



# Christ Reformed Community Church

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## “Cutting It Straight” 2 Timothy 2:15

Well, as you walked in this morning, no doubt you were able to see many of the changes that have come in this place of worship over the last several weeks. A lot of things have come together for us. We’ve been excited about how the Lord has allowed us to move into this facility in a timely manner, and He has allowed us the resources, and as Jeff mentioned earlier, all the help that people have put in to make this a very special place where we worship the Lord and we’re able to fellowship together. We’re so grateful for what the Lord has done over the last several years in bringing this church together and bringing us together in a relationship and covenant together in the local church. But central to the local church is the Word of God; and at the heart of what we do in reading the Word of God and teaching the Word of God is the preaching of the Word of God. And that is why when you walked in this morning, you saw this beautiful pulpit that was hand-built, designed down to the very detail, the true preacher’s pulpit, the ultimate preacher’s pulpit.

We want to make a statement to everyone who walks into this facility what we value. We value the Word of God above all things. We believe in the powerful preaching of God’s Word, and you can’t walk in here without being instantly drawn to this piece of ecclesiastical furniture. We are so grateful to the Lord in providing this pulpit to our church. We want to dedicate this pulpit to God this morning. We want to do that by a number of different means. I was speaking with Dr. Steve Lawson last night, and I may or may not have texted him a picture of this pulpit, and he may or may not have committed the sin of covetousness. I’m not sure, but in the course of that conversation, I asked him if he would be so kind as to send a short message of encouragement to our church regarding this very special day in which we dedicate this pulpit to the Lord, and he was more than willing to do that. So, allow me to read to you his message to Christ Reformed Community Church this morning. He says, and I quote:

I send my greetings on this momentous Sunday in which a new pulpit is being installed in your church. A pulpit says so much about what a church values. It is far more than a mere piece of furniture. It makes a visible statement to everyone who enters the house of worship. A strong pulpit testifies that this church places a high premium on the preaching of the Word of God. A strong pulpit is a strong reminder that this church is strongly anchored to the Bible. I rejoice with you that on this Sunday, November 29, 2020, your church inaugurates this centerpiece in the worship service. This sturdy pulpit upholds the preacher and most importantly, it upholds the inspired, inerrant, infallible Word of the living God. May it always bear up a Bible-preaching pastor with a Bible open before him. Signed, Steven J. Lawson.

That is a very special message to our church. I am so grateful for Dr. Lawson and his personal mentoring of me. He was my professor for preaching at The Master’s Seminary and has taught me so much, and I’m very grateful for his words. I’m grateful for the message behind those words, which emphasizes not the man behind the pulpit and not even the pulpit but the preaching of the Word of God; the thing that we value above all else, the inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of the living God. I had shared with you over the last several weeks how this whole project came together. It was several months ago I sat down, I think it was, at my dining room table in the month of June, and I sketched out what I thought in concept form would be the ultimate preacher’s pulpit. I then went back and sketched out another drawing, and by the way you can see sort of the progress of this pulpit in picture form in a binder that’s in the back there on the table. You can thumb through that. And I had found in the area a cabinetmaker who said he was willing to build me this pulpit, and I had met with him several times and had several conversations with him.

And so, we had made the plans to build this pulpit, and he called me one day out of the blue and he said, “Look, I just think that I can do this for you,” and I said, “Well, why can’t you? We’ve planned this. We’ve had this in the works for a long time.” And he said, “I just don’t think that I’m capable of doing what you require me to do in building this pulpit.” And so, I was back to square one, but I had posted a picture of one of these sketches on Facebook, and my friend Paul Krueger, who is here with us this morning—he’s there in the back. Paul, can you just sort of wave your hand up? He doesn’t want to be put on the spot this morning, so we won’t put him too much on the spot, but I at least want to acknowledge him this morning. He said on Facebook that he would be more than willing to build me a pulpit if I didn’t have anyone. So, I got on the phone and called him. I said, “Look, I had someone, and I lost him. I need someone else to build this for me.” The only issue was that Paul is a resident of the great state of Texas, so it wasn’t within close vicinity.

So, over a period of several weeks, several phone conversations, me and Paul spoke about this pulpit, and I just shared my heart with him, what I wanted in its design, what I wanted it to convey, and Paul added so much more to this design. He made it way better than I could have ever made it. He spent many hours of research, many hours of labor, and I’m so grateful to the Lord for Paul and for his friendship and all the effort he put into this pulpit to make it come to fruition. I have there in the bulletin just a little letter that I have written to the church, and I want to read this to you because this comes from my heart, and I want you to understand how significant this day is in the history of this church and also have some idea regarding all the work that went behind this. It says this:

Dearly beloved, this beautiful pulpit you see today was built by Paul Krueger in Temple, Texas. After many laborious hours of conversations, research, and careful craftsmanship, it was driven over one thousand miles to St. Johns County, Florida, on Thanksgiving Day and installed as the first pulpit of Christ Reformed Community Church. This was only fitting since Mr. Krueger is a native of New England, growing up three hundred yards from Plymouth Rock in Plymouth, Massachusetts. He’s an artifact, folks. Built from Red oak wood and coated with Provincial stain,

it’s specific dimensions and detailed design were a collaborative effort providing the ultimate preacher’s pulpit tailored for the expositor of God’s Word. This is a one-of-a-kind work of craftsmanship rarely seen anywhere in the world today. In contrast to the flimsy music stands, feminine glass podiums, and silly coffee tables of our own church era, this pulpit is emblematic of the very metaphor Scripture uses to describe the church: “the pillar and support of the truth.” Every aspect of this pulpit’s construction is intended to elevate the importance of the Word of God. Its design is to make the preacher look small and weak while also allowing God’s Word to appear what it is; strong and powerful.

The original sketches were a combination of historical and practical components. For example, the large working space inside the pulpit was modeled after John MacArthur’s pulpit at Grace Community Church in Los Angeles, California. The gothic crosses at the bottom were taken from R.C. Sproul’s pulpit at Saint Andrew’s Chapel in Orlando, Florida. Other aspects were adopted from history, including elements of John Calvin’s pulpit in Geneva as well as various Puritan pulpits from New England where Paul grew up. From top to bottom, this pulpit is indelibly marked with scriptural connotations. The gothic crosses at the bottom symbolize what Christians most cherish, our crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ. The pillars represent the sturdy truth of sacred Scripture. The rope at the top signifies Christ as the anchor of our souls, pointing beyond this life to eternity; and the central inlay reminds one of Malachi 4:2 and the sun of righteousness who rises with healing in His wings, reminding us that all biblical preaching is Christ-centered or Son-centered.

