

## **2 TIMOTHY 4:1-5**

The end of Paul's life and earthly ministry are clearly near the end and he is expecting Timothy to carry on the baton of ministry and these are Paul's simple, compact, and direct instructions to Timothy.

Timothy had no shelf full of books on management and corporate theory — all he had was 9-1/2 pages of instruction from Paul and his personal instruction. It was a simple ministry philosophy, which is in stark contrast to every ministry theory today. Consider the undue stress church growth gurus place on innovation. “You must be innovative so you can capture the imaginations of young disciples who are developing their own philosophies of ministry.” And innovation is nothing new or creative but simply being part of the latest popular trends — churches chasing the latest fads.

The quest for innovation is entirely missing from Paul's instructions to Timothy. The current church's desire for innovation is irreconcilable with Paul — it is in fact antithetical to Paul's instruction.

Paul was concerned about the danger of apostasy. There were already false teachers in the church, as evidenced in his first letter to Timothy (ch. 6). At the end of ch. 1, Paul names Hymenaeus and Alexander as apostates. Other heresies are mentioned in ch. 4 (cf. v. 7) and again in ch. 6 (beginning at v. 3).

The threat of heresy was heavy on Paul's mind in 1 Timothy, and again in 2 Timothy. His warning begins again in ch. 1 (Hymenaeus and Philetus); there will be times of difficulty (ch. 3). These predictions in ch. 3 are characteristic of church leaders, not the world! We are living and ministering in a time such as Paul described. The things Paul described are being vividly displayed in the church today.

Paul wants Timothy to be a separatists — avoid such people — “from such, turn away!” Timothy is to stay on guard against all the dangers.

Other themes tie these two letters together — the warfare motif (you cannot be faithful and free from conflict in ministry — it's warfare), his singular duty to be a herald of the Word of God (1 Tim. 4:6, 11, 13; 6:2-4; 2 Tim. 1:13; 2:15; 3:16-17). The answer to all the heresies is a return to the Word of God.

Paul knows death is coming (4:6); he is ready for martyrdom. He takes every theme of ministry philosophy and ties it together in this paragraph. These are solemn, sacred instructions for ministry (4:1-5).

What is Paul saying here? The heart and soul of this section is three words: *Preach the Word*. Yet this is not merely a prescription for expository preaching. It is not exclusively about the

pulpit; it is about all of his ministry and all his life. Paul is telling him how to live.

There are nine imperatives in this passage. This is not a series of discreet commands, but nine facets of a minister's life and ministry. This is a reminder of what a life devoted to ministry looks like.

In this passage he is putting Timothy under oath. He is binding Timothy under the penalty of a curse to these commands (v. 1 — ***I solemnly charge you***). It is not the first time Paul has done this (cf. 1 Tim. 5:21; 6:12ff; 2 Tim. 2:14). This is a typical way for Paul to emphasize the gravity of what he is about to command. These nine commands are elevated to a sacred commission.

These words are as personal to you and me and every church leader as they are to Timothy.

The construction here also is an emphatic affirmation of the deity of Christ — ***God, namely Christ Jesus...*** (v. 1). Paul in this charge is also modeling for Timothy what he wants Timothy to do. Christ is not only named as God, but is demonstrated to have eschatological rule and authority over the world. He appeals to Christ as Judge (gravity), appearing (urgency), and Kingdom (authority).

### **1. Preach the Word**

The preacher does not choose his message — he is given his message from God. Innovation is not the key to effective ministry! WE do not proclaim ourselves (2 Tim. 4:5); woe to us if we do not preach the gospel (1 Cor. 9:16). Paul's focus is stiflingly narrow — particularly for those who are wanting “innovation.”

### **2. Be ready in season and out of season.**

The verb not only means to “stand by” but to “stand up to the task.” Stand firm and stand ready. Be ready when it is timely and untimely — popular and not popular. Keep preaching the Word no matter what others think of it; no matter how much resistance you encounter and make it the heart and soul of your ministry.

### **3. Reprove**

It has the connotation of telling people they are wrong or done something wrong — the refutation of falsehood, something that is out of step with our current postmodern times. If you never tell people you are wrong you are not following Paul's command.

### **4. Rebuke**

This is a formal censure and a denouncement of every evil for what it is. How many today shirk this duty — “I just always want to be positive...” Cf. also Tt. 1:9, 13. Rebuke those who

contradict. This is fundamental to pastoral duty and calling.

## **5. Exhort with complete patience and teaching**

Exhort is *parakaleō*, conveying the idea of encouragement and solace in the form of a tender summons. That is the heart of biblical preaching. It is for the good of the hearers not for their hurt. It is not to be done to beat the sheep. The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome, but kind...(2:23-25). Paul is calling for every possible kind of patience and long-suffering. They will not be won to the truth with relentless scolding. Be gentle — that's what a true shepherd does.

Gentleness does not preclude correction.

This kind of approach to ministry is not going to be popular (cf. vv. 3-4). People today want imagineers and story-tellers and clowns, and that is what church planting gurus are telling us to model our ministries after. And that attitude is fatal to authentic faith. It is a deadly evil, especially when it is married to an orthodox, lip-service kind of faith. Paul is described a kind of obstinacy that is magnified in our own culture — no time for the unyielding truth-claims of Scripture.

Acts 17:21 describes the concept of itching ears (cf. Wikipedia's poor explanation) — the lust for novelty. We don't have to follow the flow of the world's fashions. We *shouldn't* follow the flow of the world's fashions.

## **6. Be sober-minded**

This is the contrast to every worldly trend. In this context, sobriety speaks of alertness and serious thoughtfulness and dignity — “watch thou in all things” (KJV). Remember that all these things expand the idea of preaching the Word — so, don't be a clown or trifler in the pulpit, especially when people are expecting to have their ears tickled.

## **7. Endure suffering**

Paul keeps telling Timothy to be bold and stand up against suffering and take the blows he would be dealt. Timothy had a more timid constitution than Paul, so Paul continues to address that besetting sin in Timothy. Cf. 2 Tim. 3:12. Today, people think that if people get mad at the preacher, then he needs to tone it down. Not what Paul says!

## **8. Do the work of an evangelist**

Keep Christ and the gospel at the center of the message. Proclaim the gospel and never lose sight of it.

## **9. Fulfill your ministry**

How do you do that? By preaching according to the ways that Paul has just described. There is

nothing here about cultural engagement and innovation. We engage our culture in the same sense that David engaged Goliath. That is the proper medicine for itching ears. The power of God is unleashed on the culture when this philosophy is followed, as exemplified in Paul's own ministry. The remedy for itching ears is the preaching of the Word of God (Heb. 4:12).

This charge to Timothy is not only about Timothy's public preaching ministry. This is for any person in any kind of vocation. This addresses our devotion to the Word. What is mentioned here is nothing extraordinary. Paul himself had done all these things. It kept him properly focused on and devoted to the Word of God.

The end of this chapter recounts how Paul finished because of the way he had applied these nine imperatives. We need to renounce the postmodern quest for innovation and go back to Paul's simple philosophy, preach the Word.