

Marks of the Faithful Preacher, Part 1

Scripture: 2 Timothy 4:1

Code: 55-20

INTRODUCTION

A. The Preacher's Charge

Studying this letter from the apostle Paul to Timothy, his young son in the faith, is like treading on sacred ground, for it's the last words ever penned by Paul in Scripture. We can only imagine what was racing through his heart as he beseeched Timothy, who was going to take his place, to be faithful in the ministry. That changing of the guard would occur soon, for Paul knew he would soon lose his life in martyrdom (2 Tim. 4:6-9). Paul would pass the baton to a young man who was moral and virtuous, but possibly timid. It seems Timothy didn't have the strength of character, the conviction, or the boldness of Paul. So at this late point in Paul's life, he was compelled to give a final and solemn charge.

Paul's instruction is not only for Timothy, but also for every preacher. That makes it relevant for each believer because the believer is responsible to hold the preacher accountable to the standard of God's Word. And the preacher should want that kind of accountability because he is to be an example for the church to follow.

B. The Preacher's Accountability

The Bible is not nebulous, but explicit, about what God expects from the preacher. Second Timothy 4:1-5 contains nine commands. Its exhortative style presents demands, not suggestions, ideas, or points of discussion. It's the pattern Timothy and all who follow after him are responsible to fulfill. The preacher's role is vital, for God has designed that His people be taught by gifted men. Much of the believer's spiritual growth directly relates to the effectiveness of the preaching he or she is under. So it's a serious issue with God for preachers to live by God's standards and for believers to hold them accountable. And it's vital that people respond in obedience to proper preaching. Today one of the tragedies in our nation and world is the demise of faithful, consistent, uncompromising, biblical preaching. Certainly some of the blame lies at the preacher's feet, but it also lies at the feet of believers who fail to hold the preacher accountable.

C. The Preacher's Portrait

The English preacher John Bunyan wrote The Pilgrim's Progress, an allegory about the Christian life. He wrote that story from Bedford Jail, where he was imprisoned for preaching. Bunyan depicted the Christian life through Pilgrim, who was embarking on a spiritual pilgrimage. Pilgrim was first taken to Interpreter's House because there were some things he needed to know to make his pilgrimage successful. Inside Interpreter's House he was shown the painting of a preacher that he might realize the importance of the preacher's office. The portrait "had eyes lifted up to heaven, the best of books in his hand, the law of truth was written upon his lips, the world was behind his back. [He] stood as if [he] pleaded with men, and a crown of gold did hang over his head" ([New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957], p. 28).

In 2 Timothy 4 the apostle Paul also paints a preacher's portrait. Only his painting was inspired by God, so it's more than instructive--it's binding. And it delineates the preacher's role in unmistakable terms.

D. The Preacher's Faithfulness

Paul wrote his final letter as a prisoner and recognized that his earthly ministry was near completion.

He was able to say, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:7) . He wanted Timothy to be able to say the same thing so he exhorted him to be faithful. In doing so Paul set for us the divine standard by which faithfulness is measured. It's a running theme throughout his letter.

1. 2 Timothy 1:6-7, 13--"I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline. Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, or of me His prisoner; but join with me in suffering for the gospel. . . . Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me. "

2. 2 Timothy 2:1-2--"Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also. "

3. 2 Timothy 2:8, 14--"Remember Jesus Christ. . . . Remind them of these things, and solemnly charge them in the presence of God. "

4. 2 Timothy 3:14--"Continue in the things you have learned. "

Second Timothy 4:1-5 summarizes Paul's hope for every Christian pastor. Timothy had a difficult task ahead of him where he was ministering. The church in Ephesus had already begun to defect spiritually. When Paul founded the church, it was in the heat of revival. But over the years sound doctrine lost its primacy and godliness was no longer a main issue. In addition a rampant, empire-wide persecution was beginning to foment, which had the potential of costing Timothy his life. Because the ministry ahead of him was not easy, it was imperative for Timothy to be faithful. So in his parting words Paul gave Timothy the marks of a faithful preacher.

LESSON

I. THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE PREACHER'S COMMISSION (v. 1)

"I solemnly 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. "

A. His Compelling Responsibility (v. 1a)

"I solemnly charge you. "

Those words speak of the seriousness of ministry. The Greek term translated "solemnly charge" (diamarturomai) means "to earnestly testify. " The aged warrior Paul sought to arm his young son in the faith with a keen sense of his weighty responsibility. Such seriousness is characteristic of a godly individual committed to serving Christ. Paul was like the Reformer John Knox, who said, "Give me Scotland or I die!" When compelled to preach, it is well reported that Knox locked himself in a room and wept for days because he feared the seriousness of his calling. Timothy was to take his calling just as seriously.

In discussing the tongue the apostle James said, "Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment" (James 3:1) . The man or woman who doesn't offend with his or tongue is perfect, but alas, "no one can tame the tongue" (v. 8) . Because of that, no man should rush into a preaching or teaching ministry. If he is not specially called or gifted of God, he will easily offend with his tongue and incur a greater judgment. The ministry is a serious place for those who regard its tasks in earnest.

