

THE GOSPEL PROJECT – CHRONOLOGICAL LETTERS TO GOD’S PEOPLE THE GOD WHO DIRECTS HIS PEOPLE *Toward Obedience In His Word*

Our text today is taken from three letters written by Paul to two young pastors, Timothy and Titus. These are his final three letters written shortly before the Lord takes Paul home to heaven. These letters are called pastoral epistles because they deal with matters affecting pastors and congregations. It is appropriate that Paul’s final letters were written to young pastors whom Paul looked upon as his ‘sons in the faith.’ Their generation would be next to share the gospel of Christ and it was Paul’s prayer that these young men would follow his example and ‘finish well’.

This lesson calls us to obedience to God’s Word in praying for and supporting our pastors. However, keep in mind that Paul’s words of direction and encouragement apply to every believer not just pastors since each believer preaches the Word of God with our lives. How we live determines whether the sermon we preach glorifies God or not. Before we begin, let’s look at some of the human expectations for a pastor. The perfect pastor should:

- (1) please everyone;
- (2) preach exactly 20 minutes and give an invitation in which everyone is convicted but no one is offended;
- (3) work from 7 a.m. to midnight in every aspect of work from counseling to janitorial;
- (4) be 27 years old with 30 years of experience;
- (5) have a burning desire to work with youth and still spend all his time with senior citizen; and.
- (6) should is always available in his office.

Oh, and by the way, the perfect pastor is always found in the next town over.

These crazy ideas are manmade expectations. Now, let’s look into what God’s Word says regarding the shepherds of His flock also known as pastors of churches! **Shepherds serve God’s people by embodying the truth they proclaim.**

Read 1 Timothy 4:11-16 (ESV) ¹¹ *Command and teach these things.* ¹² *Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.* ¹³ *Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.* ¹⁴ *Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you.* ¹⁵ *Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress.* ¹⁶ *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.*

Paul is challenging Timothy to remain true to his calling. However, we should not think of this letter as applying to Timothy only or to just those in full-time service for Christ. After all, Christians are called to be ministers for Christ because a minister is a servant of the One who has redeemed us to walk in newness of life.

Youth was a term applied to men until they were 40. Timothy might have been between 35 and 40 years old at this time. The solution for being young in physical years for Timothy was to live his life by setting an good example *in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity*.

The King James and New King James Versions include *in spirit* in Paul's list of ways to set an example. This is because *in spirit* is not found in many manuscripts although *in spirit* fits the context describing the inner enthusiasm and excitement of a child of God.

Paul reminds Timothy of the importance of public reading of the Scripture. I am glad that our church begins every worship service with the reading of God's Word and that goes beyond the verses for the sermon. It is sign that our pastor is following the pastoral directions of Paul. The purpose of reading the scripture aloud should be to encourage obedience and teach doctrine.

Paul warned Timothy not to neglect his gift. The council of elders had laid their hands upon Timothy. The literal act of laying hands upon him did not transfer any special power. However, done in the right spirit the ceremony can be an effective way of conveying 'partnership' in the ministry for God. Timothy had been gifted by the Lord to be a pastor. Don't make the mistake of thinking that Timothy had a special portion of the Spirit that is not available to Christians today. We should focus on the truth that each person's spiritual gifts grow through exercise! We all know it is easy to lose physical abilities when we don't exercise. It is the same with our spiritual abilities if we don't put them to work. Paul was reminding Timothy to 'keep on keeping on' in his work for the Lord

There is no magic formula that can tell us exactly what our spiritual gifts are. You can take a spiritual gift test on line. And if that is a tool that will help you serve, use it! However, don't get caught up in the temptation to serve God in the area in where you 'feel gifted.' That is not how the spiritual gifts work. God calls us to obediently serve Him in all things. He will equip us with whatever gift or gifts we need to accomplish the task to which He calls us.

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. Paul didn't mean that Timothy's actions would literally save others from hell. Only the grace of God does that. However, Timothy was called as we are called to be an encourager for the spiritual growth of others. Timothy's godliness would help others remain on the narrow way. A friend concerned about your physical health is the friend who says, "you really don't to eat that second piece of pie. Let's go for a walk instead." A friend concerned with your spiritual welfare is the friend who says, "I've noticed you've been feeling down lately. Let's pray together." **Shepherds serve God's people by preaching truth even when it is costly.**

Read 2 Timothy 4:1-2 (ESV) ¹ *I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom:* ² *preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.*

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus – Paul wanted Timothy to realize the seriousness of the situation. Have you ever been casually reading something and then a line catches your attention and you become totally focused. That was Paul’s intent – to make sure Timothy was focusing on his message. What if the generation after Paul had lost their focus and did not carry on the work of God? Where would we be today? Where will the next generation be if we don’t do our part for the kingdom of God NOW?

