

Living in God's Church Today

Fulfill Your Ministry

2 Timothy 4:1-8

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Introduction

In his commentary on Paul's Second Letter to Timothy, John MacArthur noted that the final words of dying men and women usually are stripped of hypocrisy and reflect accurately their true beliefs and feelings.

On his deathbed, Napoleon said, "I die before my time; and my body will be given back to earth, to become the food of worms. Such is the fate which so soon awaits the great Napoleon."

Not long before he died, Gandhi, the world-renowned Hindu religious leader, confessed, "My days are numbered. I am not likely to live very long—perhaps a year or a little more. For the first time in fifty years, I find myself in a slough of despond. All about me is darkness. I am praying for light."

The nineteenth-century French statesman Talleyrand wrote the following words on a piece of paper and laid it on a nightstand near his bed: "Behold, eighty-three years passed away! What cares! What agitation! What anxieties! What ill-will! What sad complications! And all without other results, except great fatigue of mind and body, and a profound sentiment of discouragement with regard to the future, and of disquiet with regard to the past!"¹

How different were the last words of the Apostle Paul. His Second Letter to Timothy was the last letter he wrote before his execution. As he concluded his letter, he charged Timothy one final time to be faithful in ministry.

¹ John F. MacArthur Jr., *2 Timothy*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 187–188.

Scripture

Let's read 2 Timothy 4:1-8:

¹ I 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: ² preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. ³ For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, ⁴ and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. ⁵ As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

⁶ For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. ⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing. (2 Timothy 4:1-8)

Lesson

2 Timothy 4:1-8 is a charge to be faithful in ministry.

Let's use the following outline:

1. The Witnesses to the Charge (4:1)
2. The First Part of the Charge (4:2)
3. The Reason for the First Part of the Charge (4:3-4)
4. The Second Part of the Charge (4:5)
5. The Reasons for the Second Part of the Charge (4:6-8)

I. The Witnesses to the Charge (4:1)

First, let's look at the witnesses to the charge.

Paul wrote in verse 1: **“I 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.”** The Greek word for **“charge”** (*diamartyromai*) means “to admonish or instruct with regard to some future happening or action, with the implication of personal knowledge or experience.”² The central theme of Paul's final charge to Timothy comes into sharp focus in this chapter. Though Paul had written some very important words, his **“charge”** here is direct and emphatic. The charge itself is given in two parts: the first part of the charge is in verse 2 and the second part of the charge is in verse 5. There are nine commands in these verses that form the essence of the charge to Timothy.

Here in verse 1, Paul calls the Father and Son as witnesses to what he is about to say to Timothy. Paul reminded Timothy that Jesus is the judge who will one day return to execute his judgment on both the living and the dead.

Every Christian serves under the close scrutiny of the omniscient God and Christ Jesus. Though these words were written to Timothy, they are nevertheless applicable to all Christians but especially to pastors. The task of shepherding God's flock is not to be undertaken flippantly or lightly. Pastors must be conscious that God's eye is on them and that they are never to misrepresent him. I think of someone who is appointed as an ambassador by the President to represent him in a foreign

² Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 436.

country. The ambassador must communicate the President's will to those in the foreign country. Pastors are Christ's ambassadors. They represent him to the communities in which they serve. Christ has given us his will, which is the word of God. And so pastors must faithfully and accurately and carefully communicate God's word and his will to the people they are serving. And they do so knowing that they are under the watching eye of God and Christ Jesus.

II. The First Part of the Charge (4:2)

Second, notice the first part of the charge.

Paul's charge is given in verse 2: **“preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.”** The first part of Paul's charge to Timothy consists of five commands.

First, he is to **“preach the word.”** The **“word”** is the entire written word of God. Timothy is to preach all that God has revealed in Scripture.

Second, he is to **“be ready.”** The Greek word (*ephistemi*) was used for a soldier prepared to go into battle or a guard continually alert for any surprise attack. These are attitudes that every faithful pastor must have. And he must have that attitude all the time—**“in season and out of season.”**

Third, he is to **“reprove.”** He must correct and convince the listener about the truth of God's word.