The whole tone of Paul's charge is a forward look to the second coming of Christ. Nothing will develop accountability like the pastor's realization that he is not primarily responsible to a church, denomination, or school, but to God.

B. His Coming Evaluation (v. 1b)

"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. "

1. The Judge's identity

"Of God even of Christ Jesus" (emphasis added) is probably a better translation, meaning that Paul was charging Timothy in the presence of God, who is Christ Jesus. One cannot be dogmatic about that interpretation since the verse could be speaking of a solemn charge made in the presence of both the Father and the Son. But the former seems preferable not only for linguistic reasons, but also because of the underlying theology. John 5 clearly reveals that the One who judges the living and dead is Jesus Christ: "Not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son. . . . [God] gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man (vv. 22, 27) .

2. The Judge's duty

In addition to affirming Christ's deity, Paul also affirmed His duty as Judge. "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus" parallels the common format for court subpoenas in ancient days. An ancient court document commonly read something like this: "The case will be drawn up against you in the court at [the name of the city] in the presence of [the name of the judge]. " In using legal terminology, Paul was saying a future subpoena will be served for the preacher to appear before God.

3. The Judge's presence

The preacher's ministry occurs in the presence of the Judge. That provides for a very unusual court setting. Typically, those subpoenaed for a trial must tell the truth so the judge will have all the facts. But as divine Judge, Christ already knows the truth! It's a compelling thought to realize the One whom you will appear before is aware of every detail in your life. The pastor's ministry is in full view of His watchful eye.

Now this isn't the only time Paul gave Timothy a compelling charge in view of the Lord's presence. In 1 Timothy 5:21 he says, "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of His chosen angels, to maintain these principles. " In 1 Timothy 6:13-14 he repeats, "I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. " There's a compelling seriousness in what we do because God, who sees everything, is who we answer to. Not one month, week, day, hour, or minute escapes His vision. He knows what you do with your time, energies, and opportunities.

4. The Judge's evaluation

The Greek term translated "judge" in 1 Timothy 4:1 (krino) speaks of an evaluation, not condemnation. From krino we derive the words criteria and critic. The phrase "who is to judge" carries the idea of "who is on the brink of judging" or "who any moment will judge. " Paul wanted to paint a picture of imminency for Timothy.

Christ's evaluation will determine the believer's reward, which will determine his or her level of service in heaven. First Corinthians 3 says that works of gold, silver, and precious stones will last, but those of wood, hay, and stubble will be burned up (vv. 12-15) . Second Corinthians 5:10 says, "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. " For the good we did in serving Christ, we will be rewarded. Our reward will be eternally manifested throughout the entire kingdom by our capacity to serve. While our heavenly inheritance refers to the breadth of our authority, our heavenly reward speaks of the nature of our service in eternity.

Paul and the other apostles lived in light of that divine evaluation. Peter said, "[God] ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead" (Acts 10:42) . Paul, in his sermon on Mars Hill, said, "[God] has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through [Christ,] whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead" (17:31) . And in Romans 2:16 Paul tells of a day when "God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus. "

First Corinthians 4:1-5 summarizes the believer's future evaluation like this: "Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. In this case, moreover, it is

required of stewards that one be found trustworthy. But to me it is a very small thing that I should be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord. Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time [of Christ's judgment], but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God. "

The implication is that the preacher's evaluation comes from God, not man. People try to evaluate a pastor, but they can't know his heart or motives. Even when you don't know anything against the pastor, and even when the pastor doesn't know anything against himself, God may know something. So God's verdict on his ministry might be different than man's. Only when God reads the heart is it certain that the praise is justified. So the preacher must seek to please God alone. In denying the accusation that he was a man-pleaser, Paul said, "Am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ" (Gal. 1:10) .

First Timothy 4:1 states that Christ will judge "the living and the dead. " That broadens the picture beyond believers to include all who have ever lived. The One who will evaluate the pastor's ministry is the very One who judges all people. Neither death nor life allows any person to escape His judgment. The living and the dead are categories into which everyone falls.

When Will the Judge Judge?

1. The First Stage

When the Lord takes the church out of the world (1 Thess. 4:13-18) , there will be an evaluation of believers at what is known as "the judgment seat of Christ" (Gk. , bema; 2 Cor. 5:10) . Christ will evaluate the good we have done and reward us accordingly. There will be no condemnation here because there is "no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1) . The bema is the first point of judgment in the end, and it is for believers only.

2. The Second Stage

The next point of judgment occurs on earth at Christ's second coming. It is the judgment of the sheep and goats (Matt. 25:14-30) , which is for both believers and unbelievers. In that judgment Christ will separate the godly from the ungodly. Believers will then enter His kingdom, but the wicked will "go away into eternal punishment" (v. 46) .

3. The Third Stage

The final point of judgment occurs in heaven at the end of the millennium. It is the Great White Throne Judgment, which is for unbelievers only. God will bring all the unbelieving dead from all the ages before His throne for final judgment and condemnation to hell. Revelation 20 says, "The sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire" (vv. 13-15) .

