

PREACH THE WORD – WHY AND HOW

2 Timothy 4:1-5

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INTRODUCTION

As the Scripture says... "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?

- Romans 10:11-14

Proclamation of the coming age of God was central to Jesus' ministry: from the Temple to the marketplace, be it on a Mount, a plane or from a boat, Jesus preached the gospel of the Kingdom of God. The apostles too, and later the seventy and many more, were sent out to proclaim the Kingdom of God that had dawned with the preaching of Jesus.¹ One hardly needs any more convincing of the necessity of preaching. Nonetheless, the question that still befuddles many is what exactly is preaching?

What is preaching?

*In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus... I give you this charge: **Preach the Word**;*

- 2 Timothy 4: 1-2

Indeed, the essence of Paul's charge to Timothy is found in the three words "Preach ['herald, proclaim' – *khrussw; kerusso*] the Word [*logov; logos*]." The tense of the verb *preach* is aorist, it is used in the active voice, and the

¹ Oden, Thomas C. *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry*. New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1983. 127

mood is imperative – together, they “emphasise the obligation of prompt action”².

Thus, we may define preaching as the active proclamation of the Word [*logos*] made flesh (John 1:14) – the proclamation of the good news that Jesus Christ is Lord. It is “the continual and public testimony which the church is constantly seeking to make to all who would hear it.”³ Accordingly, Timothy was to proclaim the good news of salvation for sinners like a herald in the market-place, to lift up his voice without fear or favour, and boldly make it.⁴

While it may be true that such a definition has merely succeeded in delineating the *activity* of preaching but has failed to elucidate the *nature* of preaching, I would argue that it is through this primary definition that we may begin to understand the dynamics of preaching – for implicit in that definition is, as Thomas Oden articulates, the “assumed threefold correlation between the revealed word in Christ, the written word of Scripture, and the proclaimed word in our own contemporary language.”⁵

² Barackman, Paul F. *The Epistles to Timothy and Titus*. Michigan: Baker Book House, 1962. 120

³ Oden, Thomas C., *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry*, 128

⁴ Stott, John R.W. “The Charge to Preach the Gospel”, *The Message of 2 Timothy*. Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973. 106

⁵ Oden, Thomas C., *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry*, 128

HOW SHOULD WE PREACH?

Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season...

- 2 Timothy 4:2a

The Performance of the Task

An Urgent Proclamation

The Christian preacher is to “be prepared in season and out of season”. “Be prepared” is the verb *ephistemi*, which literally means “be ready, be on hand”⁶. The minister, Ralph Earle explains, “has to be on duty constantly, ready for any emergency.”⁷ I would suggest however, that Paul’s words seem to take on more than just a sense of alertness and eagerness, but of insistency and urgency also.⁸ *The Message Bible* expresses this well: “[God] is about to break into the open with His rule, so proclaim the Message with intensity; keep on your watch. Challenge, warn, and urge your people. Don’t ever quit. Just keep it simple.”

⁶ *efisthmi ephistemi*

- 1) to place at, place upon, place over
 - a) to stand by, be present
 - b) to stand over one, place one’s self above
 - c) to be at hand, be ready
 - d) of time

⁷ Earle, Ralph., “1 & 2 Timothy”, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*. Frank E. Gaebelin (Ed). Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981. 411

⁸ Stott, John R.W., *The Message of 2 Timothy*, 106-7

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It is no good preaching in a “listless lackadaisical manner”⁹, for its urgent importance cannot be undermined. The message the Christian herald brings is literally a matter of life and death: “He is announcing the sinner’s plight under the judgement of God, the saving action of God through the death and resurrection of Christ, and the summons to repent and believe.”¹⁰ How then, John Stott rightly asks, can anyone treat such themes with cold indifference in light of all that hangs in the balance?¹¹

Moreover, such urgent proclamation must continue “in season [*eukairos*¹² – “opportunely”] and out of season [*akairos*¹³]”: “welcome or unwelcome, insist on it” (JB), “press it home on all occasions, convenient or inconvenient” (NEB).

