

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, October 18, 2023 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study



Preaching and Hearing God's Word
2 Timothy 4:1-5

"I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: ²Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. ³For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; ⁴and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. ⁵But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry." -2 Timothy 4:1-5 (NKJV)

For some 2 Timothy may nothing more than a continuation where 1 Timothy leaves off. But as you can see, it is so much more. The book is the Apostle Paul's "Swan Song," his warning shot, his encouragement in the face of great opposition and obstacle. It is so practical and relevant for 21st century Christians and the church... a needed word for what we face in our day.

Fast Facts 2 Timothy

- (1) Author: Paul**
- (2) Recipient: Timothy**
- (3) Date: AD 64-67**
- (4) Place: Written from a prison cell in Rome**
- (5) Destination: Ephesus (*Timothy was pastor of the church at Ephesus*)**
- (6) Incident: Paul's imprisonment and pending death**
- (7) Purpose: To encourage Timothy in the face of persecution and apostasy**

Some Key Characteristics of 2 Timothy:

- (1) 2 Timothy is Paul's last will and testimony** – In our study we are referring to it as Paul's "Swan Song." The deathbed statement of any individual has an importance which is not attached to other remarks. This is what lends significance to 2 Timothy. It is the

final communication of Paul. It has a note of sadness which is not detected in his other epistles. Nevertheless, there is the overtone of triumph... *"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith,"* written by Paul as his own epitaph (2 Tim. 4:7). Also, because this was his last letter, Paul was very personal. In these four short chapters, there are approximately twenty–five references to individuals.

- (2) **2 Timothy is Paul's warning of coming times of apostasy** - In this little book of 2 Timothy an ominous dark cloud is seen on the horizon. It is the coming apostasy. Today apostasy has broken like a storm, like a Texas tornado, on the world and in the church. What do we mean by apostasy? Webster defines apostasy as "total desertion of the principles of faith." So apostasy is not due to ignorance; it is a heresy. Apostasy is deliberate error. It is intentional departure from the faith. An apostate is one who knows the truths of the gospel and the doctrines of the faith, but has repudiated them.
- (3) **2 Timothy speaks of the ultimate outcome of gospel preaching** - The final fruition will not be the total conversion of mankind, nor will it usher in the Millennium. On the contrary, some will believe and for some there will come about a great turning away, not unlike what we are seeing today... even a watering down, compromise, and total perversion of the gospel. Don't think that what we see going on today has caught God off guard. God wrote about it and warned us about in 2 Timothy.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. What are some reasons that biblical preaching is not being emphasized today?
2. Agree/disagree: Sound preaching of the Word is the most important factor in choosing a church? Why/why not?
3. Even Jesus warned His audience about listening well (Luke 8:18). How can a person improve his listening ability?
4. Why does Paul say that sound doctrine must be "endured"? What are some implications of this?

Dr. John MacArthur, who I believe is one of the greatest Biblical preachers of our time, calls today's preaching "anemic." And he makes this very strong and indicting statement... see what you think about this statement, Dr. MacArthur says, *"True biblical preaching is in short supply these days. There are plenty of gifted communicators in the modern evangelical movement, but today's sermons tend to be short, shallow, topical homilies that massage people's egos and focus on insipid (dull, bland, wishy-washy, inane, trite) subjects like human relationships, "successful" living, emotional issues, and other practical but worldly themes—informed by little or no definitively biblical content. These messages are lightweight and without substance, cheap and synthetic, leaving little more than a fleeting impression on the minds of the hearers."*

Again, that is pretty heaven indictment on today's preaching...

➤ *Do you agree or disagree with his statement (generally speaking)?*

- *Why do you agree or disagree with his statement?*
- *If you agree why do you think today's preaching (much of it) has become so anemic?*

What happens when God Word is not Preached in our churches?: Dr. John MacArthur

- (1) **It usurps the authority of God over the soul** - Whether a preacher boldly proclaims the Word of God or not is ultimately a question of authority. Who has the right to speak to the church—the preacher or God? Whenever anything is substituted for the preaching of the Word, God's authority is usurped. What a prideful thing to do! In fact, it is hard to conceive of anything more brazen that could be done by a man who is called by God to preach.
- (2) **It removes the lordship of Christ from His church** - Who is the head of the church? Is Christ really the dominant teaching authority in the church? If so, then why are there so many churches where His Word is not being faithfully proclaimed? When we look at contemporary ministry, we see programs and methods that are the fruit of human invention, opinion polls, neighborhood surveys, and other pragmatic artifices. Church-growth experts have in essence wrested control of the church's agenda from her true head, the Lord Jesus Christ. Our Puritan forefathers resisted government-imposed liturgies for precisely this reason: They saw that imposition as a direct attack on the headship of Christ over His own church. Modern preachers who neglect the Word of God have yielded the ground those men fought and sometimes died for. When Jesus Christ is exalted among His people, His power is manifest in the church. When the church is commandeered by compromisers who have an agenda or priorities other than the Lord's, the gospel is minimized, true power is lost, artificial energy must be manufactured, and superficiality takes the place of truth.
- (3) **It hinders the work of the Holy Spirit** - What is the instrument the Spirit uses to do His work? The Word of God. He uses the Word as the instrument of regeneration (1 Peter 1:23; James 1:18). He also uses it as the means of sanctification (John 17:17). In fact, it is the only tool He uses (Ephesians 6:17). So when preachers neglect God's Word, they undermine the work of the Holy Spirit, producing shallow conversions and spiritually lame Christians—if not spurious ones.
- (4) **It demonstrates appalling pride and a lack of submission** - In the modern approach to "ministry," the Word of God is deliberately downplayed, the reproach of Christ is quietly repudiated, the offense of the gospel is carefully eliminated, and "worship" is purposely tailored to fit the preferences of unbelievers. That is nothing but a refusal to submit to the biblical mandate for the church. The effrontery of ministers who pursue such a course is, to me, frightening.
- (5) **It severs the preacher personally from the regular, sanctifying grace of Scripture** - The greatest personal benefit I get from preaching is the work the Spirit of God does on my own soul as I study and prepare for one or two expository messages each Lord's Day. Week by week, the duty of careful exposition keeps my own heart focused and fixed on the Scriptures, and the Word of God nourishes me while I prepare to feed my flock.