5. The Judge's coming

Paul based his solemn charge to Timothy not only on Christ's imminent judgment but also on His "appearing" (Gk. , epiphaneia, 2 Tim. 4:1) . That refers to Christ's second coming, when "every eye will see Him" (Rev. 1:7) . When that happens, the church will already have been raptured, its rewards already bestowed in the secrecy of heaven. In glorious liberation, God's children will return to reign with Christ, and their rewards for service will be on full display before the whole world.

Epiphaneia literally means "to appear upon. " That Christ will again appear upon the earth was a strong motivating factor for Paul in ministry. He eagerly anticipated that great event. In 1 Timothy 6:14 he says, "Keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. " Near the end of his life he said, "In the future there is laid up for me the crown of

righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing" (2 Tim. 4:8) . In Titus 2:13 he says to be "looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus. "

In ancient days the word epiphaneia was used in two special ways. One referred to an obvious intervention by some god. But more often it was used in connection with a Roman emperor, particularly when he came to visit a village or town. To prepare for the emperor's coming, the people would sweep the streets and otherwise clean their town. They attempted to have everything in perfect order for his appearing.

It's as if Paul were saying to Timothy, "You know what happens in a town when people are anticipating the emperor's arrival. But you are expecting the epiphaneia of Jesus Christ! Therefore, minister in such a way that, when Christ arrives, He will be pleased with what He sees. " To the peasant villager, nothing could exceed the thrill of having the emperor see and approve his or her work. Similarly, we as Christians are to look forward to Christ's appearing and desire His divine and eternal approval.

Christ's appearing will lead to the speedy establishment of "His kingdom" (2 Tim. 4:1) . He will come as Judge and reign as King. Sinners will be judged, and believers will be rewarded. The godly will be ushered into His millennial kingdom on earth, but the ungodly will be cast into eternal punishment. Until the Lord returns or calls him home, the preacher is to be faithful. That way he'll receive his proper reward as he shares in the glories and joys of the coming kingdom.

CONCLUSION

The preacher must realize the seriousness of his task and be consummately dedicated to it. The task is serious because it comes under the scrutiny of the Judge's evaluation. The perfect Judge will render perfect judgment on the nature, dedication, faithfulness, and consistency of the preacher's efforts. Then it will be seen if what he did was in fact gold, silver, and precious stones or wood, hay, and stubble. The world can push the pastor to compromise his ministry by trying to please others. But if he's mindful of the One he answers to, it will help keep him strong.

Timothy needed to understand the seriousness of his commission because he was going to receive much pressure to compromise his ministry. But pleasing God is the right path, for in the day of His appearing, Christ will reward the faithful in a glorious way. So if you teach a biblical message, the pressure's on, but having the perspective that God is Judge will help keep you on track. The teacher must answer to the Lord, and so must all those he teaches.

Focusing on the Facts

1. Why is 2 Timothy special? What makes it relevant and important for each believer?
2. What is much of the believer's spiritual growth directly related to?
3. How does the apostle Paul's portrait of a preacher differ from John Bunyan's?
4. Second Timothy 4:1-5 summarizes Paul's hope for every .
5. Why was the ministry ahead of Timothy not easy? Because of that what was it imperative for him to be?
6. How does James's comment about teachers (3:1) apply to the serious tone of 2 Timothy 4?
7. What does Paul's charge in 2 Timothy 4:1 look forward to?
8. Why was Paul using legal terminology in 2 Timothy 4:1?
9. In what way will judgment before Christ be in a very unusual court setting?
10. What will determine the believer's reward and level of service in heaven?
11. What did God order the apostle Peter to preach (Acts 10:42)?
12. What does 1 Corinthians 4:1-5 imply about the preacher's evaluation?
13. Paul said, "If I were still trying to please , I would not be a bond-servant of Christ" (Gal. 1:10).
14. Identify the different stages of judgment.

15. What does the term "appearing" in verse 1 refer to?

16. How was epiphaneia used in ancient days? How does that apply to the believer?

Pondering the Principles

1. Since the believer is responsible to hold preachers accountable to the standard of God's Word, it's imperative for him or her to understand their biblical role. Bible teacher Alexander Strauch wrote, "Since the life of the church depends to a large degree upon its leaders, the proper understanding and practice of church leadership through the elders is crucial to everyone's welfare. . . . Therefore, biblical eldership is not a topic to be studied only by scholars or church leaders. Rather, it should be studied by every believer because it directly affects each one--fathers, mothers, children, widows, the poor, the influential, the sick, the old, and even new believers" (Biblical Eldership [Littleton, Colo. : Lewis and Roth, 1986], p. xi) . Resolve to better understand the preacher's biblical role, realizing it directly affects your spiritual welfare and that of those you love.

2. Believers will one day stand at the Judgment Seat of Christ "that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10) . In light of that coming evaluation, strive to please God, not people (Gal. 1:10) . Look up the following examples to see if the choice was to follow God or man, noting the result of that choice:

Exodus 32:1-28

Joshua 24:15

1 Samuel 15:1-26

2 Samuel 11:1-17; 12:9-14

1 Kings 18:17-40

Daniel 3:8-30

Luke 10:38-42

Acts 5:17-29

Ask the Lord to help you obey the admonition of Colossians 3:23-24: "Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men; knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. "

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