Gordon Fee highlights the apparent ambiguities in the double adverbs (*eukairos, akairos*): whether they are subjective – relating to Timothy, or objective – relating to the hearers. Accordingly, the former would suggest that the preacher should stay with the task whether it is convenient or not; while the latter would suggest that the preacher boldly declare the Word regardless of whether the

⁹ Stott, John R.W., *The Message of 2 Timothy*, 107

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² *eukairow eukairos yoo-kah'-ee-roce*

1) seasonably, opportunely

2) when the opportunity occurs

¹³ *akairwov akairos ak-ah'-ee-roce*

1) unseasonable

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preaching comes at a convenient time for the hearers or not.¹⁴ Fee posits that in the context of the passage, particularly in the verses that follow, it was the latter that Paul probably intended.¹⁵

I bring into question however, the necessity and validity of drawing such an either/or dichotomy. John Calvin clearly understood the verse's violation of the rule of decorum, but he spoke rather of a "ruthless persistence" of both preacher and hearer alike:

Thus the Gospel will not for long hold its own, if pastors do not ruthlessly press its claims. Now this ruthless persistence (importunitas) refers both to pastor and people, to the pastor that he may not exercise his office of teaching merely at his chosen times and to suit his own convenience, but sparing himself no labour or trouble may drive himself on. For the people constant assiduity means to stir up those who are asleep, to stop those who are rushing headlong in the wrong way, and to put right the things that concern the vain world.¹⁶

John Evilly summed it up well when he commented that "no opportunity, no matter how unseasonable or inconvenient to the minister of the Gospel himself, should be omitted, if there be a hope of advantage... because even then the word itself is seasonable."¹⁷ What Paul had in mind therefore, was not that one

¹⁴ Fee, Gordon. *New International Biblical Commentary: 1&2 Timothy, Titus*. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1988. 285

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Smail, T.A. *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries: The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964. 333

¹⁷ [emphasis mine] MacEvilly, John, *An Exposition of the Epistles of St Paul* (3rd Ed). Dublin: W.B. Kelly, 1875. 135

should make a nuisance of himself, but that every opportunity for the ministry of the Word ought to be grasped.¹⁸

There is no denying that this injunction to preach welcome or unwelcome, convenient or inconvenient, has often been abused and grossly misunderstood as a biblical warrant for rudeness in which such “ruthless persistence” and “offense” becomes a repulsive application of the gospel.¹⁹ It is through such insensitive brashness that the living word becomes shrill and condemning, contributing towards evangelism’s disrepute in the mind’s eye of society today. There is no excuse for the Christian preacher to “barge unceremoniously into other people’s privacy or tread clumsily on their corns.”²⁰

A Relevant Proclamation

Be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage...

- 2 Timothy 4:2b

As such, William Barclay was right in saying that there is courtesy in evangelism as there is in every other human contact.²¹ Likewise, there is a

¹⁸ Barackman, Paul F., *The Epistles to Timothy and Titus*, 122

¹⁹ Thompson, Philip E. “Between Text and Sermon: 2 Timothy 4:1-5”, *Interpretation* 56 no 4 (October 2002): 421-423

²⁰ Stott, John R.W., *The Message of 2 Timothy*, 107

²¹ Barclay, William. *The Letters to Timothy, Titus & Philemon*. Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1960. 235

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courtesy in preaching as there is in every other conversation we carry out with another human being – pastoral sensitivity and discernment must be exercised when we preach.

John Stott points out that the Word of God is useful for a variety of ministries.²² Paul mentioned this previously in his letter to Timothy, “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” (2 Tim 3:16-17).

