PREACH THE WORD:
FIVE COMPELLING MOTIVATIONS FOR
THE FAITHFUL EXPOSITOR

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For the biblical expositor, 2 Tim 4:2 majestically stands out as sacred ground. It is precious territory for every pastor who, following in the footsteps of Paul, desires to faithfully proclaim the Word of God. In this single verse, the apostle defined the primary mandate for God-honoring church ministry, not only for Timothy, but for all who would come after him. The minister of the gospel is called to "Preach the Word!"

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As Paul penned the Spirit-inspired text of 2 Tim 4:2, he knew he was about to die.[1] The words of this verse stand at the beginning of the last chapter he would ever write. Alone in a bleak Roman dungeon, without even a cloak to keep himself warm (v. 13), the unwearied apostle issued one final charge—calling Timothy and every minister after him, to herald the Scriptures without compromise. Paul understood what was at stake; the sacred baton of gospel stewardship was being passed to the next generation. He also knew that Timothy, his young son in the faith, was prone to apprehension and timidity. That is why he prefaced his exhortation to pastoral faithfulness with the strongest possible language:

> 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: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season;

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[1] Along these lines, R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell note, "The heat of the apostle's focus was intensified by the burning realization that he himself was in truth a dying man. . . . The charge in verses 1–5 initiates the final thoughts of what is the old apostle's ministerial last will and testament." *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000), 242.

reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction (2 Tim 4:1–2).

The heart of that brief passage, *preach the word*, summarizes biblical ministry in one central mandate.

That command is consistent with what the apostle had earlier explained to Timothy about the qualifications for spiritual leadership. In 1 Tim 3:2, Paul noted that—in addition to numerous moral and spiritual qualifications—overseers and pastors must possess one universal skill: the ability to teach. They must be competent Bible expositors—men who are able to both clearly explain the text and effectively exhort the congregation.

But being called to preach and teach is not just a sacred privilege. It is also a serious responsibility—one that the minister is expected to carry out *at all times*. He is to fill his pulpit "in season and out of season." Whether it seems acceptable or unacceptable, wise or unwise, his mandate and his mission never change. The man of God has been summoned to boldly preach the message of God to the people of God, no matter how often the winds of popular opinion swirl and shift.

Faithfulness to the Word demands, furthermore, that the minister preach *all of it*. Timothy was not to focus solely on the positive, heart-warming aspects of pastoral ministry. He was also to "reprove, rebuke, [and] exhort" the flock, refusing the temptation to shy away from Scripture's warnings and corrections.[2] Yet, his reproof was to be balanced out with "great patience and instruction"—his fiery firmness tempered by his compassion and tenderness toward those under his spiritual care. For the faithful shepherd, patience toward people is of paramount importance.

But, while his shepherding is characterized by gentleness and longsuffering, his preaching must not be marked by uncertainty or ambiguity. Instead, the faithful minister proclaims the truth of God's Word with the confidence and certainty that it deserves. Authority in preaching does not come from the pastor's office, education, or experience. Rather, it derives from the highest possible source—God Himself. Insofar as the sermon accurately portrays the biblical text, it comes with the Author's own authority. The power of the pulpit, then, is in the Word preached, as the Spirit uses His sword to pierce human hearts (Eph 6:17; Heb 4:12). Consequently, the pastor's task is to faithfully feed the flock with the pure milk of the Word (1 Pet 2:1–3), trusting God for the resulting growth.

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[2] As Homer A. Kent, Jr., explains, "He must proclaim as a herald (*kēruxon*) the message which has been given to him by his Lord. He must announce it in its completeness (Acts 20:27), without alteration, addition, or subtraction. He must proclaim, not philosophize or argue. . . . To proclaim God's Word involves all the themes of Scripture, not picking out some and ignoring others. The Word of God in its entirety is the basic material of the preacher's message." *The Pastoral Epistles* (Chicago: Moody, 1982), 283.

In the verses surrounding 2 Tim 4:2, Paul provided his protégé with much-needed motivation to stand firm and persevere to the end. For Timothy, the command was clear: *preach the Word*; and the calling was deadly serious: souls were at stake. In order to equip him for the task, Paul gave Timothy five compelling reasons to persevere in ministry faithfulness. These motivations, found in 2 Tim 3:1–4:4, are as applicable today as they were when the apostle wrote them nearly two millennia ago.

