. Paul has been describing the perilous and difficult times in which the church in Ephesus and Timothy, as her pastor, are finding themselves. They are in the middle of what can only be described as a “Truth War,” as a very real battle for the truth of God in this darkened world. The battle, of course, rages in the public arena where people are willing to believe almost anything, no matter how foolish or nonsensical, in order to avoid the implications of the plain truth of God. And that is to be expected in a world that has “exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.” (Romans 1:25, ESV) But the battle, Paul said, was also in the church, in the household of God.

He describes a wide-spreading apostasy that has been infecting the church in Asia, a falling away from Paul’s teaching, a falling away from gospel faithfulness and a falling away from Jesus Christ, Himself. False teachers and false brethren have crept into the church and led people astray. Foolish believers have given themselves to sin and have caused serious damage to the body of Christ, being used as dishonorable vessels to bring division and broken fellowship – all of them combining to bring serious times of difficulty to the church. In the last message we saw how widespread this declension had become, how the love of self and the lack of real love for God had produced a poisonous crop of greedy, proud, arrogant, abusive, authority rejecting, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, brutal, treacherous, and unrestrained people who gave the appearance of godliness without the fruit – an apt description of our own days. What were Timothy and the church to do?

Paul’s simple answer for this declension was to call Timothy and the church to refuse to engage in worthless arguments, to be faithful to the Word of God, to hold fast to God’s truth and to

continue on in that faithfulness despite what was going on in visible church. That was especially made clear by Paul's definitive statement regarding the Word of God that we touched on in our last message, but which we will expand upon this morning, culminating in a look at the last specific charge, the last explicit instruction and command that we have from Paul. First let's look at this definitive statement.

Paul's Definitive Statement Regarding the Word of God (v 16-17) He says: "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16–17, ESV) Now understand what Paul is doing here. He is establishing the authority, the trustworthiness, the effectiveness, and the power of the Word of God beyond all question because of its supernatural origin. Timothy is to anchor himself, and to anchor the Ephesian church, to the Word of God...why? Turmoil and trial are unavoidable. People are fickle and ultimately unreliable. They are capable of great sin. They are human and sinful by nature and they will let you down but the Word of God is always true. There are multitude of voices, opinions, values and philosophies in our world always clamoring to be heard. There are many worthless words spoken in this world but there is only one source, one fountain, of truth upon which to build your life, upon which to build the church. There is only one acceptable standard for faith, for living, one defining deposit of truth in this world and that is Word of God. In the midst of all the trial and travail that comes with seeking to be faithful to Christ in this world, Timothy must hold fast to the soul-cleansing, mind-renewing, life-transforming, emotion-sanctifying, spirit-strengthening Word of God. It is the only unshakable and sturdy foundation for his feet and for the church in these tumultuous times. Why is that? He tells us.

All Scripture is breathed out by God...All Scripture finds its divine origin in the mind of God, is breathed out by God, and so is perfectly authoritative and filled with power. Think about it like this. From nothing, the universe was spoken into existence by God, breathed out by God. All of the so-called "natural laws" find their origin in the Lord. All of the eternal decrees, all of the providences of God, find their origin in the mind of God and are breathed out by Him. The eternal plan of redemption is spoken forth by the unbreakable Word of God. And this book that we hold in our hands, in its entirety, is spoken forth, is divinely breathed out by the Most High God, and holds all divine authority, all Truth, because it comes forth from the mind of the sovereign and holy God.

You know how this works. When you speak, the words that you are going to say take shape in your mind, as an expression of your thoughts and your will, and then you breathe them out of your mouth – you speak them as a concrete expression of your mind, heart, and will. The same is true here. The Greek term “theopneustos” means “God-breathed” and it gives us this picture of Scripture – Scripture originates in God’s mind and was communicated from God’s mouth by God’s breath or Spirit, as the expression of His mind, heart and will and since it comes from God, it is true and it has all authority and all power.