He reminds Timothy again to “correct” (*elenxon*, “convict, reprove”), “rebuke” (*epitimeson*, “censure, admonish”) and “encourage” (*parakleson*, also “comfort” and “exhort”) (2 Tim 4:2b).²³ This suggests that there are different purposes and methods in preaching. The tasks of convincing, rebuking and exhorting are not uniform but requires that they be tailored according to the specific needs of the congregation²⁴. The onus thus rests upon the preacher to choose wisely.²⁵

²² Stott, John R.W., *The Message of 2 Timothy*, 107

²³ Earle, Ralph., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*, 411

²⁴ Thompson, Philip E., “Between Text and Sermon: 2 Timothy 4:1-5”, *Interpretation* 56 no 4 (October 2002): 421-423

²⁵ Oden, Thomas C., *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry*, 211

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The *New English Bible* tells us that we are to “use argument, reproof, and appeal.” Paul Barackman classifies them as representing the plea to reason, conscience and will respectively²⁶, and John Stott similarly speaks of the three approaches to preaching: intellectual, moral and emotional. We are to apply it relevantly, he says, “For some people are tormented by doubts and need to be convinced by arguments. Others have fallen into sin, and need to be rebuked. Others again are haunted by fears, and need to be encouraged.”²⁷ In the same vein, Thomas Oden suggests that there are four dimensions of preaching – evangelical, pastoral, doctrinal and moral – which have brought forth and developed various styles in the history of homiletics such as exegetical sermons, pastoral sermons, doctrinal sermons, and morally instructive sermons.²⁸

Thomas Oden adds that while corrective preaching cares enough to be capable of negation in the context of love, and that pastoral courage is needed to address the particular deficit, injustice or lack of awareness in the flock – it is the Word itself, and not the preacher, that should become its own offense where it needs to be: “But if you are going to offend the flock, offend them with the truth. You have it turned around if you yourself are the offense. Let the gospel be the

²⁶ Barackman, Paul F., *The Epistles to Timothy and Titus*, 122

²⁷ Stott, John R.W., *The Message of 2 Timothy*, 108

²⁸ Oden, Thomas C., *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry*, 129

offense; let the word be the scandal.”²⁹ Corrective preaching thus addresses human need on the larger scale in terms of what Oden calls “ingrained social injustice” and it is here that the preacher must confront and combat the systemic evil in social processes by seeking to articulate practical, biblically grounded social wisdom.³⁰

A Patient Proclamation

Correct, rebuke and encourage with great patience...

- 2 Timothy 4:2c

Yet, as important as any other word in the second verse is the caveat to “correct, rebuke and encourage *with* great patience.” The word “patience”, William Barclay explains, is *makrothumia*:

...it describes “the spirit which never grows irritated, never grows annoyed, never grows weary, never despairs; it describes the spirit which never loses its faith in human nature, and never regards any man as hopeless and beyond salvation... [The preacher] patiently believes in men because he unconquerably believes in the changing power of Christ.”³¹

Makrothumia, we may note, is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22), and it may be said that the Christian preacher is called not just to be filled with the Spirit, but to preach from the Spirit. Elsewhere in Scripture we also find Paul exhorting other

²⁹ Oden, Thomas C., *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry*, 138

³⁰ Ibid. 138 -9

³¹ Barclay, William, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus & Philemon*, 237

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Christian leaders to lead with patience (1 Thess 5:14; I Tim 6:11; Col 3:12). Bold and achievement-oriented as he was, Paul also displayed gentleness and patience in his pastoral work: He had the boldness in God to speak the Gospel of God amid much opposition (1 Thess 2:2), yet he also spoke of his teaching, his way of life, his purpose, faith, *patience* and endurance (2 Tim 3:10). As Derek Tidball observes, “that such qualities were able to override his natural personality was amazing and perhaps it happened only because he had realized just how gentle and patient Christ had been with him (1 Tim 1:16).³² We too ought to preach, not out of a spirit of haughtiness under the guise of a pseudo-spirituality as the Pharisees, but out of a gentleness of spirit and humility of heart like Christ.