We all have our ‘winter clothes’ and our ‘summer clothes.’ Physically, it is important to change out those clothes seasonally. Spiritually, we need to be prepared for each season of our life. And just like Arkansas weather, those spiritual seasons can ‘turn on a dime’. For Timothy, in season would mean regularly scheduled sermons – out of season, the times when opportunities arose outside the pulpit. Should we be any different? In season, we talk about Jesus in church on Sunday. Out of season, we talk about Jesus at work on Monday, in the restaurant on Tuesday – wherever the opportunities arise. In order to do this, we have to know the Word. We won’t have a Word to say if we are not continually being filled with the Word. And knowing the Word for ourselves, is the way that we will know if our own pastor is truly preaching the Word or his own gospel.

God’s speaker must be patient as he preaches the Word. He will not always see immediate results. He must be patient with those who oppose his preaching. Above all else, *he must preach doctrine*. He must not simply tell Bible stories, relate interesting illustrations, or read a verse and then forget it. It has been said, “*True preaching is the explanation and application of Bible doctrine. Anything else is just religious speechmaking.*”

Read 2 Timothy 4:3-5 (ESV) ³ *For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions,* ⁴ *and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.* ⁵ *As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry*

This passage is taken from Paul’s second recorded letter to Timothy. The Emperor Nero had begun a major persecution of Christians and Paul was sitting in a prison cell in Rome waiting to die, abandoned by most of his friends. These would be Paul’s last words to Timothy and his last words to us as well.

If there ever was a time that fits verse 3, it is today in America. The time is certainly here when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Our first thoughts of unsound doctrine might be the Church of Scientology or the Church of the Latter Day Saints but in many cases Satan uses more subtle attacks. It comes in the form of churches that choose to adapt their preaching today’s culture choosing to excite a congregation positively instead of convicting of sin. Any pastor or church who chooses numbers over purity in body and spirit has caught the disease of ‘itching ears’. Any pastor or church that prefers a truth that approves their godless lifestyle instead of what God’s Word teaches is succumbing to the myths of this world. Let’s take Paul’s admonition to Timothy to heart: Jesus never said that the narrow way would be easy. We need to focus on Jesus in all situations even when it calls for enduring hardship.

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

Paul spoke of his own situation as being like a drink offering. This was one of the earliest offerings in the Old Testament. **Genesis 35:14 (ESV)** ¹⁴ *And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he had spoken with him, a pillar of stone. He poured out a drink offering on it and poured oil on it.* **Leviticus** and **Numbers** describe the sacrifices. The drink offering was to be added to the burnt offering and the meal offering. It was never added to the sin offering or the trespass offering. It had nothing to do with redemption or pointing to Christ. It went like this: They would bring in a skin of wine and pour it on the sacrifice which was being consumed by fire. The drink offering would go up in steam and disappear. This is why Paul said, *I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure.* One of the meanings for the word used for departure was the folding up of a tent in preparation for the march home or to hoist anchor and set sail. What a comforting concept of death! This world is our place of ministry and suffering – not our home. Paul’s life here was poured out – but another was about to begin. Departure also has the meaning of releasing a prisoner. Paul was facing release, not execution! The unyoking of an ox is another meaning of this word. Paul had been in hard service for years. Now his Master would unyoke him and promote him to higher service.

The crown of righteousness is God’s reward for a faithful and righteous life. It is our incentive for to remain faithful and holy as we wait for the promise of the Lord’s appearing. Wondering how to get a crown in heaven? All you need to do is look forward to Christ’s coming! **God’s people follow the shepherd by submitting to God’s Word.**

Read Titus 2:11-14 (ESV) ¹¹ *For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people,* ¹² *training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age,* ¹³ *waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,* ¹⁴ *who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.*

As you know because of the differences in time zones, the New Year dawns in New York City an hour before it does in Arkansas. The grace of God lives in all three time zones: past – present – future. The time zone of God’s grace in the past was when God sent His Son to die for our sins and then rise from the dead so that we may come to His time zone of grace in the future – the Blessed Hope – perhaps today when our Jesus will return for us. As we currently dwell in the present time zone of grace, we should not be conformed to this world. His grace redeems us and purifies us and makes us His own special possession.

It is grace that teaches us to say “no” to the things of this world and “yes” to the things of God. Paul knew there would be days when life itself would seem hopeless even to the believer. But, Paul also knew that the believer does have HOPE. He advised Titus to teach the flock to be *waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.* Whether we meet Him in the air when the church is caught away or meet Him when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, our Hope is the Living Lord.