So I am personally blessed and spiritually strengthened through the enterprise. If for no other reasons than those, I would never abandon biblical preaching. The enemy of our souls is after preachers in particular, and the sanctifying grace of the Word of God is critical to our protection.

- (6) It clouds the true depth and transcendence of our message, therefore crippling both corporate and personal worship** - What passes for preaching in some churches today is literally no more profound than what preachers in our fathers' generation were teaching in the five-minute children's sermon they gave before dismissing the kids. That's no exaggeration. It is often that simplistic, if not utterly inane. There is nothing deep about it. Such an approach makes it impossible for true worship to take place, because worship is a transcendent experience. Worship should take us above the mundane and simplistic. So the only way that true worship can occur is if we first come to grips with the depth of spiritual truth. Our people can rise high in worship only in the same proportion to which we have taken them deep into the profound truths of the Word. There is no way they can have lofty thoughts of God unless we have plunged them into the depths of God's self-revelation. But preaching today is neither profound nor transcendent. It doesn't go down, so it doesn't go up. It merely aims to entertain. By the way, true worship is not something that can be stimulated artificially. A bigger, louder band and more sentimental music might do more to stir people's emotions, but that is not genuine worship. True worship is a response from the heart to God's truth (John 4:23). You can actually worship without music if you have seen the glories and the depth of what the Bible teaches.
- (7) It prevents the preacher from fully developing the mind of Christ** - Pastors are supposed to be undershepherds of Christ. Too many modern preachers are so bent on understanding the culture that they develop the mind of the culture and not the mind of Christ. They start to think like the world, and not like the Savior. Frankly, the nuances of worldly culture are virtually irrelevant to me. I want to know the mind of Christ and bring that to bear on the culture, no matter what culture I may be ministering to. If I'm going to stand up in a pulpit and be a representative of Jesus Christ, I want to know *how He thinks*—and that must be what I want for His people too. The only way to know and proclaim the mind of Christ is by being faithful to study and preach His Word. What happens to preachers who obsess about cultural “relevancy” is that they become worldly, not godly.
- (8) It depreciates, by example, the spiritual duty and priority of personal Bible study** - Is personal Bible study important? Of course. But what example does the preacher set when he neglects the Bible in his own preaching? Why would people think they need to study the Bible if the preacher doesn't do serious study himself in the preparation of his sermons? There is now a movement among some in ministry to trim, as much as possible, all explicit references to the Bible from the sermon—and above all, to never ask people to turn to a specific Bible passage, because that kind of thing makes “seekers” uncomfortable. Some churches actively discourage their people from bringing Bibles to church lest the sight of so many Bibles intimidate the “seekers.” As if it were dangerous to give your people the impression that the Bible might be important!