Motivation 1: Preach the Word
Because of the Danger of the Seasons (2 Tim 3:1–9)

In 2 Tim 3:1, Paul warned Timothy "that in the last days difficult times will come." Used here, the phrase "the last days" refers not merely to the end of the church age, but to the entirety of it, from the Day of Pentecost to the Parousia.[3] Paul's point is that, until the Lord comes back, the church will continually experience difficult times. As commentator William Hendricksen explains, "In every period of history, there will be a season during which men refuse to listen to sound doctrine. As history continues onward toward the consummation, this situation grows worse." [4]

The phrase "difficult times" does not refer to specific points of chronological time, but rather to seasons or epochs of time.[5] And the term "difficult" carries with it the meaning of being "savage" or "perilous."[6] Paul is expressing the reality that, throughout the church age, there will be seasons of time in which believers are savagely threatened. With his execution imminent, the apostle certainly knew a great deal about the difficulty that Christians might face. He also understood that Timothy was facing persecution and hostility; and that his young apprentice would be tempted by sins of cowardice and compromise. But that was exactly why Timothy needed to preach the Word. The looming threat made his ministry mandate all the more necessary and urgent.

In 2 Tim 3:13, Paul wrote, "Evil men during these dangerous epochs will proceed from bad to worse." Such men are "lovers of self, lovers of money,

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[3] C. Michael Moss correctly observes, "[The phrase] 'the last days' is [also] used elsewhere in the NT to refer to the Messianic age from Jesus' coming until the final consummation at the end of time (cf. Acts 2:17; Jas 5:3; 2 Pet 3:3; Heb 1:2). The language and concept really represents an OT idea (cf. Joel 3:1; Isa 2:2)." *1, 2 Timothy & Titus*, College Press NIV Commentary (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2003), 224.

[4] William Hendricksen, *Exposition of the Pastoral Epistles*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1957), 311.

[5] Cf. William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 544.

[6] The term *difficult* "is translated 'times of stress' (RSV) and 'dangerous' (Norlie). It is used in Matt 8:28 to describe the bizarre actions of a pair of demoniacs" (Thomas D. Lea, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, New American Commentary [Nashville: Broadman, 1992], 223, n. 22.)

boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" (3:2–4). They are externally religious, "holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power," as they "enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (vv. 5–7). Being of a depraved mind, they are filled with sin, error, and destruction. They oppose sound doctrine and reject the faith.

Significantly, based on Paul's description, it is clear that the greatest threat to the church comes not from hostile forces without, but from false teachers within. Like spiritual terrorists, they sneak into the church and leave a path of destruction in their wake. They are wolves in sheep's clothing (Matt 7:15); and it is their treachery that makes the *difficult times* of the last days so perilous.

The church has been threatened by savage wolves and spiritual swindlers from its earliest days (cf. Acts 20:29). Satan, the father of lies (John 8:44), has always sought to undermine the truth with his deadly errors (1 Tim 4:1; cf. 2 Cor 11:4). It is not surprising, then, that church history has often been marked by difficult times—seasons in which falsehood and deception have waged war against the pure gospel. Consider, for example, the havoc created by the following errors:

Sacramentalism

One of the earliest deceptions to infiltrate the church on a massive scale was *sacramentalism*—the idea that an individual can connect with God through ritualism or religious ceremony. As sacramentalism gained widespread acceptance, the Roman Catholic Church supposed itself to be a surrogate savior, and people became connected to a system, but not to Christ.[7] Religious ritual became the enemy of the true gospel, standing in opposition to genuine grace and undermining the authority of God and His Word. Many were deluded by the sacramental system. It was a grave danger that developed throughout the Middle Ages, holding Europe in a spiritual chokehold for nearly a millennium.

Though sacramentalism was exposed, by God's grace during the Reformation, it still represents a lingering threat. Even today, it continues to thrive in the apostate systems of Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, destroying those who are doctrinally ignorant.