Finally, whenever the Christian preacher is tempted to contrive a ‘decision’ or resort to the use of human pressure, it may be helpful to remember that it is neither he who plants the seed who is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase (1 Cor 3:7): It is our portion that we remain faithful in preaching the Word, but the fruits of the proclamation are to be borne by the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the hearers. As such, it is clear that regardless of the gravity of our commission, the urgency our message, or our natural personality, there can be no possible justification for a brusque or impatient manner in our preaching.

³² Tidball, Derek. *Skilful Shepherds: Explorations in Pastoral Theology*. Leicester: Apollos, 1997. 106-7

An Intelligent Proclamation

Great patience and careful instruction

- 2 Timothy 4:2c

We are to preach the Word not just with great patience, says Paul, but with careful instruction too. The word “instruction” is *didache*, which refers to the act of teaching³³, and so, Timothy is to preach “with all the patience that the work of teaching requires” (NEB) (*keryxon... en pase... didache*³⁴).

This is significant in light of the distinction that has traditionally been made between two kinds of preaching, *kerygma* and *didache*, the former concerned about the *widening* of the community through evangelical witness, and the latter concerned about the *deepening* of the community through spiritual formation.³⁵ This verse seems to assume that our *kerygma* itself contains much *didache*. I would agree with John Stott in saying that the distinction between the two has sometimes been pressed too rigidly – for regardless of our intent, be it to convince, rebuke or exhort, it must be grounded in sound doctrine.³⁶ John Calvin articulates this most lucidly:

³³ Earle, Ralph., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*, 411

³⁴ Stott, John R.W., *The Message of 2 Timothy*, 108

³⁵ Oden, Thomas C., *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry*, 129

³⁶ Stott, John R.W. , *The Message of 2 Timothy*, 108

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This is a most needful qualification. Reproofs either fail to have any effect because they are too violent or because they disappear into thin air, not being founded in sound teaching. Exhortations and accusations can be no more than aids to teaching and without it have little force. We see examples of this in people who possess much zeal and great asperity but are not equipped with solid teaching. They wear themselves out, they shout at the top of their voices and make a great noise, but all to no avail because they are building without a foundation.³⁷

In addition, just as the gospel itself is thought to be a word (*logos*), an address to us from God Himself, the notion of *logos* can be translated not only as “word”, but as “reason” too.³⁸ Thomas Oden elucidates this dynamic relationship between reason, ordinary language and *logos*. Preaching, he observes, “consists substantially in the clarification, exposition, interpretation, and re-appropriation of the written word that witnesses to the revealed Word.”³⁹ In other words, it is the aim of the preacher, to clarify that self-revealing word of God and speak it into being in the pulsating contemporary, local, here-and-now situation. Whatever we may call it, be it the plea to reason, conscience and will; or intellect, moral and emotion; or the exegetical, pastoral, doctrinal and morally instructive sermon – the essence of biblical preaching is all about communicating God’s own address through ordinary language to reach deeply into the emotive life so as to provoke the hearer to behaviour change and a new world-view.⁴⁰

³⁷ Smail, T.A., *Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries: The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, 333

³⁸ Oden, Thomas C., *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry*, 128

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 135

The Varied Demands of the Task

But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.

- 2 Timothy 4:5

Paul speaks more personally and specifically to Timothy in the set of imperatives that we find in verse 5 – framed in relation to Timothy’s situational context and to the kind of people to whom he is called to minister.

