

2 Timothy 4:1-5 - Every Believer's Source of Strength

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Deut. 8:1-3 "Every commandment which I command you today you must be careful to observe, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land of which the Lord swore to your fathers. [2] 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. [3] 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.

Deut. 32:45-47 Moses finished speaking all these words to all Israel, [46] and He said to them: "Set your hearts on all the words which I testify among you today, which you shall command your children to be careful to observe--all the words of this law. [47] For it is not a futile thing for you, **because it is your life**, and by this word you shall prolong your days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to possess."

Introduction: The need for sound doctrine is always great. The need the people of God have, whether they perceive it keenly or not, for solid meat and sustenance from the Word of God is likewise always paramount. In the section just prior to chapter 4, Paul warned Timothy in:

2 Timothy 3:13: "But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived."

John Calvin said about this verse: "One worthless person will always be more effectual in destroying, than ten faithful teachers in building, though they labor with all their might. Nor are there ever *lacking* the tares which Satan sows for injuring the pure corn; and even when we think that false prophets are driven away, others continually spring up in other directions. Again, as to the power of doing injury, it is not because falsehood, in its own nature, is stronger than truth, or that the tricks of Satan exceed the energy of the Spirit of God; but because men, being naturally inclined to vanity and errors, embrace far more readily what agrees with their natural disposition, and also because, being blinded by a righteous vengeance of God, they are led, as captive slaves, at the will of Satan. And the chief reason, why the plague of wicked doctrines is so efficacious, is, that the ingratitude of men deserves that it should be so. It is highly necessary for godly teachers to be reminded of this, **that they may be prepared for uninterrupted warfare**, and may not be discouraged by delay, or yield to the haughtiness and insolence of adversaries."

What is Paul's great antidote to the onslaught of evil men, impostors, false teachers and their false doctrines? Scripture

2 Timothy 3:14-17 But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, [15] and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. [16] All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, [17] that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

And that brings us to the passage before us - One of Paul's final thoughts before he departed this world. In His high priestly prayer, the Lord Jesus prayed: John 17:17 "Sanctify

them by Your truth. Your word is truth.” The primary way in which the church of the Lord Jesus Christ is sanctified and strengthened is ***through the ministry of the Word through preaching in the local church***. Peter wrote:

1 Peter 2:1-3 Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, [2] as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, [3] if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

Application: All of us are in need of strengthening and of growth in the Lord.

Application 2: In the heart of every true Christian there beats a desire to hear from God. There is a desire to hear from the Shepherd and to follow what He says.

Application 3: All of us are capable of reading the Bible - and surely, Bible-reading and study is a component of personal strengthening and sanctification. But preaching holds a special place in the church of Jesus Christ. Joel Beeke and Mark Jones point out:

Thomas Cartwright (1535-1603) said preaching is vitally necessary above merely reading the Bible. He wrote, “As the fire stirred gives more heat, so the Word, as it were blown by preaching, flames more in the hearers, than when it is read.” John Owen (1616-1683) wrote: “The word is like the sun in the firmament. ... It has virtually in it all spiritual light and heat. But the preaching of the word is as the motion and beams of the sun, which actually and effectually doth communicate that light and heat unto all creatures.” Nehemiah Rogers (1594-1660) put it this way: “The text is the word of God abridged: preaching is the word of God enlarged.”

Application 4: The ministry of elders and deacons in the local church is also a very important part of the strengthening of individuals and covenant families. But our lifeline to God is to hear from His Word through preaching. Paul said:

1 Corinthians 9:16 “...woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!”

1. **A Frightening Preface to a Solemn Charge - v1**
2. **The Charge: Preach the Word - v2**
3. **Reasons for Points 1 & 2 Above - v3-4**
4. **Final Exhortations - v5**

1. **A Frightening Preface to a Solemn Charge - v1**

[1] 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:

Point: Scripture is filled with exhortations and commandments, but not all of them prefaced as this one is. Why is the charge to preach the Word of God prefaced with such incredible force [read verse again]?

Illustration: The Puritan John Preston said: “There is not a sermon which is heard, but it sets us nearer heaven or hell.” And Richard Baxter said: “Speak to your people as to men that must be awakened either here or in hell.”

Application: Not only is our strengthening and sanctification as believers tied to the preached Word of God, but our very entrance into heavenly glory will be either opened up or closed forever in response to the preached Word of God - our hearing of the gospel of Christ. There is no more solemn task than preaching, and there is no more solemn occasion than *hearing* preaching.

Point 2: Is through that Word of God that the elect are “born again.”

1 Peter 1:22-25 Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, [23] having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, [24] because “All flesh is as grass, And all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, And its flower falls away, [25] But the word of the Lord endures forever.” Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.

⇒ The Word of God is the *primary* “means of grace.” It is the primary channel through which the Spirit of God works in bringing about conversion and sanctification in the lives of people.

Illustration: Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.

2. The Charge: Preach the Word - v2

[2] Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.

Point: It is important to see this exhortation as directly connected to what has just been said about the nature of Scripture. If Scripture truly is *God-breathed*, then it is Scripture that must be preached.

Point 2: The verb here for “preach” is *kerusso*: “to be a herald; to officiate as herald; to proclaim after the manner of a herald; always with a suggestion of formality, gravity, and an authority which must be listened to and obeyed;”

“Be ready in season and out of season” - Calvin says about this phrase: “we too easily yield to the slightest opposition.” What this is saying is that the “herald” of Christ must speak forth and preach His truth from the God-breathed Word *when it is convenient and when it is inconvenient to do so.*

Application: There must be an urgency to see the Word of God *preached* to the people, and by extension there must be equal urgency to *hear* the Word of God preached *by* the people being preached to.