This pulpit will serve as a legacy piece. Indeed, the central and only piece of ecclesiastical furniture for Christ Reformed for many, many years to come. I am grateful for God’s providential goodness and blessing upon our church and pray that His Word will be proclaimed faithfully from this pulpit for as long as this church exists on earth. I humbly dedicate this pulpit therefore to the glory of God alone, and I pray that He will use the Spirit-filled work of preaching conducted behind this sacred desk in this generation as well as the generations to follow. *Soli Deo gloria.* Forever yours in Christ, Pastor Andrew.

That is our prayer this morning, isn’t it, that the Lord would use the work that is done behind this pulpit. So, as we dedicate this pulpit, I want you to take your Bibles and turn with me to Nehemiah chapter 8, Nehemiah chapter 8. In thinking of a text that would be appropriate to read, my heart and my mind automatically went to Nehemiah chapter 8, and we’re going to do part of what they did in the Old Testament. I’m not going to preach to you all day, but we are going to stand in honor of the reading of God’s Word. Allow me to read Nehemiah chapter 8 and just the first 8 verses. This is God’s Word, and it says:

*And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spoke unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded to Israel. And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month. And he read from it facing the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law. And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose; and beside him stood Mattithiah, and Shema, and Anaiiah, and Urijah, and Hilkiyah, and Maaseiah, on his right hand; and on his left hand, Pedaiah, and Mishael, and Malchiah, and Hashum, and Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam. And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was*

*above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up: And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground. Also Jeshua, and Bani, and Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, caused the people to understand the law: and the people stood in their place. So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.*

That is exactly what we do when we preach the Word of God. We cause the people through the power of the Spirit of God to understand what God has said, *“Thus saith the Lord.”* And so, we dedicate this pulpit to the glory of God as a place that an open Bible will always be laid upon for the preaching of the Word of God because God has especially sanctified preaching as the primary means of our spiritual growth and sanctification. Please be seated as we bow for prayer.

Father, we are so grateful for this very special day. We give You the glory. We give You the honor. We’re grateful for Your providence in bringing this church together. We’re grateful for those who have assembled here. Most of all, we’re grateful for Christ. We’re grateful for the authority of Your Word, the inerrancy of Your Word, the infallibility of Your Word, the perspicuity of Your Word. We are grateful that You have spoken to us, that we hear Your voice by the power of the Holy Spirit, that we can understand truth, that we can know Christ. And so, Lord, we dedicate this pulpit to Your glory. We pray for every preacher who will ever preach behind this pulpit that they will preach the unadulterated Word of God. We pray that expository preaching will mark this pulpit. We pray that Spirit-filled preaching will mark this pulpit. We pray that preaching full of integrity, full of boldness, full of courage would resound in the very prow of this pulpit.

Lord, we ask that You would bless this church and the preaching of the Word in this church. We pray that You would use this pulpit as an instrument of blessing, Lord, that You might save Your people, that You might sanctify Your people, Lord; that it would be a symbol of truth, a symbol of sturdiness in weak world, a symbol of certainty in an uncertain world; that when we come to this place, we will know that we are coming to meet with God and that we are coming to hear from Your voice; that we never diminish the importance of Your Word and the importance of preaching. And may this piece of furniture be a lasting reminder to our church and to anyone who comes here that we will stand upon the foundation of truth. Help us to be the church, which is the pillar and support of truth. We pray for Your glory and by Your grace all of these things in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Well, let’s take our Bibles this morning and be turning to 2 Timothy chapter 2, 2 Timothy chapter 2. We’re going to take a step out of our study in 1 Peter. We’re just doing a short little study in 1 Peter, but we want to step out of it this morning as we dedicate this pulpit to the glory of God, and we want to look at 2 Timothy 2, 2 Timothy 2. It was Martyn Lloyd-Jones who said, and I quote: *“The most urgent need in the Christian church today is true preaching,”* and he went on to say that, *“The greatest need in the church is also the greatest need in the world at large.”* Second

Timothy chapter 2 helps us see the significance of preaching. I want to read beginning in verse 14, the Word of God. Please hear the Word of God. Paul writes under inspiration of the Holy Spirit:

*Remind them of these things, and charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some. But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: “The Lord knows those who are his,” and, “Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.”*

*Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.*

*So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.*

This is the Word of the living God. Let us ask for His help as we look at this text together.

Our Father, as we come into Your presence to hear the preaching of Your Word, Father, we ask that Your grace and Your Spirit might be upon us. We pray, Lord, that You might enable us to understand, cause us to understand this text, cause us to see the significance of Your Word, the power of Your Word, and the importance of true, biblical preaching. Help us, Father, not to take for granted the preaching of Your Word, especially in a day and age in which our religious liberties are being encroached upon. Give us boldness. Give us courage. Give us encouragement, as we are reminded this morning anew of the power of Your Word and the power of the preaching of Your Word when it is empowered by Your blessed Holy Spirit. We pray and ask these things in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

Well, Paul wrote these words in 2 Timothy to young Timothy, who he had sent to Ephesus to be the pastor. Timothy, as you well know, was Paul's preaching protégé. It was his son in the faith. In fact, in chapter 2 in verse 1, Paul calls him “my child” or “my son.” Timothy was his son in the faith, and the great apostle Paul is writing this letter because he's coming to the end of his life, and he wants to pass to young Timothy what we could call the non-apostolic mantle of ministry. Paul was writing under desperate circumstances. He had been arrested and imprisoned

and released and re-arrested probably under Nero’s persecution. In his first imprisonment, he was basically under house arrest. He had basically accessibility to any visitor that wanted to come. He had a very fruitful ministry. Even some of the members of Caesar’s household was converted to the gospel, but not in this second imprisonment. In this second imprisonment, as Paul writes from a cold jail cell, he knows that he probably will not be released. He speaks in chapter 2 about his chains. He speaks in chapter 4 about needing a blanket to cover his cold feet, arms, and hands. He speaks in chapter 4 about the fact that he is essentially already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of his departure had come.