He is to be steady in all things

Timothy is to “keep his head” (*nephe*) in all situations, which literally means to be sober and to abstain from wine. In his exposition of this verse however, Ralph Earle points out that the verb is to be taken in the metaphorical sense as it has been elsewhere in the New Testament⁴¹ – which is to be steady and self-controlled.⁴² It has also been described as a mental state which is free from all perturbations, such that every faculty is at full command, and so that one may carefully and deliberately consider all facts.⁴³ “Be careful always to choose the right course,” says the Jerusalem Bible. The responsibilities are great for the preacher today, for not only must he be on the alert so as not to fall victim to culture’s fads and crazes, he is also to speak into a society that is characterised

⁴¹ c.f. 1 Thess 5:6-8; 1 Peter 1:13; 4:7; 5:8

⁴² Earle, Ralph, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*, 411

⁴³ Barclay, William, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus & Philemon*, 238

by rapid information exchange; and attempt to shape the paradigms of individuals who are constantly being bombarded with information from everywhere and nowhere.

He is to endure hardship

Addressing Timothy who is still in the thick of the fight, Paul writes about how he has himself endured – to have fought the good fight, finished the race, and kept the faith (2 Tim 4:6). John Calvin reminds us that struggles come to the ministers of Christ from the very moment they begin to discharge their office faithfully – and so they are to be firm and immovable in enduring adversity.⁴⁴ William Barclay expresses the same sentiment when he declared that “Christianity will cost something, and the Christian is to pay the price of it without regret.”⁴⁵ In Jesus’ own words we read in Luke 14:28-30 (NLT):

“But don’t begin until you count the cost. For who would begin construction of a building without first getting estimates and then checking to see if there is enough money to pay the bills? Otherwise, you might complete only the foundation before running out of funds. And then how everyone would laugh at you! They would say, ‘There’s the person who started that building and ran out of money before it was finished!’

Timothy must have undoubtedly been fully aware of the costs: the more grievous the troubles become, the more conscientiously was Timothy to labour to

⁴⁴ Smail, T.A., *Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries: The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, 336

⁴⁵ Barclay, William., *The Letters to Timothy, Titus & Philemon*, 239

cure them, and the more pressing the dangers, the more intently was he to keep watch.⁴⁶

He is to do the work of an evangelist

The word “evangelist” (*euangelistou*) appears only three times in the New Testament but it originates from the familiar *euangelizo* which means to “announce the good news, preach the gospel.”⁴⁷ It is unclear however, whether the reference is to all ministers of the Gospel or to some special office. This ambiguity also seems to reflect one of the major challenges facing pastoral theology today: the genuine need to affirm the general ministry of the laity without implicitly diminishing the validity of ordination.⁴⁸

While it may be possible to interpret this verse as referring to anybody who preaches the gospel and witnesses to Christ, I am inclined to agree with John Calvin that Paul is referring to the latter view. A specialist ministry seems to be implied in the only other two passages (Acts 21:8; Eph 4:11) in which *euangelistou* occurs, and Ephesians 4:11 especially seems to suggest that there was

⁴⁶ Smail, T.A., *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries: The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, 336

⁴⁷ Earle, Ralph, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*, 411

⁴⁸ Oden, Thomas C., *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry*, 26

an “intermediate order of ministry between the apostles and the pastors, so that evangelists were assistants second to the apostles.”⁴⁹

Exploring the meaning and validity of ordination, Thomas Oden asserts that while all believers are called to evangelise, there are individuals who are called of God and set apart by the church for the specific tasks of an ordained ministry. He points out that the difference between the general ministry of the laity and the ordained ministry is that those in the latter are duly called, prepared, examined, ordained, and authorised to a representative ministry on behalf of the whole people of God. He also adds that a well-equipped general ministry of the laity stands in constant need of an equipping ordained ministry.⁵⁰

He is to discharge all his duties of his ministry

Paul brings Timothy’s charge to a close with this last imperative. It takes on special urgency as it is Paul’s final charge to Timothy for his life has already been poured out like a drink offering the time has come for his departure (2 Tim 4:6). To “discharge all the duties of your ministry” literally means to “full[y]-fill one’s ministry” (*ten diakonian sou plerophoreson*).⁵¹ “Do all the duties of your

⁴⁹ Smail, T.A., *Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries: The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, 336

⁵⁰ Oden, Thomas C., *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry*, 26

⁵¹ Earle, Ralph., *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*, 412

calling,” says the New English Bible. Timothy is to pack his ministry to the full with the things that Paul has been exhorting him to do.⁵² “Ministry” (*diakonia*) embodies the idea of a many-sided service⁵³, and William Barclay articulates this as leaving no act of service unfulfilled⁵⁴. This indeed is a challenge to the way in which we think about the job-scope of the Christian minister today, especially in light of the tendency for ministry positions within the church to be clearly defined.

