

2Timothy 25-02-16a

Good morning, welcome to the Sunday morning services here at Grace and Truth Bible Church. It's a snowy day outside for us. We are grateful to be able to continue our study with you in 2 Timothy, picking up in chapter 4. We are at verse 4 and 5, moving into verse 6. This is the final chapter in our pastoral study, having already seen 1 Timothy and Titus, more or less chronologically speaking.

And we're going to look this morning at the charge that Timothy receives from Paul. We've looked at it from its motivation at the beginning of this chapter. We have seen it in its desired effect among the hearers.

And we are going to continue to look at the way in which Timothy should conduct himself in the exercise of his spiritual gift. And this is very pertinent for us because we all have a spiritual gift and the way in which it functions, the dedication and the motivation and the means by which we exercise our gift is exactly the same as it is for Timothy. So as we look at verse 5 in particular this morning, we're going to see the sort of approach or attitude that we should wake up in the morning encouraging in ourselves that we can pray for, that we can look for and help to motivate in one another.

So let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on this time of fellowship and study and worship, and then we'll begin. Father, we are always able to find instances of your grace and your provision, your protection, your blessing upon us in the circumstances of our lives. We thank you for the opportunity we have to spend this time together in fellowship and the study of your Word.

We ask that your Holy Spirit will superintend both in the delivery and in the reception, which is the subject of our passage, so that in all things the Lord Jesus will be glorified and we will be more fully able to represent Him on this earth, both in our Christian fellowship and in our witness to the world. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Reviewing our passage here, you remember the charge based on the judgment that is coming at the appearance and at the kingdom of the Lord Christ, and then this exhortation to Timothy to preach the Word over and over and over again in Scripture, whether it is the Lord Jesus in the Gospels, whether it is the record of the activities of Peter and John and Paul, Philip in the center portion of Acts, the center of the single-digit chapters of Acts, if you will. The emphasis is on communicating the Word of God. What is surprising is when you look at this biblical emphasis, if you try to erase your mind of all traditional Christianity, all of the history, all of the practice that goes on around the world, what you see on TV, what you read in books, if you just start with a blank slate and say, what I am going to do is start at Romans and work my way through to the Revelation and see if the Word of God can tell me what my Christian life should look like, what should a church look like, what should be its emphasis, what should be its theme, what should I look for as I start my day, as I execute the tasks of my day, as I conclude my day and

look back over it and do what in the service is called an after-action report.

How did it go? I had goals and objectives, I had resources, I had opportunities. How well did I do? Did I get distracted? Did I get deflected? Or did I stay on mission and did I do my tasks heartily as unto the Lord and not unto men? Did I infuse them by means of the fruit of the Spirit with a divine reflection of the Lord Jesus and the glory of the Father? How did the day go? If we don't evaluate ourselves, it's kind of like never looking at your car to see if the tires are flat, if the oil is low or old, if you've got a fraying fan belt. Sooner or later, there's going to be a calamity.

We can coast for a time on momentum or on habit, but regularly evaluating ourselves, if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. And if we fail to keep short accounts, to look at how we're doing, who am I, why am I here? Am I just here to be a small gear in a giant machine where I work? Am I just here to try to go along to get in my family? Am I just here to be pleasant and have pleasant experiences? If you think about it, any atheistic, antagonistic, pessimistic, unbeliever can do those things. What sets us apart as believers, as those who have been redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, how are we different? Obviously it is our eternal life, which we already possess and which we are entering into as our thinking is rehabilitated, as we are cleansed from our old sins, as we are given opportunities to redeem the time and look forward.

We're going to see in this passage this morning that Paul is in the present. He looks back and he looks forward. This is perspective.

This is context. This is what keeps us straight. If you're rowing across a lake, or if you're rowing in the Severn River or elsewhere, I've done a small amount of rowing, and I know this about rowing.

If you're rowing by yourself, your back is to your destination. It's really hard to push the oars and look forward. So how do you know where you're going? Because you can't see it.

And it's much like our life, but much of the future we can't see and we can't know. So how do we keep our bearings? Well, you can glance over your shoulder and get a glimpse, get a clue of a distant destination on the opposite shore. And when we are lined up and heading in that direction, we fix on something that is behind us and keep that as a reference.

If you see a white house set up on a hill, you want to keep it relatively the same over the stern of your boat. And as you row and one arm is stronger than the other, or one oar catches a little better than the other, you may start to drift off course, begin to turn in a different direction, and you'll see that that white house is starting to move across your stern quarter. And so you pull a little harder the other way, you ease up on the other oar, and keep that reference point.