Simply stated, what God declares – is – no matter what any man may think. His word defines all reality. Because it is the very word of God, it holds the authority and the power to convert, to save the sinner, to sanctify the believer, to renew the mind, to free the will from the bondage of sin to the freedom of obedience, to make wise the simple, to embolden the fearful, to encourage the downcast, to enlighten the darkened, to bring order from chaos, to declare truth in the midst of falsehood, to convict the saint of sin, to grant repentance, to give assurance of grace, to discipline the stiff-necked, and to judge the unrepentant sinner. And be sure of this. It is unbreakable Truth. The Word of God will always have the final say. That is the authority and the power of the Word of God.

The psalmist writes in Psalm 19:7-11, “The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.” (Psalm 19:7–11, ESV)

This is the reality regarding Scripture and Paul does not offer this as a topic to be debated, he sets this forth as an incontestable declaration of fact – All Scripture is breathed out by God. But Paul does stop here. He tells Timothy and the church that the Word of God is of immense profit – beneficial, productive, and sufficient for the soul – for all those who regard the Scriptures as they are – the very God-breathed words of the Living God. How so? Well, look what he says. The Scriptures are profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.

Profitable for teaching...they are profitable for divine instruction in doctrine, in truth. They are the comprehensive and complete body of divine truth necessary to believe and to live as our heavenly Father desires. The Scriptures are profitable

For reproof...for rebuking us in order to convict us of misbehavior or false doctrine and perceptions. They are profitable for exposing falsehood and sin, erroneous belief, and ungodly conduct. The Scriptures are profitable

For correction...for restoring us to our proper condition. The idea here is of helping a person back to his feet after stumbling and to build someone up in truth after rebuking them. And the Scriptures are profitable

For training in righteousness...In the larger context, the Word is profitable for training and discipline in the positive sense, not as a corrective measure, but “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.” (Ephesians 4:12–16, ESV)

This is the worth of the Scriptures to all believers, but in the context in which Paul is saying this he has in view, in particular, Timothy the pastor and preacher. What Paul is getting at here is that if Timothy will hold the Word of God in the highest regard as he should – as the very God-breathed words of the Lord – it will have its intended effect in him personally and that will be of benefit, not only for his own soul but for those to whom he preaches. Let me show you.

Paul declares that it is by the Word of God that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. Don't misunderstand. The Scriptures are vitally important for all believers, but here Paul is using the phrase “the man of God” in the same sense that it was used in the OT

to describe prophets and teachers. He has in view Timothy's calling as the pastor and undershepherd of the church. He has in view Timothy and pastors like him.

The Scriptures have the power to make Timothy complete and equipped for every good work as a pastor and preacher of the Word of God. Timothy must believe this. That word "complete" means competent, capable, proficient. His point is this. No man who does not have such a high regard for Scripture, who does not study and trust it, who does not make decisions according to its teaching, who does not sincerely believe and obey the truth of the Scriptures will stand strong in living and defending the Christian faith. But if he does, he will be divinely enabled to meet all of the demands of faithful ministry. A pastor must himself be equipped for righteous living and faithful service to the Lord in order to do the same for believers under his care.

Whether it is leading men and women to saving faith in Christ, teaching truth to believers, rebuking error, correcting and setting sinning brothers and sisters on their feet, or training believers to believe correctly and live righteously, the supreme, necessary, and indispensable resource for it all is God's Word. That's it. Paul is telling Timothy in no uncertain terms that he must be a man of the Book. He can never lose sight of that fact. Paul is telling Timothy all of this, of the vital and irresistible centrality of the Word of God in preparation for his ultimate charge to Timothy and to every pastor.

The Ultimate Charge of Paul to Timothy and to All Pastors (4:1-5) Paul says to Timothy: "I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry." (2 Timothy 4:1-5, ESV)

Look at the way that Paul does this. He says, I charge you. Not as a friend, not as a mentor, not as a father, but as an Apostle Paul places Timothy under solemn obligation, under oath, under grave promise. The weightiness of this charge cannot be overstated. Paul is saying, "If you do only one thing, your life's purpose is this –preach the Word."