- (9) **It prevents the preacher from being the voice of God on every issue of his time** - Jeremiah 8:9 says, *“The wise men are put to shame, they are dismayed and caught; behold, they have rejected the word of the Lord, and what kind of wisdom do they have?”* When I speak, I want to be God’s messenger. I’m not interested in exegeting what some psychologist or business guru or college professor has to say about an issue. My people don’t need my opinion; they need to hear what God has to say. If we preach as Scripture commands us, there should be no ambiguity about whose message is coming from the pulpit.
- (10) **It breeds a congregation that is as weak and indifferent to the glory of God as their pastor is** - Such preaching fosters people who are consumed with their own well-being. When you tell people that the church’s primary ministry is to fix for them whatever is wrong in this life—to meet their needs, to help them cope with their worldly disappointments, and so on—the message you are sending is that their mundane problems are more important than the glory of God and the majesty of Christ. Again, that sabotages true worship.
- (11) **It robs people of their only true source of help** - People who sit under superficial preaching become dependent on the cleverness and creativity of the speaker. When preachers punctuate their sermons with laser lights and smoke, video clips and live drama, the message they send is that the people in the pew could never extract such profound material on their own. Such gimmicks create a kind of dispensing mechanism that people cannot access on their own—they can’t use it to serve themselves. So they become spiritual couch potatoes who just come in to be entertained, and whatever superficial spiritual content they get from the preacher’s weekly performance is all they will get. They have no particular interest in the Bible because the sermons they hear don’t cultivate that. They are wowed by the preacher’s creativity and manipulated by the music, and that becomes their whole perspective on spirituality.
- (12) **It encourages people to become indifferent to the Word of God and divine authority** - Predictably, in a church where the preaching of Scripture is neglected, it becomes impossible to get people to submit to the authority of Scripture. The preacher who always aims at meeting felt needs and strokes the conceit of worldly people has no platform from which to confront, for example, the man who wants to divorce his wife without cause. The man will say, “You don’t understand what I feel. I came here because you promised to meet my felt needs. And I’m telling you, I don’t feel like living with this woman anymore.” You can’t inject biblical authority into that. You certainly wouldn’t have an easy time pursuing church discipline. That is the monster created by superficial preaching. But if you are going to try to deal with sin and apply any kind of authoritative principle to keep the church pure, you must be preaching the Word
- (13) **It lies to people about what they really need** - In Jeremiah 8:11, God condemns the prophets who treated people’s wounds superficially. That verse applies powerfully to the preachers who populate so many prominent evangelical pulpits today. They omit the hard truths about sin and judgment. They tone down the offensive parts of Christ’s message. They lie to people about what they need, promising them “fulfillment” and earthly well-

being when what people really need is an exalted vision of Christ and a true understanding of the splendor of God's holiness.

(14) It strips the pulpit of power - "The word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword" (Hebrews 4:12). Everything else is impotent, giving merely an illusion of power. Human strategy is not more important than Scripture. The showman's ability to lure people in should not impress us more than the Bible's ability to transform lives.

(15) It puts the responsibility on the preacher to change people with his own cleverness - Preachers who pursue the modern approach to ministry must think they have the power to change people. That is a frightening expression of pride. We preachers can't save people, and we can't sanctify them. We can't change people with our insights and cleverness, by entertaining them, or by appealing to their human whims and wishes and ambitions. There's only One who can change sinners. That's God, and He does it by His Spirit through the Word.

So pastors must preach the Word, even though it is currently out of fashion to do so (2 Timothy 4:2). That is the only way their ministry can ever truly be fruitful. Moreover, it *assures* that they will be fruitful in ministry, because God's Word never returns to Him void—it always accomplishes what He sends it to do (Isaiah 55:11).

We live in a time when many churches have abandoned the preaching of the Word, so it is of critical importance that we understand Paul's words here and make certain that this church never veers from them. If for whatever reason you ever need to search for another pastor, I hope that the main benchmark would be that he faithfully, systematically preaches God's Word of truth.

In recent years, the seeker church movement has minimized and softened biblical preaching so as to attract "seekers" to the services. If the potential "customers" want upbeat, pragmatic 20-minute messages, the customer is king! Give them what they want so that they will keep coming! If they prefer drama and touching stories above doctrine, give them drama and stories.

Now, the emergent church has moved away from the seeker church, tailoring the message for a postmodern culture that does not accept the idea of absolute truth. The emphasis is more on having a self-satisfying spiritual experience in a completely non-judgmental atmosphere. Last summer, a cover story in the *Phoenix New Times* [June 22-28, 2006] told about a radical emergent church there. One of the pastors, who is also a student at Phoenix Seminary, is quoted, "A lot of us are just sick of churches that make you follow these certain requirements, or you're just not welcome. What kind of load of [unrepeatable expletive] is that?" Evidently Paul's command here to "reprove, rebuke, and exhort" does not fit their agenda!

Here is what is happening in many churches today, in place of the preaching of the Word of God...

5 Things Preachers Are Doing Today Instead of Preaching the Word: By Dr. James MacDonald

I wish I could tell you that most pastors are preaching the Word. I can't—some are not.

Here are five things that many preachers today choose to do instead of preaching the Word

(1) Entertain 'em and they'll come back - *"Music, drama, and video, felt needs, topics, more stories"* None of those things are wrong—unless they displace the preaching of the Word of God. Some teachers will tell you that you need to tell stories in your sermons or you will bore people. I'm not bored. If you're not bored, no one is going to be bored. Can you take hold of the Word of God and take hold of a group of people and make them listen because you have something to say? Are you bored? The greatest sin in ministry is to bore people with the Bible. **Martin Lloyd Jones** said, **"Preaching is theology coming through a man who is on fire. A man who can speak about these things dispassionately has no right whatsoever to be in a pulpit; and should never be allowed to enter one."** You have to get the word of God, let it grip your heart by the power of the Holy Spirit and drive over to church with something to say. Now if a story fits in, I might tell you a story before I sit down, but don't make that your thing. If people come up to you afterwards and say, "I love that story you told," it should make you crazy. Really, that's what I am? I'm a story-teller? The Gospel is the main story that you should be telling.

(2) Talk show host sharing - *"There are some things I just want to share with you today..."* Since when is the man of God some kind Dr. Phil and Oprah combo? You're supposed to proclaim a message. If you're not preaching, glory is not coming down. You have got to preach the glory down—people have to hear a Word from God.