WHY SHOULD WE PREACH?

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, I give you this charge...

– 2 Timothy 4:1

Here in this last chapter, Paul sums up the long appeal that accounts for most part of his letter – an appeal that began by reminding Timothy to stir up the gift of God which is in him (1:6) and which now ends in the form of a solemn charge.⁵⁵

The phrase “in view of his appearing and his kingdom” is an accusative of adjuration. Earle Ralph also notes that the phrase “I give you this charge” in

⁵² Earle, Ralph., *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*, 412

⁵³ Barackman, Paul F., *The Epistles to Timothy and Titus*, 122

⁵⁴ Barclay, William., *The Letters to Timothy, Titus & Philemon*, 239

⁵⁵ Fee, Gordon, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus: New International Biblical Commentary*, 283

Greek is the verb *diamartyromai*, which has legal connotations attached to it and can mean to adjure or testify under oath.⁵⁶ Moreover, it is used, as John Stott points out, in the New Testament of any “solemn and emphatic utterance”.⁵⁷ Thus, Timothy’s paradigms are to be shaped not just by the reality of the present life but also by the kingdom reality of the coming judgement and Christ’s eternal reign⁵⁸; and so it still applies to we who are living in the age of the Kingdom “already/not yet” – to all who are called to an evangelistic or pastoral ministry. It is also worth mentioning that the significance and solemnity of such an impressive charge rides neither on Paul’s name nor in his authority, but rather in God’s divine direction, approval and “commissioning” – in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus.⁵⁹

Preparing the Way of the Lord: The Coming Christ

Gordon Fee was right in pointing out the high eschatological setting that saturates the language of Paul’s charge to Timothy.⁶⁰ Just as John the Baptist came as the voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘make straight the way of the

⁵⁶ Earle, Ralph, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*, 411

⁵⁷ Stott, John R.W., *The Message of 2 Timothy*, 105

⁵⁸ Earle, Ralph, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*, 411

⁵⁹ Stott, John R.W., *The Message of 2 Timothy*, 110

⁶⁰ Fee, Gordon, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus: New International Biblical Commentary*, 283

Lord' (John 1:23), so too is the Christian preacher to prepare the way for the consummation of the Kingdom in the second coming of Christ.

Here is our motive for work and service. Our work must be such that it will stand the scrutiny of Christ. Our lives must be such that they will welcome the appearance of the King. Our service must be such that it will demonstrate the reality of our citizenship of the Kingdom of God.⁶¹

Jesus is judge of the living and the dead

None shall escape judgement at the second coming of Christ. Some day Timothy's work will be tested, and so will every task of the Lord's servants be held accountable before Him.⁶² We will do well to remember also that the Christian teacher warrants a stricter judgement for it is eternity that hangs in the balance as he operates on the hearts of men with the gift that has been given him.

Jesus is the returning conqueror

"I charge you," says Paul, in view of His "appearing [*epiphaneia*]". This word, according to William Barclay, has strong associations with the Roman Emperor: used of a visit by the Emperor to any province or town, the Emperor's appearance was his *epiphaneia*. Everything was put in perfect order when the Emperor was due to visit any place – the streets swept and garnished, the town scoured and decorated to be fit for the *epiphaneia* of the Emperor – and Barclay

⁶¹ Barclay, William, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus and Philemon*, 234

⁶² *Ibid.* 232-3

suggests that this is the background of Paul's thoughts here.⁶³ Thus, not just that Timothy himself may be ready for the *epiphaneia* of Christ, but it is his responsibility to ensure that "the whole town" may be ready for the *epiphaneia* of the King.