The great apostle Paul knew that his time on earth was short, and as the leader of the church, he began setting his affairs straight in the household of God for the sake of future generations of Christians, and Timothy was the general that he would give the sword of the Word to, to march forth for the church. This was true not only because Paul loved Timothy, but it was also true because basically everyone else had deserted the apostle Paul. Paul speaks in this letter about Demas who had deserted him out of a love for this world. He speaks about those in Asia. “All in Asia,” Paul says, “have deserted me.” And so, Paul calls upon Timothy to try his best to visit him one more time because he knows this will be the last time he sees Timothy to his face. He says to him in chapter 4 and verse 9, “*Do your best to come to me soon.*” He says again in chapter 4:21, “*Do your best to come before winter.*” Paul didn’t even think he was going to make it through winter, and we don’t know if Timothy ever made it to Rome to visit the apostle Paul, but we know that Paul likely did not believe Timothy would make it because when we come into chapter 2, Paul gives some marching orders to Timothy, his general. Notice it with me in verse 1. He says, “*My son, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus,*” verse 2, “*and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.*”

As Paul passes the mantle of non-apostolic ministry on to Timothy, he doesn’t want it just to end with Timothy. He wants Timothy to do what Paul has done and pass the non-apostolic mantle of ministry down to other men, who will also preach the unadulterated Word of God and gospel of Jesus Christ. He says, “I want you to entrust this to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.” Now, it’s clear that this would include elders in the church, what we would call “ruling elders” or “lay elders.” But Paul specifically has in mind not just any sort of elder but preaching elders, pastor-teachers, those he would refer to that are paid to preach, those who are devoted to the gospel, those who have devoted their lives to preaching the Word of Truth, those who spend their lives crafting and delivering sermons. In fact, he’s calling Timothy to a generational cycle of faithfulness. From Paul to Timothy to faithful men to others—that’s at least four generations of this mantel of ministry being passed down. John MacArthur says this, and I quote: “That process of spiritual reproduction, which began in the early church is to continue until the Lord returns.” In other words, there is always to be another man to pick up the sword of the Word and to preach it when one man falls and dies and goes to be with the Lord in heaven. There must always be a successive line of preacher soldiers who are standing in line, ready to take the sword, ready to wield the sword of the Spirit for the people of God to protect the church, defend the church, and promote the truth of the gospel.

Paul knows he’s going to die, and he knows that God has ordained preaching and God has sanctified preachers to be His generals, to go at war with Satan. In fact, he says there in verse 1: *“Be strong in the grace that is in Jesus Christ,”* and then he gives several metaphors. He refers to preachers in verse 4 as soldiers. He refers to preachers in verse 5 as athletes. He refers to preachers in verse 6 as hardworking farmers. They are soldier preachers. They are athlete preachers. They are farmer preachers. As he passes the mantle of ministry down, it’s as if he is giving Timothy the sword of the Lord as a weapon to the soldier. He’s giving a baton to Timothy the athlete or the runner. He’s giving a seed-scatterer to scatter the gospel to Timothy, the farmer; Timothy, the preacher. And encompassing this whole letter, the breadth and the depth of 2 Timothy is basically Paul’s last will and testament to the church. It’s instructions to all Christians to be soldiers and athletes and farmers, but they are to be led by preachers; men of God called by God, set apart by the Holy Spirit, set apart by the church, hands laid upon by the elders, put in a pulpit and told to preach the Word of God.

Timothy had given his life to the preaching of the Word of God, and Paul is telling him not to stop that. Paul basically calls Timothy to several tasks in this letter. First of all, Paul calls Timothy not to waste his gift of preaching. Notice back in chapter 1 in verse 6, Paul says, *“For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, for God gave us,”* that is, all preachers, *“a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.”* Paul tells Timothy, *“Don’t waste your gift of preaching. As the mantle of ministry comes down, don’t waste it. Fan it into flame.”* He also calls Timothy not only to not waste the gift of preaching, but he also calls him to know and preach sound doctrine. Chapter 1, verse 13, he says: *“Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.”* Know sound theology. Declare that sound theology. Don’t be ashamed of it. Protect it. You’ve been entrusted with the most valuable thing in the world. Be a man. Be a preacher and speak forth the truth.

Third, Paul calls Timothy not only to not waste his gift of preaching and to know and preach sound doctrine, but third, to avoid unsound doctrine. In verse 14, he says, *“guard the good deposit entrusted to you,”* and then in chapter 2 in verse 14 he says, *“Remind them of these things, and charge them before God,”* that is, those that he entrusts this ministry of preaching to, *“not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers.”* So, Paul is saying, *“Don’t just preach the truth, but make sure you avoid the babble of false teachers. Avoid error and remind other preachers that they are to be careful to avoid error or unsound doctrine.”*

Number four, Paul calls Timothy to Christ-centered preaching. Chapter 3 in verse 14, Paul says, *“But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture,”* Paul says, *“is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”*

Paul tells Timothy that these Old Testament sacred writings, all of Scripture has been breathed out by God. Make sure you preach all of it because all of it has Christ in it. Those Old Testament Scriptures from childhood made you wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Preach the full counsel of God’s Word. Always make your sermons centered upon the salvation of Jesus Christ.

So, Paul calls Timothy to not waste the gift of preaching. He calls him to know and preach sound doctrine. He calls him to avoid unsound doctrine. He calls him to have Christ-centered preaching, and he also calls him to preach without compromise and hesitation. Chapter 4 in verse 1: *“I charge you,”* here’s the climax, *“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: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.”* So, 2 Timothy is all about preaching, and it’s all about preachers. It is a manual of preachers and preaching, and it reveals what the pulpit of every single church is to represent. All young preachers have mentors. Timothy was Paul’s son in the faith, but all preachers have mentors. As I mentioned earlier, Dr. Steve Lawson is my mentor, my preaching mentor, but my first preaching mentor was a man by the name of Dr. Robert Delnay. He was a professor at my college, and although I had other elders in my local church who helped me and mentored me in many ways, it was Dr. Delnay that helped me with the task of preaching, and he assigned his own textbook that he had written in class, entitled *Fire in Your Pulpit*. It was a great book. I devoured this book. I memorized this book. I applied this book, and for whatever reason, Dr. Delnay took a special interest in me. I don’t know why. I certainly was not the smartest in the class. I wasn’t the most engaging in class, but when Dr. Delnay taught about preaching, I sat up and I listened because I knew he was dealing with the most serious and important topic in the world, and he himself was a very serious man.

