

God's Priorities for Our Service to Him  
*"Obedience to His Word" II Timothy 3:16-4:8*

Introduction:

There are important Biblical admonitions that are very general in their scope. Because of this, it is important that we flesh out what these things mean, lest these important truths become so vague in our minds that they become little more than clichés to us. The definition of a cliché is a phrase that is overused and betrays a lack of significant understanding. This must not happen for Christians when it comes to significant Biblical truths.

The following are core Biblical truths we must be sure we understand in terms of what they require of us:

*"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul,  
and with all your mind"*

Matthew 22:37

*"Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God"*

I Corinthians 10:31

*"For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show  
Himself strong on behalf of those whose hearts are loyal to Him"*

II Chronicles 16:9a

*"let your conduct be worthy of the Gospel of Christ"*

Philippians 1:27a

What every believer must understand is what it means to truly love God, to glorify Him, be loyal to Him, and conduct ourselves in a way that is worthy of the Gospel.

The first thing that will characterize those who fulfill the admonitions above is obedience to God's Word. Frequently throughout the Scriptures we are informed that obedience to the instructions God gives in His Word is foundational to living a life that is pleasing to Him:

*"And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty  
years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your  
heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. So He humbled you,  
allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did  
your fathers know, that He might make you know, that man shall not live by bread  
alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD."*

Deuteronomy 8:2-3

*"Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all  
the Law which Moses my servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right  
hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go. This book of the Law  
shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that  
you may observe to do all that is written in it. For then you will make your way*

*prosperous, and then you will have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.”*

Joshua 1:7-9

*“Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.”*

I Samuel 15:22-23a

*“But why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord’ and not do the things I say”*

Luke 6:46

*“And He said, more than that, blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it!”*

Luke 11:28

*“If you love Me, keep My commandments”*

John 14:15

In Paul’s second letter to Timothy we find one of the passages that elaborates on the central role that God’s Word plays in the life of His people.

### **I. The Provision of the Bible: (3:16-17)**

In these verses Paul wrote, *“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”*

The single Greek term translated above as *“by inspiration of God”* is more literally rendered as *“God breathed”*. According to Paul, all Scripture is in reality the verbalized breath of God. The idea is that the Scriptures represent the words that God placed in the hearts and minds of those who composed the Scriptures. The Apostle Peter wrote about this same process, giving us an insight into how God did this:

*“Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy came not by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”*

II Peter 1:20-21

When Peter wrote that the Scripture is not of any *“private interpretation”*, he used a Greek word in a form that meant that the idea expressed in Divine prophecy did not come from the prophet’s own understanding. Rather Peter wrote that the individual was *“moved”* by the Spirit of God. The Greek term translated as *“moved”* was frequently used at the time to convey the idea of someone or something under the power of someone or something else. For instance, it was used to refer to a boat being driven by a current or wind. Peter’s point was that God worked within the

authors of Scripture (using their unique personalities and vocabulary) to guide them to write specifically what He intended them to write. Therefore, when Paul wrote that all Scripture is inspired, he was expressing that it is literally God's Word.

Next Paul wrote that all Scripture is "*profitable*". The Greek term translated as "*profitable*", refers to something that is beneficial or advantageous to those who possess it and make use of it. Paul then wrote about four specific ways that all Scripture is beneficial to humanity. It is beneficial in regard to doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. The word "*doctrine*" refers to the content of someone's teaching. Therefore, Paul was saying that Scripture is profitable because it provides us with instruction about God and His will for us. It provides infallible information about reality we could not know apart from a revelation from God. The word "*reproof*" refers to the confrontation of something that is wrong or evil. Paul's point was that the Scriptures are profitable because they reveal to us where and how we have sinned against God. The word "*correction*" refers to instruction regarding how to improve or do better. Here, Paul's point was that the Scriptures are profitable because they instruct us how to turn from our sins and they inform us concerning how we need to change. The word "*instruction*" refers to training or disciplining someone. The word was often used in the context of child-rearing. The idea is that all Scripture is valuable because it not only informs us about everything we need to know in order to live in a righteous way that pleases God, but it is also something that God uses within us to transform us into righteous people.