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[7] Two excellent treatments on the development of the Roman Catholic sacramental system are: William Webster, *The Church of Rome at the Bar of History* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2003); and Norman L. Geisler and Joshua M. Betancourt, *Is Rome the True Church?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

Rationalism

Not long after the Reformation, a second major wave of error crashed upon the life of the church: *rationalism*. As European society emerged from the Dark Ages, the resulting Age of Enlightenment emphasized human reason and scientific empiricism, while simultaneously discounting the spiritual and supernatural. Philosophers no longer looked to God as the explanation for the world; but rather sought to account for everything in rational, naturalistic, and deistic terms. In the words of one historian, "As a result of the Enlightenment, no longer was it as easy or acceptable for educated, intellectual people to say with the majority of Christian thinkers through the ages, 'I believe in order that I may understand.'"[8]

As men began to place themselves above God and their own reason over Scripture, it was not long until rationalism gained access into the church. Higher critical theory—which denied the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible—infiltrated Protestantism through seminaries in both Europe and America. So-called Christian scholars began to question the most fundamental tenets of the faith, as they popularized quests for the "historical Jesus" and denied Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch.

The legacy of that rationalism, in the form of theological liberalism and continual attacks on biblical inerrancy, is yet alive and well. As such, it represents a continued threat to the truth.

Orthodoxism

A third historic threat to the church might be labeled *orthodoxism*. With this movement came the desire to return to orthodox Christianity. But the primary means used to accomplish this goal was the imposition of external standards. The end result was not true Christianity, but a cold formalism and superficial moralism. This kind of dead orthodoxy was prevalent, for example, in early eighteenth-century England, where the church had become a spiritual desert. [9] Even in Puritan New England at that time, the spiritual climate was characterized by apathy and hypocrisy.[10]

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[8] Roger Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 523.

[9] Historian Michael A. G. Haykin describes the spiritual temperature of that time period: "Few . . . preached anything but dry, unaffecting moralistic sermons. The *mentalité* of the first half of the eighteenth century gloried in reason, moderation, and decorum. The preaching of the day dwelt largely upon themes of morality and decency and lacked [spiritual passion]. . . . Even among many of the churches of the Dissenters, the children of the Puritans, things were little better." *The Revived Puritan* (Dundas, Ontario: Joshua Press, 2000), 28–29.

[10] The Half-Way Covenant of 1662 exemplifies the spiritual state of New England in the late 17th- and early 18th-centuries.

Though the truth was accessible, genuine belief was severely lacking. True conviction was exchanged for a lifeless indifference to the Word of God; true conversion for a shallow pretense of spirituality. It was in the midst of this spiritual deadness that the Spirit of God sparked a revival—both in England and in colonial America—through the ministries of George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, and John and Charles Wesley. Yet, dead orthodoxy still persists in the church today. Twenty-first century congregations are filled with cultural Christians—professing believers who look good on the outside, but internally do not truly know God.

Politicism and Ecumenism

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, especially in America, the church grew increasingly fascinated with government and political power. Many Christians became convinced that the best way to influence the world was through civil action and social activism—whether the issue was prohibition or, more recently, prayer in public schools. Over the last 150 years, and especially in recent decades, millions of man hours and billions of dollars have been spent attempting to legislate morality. Yet, the results have been less than encouraging as American society grows continually worse.

In its preoccupation with politics, the church has neglected the fact that its primary purpose on earth is not *political* but *redemptive*. The Great Commission is a call *to make disciples*, not *to change the government*. If society is to be truly changed, it must be through the transformation of individual sinners. But that kind of heart renewal cannot be legislated; it is only possible through the preaching of the gospel by the power of the Spirit.[11]

Sadly, the church's desire for political influence opened the door to rank ecumenism. In their quest to moralize America, some evangelicals began to view other religious groups (like Roman Catholics and Mormons) as political allies, rather than the mission field. The assumption was that by partnering with such groups, the church could increase its influence in society.[12] But nothing could be further from the truth; when the gospel is compromised, any real influence is lost (cf. 2 Cor 6:14).

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[11] For more on the Christian's relationship to politics, see John MacArthur, "God, Government, and the Gospel" in *Right Thinking in a World Gone Wrong* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2009), 121–30.

[12] For an excellent treatment on the history of contemporary evangelicalism's infatuation with popularity and influence, both in the United States and in Great Britain, see Iain Murray, *Evangelicalism Divided* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2000).

Experientialism, Subjectivism, and Mysticism

In the 1960s and 70s another dangerous doctrine arose called the Charismatic Renewal Movement, as Pentecostal *experientialism* began to infiltrate the mainline denominations. As a result, the church was tempted to define truth on the basis of emotional experience. Biblical interpretation was no longer based on the clear teaching of the text; but rather upon feelings and subjective, unverifiable experiences, such as supposed revelations, visions, prophecies, and intuition.[13]

In the 1980s, the influence of clinical psychology brought *subjectivism* into the church. The result was a man-centered Christianity in which the sanctification process was redefined for each individual, and sin was relabeled a sickness. The Bible was no longer deemed sufficient for life and godliness; instead, it was replaced with an emphasis on psychological tools and techniques.[14]

Mysticism arrived in full force in the 1990s, ravaging the church by convincing people to listen for a paranormal word from God rather than seeking out truth in the written Word of God. People began neglecting the Bible, looking instead for the Lord to speak to them directly. Consequently, the authority of Scripture was turned on its head.