Paul places this charge upon Timothy in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus. He charges Timothy reminding him that he lives and moves and has his being before the face of God, before His holy presence and glory. He has this charge before the face of Christ Jesus, and notice the order here – Christ Jesus, Messiah Jesus, King Jesus! This is a charge made before the King of the Universe who will judge all human flesh, who will appear again, and who will establish forever His Kingdom. This is serious beyond measure. He is placing Timothy under the most solemn oath that anyone could take. It is the most profound responsibility in the universe. Before the face of the Holy God, before King Jesus – in His hearing and in His presence, with Him hearing and examining and scrutinizing all you say...

Preach the word...It is the Greek word “kerusso.” Proclaim publically, declare, herald with authority as a divine messenger the Word of God. This is not dialogue or discussion, not suggestion or a talk, not diplomacy or spin-doctoring; it is bold proclamation. Preach the Word – the authoritative, inerrant Word of God, law and gospel, God’s revealed truth. Preach the great doctrines of the faith, the message of the cross – justification through the blood sacrifice of Christ, redemption from sin, the propitiation of God’s wrath through Christ as our sin-bearer, adoption as the children of God through faith in Christ, sanctification by the power of the Holy Spirit, the election of sinners to salvation, real righteousness, the call to obedience, the pursuit of holiness, regeneration, the resurrection and its power for living in the newness of life, the return of Christ, divine judgment, the eternal state...and all the rest – OT and NT. The idea is to do it in plain speech, direct and clear, applying its truth accurately, so that no one comes away from his preaching unsure of what the preacher has said or how he should respond. The power to bring in the kingdom, to save souls, to sanctify saints, to impart grace, and to build the true church is the preaching of the Word of God.

Now look, the temptation to preach something else seemingly more suitable to men, to focus his ministry in another area, would have been a great temptation to Timothy, just as it is in our day. To be popular, to have no opposition, to be well-loved by all is a very real temptation to any pastor. But to do that would be of no use to his hearers, to the church he shepherded, or to the souls of the lost.

That is why Paul tells Timothy to be ready, to persist in preaching the Word as his consuming passion whether it is in season or out of season –whether it is in style or not, convenient or not,

well received or not, immediately gratifying or not, apparently fruitful or not, popular or not, through glad and difficult seasons. It is not an option.

Preaching the Word is sacrosanct, untouchable, to be revered because: Preaching the Word lets God speak and not man, forces the preacher to preach the whole counsel of God, creates biblically literate and formed Christians, carries with it the authority and power of God, transforms both preacher and congregation, fuels our worship, faith and practice, and because it is only God's Word that he commissions his preachers to proclaim. Nothing else.

Through the preaching of the Word, Timothy is to reprove, rebuke, and exhort the church, refuting error and misconduct, calling the erring soul to repentance, and coming alongside and commanding and encouraging the erring soul to lasting spiritual change. And he was to do it all with complete patience and teaching. Why the encouragement to patience?

Because preaching and teaching the Word of God in one church for the long haul requires such patience. In some ways, Paul's labor in the gospel was more inviting than Timothy's. To be a visiting preacher, even if you stay on for a while, is easier in the sense that you come and preach to a congregation for a while and then it is off to another exciting opportunity in another field of service. The hard labor of bearing with people, patiently instructing them, knowing everything about them and them you, requires patience born of love. To stick with and labor with the same people over time is not always exciting, not always invigorating. Sometimes it is difficult and slow-going, sometimes you have to preach and teach and apply the same truths over and over again. It's not always flashy and appealing but by God's grace it is immensely satisfying when you see God's truth take root in the heart. That kind of long-haul, "not giving up on you" kind of commitment requires patience – the very first word that Paul uses to describe love in 1 Corinthians 13. Timothy was to be patient, to bear all things, to believe the best about the flock, to hope all things – the growth of grace in those to whom he ministered, preaching and teaching the Word of God to them so that they could understand it, applying it to their lives faithfully –that's the idea of teaching -- in the hopes of enduring fruitfulness to the glory of God.