Question: Can you not hear the urgency in Paul’s words here? There are two reasons for his urgency:

1. **Contained in Scripture are the very words of Eternal Life!**

2. **Paul knows the end of his earthly life is drawing near: 2 Tim. 4:6-8** For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. [7] I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. [8] 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.

3 things:

1. **“Convince”** - “to express strong disapproval of someone’s action, reprove, correct”

Illustration: This is what John the Baptist had done to Herod: **Luke 3:19** “But Herod the tetrarch, being rebuked by him concerning Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done,”

Application: The Word of God must be used to “convince” or “reprove” *political leaders and all men for their sins*. All men must be made to see from what their Creator says that they are, in point of fact, ***sinners in need of being saved by the blood of Christ***. The law of God must be used to show men their need to repent and turn to Christ.

2. **“Rebuke”** - “to express strong disapproval of someone, rebuke, reprove, censure also speak seriously, warn in order to prevent an action or bring one to an end.” This term is a bit stronger. It is what Jesus did to the demons when he rebuked them and commanded them to be silent about who he was, and to come out of people.

3. **“Exhort”** - “to urge strongly, appeal to, urge, exhort, encourage” - This has more of a positive setting forth of true doctrine. Notice what the text goes on to say:

“with all longsuffering and teaching.” All of our convincing (or reprovng), rebuking, and exhorting must rest on the *teaching or doctrine* of Scripture. The propositional doctrinal content of the Bible must be that upon which all of our convincing, rebuking, and exhorting must inseparably rest.

3. Reasons for Points 1 & 2 Above - v3-4

[3] 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; [4] and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

Point: Calvin comments: “soon shall the gospel be extinguished, and perish from the remembrance of men, if godly teachers do not labor with all their might to defend it.”

Point 2: This passage is teaching *clearly* that:

1. There will be false teachers - *lots of them*. The verb translated “heap up” in v3 means: “accumulate in piles.”

2. False teachers will be successful in gaining adherents - And why? Because people have “itching ears.” People’s ears are just *itching* to hear something new, something exciting, something that will provide a temporary fix. BDAG’s entry for the term “itchy” actually says: “This itching is relieved by the messages of the new teachers.”

⇒ **The phenomemon of “religious consumers” in our day is actually nothing new.** Notice from the text that it is not enough for those with “itchy ear syndrome” to have just one teacher. They need a “heap,” a “pile” of them. And normally, those whose ears itch to be lied to are constantly needing new lies to believe.

Application: Sadly, there is no shortage in the ever-increasing “pile” of false teachers who are more than happy to get wealthy off of preaching falsehood in the name of truth. And their followers are like *locusts who hop from one “church” to another until they’ve consumed everything that new teacher has to offer and they become bored with him or her and then they move on.*

The end result of itching ear syndrome - v4: “and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.”

Application: People will turn their own ears away from the truth and be turned aside to fables.

Matthew Henry comments: “They will turn away their ears from the truth: they will grow weary of the old plain gospel of Christ, and then they will be greedy of fables, and take pleasure in them, and God will give them up to those strong delusions, because they received not the truth in the love of it.”

Application question: Do you *love* the truth?

Application 2: Truly the greatest danger that people face and that the church faces is: *deception*. How many vast multitudes of people have believed false gospels of works righteousness - *confident that their works would save them*, only to awaken in hell? How many people have turned away from the truth of God’s Word to embrace the absurd falsehood of the so-called “evolutionary worldview?” How much has the Christian Church been hurt by the rise of an unbiblical and pessimistic eschatology that comes about as close as possible to teaching people that attempting to fulfill the Great Commission is a waste of time and doomed to failure?

Question: If deception is our greatest enemy, then Scripture is our greatest weapon against it. There is so much to be “convinced and reprov’d,” so much to “rebuke,” and so much to “exhort” with all long-suffering and teaching (or doctrine)!

4. Final Exhortations - v5

[5] But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

Point: Be “well-balanced and self-controlled.” Don’t drift mentally - stay sharp, stay alert, stay focused. And we are called to be these things “in all things” - i.e. what you say, how you say it, where you go, what you read, what you watch, who you get close to, and what you believe and teach. *Well-balanced and self-controlled.*

Point 2: “endure afflictions” - a true minister of the gospel will have these - either from those outside the church, or at times from within.

Point 3: “do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.” The gospel must as much as possible be at the center of preaching. Not every verse or every passage of Scripture is specifically about the gospel - but it must be woven into sermons - and *the pastor's ministry* must have as one of its goals the equipping of the church to be faithful witnesses of the true gospel to the world.

Application: As much as a big part of the work of ministry is reproof and rebuking sin and calling the church and the surrounding world to repentance, it is the Gospel of Jesus Christ of which we are primarily heralds. That all men would hear the call of God to repent and believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. *That message* is the only hope of the unconverted sinner, and it is also the lifeblood of the converted saint. Jesus and His cross are the source of our sanctification and progress in holiness.

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Conclusion: From p684 of *A Puritan Theology* by Beeke / Jones:

The Puritans viewed preaching as the minister's “principal work” and the hearer's “principal benefit.” Preaching is God's great “converting ordinance,” they said. Seldom would anyone be converted apart from it. William Ames (1576-1633) wrote, “Preaching is the ordinance of God, sanctified for the begetting of faith, for the opening of the understanding, for the drawing of the will and affections to Christ.” Not surprisingly, therefore, they were experientially acquainted with Paul's statement, “Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel” (1 Cor. 9:6). So that they must either preach or perish: this must be done or they are undone.”

How are individual and covenant families “strengthened?” Through the Word of God read and preached - we live, breathe, and grow by that all-sufficient Word. This is why the public reading and preaching of Scripture ought always to hold the center of our worship.