All three of these movements attacked the sufficiency of Scripture. Whether people supplemented the Bible with supposed miraculous gifts, or with the human wisdom of psychology, or with their own imagined intuitions, many in the church began to seek something beyond the pages of God's Word.

Pragmatism and Syncretism

At the end of the twentieth century, the church was also greatly damaged by the Trojan horse of pragmatism. Though it looked good on the outside (because it resulted in greater numbers of attendees), the seeker-driven movements of the 1990s quickly killed off any true appetite for sound doctrine. Ear-tickling became the norm as "seekers" were treated like potential customers. The church adopted a marketing mentality, focusing on "what works," even at the expense of a biblical ecclesiology.

Pragmatism inevitably gave way to *syncretism*, because popularity was viewed as the standard of success. In order to gain acceptance in a postmodern

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[13] For a survey of some of the extreme errors that characterized the charismatic movement during this time period, see John MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992).

[14] A helpful critique of the "Christian psychology" movement of the 1990s is found in Ed Bulkley, *Why Christians Can't Trust Psychology* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1993). For a biblical alternative to psychology, see John MacArthur and Wayne Mack, eds., *Introduction to Biblical Counseling* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005).

society, the church became soft on sin and error. *Capitulation* was masked as *tolerance*; *compromise* redefined as *love*; and *doubt* extolled as *humility.* Suddenly, interfaith dialogues and manifestos—and even interfaith seminaries— began to sprout up on the evangelical landscape. So-called evangelicals started to champion the message that "we all worship one God.' And those who were willing to stand for truth were dismissed as divisive and uncouth.

The church today is the hodgepodge product of these accumulated errors—from sacramentalism to subjectivism to syncretism. The "difficult times" that Paul spoke of certainly characterize the contemporary situation. Yet, in the midst of this chaos and confusion, faithful ministers are still required to carry out the very task that Paul gave to Timothy. In fact, the only solution for the church today is for pastors to diligently fulfill their God-given responsibility to *preach the Word*.

Motivation 2: Preach the Word
Because of the Devotion of the Saints (2 Tim 3:10–14)

The faithful preacher is also motivated by his love and appreciation for those believers who have gone before him. Like a great cloud of witnesses, the examples of steadfast spiritual leaders from generations past spur the biblical expositor on toward greater commitment and ministry effectiveness.

In Paul's case, he reminded Timothy of his own example, and urged him to follow suit. Thus, he says in 3:10–11, "Now you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, persecutions, sufferings. Such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra; what persecutions I endured and out of them all the Lord rescued me!"

The gospel Paul taught, Timothy was to continue preaching. The conduct, confidence, and Christ-likeness that marked the apostle's ministry was likewise to characterize his son in the faith. Even the suffering that Paul endured, Timothy was to embrace as well. The young pastor was to stay the course and follow in the same path as his mentor.[15]

The integrity of Paul's ministry had been obvious to Timothy. In their travels together, Timothy had witnessed the consistency between Paul's public teaching and his private practice.[16] The testimony of the apostle's life was one of

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[15] Along these lines, Thomas D. Lea, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus,* 44, observes, "This is a personal word to a beloved follower. He reminded Timothy of their longtime acquaintance (3:10–11) and appealed to his loyalty to Pauline teaching (1:6–14; 2:1–13; 3:10–4:5). To Paul this was also loyalty to Christ (see 1 Cor 11:1). . . . No doubt the memory of Timothy's warm affection and sharing of difficulty gave warmth to the lonely, weary heart of the apostle."

[16] Sound teaching is one of Paul's primary emphases in the pastoral epistles. As Raymond F. Collins notes, "More than two-thirds of the New Testament's uses of the term 'teaching' (*didaskalia*) are found in the Pastoral Epistles." *I & II Timothy, Titus* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 255. The author goes on to highlight, in this epistle, "just how much and

unwavering conviction—a fact that Timothy knew firsthand. Thus, Paul is able to commend himself to Timothy and encourage him not only to preach faithfully, but also to follow the same God-centered purpose: to passionately pursue faithfulness in his own life.