He was about five foot six and he had a club foot. He had been married for about fifty years at the time that I knew him, and he had no children, and so he loved to take preacher boys under his wing. And I remember sitting in his office, his tiny office on campus, as he would review my sermons, and I would ask question after question: “Dr. Delnay, what about this? Dr. Delnay, what about that? Dr. Delnay, Dr. Delnay...” Always kind, always patient, always honest. This godly man answered my questions, and I was like a sponge soaking up all I could, loading my preaching gun with bullets ready to fire away for anyone that would hear me preach. And I remember one Sunday evening a little Plymouth Brethren church inviting me to preach, and I went to this church and all the elders of this church were against preachers that were paid. They thought it was sinful, and there was one particular elder there that used to be a minister in a Baptist church, and he sat on the front row with a critique sheet, critiquing my sermon. He was actually very gracious and kind, but he had one criticism. He said that I put my hands in my pockets too many times. Well, I was just a young teenager, and so this sort of bothered me, so I went to Dr. Delnay and I said, “Is it permissible for a preacher to put his hands in his pocket?” Dr. Delnay looked off in the distance, and he said, “Is that the only thing that he said? Is that the only criticism?” I said, “Yes sir, that was the only criticism he had,” at which point he grinned. He put his hands in his pockets, jingled some coins, and said, “Don’t listen to him. Just keep

preaching the truth.” He understood exactly what was important behind the pulpit. It is not the gestures. It is the Word of God. It is the truth of the Word of God that is to be declared and upheld above all things. Let the man behind the pulpit be lost, and may we hear the voice of God, which is the only voice of truth.

I also remember Dr. Delnay being against—it’s hard for me to even say it—he was against alliteration. And from the time I graduated, I’ve had in my office a framed picture of me and Dr. Delnay, and every time I’m preparing my sermons each week, I look up at that picture, and I can just hear him saying, “Smith, resist the urge to alliterate,” and I’ve never been able to overcome that. However, Dr. Delnay passed away this year at the age of ninety-three. He was still faithfully preaching the Word of God. So, in honor of him, to prove to him and to myself that I can preach a sermon without alliteration, I have resisted the temptation to alliterate my points this morning, and in fact, I just want to look at one verse. I’ve given you the context of 2 Timothy, but I want us to look at 2 Timothy 2:15, “*Do your best*,” Paul says, “*to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling*,” or dividing, “*the word of truth*.” This one verse encapsulates everything that stands behind true biblical preaching, what we call expositional preaching. And so, as we dedicate the pulpit on this momentous day, I want us to simply think about what the pulpit represents. Why have this big pulpit? Why make a big deal about this? Second Timothy 2:15 gives to us four truths that the pulpit of any church represents.

It represents, number one, the preacher of truth; secondly, the God of truth; third, the people of truth; and fourth, and most importantly, the Word of Truth. Number one, the pulpit represents the preacher of truth who labors relentlessly, the preacher of truth who labors relentlessly. Notice the beginning of verse 15. Paul tells Timothy, his preaching protégé, “*Do your best to present yourself to God [as one] approved...rightly dividing the word of truth*.” It’s that phrase “*Do your best*.” This is the work of the preacher that’s being described in verse 15, but technically, the work of the preacher is given later in the verse, which is described as “*rightly handling the word of truth*.” That is the work of the preacher, but here at the beginning, “*Do your best*” describes not the work of the preacher but the work habit of the preacher. It describes his zeal to know the truth. “*Do your best*.” The NASB translates it: “*Be diligent*.” *Spoudazōn* is the Greek word. It describes an ardent desire to accomplish a particular objective until its completion, an eagerness to do something; and that something for the preacher, what he is to do his best at is preaching with the skills God has given him. He is to be diligent.

The preacher, therefore, who works diligently, works persistently. He works aggressively. He works scrupulously, zealously, perseveringly. It’s true that his overall ministry is to be marked by hard work and hard labor, but Paul has specifically in mind the task of preaching. That’s the context of 2 Timothy; that is, the mantle of ministry that is being passed down. It’s the gift of preaching. It’s the proclamation of God’s Word. So, preaching is the preacher’s or the pastor’s singularly most important objective in all of ministry no matter how impractical and unpopular it might be. What does Paul say in chapter 4? He says, “*Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season*.” I think that means when it’s popular and when it’s not popular, when it’s in vogue

and when it’s not in vogue, when feminine glass pulpits are the craze and wooden pulpits, you can’t even find someone to make. Paul says it doesn’t matter; *“Preach the word...in season and out of season.”* Dr. John MacArthur puts it this way. He says, and I quote: *“Fruitful expository preaching demands great effort.”* He says, *“Since nothing is as important as the word, no energy expended by anyone in any other field should ever equal the effort of any expositor who rightly divides the Word.”* An expositor who seeks to rightly divide the Word will work harder than anybody. Now, the Bible says that the preacher is to do his best. *“Do your best.”* How does a preacher do his best? Hold me accountable.

Paul is saying the preacher is to do his best when he’s preaching. He is to be marked, first of all, by excellence in examination of the Word, excellence in examination of the Word. Turn back to 1 Timothy 4:16. Paul tells Timothy, *“Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.”* Skip back to verse 13: *“Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you.”* Devote yourself. Do not neglect. *“Practice these things.”* Keep a close watch on your teaching. That’s why the King James translates this, *“Study to shew thyself approved.”* It’s talking about, Paul is, when he says, *“Do your best,”* he’s talking about in the study. Get the text right. Examine the Word. The preacher who does his best is marked by excellence in examination of the Word. He takes a magnifying glass, and he sees the depth of the riches of God’s truth so he can declare it to God’s people.

Secondly, if he is to do his best, he’s not only marked by excellence in examination of the Word but intelligence in interpretation of the Word. A preacher is to be a whole-Bible preacher because all of the Bible is all of God’s truth. That’s why Paul said all Scripture is inspired by God in 2 Timothy 3. It’s all inspired by God. Second Timothy 3:16, it’s all inspired by God. So, the preacher must not merely be knowledgeable about the full counsel of God’s Word; he must preach the full counsel of God’s Word. He must have an intelligence that goes beyond the surface and goes beyond the New Testament to dip into the Old Testament and know all of the glory of all of God’s doctrine and truth. Study the sermons of those in the Bible. Study the sermon of Stephen in Acts, how many times he quotes the Old Testament. He quotes Genesis 12:1, Genesis 12:7, Genesis 17:18, Genesis 15:13, Exodus 3:12, Exodus 1:8, Exodus 2:14–15, Exodus 3:1–10, Exodus 3:32, Deuteronomy 18:15, Deuteronomy 18:18, Amos 5:25–27, Isaiah 66:1–2. The apostle Paul was also an example of someone who preached the full counsel of God’s Word. You remember back in Acts chapter 20—turn back there with me, Acts chapter 20. Paul addresses the Ephesian elders. What does he say in verse 27? He says, *“For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.”* And we know that is true because for three years he preached in Ephesus, at least two of those years were in the school of Tyrannus. Acts 19:10 says that all of Asia heard the Word of God because Paul was laboring at that, and we know that this church in Ephesus was one of Paul’s strongest. It’s commended in Revelation because its congregants tested those who called themselves apostles and were not. The only way you can do that is if you know doctrine, and the only way a congregation knows doctrine is if the preacher is intelligent enough to interpret the text so that the people can fill their heads with the truth of God’s Word.