You have a fixed point on the shore that gives you that directional reference. So in the same way, we are trying to move through life and make progress in the right direction. And we use

the fixed truths of the Word of God to give us context.

We can look around, we can see what is passing us on one side or another. If you've ever floated a river, you can kind of look at a map that they will give you when they issue you your craft, whatever it is you're going to float down with, whether it's merely an inner tube, or if it's a something larger. But you want to figure out, well, is there a bend in the river? Is there some falls? Are there some rapids? Is there a bridge I will go under? Will I pass some reference so I know how long have I got to go before I reach my destination? And there's someone there to pick me up, and so on.

This is essentially a metaphor for our lives. And we have to know where we have been. We need some notion of where we are going, and where we are in the progress of that journey.

And this requires some observation, some interpretation, some evaluation, some application. If someone says, I will meet you at a certain time, and you're behind in your progress, you've got to find a way to make up lost time. So it is very important for us as believers to not be put to sleep.

And our routine, and the days of the week, and what they bring lulls us into operating like any other human being that doesn't have a higher purpose, a higher calling, an eternal destination. And that it isn't just getting my work done, it is learning and practicing skills for the kingdom of God as I do those. They are invested with greater meaning and greater purpose.

Anybody can make a sandwich. We can make a sandwich with motivation, with attitude, with thinking, with application of the Word of God that turns that mundane, menial, seemingly unimportant activity into an eternal weight of glory. The practice of thinking our way through the day as believers, thinking our way through the day, recognizing that it isn't just what I do, but why I do it, how I do it.

The spiritual dynamic that is active as I do it separates us from the world, enters us into that place of growth and production that only maturing, growing believers in the Lord Jesus Christ can enter into. Man looks on the outward appearance. Two are grinding at the mill.

You got two people working at the mill, grinding the grain, but one shall be taken and the other left. Two will be sleeping in a bed. One will be taken and the other is left.

You can't tell which was which from the activity. It's what's on the inside. It's God's evaluation.

So this charge to Timothy, which is a charge to us in second Timothy chapter four, is remember that you're on an inevitable track to the judgment and the future kingdoms of God. The Lord Jesus is going to appear. He is going to implement his kingdom.

His kingdom is going to be a place of service and opportunity and function for those who have taken the training on board, who have learned the lessons, who qualify themselves to be overcomers. For Timothy, he is primarily tasked with communicating the truth. The rest of us as

believers are tasked with receiving and digesting and acting and living in the power of that truth.

But when you look at Christianity today, there is an element of preaching. There is something from the Bible. But there is so much more that is imported into what is thought to be Christianity or church or the life of a believer.

And in many cases, when you look for a foundation of truth underneath it, is there a call? Is there an imperative? Is there a teaching of the word of God that says, yes, do this? It's lacking. It is tradition. It is accepted by the group and begins to have the same weight as what scripture actually says.

Well, you might as well be a Catholic if you're going to let the church import ideas, practices, priorities, expenditures of time that aren't grounded in scripture. And what does this amount to? The time comes when sound doctrine doesn't do it for people and they're not content with it. It becomes endurance.

Well, I'm not going to endure this anymore. I need something stimulating. I want something that hooks into some aspect of my soul that gratifies me, that satisfies me, that makes me feel good.

And our Christian life is not measured by how we feel. Look again at verse three. The time will come they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires.

God has desires. We have desires. In our natural state, how often do those match? How often are my desires God desires? How often are my instincts and my impulses godly? If they were that way, all men everywhere would be saved.

We wouldn't need to grow. We wouldn't need to learn. We wouldn't need correction, rebuke, or instruction in righteousness because we would have natural inbuilt desires that corresponded with God's plan and purpose.

Obviously, it is the opposite. We are all as an unclean thing. All our righteousness what we think is good is actually filthy rags.

We fade as a leaf. Our iniquities like the wind carry us away. We are tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine, meaning whatever somebody says this is the way, this is the truth, this is the life, and it doesn't partake of the Lord Jesus.

So the time will come they will not endure sound doctrine. Who is they? I am so glad that Paul uses the third person and not the second or the first. How would it be if Paul was saying the time will come when we will not endure sound doctrine? The time will come when you will not endure sound doctrine.

He says they. This is the sword that divides households, that divides families, that divides

people formerly in friendships or relationships. Sooner or later it is, I think of a song by Don Henley and the title of it is Them and Us.

It's them or us. It's those people over there. It's us in here.

He was opining about the Cold War at that time. But they will not endure sound doctrine. Paul subtly implies here we are not they.