Throughout his missionary journeys, Paul had suffered greatly for the sake of the gospel. Even as he wrote this letter, he was suffering for Christ. Timothy surely felt the weight of Paul's words, when the apostle added, "Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (v. 12). Yet, Paul is clear, such tribulation is no reason to shy away from following the way of faithfulness.

The world will continue to grow darker; and "evil men will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived" (v. 13). Nonetheless, Timothy must not capitulate or be deceived. His task was not easy, but it was simple: to stay true to the Word of God and preach it carefully and consistently. Thus Paul challenged Timothy with these words, "You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them" (v. 14).

In exhorting Timothy to hold fast and endure, Paul called on his disciple to remember his own example. Timothy did not need a new strategy. He simply needed to follow the pattern of faithfulness he had observed in the man of God who had gone before him.

Paul understood that uniqueness and novelty in ministry is deadly. The right approach is not to reinvent the paradigm; but rather to follow in the well-worn paths of those who have come before. The faithful preacher appreciates his spiritual heritage—recognizing that he is linked to a long line of godly men from whom there can be no separation. Moreover, he understands that it is his responsibility, as part of the current generation of church history, to guard the truth that has been entrusted to him. Then, one day, he will pass it on to those who come after him.

That this was Paul's expectation is clear from his instruction in 2:2: "The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." The four ministerial generations described in that verse include Paul, Timothy, faithful men, and others also. From generation to generation, the truth was to be safeguarded by each generation and then passed on without innovation or deviation.

It is the brash folly of young men today that tempts them to disregard the wisdom of previous generations and instead to glory in their own cleverness or originality. Those who scorn the faithful examples of saints now in heaven,

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how faithfully Timothy has learned from Paul (see 1:13–14; 2:2, 8–9, 11–13). Thus, [in 3:10] it is Paul's teaching, 'my teaching,' that Timothy has followed."

and instead prize their own self-styled, inventive approaches to ministry, do so to their own peril.

But, as evidenced by Paul's instruction to Timothy, the faithful preacher is motivated by the heritage left by prior generations of church history. And like the spiritual giants of past centuries, he is committed to the same ministry mandate as they were. It is a privilege to stand on their shoulders. But it is also a responsibility to carry on their legacy. Therefore, through both his life and his lips, he must *preach the Word.*

Motivation 3: Preach the Word
Because of the Dynamic of the Scriptures (2 Tim 3:15–17)

The faithful expositor is motivated, thirdly, by the nature of the Bible itself. He understands that Scripture is no ordinary book; it is the inspired revelation of God Himself. If the pastor desires to honor the Lord in his ministry, or to see the Holy Spirit's work unhindered in the lives of his people, he has no other alternative than to preach the Word faithfully.

Timothy experienced the power of God's Word from a young age. Paul reminded him of that reality with these words: "From childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (3:15). It was clear to Timothy where the power and authority in ministry lay.

The term Paul used for "childhood" refers to an infant. From the time Timothy had been a baby in the arms of his mother he had been exposed to the Word of God. And it was through the Scriptures he had come to saving faith in Jesus Christ. The apostle appealed to Timothy's past, essentially asking, "Why would you do anything other than preach the Word when you know, from your own personal testimony, that it alone is the wisdom that leads to salvation?" When the mission is to present the message of salvation in all its Spirit-empowered fullness, the only option is to faithfully proclaim the truth of God's Word.

Having already appealed to Timothy's upbringing, Paul reinforced his point by emphasizing the Bible's true nature and dynamic effectiveness: "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (3:16–17). This sacred book is "inspired by God," or more literally, *God-breathed*.[17] And, as these verses indicate, it is not only powerful to save (v. 15), but also to sanctify.

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[17] Paul Enns, *Approaching God* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1991), 55 explains that: "The word 'God-breathed' [in v. 16] is not active, as though the Scriptures are purely a human product, but passive, meaning that the Scriptures have their origin with God, not man. That is also consistent with many Old Testament passages that state, 'God spoke all these words' (cf. Exodus 20:1; Deuteronomy 5:22), or, 'the Lord speaks' (Isaiah 1:1), or, 'thus says the Lord' (Isaiah 44:2), or, 'the word of the Lord came to me saying' (Jeremiah 1:4). The emphasis in those passages is that God

The Word of God is *profitable*, or useful towards sanctification, in four ways. First, as the sole source of divine truth, it provides the doctrinal content for *teaching.* Second, it is the authority for admonition and *reproof*, because it confronts sin and error. Third, it provides the vehicle for *correction.* The Scriptures not only expose wrong-doing, they also show transgressors how to be restored to an upright position. Finally, after the truth of God's Word has torn down sin and error, it builds up the believer through *training in righteousness.* Clearly, the function of the Scriptures in the life of the believer is a comprehensive work.