The church does not need more preachers. The church needs more intelligent preachers; those who know the truth because they labor relentlessly to know the truth. They don't have to be the smartest. They just have to immerse themselves in Scripture. A preacher of truth is to do his best, and when he does, he's marked by excellence in examination of the Word; intelligence and interpretation of the Word; third, competence in explanation of the Word. Ezra the scribe priest serves as our example, remember from Nehemiah 8? We read it earlier. *“Ezra [the scribe] stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they made for [that] purpose. [He] opened the book in the sight of all the people.”* He called other men beside him, the Levites, and what does the Bible say? It says they *“caused [the people] to understand the reading.”* So, they read in the book of the law of God. They gave a distinct meaning. They gave the sense and caused the people to understand the reading. They were competent in explaining it.

The Puritans used to say that they were for simple preaching. They didn't mean by that that it was superficial and shallow. They meant that when the guy got in the pulpit, you actually understood what he was saying because he stuck to the Word of God. He preached it competently. He was able to explain it. It doesn't mean that the preacher won't sometimes speak over peoples' heads, but he's aiming at hearts because he wants he who has ears to hear, to hear, so that their life is impacted with truth. Paul's preaching was not merely deep, but it was also wide. Acts 19:10 says that all in Asia heard him. They were willing to hear him because he had competence in explaining the Word. He wasn't giving theological lectures. He preached in a simple enough way that even a child could understand the truth. And if a preacher is to do his best, the Bible says he will be marked by excellence in examination of the Word; intelligence in interpretation of the Word; competence in explanation of the Word; but number four, insistence in application of the Word. So, the Word of God is warm, and a preacher who gives his best will result in a fire in the souls of the listeners. The preacher must press home the importance of God's Word being applied to the heart; otherwise, he's just involving himself in cold orthodoxy, and you will have a church that knows theology and doesn't know Christ. Insistence, insistence in the application of the Word.

Again, Paul is an example of this. Paul preached the full counsel of God's Word, but he wasn't directing it just to head, just for knowledge to know all of this knowledge, but he was stoking a fire within their hearts. Back again in Acts chapter 20, that's a very tender passage where Paul says in verse 31, *“Be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”* Paul says, “I warned you. I admonished you. I applied the Word in such a way that I didn't just give doctrine and theology. I said, ‘Here is the standard. Here is the warning. If you don't follow it, here are the consequences.’” Paul knew that the Spirit of God was behind biblical preaching and that when done in the Spirit of God, lives would be saved, souls would be sanctified. So, he preached that way.

Now, it's only preachers who do their best who are considered worthy of double honor. I told you those elders who were in disagreement with preachers being paid, they held an unbiblical position because Paul says in 1 Timothy 5, “*Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor,*” that is, double pay, “*especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.*” And then Paul quotes the Old Testament: “*For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,’ and, ‘The laborer deserves his wages.’*” Paul is not saying that the preacher should be wealthy with jets and a mansion. What he's saying is, “Give him what he needs to survive because he needs to dedicate his life to the preaching of the Word of God because your soul depends upon it. And if he's worried about the things of this world, he can't devote the amount of labor and relentless effort that is required to be what God has called him to be.”

So, what does a pulpit represent? First of all, it represents the preacher of truth who labors relentlessly, but now the question becomes: Why does he labor so hard? Well, because the pulpit also represents the God of truth who examines thoroughly. Not only the preacher of truth who labors relentlessly but the God of truth who examines thoroughly. Notice verse 15 again, “*Do your best,*” Paul says. Why? “*To present yourself to God as one approved.*” You might think up to this point that preaching is all about the preacher, but Paul says not really. It's really about God. God is the standard. The preacher preaches so that he's able to present himself to God as one who is approved. What is Paul saying? Well, he's saying simply this; the preacher's motivation is not or should not be how many people listen to him, what his approval rating is, how many Likes on SermonAudio. To put it to you simply, the preacher does not preach ultimately horizontally but vertically. He preaches to an audience of one. He preaches as if God is the only one who matters because—guess what?—God is the only one who matters. He is presenting his work to God to be inspected. In fact, that is the exact imagery that is being shown here. The Greek word *presented* is *paristēmi*. It literally means “to stand alongside of.” And in the context, it is the picture of the courtroom where the preacher stands alongside of God with his sermon manuscript in his hand for God to inspect in detail. That's the image.

To borrow an Old Testament analogy, I like to think of the preacher's work of a sermon like a sacrifice he presents before God like a priest in the Old Testament. This is judicial language. In Acts 27, *paristēmi*, “come alongside, present” is used to speak of Paul standing before Caesar, who would render the final verdict. In Romans 14:10, *paristēmi*, “present,” literally “stand alongside of” describes the passing of judgment on a brother, which is always imperfect, but in that passage, Paul says there will come another judgment where we will all *paristēmi*, “stand before the judgment seat of God.” Someday, we will all stand alongside of God, and He will examine us. Paul is using that word, and he's saying what's true of all Christians, that they will stand before God to be examined, is double true of the preacher. He will not only be examined by God as a person, but his preaching will be examined. He is to do his best because either God will approve his preaching or not approve his preaching. It matters not if your seal of approval is on it or not. It's God's seal of approval that matters, and so the pulpit is a symbol of one's hard work and devotion to God; the preacher as a living sacrifice. He must know the truth and preach the

truth. His most important job is preaching. His tool is the Word of God. His shop is the study, and his boss is God. That’s who holds him accountable.