(3) Soft and easy does it wooing - *"Careful, careful, don't offend, always comfortable, never pressured, just a pinch of truth, when they're ready to handle it"* The preaching of the gospel has become so watered down that the non-elect can't even reject it. If you don't have people walking away from your ministry saying, "This is a hard word, who can accept it?" then you don't have a ministry like Jesus had. I just hate this notion that we can be so clever and sophisticated that we can remove the offense from the gospel. It is foolishness to those who are perishing; it is the power of God to those who are being saved. It is the aroma of death to those who are perishing; it is the aroma of life to those who are being saved. Listen, preacher: If you don't want to be the aroma of death to those who are perishing, you can never be the aroma of life to those who are being saved. That's why preaching is hard work.

(4) Look how impressive I am intellectualizing - *"I've been thinking and researching this in the original languages..."* We're supposed to love God with our heart, soul, mind and strength. And preaching that stops at the shoulders is defective preaching. It has to move me—it has to call me to action—mind, emotions, and will. If you're just preaching your theological construct, you're blowing it. Stop preaching the scaffolding around the Bible and preach the Word—what God actually says. **John Calvin** said, **"God deigns [considers**

it proper] to consecrate to himself the mouths and tongues of men in order that his voice may resound in them." Your preaching is at its best when your people have forgotten that you're even standing there, and God's Spirit is moving through you. I am afraid that we've lost sight of this.

(5) **Let me be brief abbreviating** - *"Twenty-minute sermons or less"* I don't know how it works at your church, but for us it takes 5 minutes to set the rig up and another 5 or 10 minutes to take it down. If you're only preaching for 20 minutes, that gives you 5 minutes to drill. You're not going very deep, are you? It takes some time. Luke 10:16—Jesus said, "He who hears you, hears me." "He who hears you," Jesus said, "hears me." Yet there's no pridefulness, is there? It's so humbling. It's a crushing weight, isn't it? I tell people the weekly message preparation is the crucible of my sanctification. Never get in a habit of getting up in the pulpit when things aren't square everywhere. That by itself will keep you going in the right direction. "He who hears you, hears me," Jesus said. I love that challenge—to be that person.

READ: 2 Timothy 4:1-5

"¹I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: ²Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. ³For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; ⁴and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. ⁵But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry." -2 Timothy 4:1-5 (NKJV)

Our text is Paul's final charge to Timothy just before the apostle's execution. He senses that the time of his departure has come (4:6). He is handing off the baton to his younger friend and understudy. Inspired by the Spirit of God, Paul realized that Satan would relentlessly attack God's Word. Having just emphasized the trustworthy nature of that Word and its vital importance (3:16-17), he now charges Timothy (and every pastor after him) to be faithful in preaching the Word, no matter what the opposition or hardships. But preaching is a two-way street. So Paul's words are not only a solemn charge to pastors. They also are a solemn charge to all believers to welcome solid preaching.

"¹I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: ²Preach the word!"

Preaching and hearing God's Word are of the utmost importance in view of eternity.

- If Paul had said, *"I charge you... preach the Word!"* it would have been a strong exhortation.
- If he had said, *"I charge you...before God and the Lord Jesus Christ... preach the word!"* it would have been a *really* strong exhortation.

- If he had said, *"I charge you...before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead!"* we're off the charts on strong exhortations.
- But when Paul says (4:1-2a), *"I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: ² Preach the word!"* it is hard to imagine how he could have said it any more emphatically!

It's as if he reached out and grabbed Timothy by his shirt, pulled him to within six inches of his face, and screamed at him, "Preach the Word!" Paul uses nine imperatives here, five in verse 2 and four in verse 5. Here is how you might outline our passage in 2 Timothy 4:1-5... these are the key emphases

Key Emphasis of 2 Timothy 4:1-5:

- (1) Paul shows us why preaching the Word is of utmost importance (2 Timothy 4:1-2)
- (2) Paul shows us why hearing the Word is of utmost important (2 Timothy 5:3-4)
- (3) Paul shows us that, in light of inevitable opposition, a pastor must persevere in preaching the Word (2 Timothy 4:5)

Let's dig into these a little deeper...

PREACHING THE WORD IS OF UTMOST IMPORTANCE IN VIEW OF THE COMING JUDGMENT AND KINGDOM (2 Timothy 4:1-2)

Paul answers four questions: *Why* preach? *What* to preach? *When* to preach it? *How* to preach it?