We are not of those who fall back unto perdition. We are they fall back to perdition. We are those who by faith and patience inherit the promises.

But this inevitably reminds us that there are believers from whom we have to separate. There are people with whom we have to maintain a distance because they live and act according to their own desires. They will not endure sound doctrine, the promises and the principles and the statutes and the ordinances and the commandments of the Word of God.

I don't cotton to that as they used to say. I don't agree with it. I don't think that's right.

And the unconscious hubris that says I will pass judgment on what the Word of God teaches, I'll decide whether what the Scripture says is good or not or good for me or not. To set ourselves up at that height instead of having the humility and the teachability to be corrected, to be rebuked, to be instructed, to be brought to a place of repentance. This separates us into two camps.

It's them and it's us. They will not endure sound doctrine. They according to their own desires with wanting to hear pleasant things.

This itching ears means my ears are looking for something pleasing. I want to hear a happy tune. I want to hear something that makes me feel good about myself, that lets me off the hook in terms of responsibility for my decisions and my actions.

That the cause and effect of my life really isn't my fault. It wasn't that I failed to heed a word of instruction or that I exercised poor judgment or that I went into a self-gratification mode and now there are outcomes and results from that. Oh no, it's not me.

There's some other place I can shift the blame. I want to hear what makes me feel good about myself and relieves me of responsibility for change, for repentance, for dependence upon God and His power. Itching ears, they heap up for themselves teachers.

If you want to hear a certain thing, you can find somebody to represent it, to speak about it. Look around in the political world today in the aftermath of the November elections and the shift in the government from a greatly leftward leaning direction to a significantly rightward leaning direction from the liberal view to the conservative view, from the passive laissez-faire view to the active let's get something done and fix this view. Some people welcome this.

Other people are horrified. And you will find spokespersons for whatever proclivity, whatever

appreciation you have for a certain set of values or a certain way of doing things. And if you don't like what's happening, you can find people who will represent and these people become popular and a collection of them.

I have news outlets that I love to listen to because they're supposedly news readers and they're actually opinion generators on both sides. I want to hear them. So if you're on the right, you'll heap up personality after personality on conservative media and conservative streaming outlets and rumble and so on.

If you're leftward leaning, then you're going to look to other outlets and find the personalities that are able to articulate that view. And you heap up to yourselves teachers that tell you what you want to hear by implication. And I say this carefully, but by implication, this is talking about the teaching of the word of God.

And you can find people who tend to teach it in a way that is comfortable and we like it and it lets us off the hook. The same thing can happen with the news. Because we are such an information driven society now, to only listen to those who tell us what we like to hear can be as dangerous as being misled because we can be misled by not striving for balance to at least listen to or consider arguments from the other side.

Generally speaking, and this is the genius of our founding fathers and the architects of the constitution who were believers and derived these principles from their understanding of God in heaven and fairness and justice in government. But they built into our constitution and into our government tension. The two party system has worked for 240 years.

Why? Because there is a tension. The left pulls in one direction, the right pulls in another. The Whigs pulled in one direction, the Tories in another.

The Democrats in one direction, the Republicans in another. And that results in a middle course. A middle course where you can't go to an extreme.

We've understood this about the word of God. For every clear teaching in the word of God about faith and practice, you can find others that limit and inform that understanding and prevent us from taking it to an extreme. So balance is in view.

People who heap up teachers according to their own desires are only listening to one side. Wouldn't it be wonderful? All of us know people who have gone down a path that we think is harmful, bad, wrong, leading to a waste of time and life. And we grieve for people who we think have gone down a road and made bad choices, adopted bad points of view from our perspective.

And we say, oh, if only I heard a wonderful lesson from the word of God today, if only this friend, if only this relative, if only this person of interest in our life could hear that. Well, of course, generally a man hears what he wants to hear and disregards the rest. And the reason they don't hear it is they don't want to hear it.

But anytime we have that thought, it is useful to turn it around. Go from Romans chapter one to Romans chapter two. Is someone hearing a truth of the word of God and thinking of me and wishing I would incline my ear to it and apply my heart to it and cry out for wisdom and lift up my voice for understanding? And I'm on a road where I am blind or insensitive to things that others understand from the word of God and recognize that they would make a profound and positive difference in my life if I were only willing to listen and be corrected, rebuked, and instructed by it.

Me. Use the first person. I can't get somebody over there to listen to that which they have neglected or rejected and they have heaped up to themselves teachers who say what they agree with and it leaves them comfortable and unchanged.