It wouldn't be easy. It would be hard going sometimes. Paul knew that Timothy would be tempted to abandon the Word for the sake of gaining hearers. Paul understood the time is

coming (in fact, was now here is the idea) when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. Paul knew that some would not endure, hold fast to, or value sound teaching. They would not put up with the faithful preaching of the Word of God, especially when it confronted their pet sins, their wrong thinking, their self-love and selfishness. When they were not getting their egos stroked and their ears scratched, when it all grew boring to them and they no longer found satisfaction in gospel-centered, faithful exposition of the Word of God, they would go find teachers that would suit their own passions, who would say what they wanted to hear. They would seek out other preachers who struck their fancy, who met their approval, who said what they wanted and demanded to hear, rather than remain under the faithful preaching of the Word. Their end would be that they would turn away from the truth to spiritual myths – to easy believism, to antinomianism – using grace as a license to sin, to asceticism and legalistic practices that elevated them and gave them a false sense of spirituality, to selfism, to preachers that will confirm their own desires, illusions and errors so they could have their egos stroked and their sins approved in order to maintain an appearance of godliness though minus the most basic realities.

Paul tells Timothy all of this because he does not want him to be discouraged or to give up on the Word of God when he saw it happening. Instead, he gives him this final command. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. Be sober minded – keep your head on straight and think rightly about these things. Don't lose your head or be intoxicated with the seeming success of unfaithful men. Don't lose your head when some depart from sound preaching. Remember your calling and keep your head. Endure suffering – put up with the hardships that come with faithfulness to Christ and His Word, the lows and the highs, the rejection as well as the approval, the dishonor as well as the honor. Do the work of an evangelist – keep preaching the gospel to everyone you preach to. Be an evangelist, a herald of the gospel, and do not abandon the gospel as the core foundation of all that you preach. Fulfill your ministry – accomplish your calling. Stay faithful and do what you were called to do. That takes work. John Calvin said it like this: “The more determined men become to despise the teaching of Christ, the more zealous should godly ministers be to assert it and the more strenuous their efforts to preserve it entire, and more than that, by their diligence to ward off Satan's attacks.”

Now beloved, this message, in large part is for me, and for our pastors. It may be that I should be preaching this looking in the mirror, right? So why am I preaching this text to you? Well,



first, because it is in the text. I can't just skip it. But, second, this message has a profound impact on both you and me.

### How This Message Impacts You and Me

In telling Timothy to preach the Word, is it not true that Paul is also telling the church to hear, to receive, to absorb, to obey, to live out the implications of the gospel and the preaching of the Word? He is. As important as it is for Timothy to preach the Word, it is equally important that every member of the church endure sound doctrine, hold fast to it, value it as they should, long to hear what God has for them and not accumulate teachers to serve their own desires, so that they will not stray off into spiritual myths and turn away from listening to the truth. This message is for Timothy first, a solemn charge to him, but it is also a solemn charge to all believers to welcome faithful preaching.

Coming to a passage like this, in which Paul, on behalf of God, commands and charges a preacher what he must do for the sake of the people of God – preach the Word -- we must realize that God, who loves us and desires above all His glory and the good of His people, knows and commands what we need the most. And so when we come to this text, we must realize that when God commands the preacher to preach the Word as his most important responsibility, then the most important responsibility on the part of the people of God is to hear it gladly. Preaching the Word of God and hearing the Word of God are indispensable to the people of God. My primary task before the Lord is to preach the Word of God and your primary task is to hear the Word of God with a heart of obedience.

For that reason, there must be an essential and vital covenant that exists between you and me, beloved. I must covenant that before God, by His grace and the empowering of His Spirit, I will live according to His Word and preach His Word so that you can understand it, applying it to your life faithfully and accurately, teaching you with all patience with a view to your salvation and sanctification before the Lord, to preach so that the Spirit of God convicts you of sin and commends you in your faithfulness, all the while pointing you to Christ above all else. And you must covenant to hear the Word, to receive it with gladness, to obey its teaching, to bring your life into conformity with it, to let it do the work of renewing your mind, will, and emotions, and leading you into holiness and into communion and fellowship with God.