"I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: ² Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. ³ For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; ⁴ and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. ⁵ But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry." -2 Timothy 4:1-5 (NKJV)

4 Questions On the Important of the Preaching of the Word:

- (1) **Why preach?** = The Word must be preached because Christ Jesus is coming to judge everyone and to establish His kingdom - The word translated *"charge"* (1 Tim. 5:21; 2 Tim. 2:14) had a legal nuance, of taking an oath in a court of law. Paul is calling Timothy in front of God's judicial bench and charging him under oath with the serious task of proclaiming God's Word to those who also will someday stand in front of that

bench for judgment by Christ Jesus who will return to reign over all. The verb “will” (“judge”) literally means, “is about to.” It implies the urgency of the task. The day is soon coming when Christ will return. He came the first time as the suffering Savior to redeem us from our sins. But the second time He will come as the Sovereign King, to put down all rebellion and to judge the living and the dead. That includes almost everyone (some of you may be hovering somewhere between those two realms)! Although as believers in Christ, we will not face condemnation, we all will stand before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10). This means that you need to take life seriously. One day you will stand before the living God to give an account of your life. The Word of God tells us how to live so that we will hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Master.” Preaching is important because of the seriousness of this fact. Christ will appear and set up His kingdom to reign over all. The word “appear” was used of the Emperor’s visit to a province or town. Just before his visit, things were put in perfect order. The garbage was cleaned up, the streets were swept and the buildings were scrubbed clean for his appearing. When I was in the Coast Guard, we heard that an admiral was going to visit the clothing warehouse where I worked. We worked for days to get it ready. That’s the idea here: Christ, the King, is coming. Preach so that people’s lives are clean and ready for His return.

- (2) **What to preach? = Preach the Word!** - Some scholars argue that “*the word*” means the gospel. I don’t object to that, as long as by “the gospel” you include the whole counsel of God as contained in all of Scripture. In the original text, there is no chapter break between 2 Timothy 3:16-17 and 4:1-5. All Scripture is profitable for teaching. “Instruction” (4:2) means teaching or doctrine. A preacher must explain and apply the doctrines of the Bible so that when he is done, you can look at the biblical text in its context and say, “I understand what it is saying and how it applies to my life.” The preacher’s message should come out of the text and be governed by the text. “Preach” means “to herald.” The herald was the king’s messenger who relayed the king’s message to the people. He wasn’t free to make up his own stuff. He wasn’t a politician or diplomat or a spin doctor. His job was to proclaim faithfully the king’s message so that the people understood it. There is a sad lack of that kind of biblical preaching in the pulpits of America. I once heard some tapes titled, “The best of ...” a well-known preacher. He took his theme loosely from a biblical text, but then he’d jump off from there and tell a lot of uplifting stories. But when he was done, he had not explained or applied the words of the text in its context. Others give positive, upbeat, self-help messages with a few verses sprinkled in for good measure. But you could remove all the verses and the result could appear in *Reader’s Digest*, not much altered by the absence of the Scriptures. But Scripture gives us “the wisdom that leads to salvation” and equips us for every good work (3:15-17). Scripture reveals to us “everything pertaining to life and godliness” (2 Pet. 1:3). If a man doesn’t explain and apply Scripture, his preaching may be entertaining and inspirational; but it will lack life-changing power. Although I disagree with much of Karl Barth’s theology, I admire him for a story told of him. During the 1930’s, he was preaching on John 3:16. Even though many in his German audience professed to be

Christians, they were going along with the persecution of the Jews. Barth made the point that Jesus was a Jew, that He had died for all the world, and that the Jews were part of that world. Thus anyone who loves Christ would not participate in the widespread ill treatment of the Jews. Many in his congregation walked out in disgust before he finished the sermon. One wrote a scathing letter denouncing him. Barth's reply was a single sentence: "It was in the text." That kind of preaching takes courage! But the man who proclaims the Word of God must not pull his punches. He must be patient and gentle, but he must proclaim and apply the text of Scripture. Thus Paul tells us that we need preaching because of the coming judgment and kingdom; and that the man of God must preach the Word of God.

- (3) **When to preach it? = Be ready to preach the Word at every opportunity - "Be ready in season and out of season."** The idea here is that a preacher is not just to play at preaching. Rather, it must be a life-consuming passion. He is never off duty. All his life and his walk with God go into the preaching of the Word, because biblical preaching is God's truth imparted through a man who walks with God. "Be ready" imparts a further sense of urgency. Picture a paramedic unit on call, ready to save someone's life. Souls are perishing without Christ. Christians are straying from the fold. Proclaim God's Word whenever and wherever you can! The 18th century evangelical preacher John Berridge was called in by the Anglican bishop and reproved for preaching at all hours of the day and on every day of the week. "My lord," he replied, "I preach only at two times." The bishop pressed him, "And which are they, Mr. Berridge?" He quickly responded, "In season and out of season, my lord" (*The Inextinguishable Blaze*, A. Skevington Wood [Eerdmans], p. 212).
- (4) **How to preach it? = Preach the Word with application to life - "Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching."** (4:2). A preacher once asked a class what they did with the commands of Scripture. A little old lady raised her hand and said, "I underline them in blue." That's nice, but the point of biblical preaching is not to get people to underline their Bibles or fill their notebooks. Biblical preaching should show people where their lives are not in line with God's truth and help them to make the necessary corrections to obey that truth consistently. To do this, a preacher must make an *appeal to the reason* of the hearers: "Reprove." This is a legal term that means to present your case in such a manner as to convince your opponent of his wrong. A preacher must present his case in a logically convincing manner from the Word, so that his hearers are persuaded that what Scripture says is right even though their behavior is wrong. The Holy Spirit's task is to reprove (convict) the world concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8). He does this largely through Spirit-filled biblical preaching. Second, a preacher must make an *appeal to the conscience* of the hearers: "Rebuke." This moral aspect of preaching says, "You are sinning against God; you need to repent!" We tend not to like that sort of thing, but it is desperately needed in our day of watered-down, feel good Christianity. William Barclay was right when he wrote (*The Daily Study Bible* [Westminster Press], p. 207): "Any teacher ... whose teaching tends to make men think less of sin is a menace to Christianity and to mankind."

