

Marks of the Faithful Preacher, Part 3

Scripture: 2 Timothy 4:3–4

Code: 55-22

INTRODUCTION

A. A Call to Spiritual Commitment

In 1 and 2 Timothy Paul gave a breadth of responsibility to Timothy. Timothy was to correct those who taught false doctrine. He was to call people to a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith. He was to fight for divine truth and God's purposes. He was to pray for the lost and lead those in the church to do the same. He was to call women to fulfill their God-given roles of submission and rearing godly children through faith, love, holiness.

Timothy was to exercise care in selecting godly men for church leadership. He was to nourish believers continually through preaching God's Word. He was to discipline himself in godliness so that others could follow his example. He was to read, explain, and apply the Scriptures publicly. He was to progress toward Christlikeness. He was to be gracious and gentle in confronting sin. He was to give special consideration and care to widows. He was to honor faithful pastors who work hard and not receive an accusation against any of them unless it was substantiated by two or three witnesses. Timothy was to care for his health that he might have strength to minister. He was to flee the love of money, but pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance, and gentleness. He was to fight for the faith in the midst of hostile opposition. He was to obey the Lord's commandments and guard His Word as a sacred trust. He was to keep his spiritual gift fresh and useful and not be timid. He was not to be ashamed of Christ or those who serve Him. He was to reproduce himself in faithful men.

Timothy also was to expect and willingly accept suffering and persecution for the sake of Christ. He was to keep his eyes on Christ at all times. He was to exercise leadership with authority. He was to interpret and apply Scripture accurately. He was to avoid useless conversations. He was to be an instrument of honor by setting himself apart from sin. He was to flee sinful desires. And He wasn't to be contentious, but teachable, gentle, and patient—even when wronged.

Paul's charge was not only to Timothy but to anyone who ministers. Fulfilling that charge requires commitment, but it's been well said that "the only true happiness comes from squandering ourselves for a great purpose" (John Mason Brown, cited in John W. Gardner's *Excellence* [N. Y. : Harper and Row, 1961], p. 149). The supreme purpose in life is to glorify God. Those who give of themselves for that great cause receive back the highest sense of fulfillment.

B. A Call to Spiritual Excellence

Giving Timothy such a breadth of responsibility was also a call to spiritual excellence. Paul never measured Timothy's spiritual excellence by the size of a church or the amount of money it took in. Neither did he consider the world's acceptance of him. That's because Paul made a distinction between spiritual excellence and worldly success.

Jon Johnston explored the differences between excellence and success in his book *Christian Excellence: Alternative to Success* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985). He suggested that success and excellence are competing ideals, defining success as attaining cultural goals that elevate one's importance in society. Status in one's culture usually brings four things: power, prestige, wealth, and privilege. Power refers to one's sphere of influence or domination, prestige speaks of being esteemed or honored, wealth refers to an abundance of money, and privilege refers to being able to

do what most can't.

Johnston described excellence on the other hand as the pursuit of quality in one's work and effort. And that pursuit doesn't depend on having one's effort recognized by others. Success seeks status, but excellence seeks satisfaction. Success is in relation to others, but excellence is in relation to one's potential. Success is being esteemed by people, excellence is being the best you can be. Worldly success seeks to please men, but spiritual excellence seeks to please God.

Johnston then offered this comparison: "Success offers a hoped-for future goal. Excellence provides a striven-for present standard. Success bases our worth on a comparison with others. Excellence gauges our value by measuring us against our own potential. Success grants its rewards to the few, but is the dream of the multitudes. Excellence is available to all living beings, but is accepted by the special few. Success focuses its attention on the external--becoming the tastemaker for the insatiable appetites of the conspicuous consumer.

"Excellence beams its spotlight on the internal spirit --becoming the quiet but pervasive conscience of the conscientious who yearn for integrity. Success engenders fantasy and a compulsive groping for the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Excellence brings us to reality and a deep gratitude for [the promise of joy when we do our best]. Success encourages expedience and compromise, which prompts us to treat people as means to our end. Excellence cultivates principles and consistency, which ensure that we will treat all persons as intrinsically valuable ends--the apex of our heavenly Father's creation" (p. 33).