In verse seventeen, Paul wrote about what God's purpose was when He inspired the Scriptures, "*that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work*". The Greek word translated as "*complete*" refers to being capable of performing something as one was intended to. In other words, the Scriptures make it possible for an individual to be able to fulfill God's will, to be capable of living a life that is pleasing to Him. The Greek word translated as "*thoroughly equipped*" refers to be fully furnished with everything necessary in order to do a given thing. In writing this, Paul was expressing that the Scriptures provide all the information that an individual needs so that he or she can succeed in every virtuous thing that God would have them do. Therefore, the entire purpose of Scripture is to enable Christians, by the empowering of the Holy Spirit, to live in harmony with the will of God. Of course, the Scriptures can only accomplish this in our lives if we choose to obey what they teach us.

## **II. The Responsibility that Goes with His Provision: (4:1-2)**

In these verses Paul wrote, "*I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.*" To "*charge*" someone with something, means to invest them with a significant responsibility. When Paul wrote that he was doing this "*before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom*", he was emphasizing the solemnity of

the responsibility that God has given to Christians. He was putting this responsibility in its eternal and ultimate context. It was a responsibility given to Christians by God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. It was a responsibility that relates to final judgment, because the Gospel is the only means by which a lost sinner can escape eternal condemnation. Paul would then go on to remind Timothy that a Christian's responsibility is not only to obey the Scriptures, but also to ensure that others learn what the Scriptures teach so they can obey it also.

Paul expressed that the responsibility set before the Church is to preach the Gospel. The Greek verb translated as "*preach*" means to proclaim a message. It is a term that had its origins in the proclamations of royal messages or the declaration of community leaders to the general populace. The word carried the connotation of communicating information that was of great importance and that carried with it the authority of the one who was the ultimate source of the message. When Paul wrote that preaching was to be done "*in season and out of season*", he meant that the message was to be proclaimed whether or not it was expected and welcome. The idea is that it is not simply done when it is convenient, and when it is easy, it is to be done even in the midst of adverse circumstances. The latter part of verse two contains a series of words that stress the effort one should invest in proclaiming the Gospel. To "*convince*" means that the preaching is meant to be persuasive, that the goal is enabling people to recognize the truthfulness of the Gospel. To "*rebuke*" means that it will involve confronting individuals with the reality of their sinful state before God. To "*exhort*" means to urge or encourage others to do what is right before God, to repent and believe. The "*longsuffering*" Paul refers to means the process will require patience, time and commitment. What Paul wrote here to Timothy is an application of the Great Commission given to the Church as a whole by Christ Himself:

*"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you."*

Matthew 28:19-20a

### **III. The Resistance We Will Encounter: (4:3-4)**

In these verses Paul wrote, "*For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.*" When Paul referred to a time that would come, he was not writing about some far-off reality, but about something that inevitably happens in every ministry; a characteristic of preaching the Gospel in this Messianic age. Paul explained that the root cause of the problem would be the desires that grip the hearts of lost people. The reality is that lost human beings are driven more by their desires than they are by what is true or by what is good. Paul taught that as believers seek to proclaim the Gospel, those who are inclined to reject it will be motivated in their resistance by their devotion to the things they desire. Because of this inclination they develop what Paul calls "*itching ears*". This is a

metaphor that pictures people longing to hear what they want to hear, and this motivates them to ensure that they do hear those things. Regarding this Paul wrote, “*they will heap up for themselves teachers*”. Paul was explaining that those who resist the Gospel will collect many false teachers to fortify their resistance. The idea is that they will make the effort to drown out the Gospel by enlisting a vast array of teachers who will support them in their resistance by telling them that they are right and that those who preach the Gospel are wrong. Such individuals will consciously turn from the truth of the Gospel and instead choose to believe in “*fables*”. The Greek word Paul used is the source of the English term “*myth*”. They will turn to humanly created stories and explanations that have no basis in fact, because they do not want to submit to the truth. One aspect of the impact of the Fall of mankind is that people will choose falsehoods over truth because it is more appealing to them.