Third, a preacher must make an *appeal to the will and emotions* of the hearers: “Exhort.” The word means strongly encouraging someone to right behavior. Some people need rebuke and some need encouragement. If you encourage those who need rebuking, you assist them to go on sinning. But if you rebuke those who need encouragement, you’ll discourage them. Someone has said that the preacher’s job is to comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable. Only the Holy Spirit can take the Word and apply it individually to a congregation made up of all sorts of needs. The preacher becomes the channel for the Spirit’s working when he appeals with “*great patience and instruction.*” People require time to change. They don’t always get it the first time around. So the preacher of the Word must say it over and over again as he teaches the Word of God. Patience does not mean tolerating open sin, but rather, bearing with people’s weaknesses. But the preacher doesn’t just leave the people in their weakness; he gives them careful instruction so that they can grow in Christ.

Thus Paul is saying that preaching the Word is of utmost importance in light of the coming judgment and kingdom of Jesus Christ. But even great preaching that falls on closed ears and hardened hearts is not effective. Thus,

HEARING THE WORD IS OF UTMOST IMPORTANCE IN VIEW OF THE SINFUL HUMAN PROPENSITY TO TURN AWAY FROM THE TRUTH (2 Timothy 4:3-4)

Notice **verses 3-4** of or passage, “³ *For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; ⁴ and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.*” Paul warns Timothy (4:3), “*For the time will come when they [those in the church is the implication] will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate [lit., ‘heap up’] for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires.*” They will find teachers who tell them what they *want* to hear, not what they *need* to hear.

Paul here speak of those who have “itching ears.” The Greek word translated “itching” literally means “to itch, rub, scratch, or tickle.”

To want one’s ears “tickled” is to:

- *desire massages rather than messages*
- *sermons that charm rather than challenge*
- *preaching that entertains rather than edifies*
- *preachers who please rather than preach*

The people Paul warns about will have, as one commentator put it, “ears which have to be continually titillated with novelties.”

“Itching ears” is a figure of speech that refers to people’s desires, felt needs, or wants. It is these desires that impel a person to believe whatever he *wants* to believe rather than the actual truth itself. When people have “itching ears,” they decide for themselves what is right or wrong, and they seek out others to support their notions. “Itching ears” are concerned with what feels good or comfortable, not with the truth—after all, truth is often *uncomfortable*. Paul’s warning is that the church would one day contain those who only opened their ears to those who would scratch their “itch.”

Those with “itching ears” only want teachers who will assure them that all is well, teachers who say, “Peace, peace . . . when there is no peace” (Jeremiah 6:14). Where there is a demand for something, the suppliers are not far away. Paul says that not only will there be great demand for watered-down, personalized messages, but there will be “a great number of teachers” willing to provide such pap and steer people away from “sound doctrine.”

Evidence today of people having “itching ears” includes...

4 Evidences of Itching Ears in Today’s Churches:

- (1) **The popular message that you don’t have to change (be transformed)** - The popularity of messages that people are not required to change, as if repentance were outmoded; that people are basically good
- (2) **The accepted message that God doesn’t judge anyone** – The comfortable message that many espouse today that God is too loving to judge anyone
- (3) **The widespread message that you can be saved apart from the cross** - That the cross, with all its blood, is not really necessary.
- (4) **The common message of health, wealth and prosperity - That God wants His children to be healthy, wealthy, and content in this world.**

As people turn their backs on the truth about sin and condemnation, they disregard their need for repentance and forgiveness. And a craving for “new” and “fresher” ideas grows—even though there is **“nothing new under the sun”** (Ecclesiastes 1:9–10) - accompanied by a longing to feel good about who they are and where they’re going. Messages that tickle ears can fill a lot of churches, sell a lot of books, and buy a lot of time on cable tv.

Some of the early followers of Jesus complained about some of the Lord’s words, **“Many of his disciples said, ‘This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?’ . . . From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him”** (John 6:60, 66). Walking away from hard truth is easy to do.

In today’s postmodern church, we see many walking away from the hard truth. Some churches that once preached sound doctrine now teach as acceptable the very evils the Bible condemns. Some pastors are afraid to preach on certain passages of the Bible.

- *“Christian feminists” deny God as a heavenly Father, calling Him a “she”*
- *“Gay Christians” are not only welcomed without repentance into church fellowship but into the pulpit, as well*

The church’s remedy for those who have “itching ears” is found in the same passage of 2 Timothy... *“Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction”* (2 Timothy 4:2). It is a solemn charge, made *“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”* (verse 1). And it contains all the elements needed to combat the temptation to tickle ears... preach, correct, rebuke, and encourage. The content of preaching *must* be the written Word of God, and it must be preached when convenient and when inconvenient. This takes “great patience and careful instruction,” but sound doctrine is worth it.