The result of this all-encompassing work is that the man of God and everyone under his influence is made mature, whole, complete, and equipped for every good work (v. 17). The first student of the Word is the preacher, who himself must be impacted. He is the primary beneficiary, and his ministry to others flows out of the Word's transforming work in his own heart.

With such a comprehensive work of both salvation and sanctification available through the power of the Scriptures, why would anyone be tempted to preach anything else? The pastor who cares about the spiritual growth of his people must make God and His Word the centerpiece of his ministry. In order to do that, he must *preach the Word.*

Motivation 4: Preach the Word
Because of the Demand of the Sovereign (2 Tim 4:1–2)

Up to this point, Paul has prefaced his command to preach by warning Timothy about the dangerous seasons that will come, and by pointing to his own example and to the supernatural power of Scripture. But in 4:1, the apostle escalated his exhortation to an even greater level. Invoking God himself, Paul expressed the seriousness of the situation in explicit terms: "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who is to judge the living and the dead and do so by His appearing in His Kingdom."

Those piercing words should strike holy fear into the heart of every preacher. They stand as the apex of Paul's previous statements, and should serve as the most compelling motivation in the life of the expositor. The Scottish Reformer John Knox certainly understood this reality. Upon being commissioned to preach, and feeling the weight of that responsibility, Knox "burst forth in most abundant tears and withdrew himself to his chamber."[18] He was completely overwhelmed by the awesome accountability of that duty.

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spoke, and the result was a perfect word. That is the idea of the Scriptures as stated in 2 Timothy 3:16. God spoke forth, and the Scriptures were the result."

[18] Marion Harland, *John Knox* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1900), 16. Prior to this reaction, a fellow preacher named John Rough read Knox a charge very similar to Paul's words in 2 Tim 4:1.

Timothy's call to preach came not simply from Paul, but from the Sovereign King by whom he was commissioned, and before whom he would one day give an account. Jesus Christ is the one who will judge the faithfulness of his ministers.[19] As men of God, they are under holy scrutiny from the Lord himself. This is nowhere made clearer than in Rev 1:14 where Christ is portrayed as surveying His church with penetrating eyes of fire. Those who are called to preach are under inescapable divine observation (cf. Prov 15:3). There is no relief from His gaze, no hiding from His evaluation (cf. Ps 139:7–12).

It is for this reason that James exhorted his readers to stop being so many teachers, as theirs is a greater judgment (Jas 3:1). It is why the Apostle Paul said in 1 Cor 4:3–4 that it was a small thing what men thought of him, including what he thought of himself, because he was accountable to God. Hebrews 13:17 plainly states that leaders "will give an account" for their ministry. The most dominant force in the preacher's life and ministry is the realization that he will one day give an account to God (cf. 2 Cor 5:10).

Consider the following anecdote from Spurgeon's ministry:

> A young preacher once complained to Charles Spurgeon, the famous British preacher of the 1800s, that he did not have as big a church as he deserved.
> "How many do you preach to?" Spurgeon asked.
> "Oh, about 100," the man replied.
> Solemnly Spurgeon said, "That will be enough to give account for on the day of judgment."[20]

Serious ministry is motivated by that weighty reality. Popularity with people, recognition from peers, winsomeness in the pulpit—these are not the standards of success. God's opinion is the only one that ultimately matters. And His measure of success is *faithfulness* (cf. Matt 25:21, 23). Knowing this, the biblical expositor is driven to carefully, clearly, and consistently *preach the Word*.

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[19] William B. Barclay, *1&2 Timothy* (New York: Evangelical Press, 2005), 284, writes, "Christ is not just the King; he is also the Judge. . . . This reality impacts on the servant of Christ in two ways. On the one hand, it gives confidence that the opponents of the gospel will be judged. On the other hand, it reminds believers that they, too, will have to stand before the judgment seat of Christ to give account for what they have done (2 Cor. 5:10). They must be about the work of the kingdom."