*“Do your best,”* Paul says, *“to present yourself to God as one approved.”* The Greek word *approved* is *dókimos*. It carries with it the idea of being tried and passing the test. So, God is the Judge. A preacher who does his best will pass the test. He will come out tried and true because God is the standard. God is the Judge. Let me be clear; the people are not the judge. The culture is not the judge. The internet is not the judge. The world is not the judge. The TV is not the judge. God is the Judge, and you will stand before God, and I will stand before God, and He will examine us. He will examine you to the degree that you absorb biblical preaching. What do you do with biblical preaching? Do you have ears to hear what the Spirit says? You’ll be held accountable for that. I will be held accountable not only for what I study but how I proclaim it because God examines. God either approves it or He doesn’t approve it. We want His verdict. And by the way, you don’t have to wait until the judgment day to find out if a preacher is approved by God. Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 2:4, *“Just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts.”* Paul says, *“God’s already examined my heart, and He’s approved me.”* You can know whether a preacher is approved by God today in this world by asking this question: How faithful is he to the text? How accurate is he in explaining God’s Word? How faithful is he in exalting God’s truth, not his own opinions, not his ego? Does he give glory to God? You see, it’s a black and white issue. A preacher is either a slave of Christ, or he’s a slave of the culture. He’s either a slave to the winds and the waves and the trends of the world, or he’s a slave to the Word of God. He’s either a slave to the creature, or he’s a slave to the Creator.

So, Paul says in Galatians 1:10, *“Am I striving to please men? If I were still striving to please men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.”* To the degree that a preacher preaches the Word of God and is absorbed in the Word of God is to the degree that you can know whether or not he’s approved by God and whether or not he’s even a servant of Christ. Biblical preaching, never has as its stated or desired goal the applause of man; only the approval of God. At the end of the day, that’s all that matters. It doesn’t matter what man says after the sermon. It matters what God says: *“Well done, thou good and faithful servant.”* God will only spiritually bless a preacher and a church that upholds truth; and conversely, He will always bring curses upon local churches that don’t have preachers of truth. It’s not merely about the preacher. It’s about those in the pew. Turn with me to Revelation just quickly. You have in the book of Revelation, chapters 2 and 3—I know that you’re familiar with it—the message of Christ to the seven churches, and in each one of these messages it is a message delivered to the angel of the church, literally in the Greek, to the *messenger* of the church. Who is the messenger? Well, it’s clear. The messenger is the pastor. He is the one that is the messenger of truth. This is not some angel with wings that guards over each church. The angel or the *messenger*, literally in the Greek, is the preacher. He is the one sent from heaven to give a message.

Now, let’s just look for example at the church in Pergamum. It’s written to the angel of the church, verse 14. Verse 12: *“To the angel of the church in Pergamum,”* but notice this, verse 14,

“I have a few things against you.” What are they? Here it is, “You have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality.” So what you have here is a church who embraces false teachers and false teaching. In other words, the pulpit is in error. It’s not an issue with the preacher. That’s an issue with the people. In verse 15: “Also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.” So, they were embracing false teachers and false teachings. And God holds the church accountable, and He says in verse 16, “Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” What is preaching? Well, preaching is the Spirit speaking into the ears of the congregation, and when preachers tolerate worldliness and error, they will be judged, and a church will be held accountable. Do you know where the church of Pergamum is today? It doesn’t exist. God’s people are to always live *coram Deo*, “before the face of God.” And you will never come before the face of God nearer than when you sit under the preaching of the Word of God, to live under the gaze of God.

An example of a man in the Old Testament who didn’t live this way was Ishmael. You know Ishmael well. He was born to Hagar. This was due to Abraham’s lack of faith that God would provide a son through Sarah, which God later did in Isaac; but you remember the Bible says that divine blessing did not come upon the household of Abraham because of Ishmael but a divine curse. And it’s interesting, we read in Genesis 16 a couple of verses about Ishmael. One verse says that he would dwell in the presence of all his brethren, and then at the end of his life a biographical verse says that he would die in the presence of his brethren. He was a man who lived for his brethren. He was a great warrior, and in fact, he led that Ishmaelite nation. Under the providence of God, God allowed it to be somewhat successful and his followers, those of that nation, those of his family, idolized Ishmael. We could say this; he did not meet the approval of God, but he met the approval of his brethren. He lived for himself. He lived for his brethren. He dwelled in the presence of his brethren. He died in the presence of his brethren, but he did not live *coram Deo*. He did not live before the face of God; and therefore, he did not meet the approval of God. There was a curse upon Abraham’s household because Ishmael did not live *coram Deo*. And by way of simply analogy, there is a curse that is brought upon the household of God when God’s people do not live *coram Deo* before God’s presence.

There is a way to live before God’s presence. First Timothy 3:15, conduct yourself the right way, Paul says, “in the household of God, which is...the pillar and support of the truth.” You are most in God’s presence when you are in the presence of truth. You are most out of God’s presence when you don’t have truth before you. And so, we must live with preachers of truth. We must demand preachers of truth. Calvin says in his commentary: “The reason why the Church is called the “pillar of truth” is, that she defends and spreads it by her agency. God does not himself come down from heaven to us, nor does He daily send angels to make known His truth; but He employs pastors, whom He has appointed for that purpose.” And the church maintains truth because, by preaching the truth and proclaiming the truth, the church keeps herself pure and free from corruption.

And so, the pulpit represents the God of truth, who examines thoroughly every Christian, every preacher, every church; and that takes us to the third point. We’re talking about what does a pulpit represent? Number one, it represents the preacher of truth who labors relentlessly (he does his best); the God of truth who examines thoroughly. God will judge every preacher in every church and every Christian, but not only the preacher of truth who labors relentlessly and the God of truth who examines thoroughly but—I’ve already touched upon it—the people of truth who need protected vigorously. Notice verse 15, *“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved,”* and it’s that next phrase from which I attach my third point. He calls Timothy and all preachers, workers who have no need to be ashamed, if they rightly divide the word of truth. So, here’s the idea. A shamed preacher—and I’ve already touched upon it—equals a shamed congregation. Now, what kind of shame is he talking about? Is he talking about a lack of integrity? Many preachers fall into immorality and shame themselves and shame the church. I don’t think that’s what Paul is speaking about. In the context, he’s talking about shame that is associated with false teaching because the whole context is about false teachers. Paul calls preachers “workers” here in verse 15 because preachers are to work hard to protect the flock of God so as not to shame them into false teaching. That’s the idea. Again, I used Paul as an example.

In Acts chapter 20, when he speaks to those Ephesian elders, Paul made a prediction. He said, *“Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.”* He says, *“I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.”* So, when Paul says, *“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed,”* what he’s saying is, “Make sure your preaching is doctrinally sound because if it’s not, you shame not only yourself but your congregation by your lack of hard work.” They are shamed into false teaching, false teaching. First John 2:28, here’s a warning: *“And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming.”* What is the apostle John writing about? He’s giving a warning concerning antichrists. Don’t be ashamed when Christ returns because you followed the path of error. Make sure you sit under sound preaching because false doctrine only leads to one thing, and that is shame. What does Paul say in Philippians? He says, *“For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame.”* He’s talking about false teachers, those who have shamed themselves and shamed their followers through believing the wrong things and being deceived.