Excellence deals with your character and integrity. But some obtain success by lying, cheating, or stealing. You can obtain success by cheap discounts, but you must pay the full price for excellence. Johnston quoted David Neff as saying, "Success is the key they hand you when they like you. It doesn't matter why. They just give you the key that unlocks an upscale condo, triggers the powerful purr of your new Mercedes, and accesses the executive washroom. It's what they give you.

"Excellence is [different]. It's what's within you. It's what you do that stretches mind and muscle. They'll hand you success when your ratings are up, your sales soar, or when the eager masses plunk down their grubby bucks to buy your stuff. And they'll snatch success away at daybreak. Success loves its one-night stands at the Ritz. But never expect it to say, I do. Success is a day-tripper and a tease. [Success will] forget you. Excellence endures when the crowd moves on" (p. 8). What honestly motivates you: worldly success or spiritual excellence? Pride is the source of success, but humility is the source of excellence. Excellence says, "I'm content to be the best I can be. " Success says, "I'm not content until I'm better than you. "

Annihilation by ExaltationWe must learn to be content in God's will. That is well illustrated in a story I read about a little delicate watch that was dissatisfied with being in a lady's pocket. It envied Big Ben, the great tower clock in London. As the little watch accompanied the lady aboard a ship crossing under the Westminster Bridge--in full view of Big Ben--this exchange took place:

"I wish I could be up there," said the little delicate watch. "Then I could serve a multitude of people. " "You shall have your opportunity, little watch," responded the ship's tour guide.

The little watch was then drawn up to the tower by a slender thread. When it reached the top, the guide said, "Where are you, little watch? I cannot see you. " After a dramatic pause, the guide then said, "Its elevation has become its annihilation. " We most effectively serve the Lord when we accept His design for our lives.

In 2 Timothy 4:1-5 Paul gives several requirements to help us live up to our God-given potential and achieve spiritual excellence.

REVIEW

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

A. His Compelling Responsibility (v. 1a)

B. His Coming Evaluation (v. 1b)

II. THE ESSENCE OF THE PREACHER'S COMMISSION (v. 2a)

A. Timothy's Character

B. Timothy's Message

III. THE SCOPE OF THE PREACHER'S COMMISSION (v. 2b-f)

A. He Is Always Ready to Minister (v. 2b)

B. He Exposes Sin (v. 2c)

C. He Encourages Right Behavior (v. 2d)

D. He Is Patient (v. 2e)

E. He Teaches Sound Doctrine (v. 2f)

One old creed well stated that the minister is to preach no sacrifice but Calvary, no priest but Christ, no confessional but the throne of grace, and no authority but the Word of God. His preaching ought to be interesting to listen to, clear to understand, and practical to make biblical application for obedience.

LESSON

IV. THE URGENCY OF THE PREACHER'S COMMISSION (vv. 3-4)

"The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths. "

A. The Unbeliever's Intolerance of Truth (v. 3)

"The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires. "

1. What he doesn't want to hear

"The time will come" introduces a prediction similar to 1 Timothy 4:1: "The Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons. " Second Timothy 3:1 says, "In the last days difficult times will come. " The Greek word used in all three incidents (kairos) refers to an epoch or season. Throughout church history there have been times when people didn't want to hear God's Word.

Christ spoke to His disciples about those who would reject the truth: "I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; therefore be shrewd as serpents, and innocent as doves. But beware of men; for they will deliver you up to the courts, and scourge you in their synagogues; and you shall even be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, do not become anxious about how or what you will speak; for it shall be given you in that hour what you are to speak. For it is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.

"And brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents, and cause them to be put to death. And you will be hated by all on account of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved. But whenever they persecute you in this city, flee to the next; for truly I say to you, you shall not finish going through the cities of Israel, until the Son of Man comes" (Matt. 10:16-23). The world not only rejects God's Word, but also persecutes those who proclaim it. Christ also told His disciples: "They will make you outcasts from the synagogue, but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God" (John 16:2).

The lost react that way because they can't "endure sound doctrine" (2 Tim. 4:3). The Greek word *aneko* means "to hold up" or "bear with" and can be translated "to tolerate. " First Timothy 1:10 describes those who turn a deaf ear to avoid biblical teaching as "immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers. " However, 2 Timothy 4:3 refers not only to those outside the professing church but also to those inside it. Timothy preached to both groups.