2 Good Principles for Churches To Remember: (concerning the preaching of God’s Word)

- (1) The church’s quest to manage the comfort level of its audience must never take priority over preaching the Word**
- (2) The fear of offending people’s sensibilities can never supersede the fear of offending God**

Rather, the church should follow the example of the apostles, *“We have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God”* (2 Corinthians 4:2).

The church today, more than ever, needs to re-examine the teachings it endorses. We need to ask ourselves the following questions...

4 Questions Churches Need To Ask Themselves:

- (1) Are our teachings truly from God or simply itches we want to scratch?**
- (2) Are we standing on solid biblical grounds, or have we allowed the world to influence our thinking?**
- (3) Have we guarded ourselves from the schemes of Satan (*Ephesians 6:11*)?**
- (4) Are we keeping ourselves “blameless for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (*1 Thessalonians 5:23*)?**

The truth is, God is not concerned with scratching our itches but in transforming us into the image of His Son (Romans 12:2; 2 Corinthians 4:4).

“Sound doctrine” is one of Paul’s frequent themes in the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim. 1:10; 2 Tim. 4:3; Titus 1:9; 2:1; “sound words” in 1 Tim. 6:3; 2 Tim. 1:13). *“Sound”* means healthy

(we derive our word “hygienic” from it). Sound doctrine results in healthy Christian living. Note that such healthy teaching is set in contrast to what people like and thus it must be *endured*! This implies that, like health food, it doesn’t always feel good at the moment, because it confronts our selfish desires, but in the long run it yields healthy Christianity. Why didn’t God make spinach bad for us and ice cream good for us?

In **verse 4**, Paul says that people will turn aside from the truth to myths—the religious ideas of men as opposed to God’s revelation in the Word. The propensity of the sinful human heart is to turn away from God’s truth and to embrace what feels good at the moment. There is a powerful temptation to the preacher, especially if he wants to be liked, to give people the ice cream of popular worldly myths instead of the spinach of God’s truth. But you should not judge a man’s preaching by whether you like him or not, but rather by answering the question, “Does his preaching line up with what God’s Word says?” Is it in the text?

But what if people don’t listen? What does a preacher do then? Paul tells Timothy in verse 5...

PERSEVERANCE IN PREACHING THE WORD IS REQUIRED IN VIEW OF INEVITABLE OPPOSITION (2 Timothy 4:5).

“⁵ But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”

When people won’t listen, the preacher must keep preaching the Word anyway. This is the third time in this section dealing with the difficult last days that Paul has said, *“But you ...”* (3:10, 14). It is a pointed reminder that a man of God must go against the flow, even, at times, against the “Christian” flow. Paul gives four commands that show Timothy how to conduct his ministry even if people aren’t responsive:

4 Commands on How to Conduct Your Ministry and Life: (if people aren’t responsive)

- (1) ***“Be sober”*** - (literally, “Don’t be drunk”). When people get intoxicated with the latest winds of false doctrine, you’re the designated driver. Keep your head about you and continue preaching the truth.
- (2) ***“Endure hardship”*** - If you preach the truth of God’s Word, you will catch flak. **H.A. Ironside** said that he sometimes received letters from people (invariably people he didn’t know personally) who would say, *“I resent your personal attack on me last Sunday. I don’t like your preaching; and I don’t think you had any right to expose me in the way you did. I don’t know who has been talking to you about me.”* And invariably they closed by saying, *“It’s not true.”* His comment was, *“If you throw a stone into a pack of dogs and one of them yelps, you know who got hit”* (*Timothy, Titus, & Philemon* [Loizeaux Brothers], p. 236).

- (3) **“Do the work of an evangelist”** - Don’t get sidetracked by critics in the church, but keep preaching the gospel and going after lost people. Evangelism is the cutting edge of the church’s ministry. I agree with Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who said (*Preaching and Preachers* [Zondervan], p. 150), “There is something essentially wrong with a man who calls himself a Christian and who can listen to a truly evangelistic sermon without coming under conviction again, without feeling something of his own unworthiness, and rejoicing when he hears the Gospel remedy being presented.”
- (4) **“Fulfill your ministry”** - Paul is saying, “Don’t bail out of the ministry and go into an easier line of work just because you run into opposition. Fulfill your calling as a preacher of God’s truth! Follow me in fighting the good fight so that you will finish the course” (4:7).

Years ago in Oklahoma, I was going through a time of unusual attacks against my ministry. On a particular day off, I had a chance to get out of the ministry and go to work for a Hospice Service that was looking for chaplains... I all but took it. As I prayed about it I kept hearing God speak in my heart (it was a powerful voice that I knew what it was saying... don’t give up what I’ve called you to... stay strong) It was tempting, but Paul is saying, “Don’t bail out!” John Calvin makes the point that rather than giving up because of opposition, the more intense the opposition, the more vigorously we must fight, to ward off Satan’s attacks on the church (*Calvin’s Commentaries* [Baker], p. 255). So don’t concede the battle to the enemy. Defend the gospel against all attacks.