This is what is missing in so many churches. Rather than a covenant, there instead exists a contract of sorts, an unwritten contract in the minds of the attendees that says instead: “Make me happy. Don’t talk about sin. Make me successful, make me laugh, make me feel good about myself, build up my self-esteem, tell good stories, sprinkle a little religion in there but don’t go overboard.” If the preacher doesn’t do that then he has broken the contract and people are free to leave. So the preacher labors to deliver the goods. But Paul will have none of that. Instead he says, “Preach the Word.” If we would worship in “truth,” we must have this preached word. If we would believe on the Lord Jesus Christ to be saved, we must have this gospel proclaimed to us. If we would endure all things, persevering in them faith, we must have this good gospel preached to us. We cannot do without the Word.

Preaching and hearing the Word is serious business. Spurgeon said: “Life, death, hell, and worlds unknown may hang on the preaching and hearing of a sermon.” Any pastor or preacher that does not consider that eternal life is at stake in their preaching and teaching, and counseling is foolish and lacks the fear of the Lord. Eternal joy in the Kingdom of God and His Christ or eternal misery in hell is at stake. For that reason, the words of this text cause this burning longing in my heart that you would receive the Word of God mixed with faith in your heart and submit yourself to the words I preach – if they are faithful and accurate and true – lest they stand against you, to condemn you on the day of judgment, or bring the discipline of God upon you rather than being the instrument of God for your salvation and sanctification. Your response to my preaching, if it is faithful, accurate, and true, will either be life giving or death confirming, praiseworthy or worthy of discipline and judgment and I earnestly, longingly desire that the ministry of the Word that I perform, commissioned by God, would be the fragrance of life for you.

Believe me. I understand the seriousness of the charge given to me. Every time I stand to preach, I am aware that my words are not merely being spoken into the air...God hears my every word. Every word I speak, its purpose, its intent, whether it serves the gospel and the glory of God in Christ. And it is why I long for you to receive the Word well. And it is why you must labor and be intent upon receiving the Word well. You receive the Word well when you come expecting that God will meet His people in preaching. You receive the word of God well when you come with a heart that is prepared to receive the Word of God – through prayer, confession, reading and meditating on the text ahead of time – and longing for it to penetrate your heart, to be mixed with faith and expressed in the way that you live. You receive the

Word of God well when you have a mind that is alert – no fussing and fidgeting during the preaching, no tuning in and out, or treating the preaching of the word of God with casual disregard. You receive the Word of God well when you receive it with a responsive heart. You receive the Word well when you come without preconceived notions as to what you ought to hear but receive gladly what God’s Word says. You receive the Word well when you make corporate worship a necessary priority above everything else, not here a week gone a week or two. You receive the Word well when you see it as a command to be obeyed and not an option to consider, when you are a hearer of the Word and a doer of the Word.

Beloved we need to be freshly affected with the truth that it is a momentous and crucial and significant and meaningful thing that we do every week as a people when we gather to hear the word of God preached. We need to remember the weightiness and the gravity of both the message and the moment. We need to grasp this, you and me, as those who will give an account before God.

I have said this to you before but I want to say it to you again. I think about this a lot. What a great grace it would be if we were in line together before the throne of God, on the Day of Judgment, and we could give our account to God together with joy. What a great blessing to would be for me to be able to say, “ Lord, I faithfully and accurately preached the words you gave to me. I preached your gospel without compromise. I preached the whole counsel of God. I exhorted, rebuked, reprovved, corrected, admonished, instructed, and called to faith all your people in the power of your Spirit, faithful to your Word, for the renown and reward of Christ and for your eternal glory. I received the burden of the Word of the Lord and was honored to give myself to it.” And what an equally glorious blessing to have you standing there, able to say: “Lord, I received your word with faith and repentance, with an eager mind and a humble heart. I delighted to hear your gospel preached without compromise. I desired correction and edification. I was glad to be washed with the water of Your Word. I sought to be obedient to your truth and to be submitted to your will. I gladly received the Word of God and was thankful to have it.”

That is my prayer for us beloved, in light of this text we have read today. It is the covenant that I cut with you this day anew and I pray you will as well. Let’s pray.

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