In the Ephesian church where Timothy was ministering, some had no interest in God's Word. In the

days of the prophet Isaiah only one-tenth of the people wanted to hear his message (Isa. 6:13). It's no different in today's professing church. That's because the lost have ears that are dull, eyes that are dim, and hearts that are insensitive (6:10).

Ravenous Wolves in Sheep's Clothing

There was a time when our country honored God's Word and respected the minister. But that's not true anymore. In fact, it's not only the world that's despising the truth, but also the professing church. Within the large framework of professing Christendom a small remnant of true believers eagerly hear sound teaching. But some of the lost in the professing church support such things as homosexual and feminist causes. There is even a so-called Bible that has removed masculine references to God to avoid offending feminist beliefs.

The lost, whether outside or inside the professing church, refuse to hear God's teaching about controversial issues such as the woman's role, homosexuality, or abortion. They won't tolerate strong biblical teaching because it confronts and refutes their errors and calls for their obedience. By adopting the ways of the world, much of the professing church has become corrupt and perverse. Apart from a dramatic change, the pressure will continue to intensify against those who speak the truth.

2. What he does want to hear

The lost, "wanting to have their ears tickled . . . will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires" (2 Tim. 4:3). Unbelievers want a teacher to say only what they want to hear. In the days of the prophet Jeremiah the people were the same way: "An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule on their own authority; and My people love it so!" (Jer. 5:30-31). The people wanted the prophets to lie and the priests to forsake divine authority.

The prophet Ezekiel received similar opposition: "As for you, [Ezekiel], your fellow citizens who talk about you by the walls and in the doorways of the houses, speak to one another, each to his brother, saying, 'Come now, and hear what the message is which comes forth from the Lord.' And they come to you as people come, and sit before you as My people, and hear your words, but they do not do them, for they do the lustful desires expressed by their mouth, and their heart goes after their gain. "And behold, you are to them like a sensual song by one who has a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument; for they hear your words, but they do not practice them. So when it comes to pass--as surely it will--then they will know that a prophet has been in their midst" (Ezek. 33:30-33). The people received Ezekiel's message as mere oratorical entertainment.

Second Timothy 4:3 tells us the ungodly amass teachers according to their own "desires" (Gk. , *epithumia*). Here the word refers to sinful lusts. Churches today are filled with so-called preachers who say only what the congregation wants to hear. Such congregations are like the philosophers in ancient Athens who spent their time "in nothing other than telling or hearing something new" (Acts 17:21). The attitude of the lost is, "Make me feel good about myself. Tell me something sensational, entertaining, or that builds up my ego. "

Not surprisingly, those same people will reject biblical messages that expose their sins. But the preacher they least like to hear brings the message they most need to hear. As Bible scholar Marvin Vincent pointed out, "If the people desire a calf to worship, a ministerial calf-maker is readily found" (Word Studies in the New Testament, vol. 4 [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903], p. 321). How sad that is!

B. The Unbeliever's Appetite for False Teaching (v. 4)

"[They] will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths. "

Verse 3 shows that many unbelievers will deliberately refuse the truth, while verse 4 reveals them to be victims of their wrong choice. Instead of wanting to hear God's Word, they'd rather hear

hypocritical liars who function as agents of Satan. Their turning away from Scripture lays them open to Satan's influence so that they are easily turned to error. The Greek verb translated "will turn aside" (ektrepo) speaks of twisting or dislocating. Their minds become dislocated, out of joint, or non-functioning because they believe myths.

The Greek term translated "myths" (muthos) literally means "fables" and speaks of false teaching. The lost amass or heap up for themselves false teachers to "have their ears tickled" (v. 3). They prefer to be entertained by teachings that produce pleasant sensations and leave them with a good feeling. They have an itch to get their ears tickled by nice stories, positive thinking, and a little psychology. However, the gospel doesn't tickle the ears--it boxes them! Only then will salvation follow. God's Word brings reproof, rebuke, and conviction of sin. Therefore, it's imperative that we continue to proclaim God's Word to the lost.