CONCLUSION

Once after the famous French preacher, Jean Baptiste Massillon had preached, one of his hearers exclaimed, “What an eloquent sermon! How gloriously he preached!” When the comment was reported to Massillon he replied, “Then he did not understand me. Another sermon has been thrown away!”

The point is not eloquent sermons, but a message from God’s Word that the Holy Spirit anoints and applies to our lives. After I’m done preaching, my aim is that you can look at your Bible and understand what it is saying and how it applies to your life. Very shortly, the time of your departure and mine will come. We all will stand before the Sovereign Lord Jesus Christ, Judge of the living and the dead. In view of that solemn day, it is essential that as your pastor, I preach God’s Word. It is essential that you listen to the preaching of God’s Word with a view to obedience. Then on that great day when we stand before Christ, we all will hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant!” Preaching the Word and hearing the Word are of utmost importance in view of eternity.

Preach is not really about style... Style is surface. We all have one: narrative, dramatic, monologue, monotone, calm, passionate, soft, loud, still, demonstrative. I have heard great sermons in every style and really bad ones, too.

Preaching is not about textual approach... Though I do have some favorites in this category, let me say that approach is preference. What's your preference—exegetical, expository, topical, allegorical, biographical, historical? When it comes to approach, we all lean toward one, but we have heard great sermons in every approach and really bad sermons, as well.

I want to talk about effectiveness.... What makes preaching and a sermons effective? That is what makes preaching powerful, life-changing, *adequate to accomplish its purpose; producing something life-altering, life-transforming, soul-saving...*

Let me give you, in closing, these six elements of an effective (fervent, powerful) preaching...

6 Elements of Effective Preaching that is Truly Life-Changing:

- (1) **Truth** - An effective sermon must faithfully communicate the truth of God's Word. Statistics, trends, illustrations, poems, antidotes, object lessons, pop artist rhymes, and dead theologian's quotes can be helpful, but the truth is required. Not shades of truth, pieces of the truth, or truth mixed with lies. Like a witness testifying before a judge in court, we need to tell "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." The sermon is not the space to just pontificate politics, polemics, or pabulum. We are entrusted with the eternal truth of God. It alone is able to save souls and transform lives. It undergirds and guides. It comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable. We need truth, so handle with prayer.
- (2) **Timely** - There are many powerful and wonderful truths in the Word of God, but knowing which one is the right one for this moment is the constant challenge. This involves must prayer and seeking the heart of God for what He would desire to be preached/proclaimed. Holy Days, tragedies, and important occasions capture the listeners' focus. Catching the emphasis of a specific moment in time can make your message soar. Many a seasoned pastor has had to leave the preaching plan and inset a special sermon, a timely message, because what was happening in the lives of the people was so profound it could not wait. Proverbs 25:11-12 says, *"A word spoken at the right time is like gold apples in silver settings. A wise correction to a receptive ear is like a gold ring or an ornament of gold."*
- (3) **Targeted** - *"God's Word is always good, but we have to share it in a way that connects with the people in front of us."* God's Word is always good, but we have to share it in a way that connects with the people in front of us. We can have the greatest message in the world, but the people we're speaking to need to be able to understand it, and get it.
- (4) **Received** - A sermon is not a sermon unless it communicates, and communication is two sided. There is what we sent out and what they received. If we make a phone call and no one answers, or they answer, but the connection is so bad we cannot understand each other, then we may have heard each other, but communication has not occurred. Learning styles are often categorized as visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. While there is not universal agreement of how many people fall into each of these categories, there is

common agreement that we do not all learn the same way. Some studies suggest that as low as 5% is retained from lectures. Graphics, object lessons, notes, application, and groups participation can help to make sure the message is received.

- (5) **Remembered** - Have you ever left an event when someone spoke, and you could not remember enough to truly explain what the speaker said to someone else? Well, I have. So, is a sermon truly great if no one can remember it? I think not. Using tools that make the sermon, what I like to call portable is vital. Mnemonics, rhymes, repetition, acrostics, and visuals all help. I know some of you purists are saying that it is unnecessary to use memory devices. Well, tell it to David in the psalms. Tell that to Jesus in the parables, with the woman caught in adultery, or in the Sermon on the Mount.
- (6) **Responded to** – Preaching, I believe, should always elicit (prompt, produce, provoke, stimulate, extract) a response... always... of some kind. No effective sermon is complete without a response. The goal of preaching is not just to put information into the minds, but to transform the hearts and lives. Maybe God used your message to encourage a person to keep going, to convict a person about the need to change, to strengthen a person for the task ahead, to transform a person's life, or to refocus a person to give praise and glory to Almighty God. Though I believe God would prefer each of us to always preach effective sermons, take comfort, God can even accomplish His will through an ineffective sermon. Isaiah 55:10-11 confirms this. "For just as rain and snow fall from heaven and do not return there without saturating the earth and making it germinate and sprout, and providing seed to sow and food to eat, so my word that comes from my mouth will not return to me empty, but it will accomplish what I please and will prosper in what I send it to do." I've witnessed God use even bad sermons to work miracles. I know this because some of the ineffective sermons were mine!