Jude also speaks about false teachers. He describes them as *“hidden reefs.”* He describes them as *“shepherds feeding themselves; waterless clouds swept along by winds; fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted; wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars for whom the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever.”* So, the whole context is comparing approved preachers with the shamed preachers, and even in 2 Timothy 17, Paul mentions two by name. Can you believe that? He says, *“Their talk will spread like*

*gangrene*,” that is, the irreverent babblers of verse 16, false teachers. It “*will spread like gangrene. Among [whom] are Hymenaeus and Philetus.*” False teachers, you know them by name. Avoid them. Their teaching is like gangrene, and what does it do? Back up in verse 14, “*Remind them,*” that is, these other teachers that will be entrusted, faithful men who will teach others also, verse 2, “*Remind them of these things, and charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only,*” what? “*ruins the hearers.*”

It’s always what false teaching does. It ruins the hearers. It’s like gangrene. It’s like a disease, and when you get it, it’s hard to get rid of it. It destroys people. It ruins people. That’s why I said we don’t need more preachers today; we need more sound preachers. We need more biblical preachers, those who work hard to protect the flock, to refute all doctrinal error so as not to shame themselves and shame the church and bring God’s judgment upon the church. The preacher will be most ashamed when he falls asleep on guard duty and doesn’t protect the sheep, and the people are then placed in a dangerous environment from which they won’t be able to escape. There is a difference between *sola Scriptura* and *solo Scriptura*. There’s a difference. *Solo Scriptura* says, “I don’t need any teachers. I don’t need any preachers. Just give me my Bible. I just need the Spirit of God.” That’s usually how it’s presented. The Reformers believed in *sola Scriptura*, which says the Bible alone is our final authority, and they believed that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit was a reality for every Christian and that, yes, a true Christian could understand the Word of God on their own because popes and councils often err, and they did err in the Middle Ages. They got most of the things wrong. That’s they there needed to be a Reformation.

But Luther did not believe, nor any of the other Reformers that preachers were not necessary. In fact, Luther said: “The Holy Spirit is no skeptic.” That is to say, the Bible is not a subjective book that you can never come to grips with. It’s not a book of skepticism. It’s an objective book. It’s a noble book. But Luther also said that “The pulpit is the throne of the Word of God.” That’s where the King speaks. We believe in the perspicuity of Scripture, the clarity of Scripture. The Reformers believed in that. The Reformers quoted the church fathers to support *sola Scriptura*, Scripture alone as our final authority—not a pope, not a council. But they did write creeds and they did write catechisms, and they did write confessions, and guess what? They never, ever diminished the importance of preaching. They elevated the importance of preaching. The Puritans moved the pulpit from the side to the center, as the only piece of ecclesiastical furniture as if to say to the world, “This is where God speaks.” So, you remove the pulpit, you remove the preacher, and you will open the church up to shame. You open the people up to false doctrine.

The preacher is not only a worker, but he is a warrior. His weapon is the Word of God, and his fort is the pulpit, which is the throne of the Word of God. Can a church have small groups? Sure. Can a church have Sunday school? Sure. Should you read your Bible and study your Bible on your own? If you want to grow as a Christian, you better, but the primary means of grace is the preaching of the Word of God. The Second Helvetic Confession says that “The preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God. The preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God.” God

has designed the church to have a pulpit and to have a preacher, and that’s how God’s people chiefly are sanctified.

What in the world does the pulpit represent? Well, it represents the preacher of truth, who labors relentlessly; the God of truth who examines thoroughly; the people of truth who need protected rigorously or vigorously. Number four, the pulpit represents the Word of Truth, which needs expounded correctly. Finally, we come to the most common phrase of this verse. Notice verse 15 again, “*Do your best. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed,*” here it is, “*rightly handling the word of truth,*” or “*rightly dividing,*” we would say, “*the word of truth.*” Now, that expression “the Word of Truth” you well know—and I won’t insult your intelligence—really refers to two things. It refers in general to Scripture. Scripture is the Word of Truth. Ephesians 1:13, the Word of Truth is “*the gospel of your salvation.*” So, it refers to the gospel specifically; the Word of God generally. James 1:18. “*He brought us forth by the word of truth.*” That is the gospel. It’s the gospel specifically, Paul is speaking about, but Jesus says, “*Sanctify them in truth; your word is truth.*” So, it’s also speaking generally about the Bible. Both are true. If you interpret the Bible correctly, you will get the gospel right. The gospel, the true gospel, the right gospel is found in the Bible, but you must interpret the Bible, the Word of Truth correctly before you can interpret the gospel, the Word of Truth correctly.

That was the whole issue in the Reformation. It’s why *sola Scriptura* was the motto. They didn’t understand their Bibles; and therefore, they didn’t understand the gospel. So, the Word of Truth refers to the Bible in general (the Word of Truth); the gospel in particular (the Word of Truth). And Paul says, “Make sure that you rightly handle the Word of Truth, you rightly divide the Word of Truth.” There’s so many debatable and speculative ideas as to what concept this word in the Greek is conveying. The compound Greek word “rightly handling, rightly dividing,” *temnō* is one of the words, which means “to cut” and *orthós* the other word, which literally means “straight.” So, when you put it together, it means literally “to cut straight, to cut straight.” This is a pastoral epistle. Paul’s writing to a preacher. He’s writing to other men and succeeding generations, who are considered faithful, who will be able to teach others also. So, clearly what he is speaking about when he’s talking about “rightly dividing the Word of Truth” he’s speaking about preachers who stand in a pulpit before the public assembly and declare the Word of God. They must handle it rightly. They must expound it correctly. That’s what he’s saying, but what imagery is in mind?