I can't do anything about that. That is a decision they have to make. If the prodigal son, the devotional for today in Dr. Criswell's website application, I set it up last night, is the prodigal son.

And I found a wonderful picture to go with that podcast. It's shortened version of the sermon on the prodigal son. And it pictures the young man with his stringy hair hanging beside his face and several sows in his vicinity.

And you can tell that he is pensive. He's thinking. He's considering.

He is changing his mind about his course of action, his priorities, his decisions. He's thinking about the past. He's looking at the present.

And he is considering possible futures. He's putting his life in context. And happily, he comes to the point of saying, I will change.

I will return to my father. I will go back. And even if I only have the status of a servant, that will be better than the outcome of the path I have chosen.

I can't do anything about someone who is on the prodigal journey. I can do something about myself. We look at others and we say, oh, how can they be blind to this truth? Why will they not listen to this piece of helpful viewpoint from the Word of God? You can't change that.

You can pray that God will shine a light, that God will give them opportunities, that God will bring them to a point where these things can be understood and be meaningful. But ultimately, it will still be their decision. I can't say, oh, Lord, change their heart, change their mind.

I can pray that God will make the issue clear, that if there is any way that they can be prodded, that they can be attracted, that they can be drawn in a different direction because I know them and I love them. Oh, Lord, in Your time, with Your knowledge, in Your way, if there is any way by which they can be placed in a circumstance where they will take a fresh look and come to a point of change of mind, I ask You to do that. If I am to be a part of it, give me wisdom.

Give me strength. Let me know whether I should remain silent or speak. If it is going to be someone else, Lord, I pray for that person or those persons.

Give them wisdom. Give them insight. Put the words in their heart that they can speak because it is all about the Word.

Preach the Word. The agent of change is God's truth. It isn't fellowship.

It isn't prayer. It isn't programs. It isn't efforting.

It isn't representing. It isn't brochures. It's not resources.

It is the truth of God directly from the Scriptures in the hands of the Holy Spirit. That is the power for change. If you know of someone and you grieve, you weep in your heart, you wish that things were different, and I think all of us at one time or another and maybe in the present are in that situation, pray that the sharp sword of the Word of God will divide us under the soul and the spirit and the joints and the marrow.

Nothing else in Scripture is said to do that. The Holy Spirit doesn't crack the heart open, doesn't split the bones. It's the Word of truth.

Preach the Word. The Holy Spirit is standing by to do His part, but it is the Word of truth. Speak the truth to one another in love.

Do not be deflected because the time comes when people will not listen to truth. Maybe we have endeavored to communicate it and people would not endure it, don't want to hear it. No, wrong.

They turn aside to fables, turn aside to untruth. They heap up for themselves teachers. They turn their ears away from the truth.

Notice the active here. They turn their ears away from the truth, and they are turned aside to fables. Notice in verse 4 the active and the passive elements.

What happens first? Remember this is the old issue of did God harden Pharaoh's heart? Look at verse 4. In the context of verse 3, they turn away from the truth. They turn their ears away from the truth, and what is the result? They now are turned aside to fables. Their decision to not listen to the truth results in them being influenced from the outside to believe what is false, what is useless, what wastes the capital of time and opportunity in their lives.

Whatever talents, whatever gifts, whatever wonderful personality traits are poured out on the ground like water because they turned their ears away. Now they are being controlled and fed fables, but it's their decision. It is their choice, and you see that throughout verse 3 and into verse 4. They decide not to endure sound doctrine.

According to their own desires, they heap up for themselves false teachers, and that false

teaching is now the driving force in their lives, and it controls them. We turn our ears toward the truth, and we hope and pray that we are motivated and guided and enabled by what we hear. Everyone is driven by what they accept, what they place their faith in.

If it is divine, it has God's power. If it is fables, it is evil, and it deceives, and it corrodes, and it disintegrates, and it destroys, and it wastes. Well, there's a lot on the line in our daily decisions to listen to the truth, to reflect on the truth, to measure ourselves in the light of the truth, and to remember that every hour of every day, we are being evaluated in terms of the coming judgment.

It's a judgment that not only will discipline and inflict penalties, it is also a judgment that will determine value and faithfulness. Paul is going to go on here in verse 8 to talk about at that judgment, there is a crown that is laid up. It isn't just who did wrong, who did well.

We want to be we. We don't want to be they. Let's pause here and take our break.

When we come back, we'll pick up here at verse 4 and move into verse 5, because here is the remedy. We have imperatives here. This is what to do to ensure that we are we, and we are not they.