Vetoing the Valedictorian! read about a young girl in high school who was the valedictorian of her school's senior class. As a Christian she wanted to honor the Lord in her commencement address by saying, "The most important Person in my life is the Lord. " But school officials demanded that she remove the word Lord from her speech. She refused and therefore the school would not allow her to speak. That happened in the United States of America! Our coins are printed with "In God we trust," yet a young person was forbidden to say "Lord" in a public address. In some ways our country has an intolerance for biblical truth. So it's important that we make the most of our opportunities to give out the Word while we can.

V. THE ATTITUDE UNDERGIRDING THE PREACHER'S COMMISSION (v. 5a)

"But you, be sober in all things. "

"But you" introduces a contrast to the ungodly who reject God's Word. "Sober" means "self-contained" or "steady" and speaks of someone who is stable, unwavering, and steadfast. Bible scholar Fenton Hort described it as a mental state where "every faculty [is] at full command, to look all facts and all considerations deliberately in the face" (cited by William Barclay in *The Letters to Timothy Titus, and Philemon*, rev. ed. [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975], p. 207). The sober person is like an athlete who brings all his passions, appetites, and nerves under complete control for maximum performance. The opposite is someone who is flaky, trendy, whimsical, or inconsistent. We don't need flaky, trendy, or whimsical preachers whose messages coincide with the latest fancies of the lost. In the midst of our chaotic and changing world we need preachers whose heads are clear of such things and unaffected by people's desire to have their ears tickled. I believe "sober" also implies an unruffled alertness or watchfulness. The mind of the sober believer is balanced with biblical truth and unswayed by the sinful desires of the lost.

CONCLUSION

Paul's call to spiritual excellence was not only for Timothy, but also for all believers. If you strive for worldly success, you'll be like that little pocket watch--useless to God and others. Pursuing worldly success will lead you to compromise the truth, but pursuing spiritual excellence will keep you strong. You can travel the cheap route of worldly success or travel the costly route of spiritual excellence. The reward for worldly success is earthly and temporal, but the reward for spiritual excellence is heavenly and eternal.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What did fulfilling Paul's charge require of Timothy?
2. Summarize the differences between success and excellence.
3. What was Christ teaching His disciples in Matthew 10:16-23?
4. Whom does 2 Timothy 4:3 refer to?

5. What was Isaiah's description of the lost (Isa. 6:10)?
6. Why has much of the professing church become corrupt and perverse?
7. What was the reaction of the people to God's Word in the days of Jeremiah and Ezekiel (Jer. 5:30-31; Ezek. 33:30-33)?
8. What does "desires" refer to in 2 Timothy 4:3? How does that apply to today's church?
9. The preacher unbelievers like to hear brings the message they need to hear.
10. What is the distinction between 2 Timothy 4:3 and 4:4?
11. In rejecting God's Word, whose influence will the lost be under? What will that turn them to?
12. What happens to the mind of the unbelieving when they "turn aside" from the truth (2 Tim. 4:4)?
13. What do "myths" refer to in 2 Timothy 4:4?
14. How do the lost "have their ears tickled" (2 Tim. 4:3)?
15. What does "sober" mean in 2 Timothy 4:5? Who is the sober person like?
16. The call to spiritual excellence is for.

Pondering the Principles

1. The lost have an intolerance of truth and an appetite for false teaching. But as a Christian you should have an insatiable appetite for truth and an abhorrence for false teaching. Look up the following verses and then write out the principles they teach about truth and falsehood:

Psalms 101:7

Proverbs 12:22

Zechariah 8:16

Malachi 2:6

John 18:37

Ephesians 4:25

Revelation 21:8

2. In spite of increasing opposition to God and His Word, be spiritually steadfast. Moses exemplified such an attitude. Hebrews 11:24-27 tells us he "refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin; considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward. By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen. " Moses could have chosen honor, riches, and pleasure in the court of Egypt, but he refused to do so. Instead he chose scorn, suffering, and affliction for the sake of God and His people. In the face of Pharaoh's wrath his heart was steadfast in faith and firmly fixed on the unseen One. Ask the Lord to help you be steadfast like Moses.

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