Fourth, he is to **“rebuke.”** This Greek word (*epitimao*) denotes censure.

And fifth, he is to **“exhort.”** This could mean either “exhort” or “encourage” depending on the context. The preacher is to bring comfort and edification in his preaching. All of these exhortations must be accompanied **“with complete patience**

and teaching.” This includes both the manner (“**patience**”) and the method (“**teaching**”) that Timothy should adopt.

The exhortation “**be ready in season and out of season**” came to me vividly when I was not yet ordained or even trained to be a pastor. I believed God had called me to be a pastor, and my pastor had arranged for me to preach at a small church that did not have a pastor. Two old ladies (who were sisters) essentially kept the little church together. They invited me to their home for tea on Sunday afternoon before the evening service, where I was to preach. After tea, they said that they wanted me to join them to visit a church member who was dying. I drove them in my car to the lady’s house. When we arrived at the house, I thought that I should take my Bible into the house with me. The sisters first went into the lady’s bedroom and after a few minutes, one of them came to invite me to join them. The lady was extremely ill. One of the sisters announced that I was the pastor who had come to minister to her. Was I shocked! I was glad that I brought my Bible with me. I believe I turned to Psalm 23 and read it. Then I prayed with the lady. I remember thinking of this expression as I was in that situation: “**be ready in season and out of season.**”

III. The Reason for the First Part of the Charge (4:3-4)

Third, observe the reason for the first part of the charge.

Paul gave the reason for the first part of the charge in verses 3-4, “**For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.**” Paul warned Timothy there will be people who will no longer listen to the proper proclamation of

God's word. Rather, they will follow preachers who say what they want to hear instead of listening to preachers who proclaim what God has said in his word.

I was speaking with someone who had grown up in a church but had not attended worship for many years. This person felt a deep dissatisfaction in her soul and knew that she needed to get back to her roots. I asked her if she had been attending any churches. She said she had not but had been listening to preachers on TV. When I asked who she found helpful, she mentioned the names of prosperity preachers. This dear woman was finding the prosperity message appealing because it promised health and happiness. The problem is that it is an empty promise. I urged her to start attending a local worship service in person where the focus is on teaching the word of God and the good news of the gospel.

IV. The Second Part of the Charge (4:5)

Fourth, look at the second part of the charge.

Paul gave the second part of the charge in verse 5, **“As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”** Paul directed four more commands to Timothy.

First, Timothy was to be **“sober-minded.”** The Greek word for **“sober-minded”** (*nepho*) means “to behave with restraint and moderation, thus not permitting excess.”³

Second, Timothy was to **“endure suffering.”** Earlier, Paul had exhorted Timothy to “share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus” (2:3). As a preacher of God's word, Timothy was to endure persecution, misunderstanding, and

³ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 751.

hardship for the sake of the gospel.

Third, Timothy was to **“do the work of an evangelist.”** The word **“evangelist”** occurs three times in the New Testament (here; in Acts 21:8; and in Ephesians 4:11). An evangelist is a messenger of the good news. Though Timothy had important administrative and pastoral duties in Ephesus, he was not to neglect the bold, public declaration of the gospel.

And fourth, Paul told Timothy to **“fulfill your ministry.”** The *Amplified Bible* captures the essence of the command: “fully perform all the duties of your ministry.” Paul wanted Timothy to persevere in his ministry. He was not to become discouraged but to press on because he was serving God. This final command, it seems to me, is the overarching command regarding Timothy’s service to God.

We should not be surprised at the cultural and moral decline in our society. But we must press on with the truth. John Stott put it this way, “The harder the times and the deafer the people, the clearer and more persuasive our proclamation must be.”⁴ And John Calvin put it this way, “The more determined men become to despise the teaching of Christ, the more zealous should godly ministers be to assert it and the more strenuous their efforts to preserve it entire, and more than that, by their diligence to ward off Satan’s attacks.”⁵

V. The Reasons for the Second Part of the Charge (4:6-8)

And fifth, let’s observe the reasons for the second part of the charge.