Let me give you some views. Number one, “to cut straight” refers to a craftsman who cuts a straight line. Secondly, a farmer who plows a straight furrow. Some commentators think that because Paul was a tentmaker refers to Paul cutting straight pieces of leather that he would then glue together to make a tent. There are a plethora of other nuanced suggestions as well. By the way, none of which I like or think is the true meaning. I favor the older commentaries. One says, “This is imagery drawn from the temple priests, who divided the sacrificial animals rightly, according to Mosaic precept,” according to the inspired Word of Truth. Sermons are like a sacrifice offered to God. They need to be offered the right way, just like a priest who divided the

sacrifices according to what God’s Word said. There’s only one way to offer them. You couldn’t offer them the way you wanted to offer them. As a priest, you offered them the way God wanted you to offer them. Somewhat compelling, may be true, but I prefer Calvin. Calvin sees the imagery not of a farmer, not of a tentmaker, not of a craftsman but that of a father; the father of a household who divides the food rightly, allocating a fitting portion to each member of his household. He says this, and I quote: “This is a beautiful metaphor, and one that skillfully expresses the chief design of teaching. Since we ought to be satisfied with the word of God alone, what purpose is served by having sermons every day, or even the office of pastors?”

So, Calvin is saying, “If we have the Word of God, why do we need teachers in the church? Why do we need preachers?” Calvin says, “Paul assigns to teachers the duty of dividing or cutting, as if a father, in giving food to his children, were dividing the bread, by cutting it into small pieces.” I think that’s what Paul has in mind. We are to long for the pure milk of the Word so that we might grow with respect to our salvation. Hebrews 5 speaks about the Word of God as meat. Jesus refers to the Word of God as bread. This is the task of the preacher. It entails him dividing the text, taking the text apart into bite-sized pieces and then putting a meal together for the people of God. He’s not the chef, as John MacArthur says; he’s just the waiter. He prepares the meal for the children of the household of God. This is, by the way, why expository preaching is the only biblical form of preaching because in order to expound the Word correctly, the preacher must in his study, take the text apart, divide it up, put it back together, come into the pulpit, divide it up again, put it back together, feeding the people of God, rightly dividing the Word of Truth.

He has a job to do, Ephesians 4. It’s to equip the saints. It’s to feed them. It’s to serve them, and he can’t afford to fall asleep behind the wheel of the sacred desk. So, you need to pray for biblical preachers. Paul is not calling the pastor to be a professional apologist. He’s calling him to be an expositor who rightly divides the Word of Truth. Are there false teachers? Sure, there are false teachers. There were false teachers here. Paul is writing about the false teachers, but he doesn’t tell Timothy, “Go, be an apologist.” He says, “Be an expositor. Divide the Word, week after week, month after month, year after year.” Why? Let me put it to you this way; because the steady diet of truth preached week in and week out builds a solid foundation that won’t crack from the pressure of false teaching. You don’t need to know every detail about the cults. You just need to know the truth of God’s Word. That’ll protect you. You need to sit under preaching that divides God’s Word apart and feeds it to you for the good of your own soul. Then you will grow with respect to your salvation.

So, why a pulpit? Why a pulpit? The pulpit represents a lot: the preacher of truth who labors relentlessly; the God of truth who examines thoroughly; the people of truth who need protected vigorously; the Word of Truth, which needs expounded correctly. Steve Lawson says, and I quote: “To step into the pulpit is to enter onto holy ground. To stand behind an open Bible demands no trifling with sacred things. To be a spokesman for God requires utmost concern and care in handling and proclaiming the Word of God.” Several years ago, I came across a piece that was written by a layperson, and this layperson desired nothing more than to have an expositor as

a preacher, and this is what this parishioner said every parishioner should do to his pastor. Are you ready for this? Here’s what they said:

Fling him into his office and tear the “office” sign off the door and nail on the sign “study.” Take him off the mailing list. Lock him up with his books and his Bible. Slam him down on his knees before texts. Throw him into the ring to box with God until he learns how short his arms are. Engage him to wrestle with God all the night through, and let him come out only when he’s bruised and beaten into being a blessing. Require him to have something to say before he dares break the silence. Bend his knees in the lonesome valley. Burn his eyes with weary study. Wreck his emotional poise with worry for God. Make him exchange his pious stance for a humble walk with God and man. Make him spend and be spent for the glory of God.

Whip his telephone out of his hand. Put water in his gas tank. Give him a Bible, tie him to the pulpit, and make him preach the Word of the living God. Form a choir, raise a chant, and haunt him with this chant night and day: “Sir, we would see Jesus.” And when at long last he dares assay the pulpit, ask him if he has a word from God. If he doesn’t, then tell him to go sit back down. Tell him you can read the morning paper, digest the television commentaries, think through the day’s superficial problems, and manage the community’s weary drives. Command him not to come back until he’s read and reread, written and rewritten, until he can stand up, worn and forlorn, and say, “Thus saith the Lord.”

Cover him with demands for celestial wisdom. Give him no escape until he’s back against the wall of the Word, and sit down before him and listen to the only word he has left—God’s Word. Let him be totally ignorant of the downstreet gossip, but give him a chapter and order him to walk around it, camp on it, sup with it, and come at last to speak it backward and forward until all he says about it rings with the truth of eternity. And when he’s burned out by the flaming Word, when he’s consumed at last by the fiery grace blazing through him, and when he’s privileged to translate the truth of God to man, finally transferred from earth to heaven, then bear him away gently and blow a muted trumpet and lay him down softly in the grave. Place a two-edged sword in his coffin, and raise the tomb triumphant, for he was a brave soldier of the Word, and ere he died, he had become a man of God.

What does the pulpit represent? It represents the man of God, who is nothing more and nothing less than a man of truth, a man of the Word so that the people in the pew become men and women of the Word, so that God is glorified. Christ is exalted. Souls are saved. You are sanctified. Your children come to know Christ until the Lord Jesus Himself returns. May we give our attention forever and always to the preaching of the Word of God. Let us pray.

Our Father, we thank You for this text that we have looked at. We have looked at many texts, but it is 2 Timothy 2:15 from which we have focused most of our attention. It is this text which has behind it all that preaching stands for. Preaching is about the truth. It is about the preacher of truth and the God of truth, the people of truth, and the Word of truth. Lord, we pray that this pulpit would always be about the truth. We pray that You would sanctify this church through its preaching. Lord, we thank You for Your Word, the clarity of Your Word. We thank You for Your people who are attentive to Your Word. Father, we ask that You would help us to fall more in love with Your Word so that we fall more in love with Christ. Help us, dear Father, to value preaching. Help us to cut it straight. Help us to get your Word right under the power of your Holy Spirit. Give us preachers that will get it right and preach it right and do so boldly. This is an hour of crisis in which we pray you would raise up other faithful men who will be able to teach others

and preach the Word in this way. Do it for your sake, the sake of your Son, for the sake of Your kingdom, to the glory of Your name. We pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.