#### **IV. The Means of Successfully Proclaiming God’s Word: (4:5)**

In this verse Paul wrote, “*But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.*” Here Paul was exhorting Timothy about his specific responsibilities as a Christian who was appointed to be a shepherd of others. However, this same admonition has relevance to all Christians, because in different ways and to different degrees, we are all involved in the process of advancing the proclamation of the Gospel. To be “*watchful*” means to be alert to potential dangers or threats. Paul was exhorting Timothy to remember that the evil one is always seeking ways to undermine the saints in their efforts to obey God. Therefore, as he shepherded the saints in Ephesus, he was to look out for evidence of the devil’s work within the congregation. Timothy was told to “*endure afflictions*” as he carried out his ministry of preaching the Gospel. Paul’s point was that continuing in faithfulness to what God had instructed would be difficult at times and he needed to persevere through the opposition and heartache and not allow it to hinder his faithfulness to God. When Paul told Timothy to do the work of an “*Evangelist*”, he was using a term in the Greek language that did not have the connotation it does now in modern Evangelicalism. The title simply refers to one engaged in proclaiming the Gospel. However, it does not necessarily refer to one who only preaches messages soliciting initial faith. It refers to everything that is involved in the Gospel ministry, which is the Great Commission, and that includes the ongoing teaching of those who have been converted to obey everything that Christ commanded His followers to do. The admonition “*fulfill your ministry*”, was an exhortation for Timothy to focus on accomplishing all that God was calling him to do, something that all believers should have as their personal goal.

#### **V. The Motivation For the Investment of Our Lives: (4:6-8)**

In these verses Paul wrote, “*For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.*” In this

closing portion of the passage Paul employed sacrificial language to speak about what motivated him in his service to Christ, with the intent of it also motivating Timothy to ongoing faithfulness. The reality for Paul was that he knew that he was going to be put to death by the decree of Caesar because of his efforts to proclaim the Gospel. Rather than seeing this simply as a personal tragedy, Paul saw it as his opportunity to express his utter devotion to God. He was willing to do what God had instructed him to do, even though doing so would cost him his life. The departure he wrote about, would be the moment when he was executed, when his mortal life would end, and when his eternal existence in God's presence would begin. When Paul wrote "*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race*", he was using athletic metaphors from the Greek games (boxing and running) to illustrate the nature of Christian service. It involves a struggle, and it requires perseverance to overcome the resistance that one encounters to the Gospel. Part of that resistance is from others, part of it is from one's own sinful tendencies. When Paul wrote "*I have kept the faith*" he was using a word that referred to guarding or protecting the Gospel from something that threatened it. He had preserved the truth of the Gospel against false teaching, and from the distortion that could have been caused by the sins of those he disciplined.

What enabled Paul to persevere in faithfulness was his confidence in what awaits the believer after death. Paul wrote, "*there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day*". The "*crown of righteousness*" is a reference to the reward of eternal salvation that belongs to all who have genuinely placed their faith in Jesus Christ. Paul was expressing that the glorious moment of experiencing the fullness of his salvation would make every sacrifice and hardship he endured worth it. The expression "*that Day*" could be a reference to the consummation of the age when Christ returns. However, it is more likely not a reference to a day in God's overall eschatological plan, but rather to the day of Paul's death. Paul added that this was not something destined for him alone, but for "*all who have loved His appearing*". The idea of loving Christ's appearing is that one is so enthralled by the anticipation of that glorious moment that they live out every day in obedience to God so that Christ will find them doing what pleases Him when He does finally arrive. The Greek word translated as "*appearing*" does not focus on the entire process of the Second Coming, but on the moment when He will be physically seen by those waiting for Him.

### **Conclusion:**

The implication for each of us is obvious. If we truly love God, we will love and cherish His word to us. If we are truly interested in glorifying God, we will seek to obey everything He has said to us in His Word. If we are going to be loyal to Him we will proclaim the truth of His words to ourselves and everyone we come in contact with, because His truth is our truth. If we intend to live in a way that is worthy of the Gospel, we will recognize that the message we proclaim is one that is meant to be supported by the way we live our lives, and because of this we will seek to speak, behave, and act in ways that reflect the same message as the one we preach.