[20] Cited from Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary: New Testament* (Colorado Springs, CO: Cook Communications, 2001), 2:254.

Motivation 5: Preach the Word
Because of the Deceptiveness of the Sensual (2 Tim 4:3–4)

Having reminded Timothy of the ultimate accountability, Paul continued by warning him that *faithful* preaching will not necessarily be *popular* preaching. As the apostle explained, "For 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" (4:3–4).

Sinners, throughout all of church history, have refused to heed the truth that saves and sanctifies.[21] Instead, hardening their hearts, they seek out soft-peddled messages that accommodate their sin. Thus, they search for preachers who make them feel good, not guilty. And false teachers are happy to oblige, tickling the ears of their audiences with man-centered messages and false hopes.

In the process, the seriousness of sin is downplayed and disregarded; greed is promoted with promises of prosperity; worship is reduced to vain emotionalism; and felt-needs are highlighted while the true gospel is ignored. These false teachers are the same people who, according to 2:16, pursue worldly, empty chatter that leads to further ungodliness. Their worldly message may be popular, but like gangrene, its spread is actually deadly.

Paul's words certainly describe the scene in contemporary American Christianity. *Doctrine* has become a bad word; *truth* is viewed as relative; and *numbers* have been made the measure of ministry effectiveness. The temptation to tickle ears is great, since the preachers who attract the largest crowds are deemed the most successful. But to pervert the truth by watering down the gospel is a deadly form of wickedness. The minister who caters his message to the whims of the world, telling unregenerate hearts only what they want to hear, has sold out.

By contrast, the faithful minister is willing to boldly speak the whole truth, even when it is not popular to do so. The only way to see lives transformed from sensuality to salvation is to faithfully proclaim the message of the gospel. If those who wish to have their ears tickled are to be radically transformed, they must be confronted with the truth. To that end, the faithful expositor will not cease to *preach the Word*.

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[21] Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 227, explains, "The time will come—future for Timothy, but already here for those living after him—when people will not 'endure' sound teaching. Paul chooses an intriguing Greek word, translated 'endure,' which means 'to be patient with, in the sense of enduring possible difficulty.' The idea is that they find the truth of God to be so torturous to their sinful desire that they must 'endure' in the same manner Christians must 'endure' hardship."

Faithful to the End

Paul was under no delusions that the commission would be easy for Timothy, or for the faithful men coming after him. It had not been easy for Paul either. Yet, in spite of the many trials he faced, the apostle had remained true to the end. As a result, he could say, "I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith" (4:6–7). In this, his last appeal to Timothy, he invited the young pastor to likewise run the race with endurance (cf. Heb 12:1–2).

But Paul went to his grave not knowing how the story would end for Timothy. He had to trust that the Lord would preserve him. Would Timothy remain faithful to the end?

The book of Hebrews offers an initial answer to that question. In Heb 13:23, the author told his readers, "Take notice that our brother, Timothy, has been released, with whom, if he comes soon, I shall see you." These words, written after the death of Paul, indicate that Timothy had been in prison, but was soon to return to the work of ministry. The implication is clear: Timothy had been persecuted for the sake of the gospel. Yet, like Paul, he had remained faithful and steadfast in spite of the suffering he faced.

Church history provides a later glimpse into Timothy's legacy of faithfulness. According to *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*,

> Timothy was the celebrated disciple of St. Paul, and bishop of Ephesus, where he zealously governed the Church until A.D. 97. At this period, as the pagans were about to celebrate a feast called Catagogion, Timothy, meeting the procession, severely reproved them for their ridiculous idolatry, which so exasperated the people that they fell upon him with their clubs, and beat him in so dreadful a manner that he expired of the bruises two days after.[22]

To his dying day, Timothy courageously confronted the culture around him with the truth of the gospel. That unwavering commitment cost him his life. Like Paul, he was martyred for his faithfulness.

At the end of Timothy's life, he too was able to look back on a ministry that had been devoted to honoring Christ through the preaching of His Word. In the same way that Timothy had received a legacy of faithfulness, he passed it on to the next generation of Christian leaders. Bible expositors today, though removed by many centuries, are the recipients of that faithful heritage. The motivations that drove Paul and Timothy ought to compel the current generation

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[22] John Foxe, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, ed. William Byron Forbush (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1967), 7.

of preachers and teachers. God is still delivering His divine mandate to faithful men: *Preach the Word.*