Jesus is King

Finally, Paul brings to Timothy's mind his citizenship in the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. He is thus to walk and live as a Kingdom representative, for in any kingdom the citizens who obey the laws and honours the king himself walks in honour.⁶⁴

Preparing the Way of the Lord: The Contemporary Scene

For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.

– 2 Timothy 4:3-4

John Stott picks up on the word "for" which introduces this paragraph. As such, it is in light of Christ's coming that Paul gives Timothy a second basis on

⁶³ Barclay, William, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus and Philemon*, 233

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 233-4

which to ground his charge.⁶⁵ Paul wrote 1 Timothy during his fourth missionary journey after his release from prison in Rome in A.D. 62-63.⁶⁶ Paul's significantly altered circumstance in this second letter however is noteworthy, and it is in this context that Paul issues further instructions: His itinerant ministry ground to a halt as he was imprisoned in Rome once again; but more than that, death seemed imminent as he awaited his final trial.⁶⁷ Moreover, the situation in Ephesus was beginning to deteriorate with some abandoning Paul and his gospel⁶⁸ and still others persistent in their efforts to overthrow the faith of many.⁶⁹

While the historical and cultural context has undoubtedly altered significantly over the centuries, the human condition has, regrettably, changed little. The same problems have merely morphed to manifest itself in various forms of popular theories such as post-modernism and new-age spirituality for example. The underlying issues however, remain the same as Paul points out that people will be prone to believe what they want to believe – their itching ears tuned to their subjective tastes as they substitute their fancy for God's revelation and readily follow teachers who will oblige by "toeing their line"⁷⁰.

⁶⁵ Stott, John R.W., *The Message of 2 Timothy*, 110

⁶⁶ "2 Timothy: Title and Background", *Holy Bible, New International Version*. Colorado Springs: International Bible Society, 1984. 16423

⁶⁷ 2 Timothy 4:6-8

⁶⁸ 2 Timothy 1:15

⁶⁹ 2 Timothy 2:17-18

⁷⁰ Stott, John R.W., *The Message of 2 Timothy*, 111

CONCLUSION

Indeed, “the coming time when men will be loath to listen makes it important that what be must be done be done quickly”⁷¹. Thus, the Christian preacher is to preach the Word, in season and out of season – to correct, rebuke and encourage – while there is still time.

As Richard Peace’s study goes to show, there are different ways in which evangelism and conversion may be understood – Evangelical, Pentecostal, mainline Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox – and he rightly asks, “So who is right?”⁷² The answer I contend, must surely move beyond analysing the efficacy of the various “technologies” of conversion. A holistic understanding of conversion, says Peace, will not settle for cultural faith but a genuine repentance.

Repentance is, in essence, the renewing of our mind. If the purpose of preaching then, is about renewing the mind and changing the paradigms of others, it is almost embarrassing to discover that the secular media such as Hollywood has oftentimes done a better job influencing people’s way of thinking and establishing a different kingdom culture. The Christian preacher is to correct, rebuke and encourage, but he cannot hope to do so without first bridging

⁷¹ Barackman, Paul F., *The Epistles to Timothy and Titus*, 122-3

⁷² Peace, Richard. “Conflicting Understandings of Christian Conversion: A Missiological Challenge”, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 28 no 1 (January 2004): 8-14

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the deep rift between the biblical and modern world. It is across the broad and deep divide of two thousand years of changing culture that Christian communicators have to throw bridges. It is our task, to take hold of the baton that has been passed down through the centuries since Paul to Timothy, and relate the truths of Scripture to the hearts of a living people in society today.⁷³

⁷³ Stott, John. *I Believe in Preaching*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1988. 138

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