⁴ John R. W. Stott, *Guard the Gospel the Message of 2 Timothy*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 112.

⁵ Quoted in John R. W. Stott, *Guard the Gospel the Message of 2 Timothy*, 112–113.

In verses 6-8, Paul set down three reasons to accompany the second part of the charge.

A. The Present: Ready for Departure (4:6)

The first reason for fulfilling ministry has to do with the present, and that is to be ready for departure.

Paul wrote in verse 6, **“For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come.”** In the Old Testament sacrificial system, a “drink offering” was the final offering that followed the burnt and grain offerings prescribed for the people of God (see Numbers 15:1-16). Paul saw his coming death as his final offering to God in a life that had already been full of sacrifices to him. He had served faithfully and was ready to die, depart, and be with God.

R. C. Sproul died on December 14, 2017. One of the greatest champions of Reformed Theology in our generation had completed his earthly service to the Lord and went to be with him. R. C. Sproul had struggled with poor health during the years leading up to his earthly departure. His ministry and service to the Lord and his people did an incalculable amount to restore faithful, Biblical truth. His life has caused many pastors to redouble their efforts to serve the Lord faithfully.

B. The Past: Having Kept the Faith (4:7)

The second reason for fulfilling ministry has to do with the past, and it has to do with having kept the faith.

Paul wrote in verse 7, **“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”** Paul used three illustrations from the Olympic Games. The form of the three Greek verbs (“**have fought,**” “**have finished,**” and

“have kept”) each indicate completed action with continuing results. Note that Paul did not say that he had won each event; rather, he said that he had **“finished.”** The Greek word for **“fight”** (*agon*) means “contest or struggle.” So, it could refer to a wrestling contest. The Greek word for **“race”** (*dromos*) refers to a running event. In the third illustration, when Paul said, **“I have kept the faith,”** he meant, “I have kept the rules.” He followed the truths and standards that God had revealed in his word.

Every pastor—and every Christian—wants to come to the end of his life and be able to say with Paul, **“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”** A few months ago, I attended the funeral service of a pastor. It was encouraging to hear testimonies from his family and friends about this beloved pastor. He had served his Lord faithfully for many years, even though he struggled with health issues in his final years. Nevertheless, he had fought the good fight and finished the race, and kept the faith to the end.

C. *The Future: Receiving the Reward (4:8)*

And the third reason for fulfilling ministry has to do with the future, and it has to do with receiving the reward.

Paul wrote in verse 8, **“Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.”** The Greek word for **“crown”** (*stephanos*) means “a prize, understood as a laurel or crown signifying victory.” This was given to athletes who had won their competition. Linguistically, **“of righteousness”** can mean either that righteousness is the *source* of the crown, or that righteousness is the *nature* of the crown.

We do know that when a believer enters glory, he will be perfectly righteous and all sin will be gone forever. This **crown** is not only for Paul but **“also to all who have loved his appearing,”** that is, for those who are believers and are looking forward to seeing the Lord Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the charge in 2 Timothy 4:1-8, we should strive to fulfill the ministry that God has called us to do.

What Paul wrote to Timothy could easily have been an epitaph on his tombstone. When you come to the end of your life, how would you like to have your life and service to God described? Will you have fulfilled your ministry?

John Newton, the author of the well-known hymn “Amazing Grace,” wrote his own epitaph, as can be seen on his gravestone at the Church of Saints Peter and Paul in Olney, England. He wrote, “JOHN NEWTON. Clerk. Once an infidel and libertine, a servant of slaves in Africa, was by the rich mercy of our LORD and SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST preserved, restored, pardoned, and appointed to preach the faith he had long laboured to destroy. Near 16 years as Curate of this parish and 28 years as Rector of St. Mary Woolnoth.”

Let each one of us labor faithfully and fulfill the ministry that God has given to us. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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