

2 Timothy 4:1-8

¹I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and Christ Jesus, who is going to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom: ²Preach the word. Be ready whether it is convenient or not. Correct, rebuke, and encourage, with all patience and teaching. ³For there will come a time when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, because they have itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in line with their own desires. ⁴They will also turn their ears away from the truth and will turn aside to myths.

⁵As for you, keep a clear head in every situation. Bear hardship. Do the work of an evangelist. Fulfill your ministry.

⁶You see, I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. ⁷I have fought the good fight; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith. ⁸From now on, there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness. The Lord, the righteous Judge, will give it to me on that day, and not only to me but also to everyone who loved his appearing.

Convenient

I.

Convenient. Is it more convenient or less convenient?

Life is certainly more convenient than centuries ago. Grocery stores and Amazon deliveries and electricity and gas make things far more convenient—and comfortable—than life was just decades ago, let alone centuries ago.

News and information. Is it more convenient or less convenient these days to find reliable information about the news? The great big World Wide Web is out there for your convenience. Twist a few dials, type in the right search terms, and you can find the information you were looking for. Convenient.

On the other hand, if you turn on the old news sources from television or radio, you get only the information they have curated for you. Inconvenient. You see what they want you to see; nothing more, nothing less. With each story presented you should be asking the question: “Why did they choose this particular story and not another?” Perhaps you should also ask: “Are they presenting everything about this story, or did they draw their conclusions before airing it from their own biases?”

What about Christianity? Is it more convenient or less convenient to be a Christian, to act like a Christian, to speak like a Christian these days?

Perhaps the month of June has served to bring to your attention just how much less convenient it is to state your Christianity and to live your Christianity. You can't escape it. God gave to Noah a symbol of his promise to never again send a world-wide flood; that symbol has been hijacked and turned into a symbol of pride in sin.

This is the time to celebrate sin. Most important, it's the time to celebrate all kinds of sexual sins. New ones have been thrown in and highlighted for good measure. So many sins of human sexuality are jammed into your psyche.

Do you do business with *any* mainstream company? Somewhere on their website or in their literature or their promotional materials you will find a reference to pride month—usually it's a prominent reference. Newscasts feature stories about pride.

Paul predicted it. “They will accumulate for themselves teachers in line with their own desires” (2 Timothy 4:3, EHV).

YouTube videos and podcasting platforms have become very popular these days. Want to learn more about gardening or farming? You can find a YouTube video about that. Want to gain a new skill? You can probably find step-by-step instructions on YouTube. Want to hear very unique and specific information about any subject? There is something out there that will go into great detail about your area of interest.

Desires, Paul said. Not the facts. Not the truth. *Desires*. Most people aren’t seeking a balance of information from two sides; they look for what they *want* to hear. Truth has nothing to do with it.

In fact: “They will also turn their ears away from the truth and will turn aside to myths” (2 Timothy 4:4, EHV). What God says is truth. Not your truth or my truth, but *the* truth. Thousands of years ago people looked at the world around them and concocted all sorts of myths about various gods and what their hand was in creation. These days, people dig around in the ground and explore the heavens and come up with myths that leave out any participation by some God in creating the universe or having anything to do with human beings one way or the other. Whether myths about gods or godless myths, they are all myths. People deliberately and actively walk away from *the* truth God has told us to seek those myths.

II.

“For there will come a time when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, because they have itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in line with their own desires” (2 Timothy 4:3, EHV).

Paul is not just talking about the great big, bad world “out there,” he is talking also about the church. He is talking about you. “Sound doctrine” is what God has to say about everything. That means, what God has to say about both Law and Gospel.

Even within the people of God, lots of people don’t like to hear what God has to say about sin. Jeremiah found that out in the First Reading for today. He wrote: “The word of the LORD has brought scorn on me. I am mocked all day long” (Jeremiah 20:8, EHV). There was serious opposition to the message Jeremiah brought because it did not line up with the desires and dreams of the people.

Have you noticed the news about Christian colleges in our area in the last few years? Students will stage a protest because some professor—or perhaps the college itself—will take the position God’s Word says. Some group from the community—or perhaps the students themselves—find this to be in conflict with what their itching ears want to hear.

The same thing has been happening in some churches in our area and the denominational affiliations to which they belong. A congregation or church body takes a stand on some area of doctrine in accordance with what God’s Word says and finds itself besieged with protestors.

“Preach the word. Be ready whether it is convenient or not. Correct, rebuke, and encourage, with all patience and teaching” (2 Timothy 4:2, EHV).

At times it is convenient to preach the word. Sometimes the positions of popular culture line up with what God’s Word has to say on the subject. At such times, it is convenient to preach the Word of God.

At other times it isn’t convenient. Perhaps at *most* times it isn’t convenient. “For there will come a time when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, because they have itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in line with their own

desires” (2 Timothy 4:3, EHV).

Put that in terms of yourself and your own pet sin. Your desires—your feelings—can surely be validated by someone out there. Perhaps you can even find a church that will agree with your desires.

That makes it inconvenient to be a pastor who presents sound doctrine. There have been people who have walked away from this congregation because of doctrine. The Apostle John writes: “Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see if they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1, EHV). In other words, the job of every believer listening to pastors preach is to make sure that what they say lines up with what God’s Word says. Many, however, who have walked away from this congregation because of doctrine have *not* done so because they are convinced that what we teach and believe is an incorrect understanding of God’s Word, but because they don’t like what God’s Word says about a particular matter. They left to find a place that either would ignore that part of God’s Word completely, or would twist what God’s Word says about the matter until it fits their desires the way they wanted in the first place.

Itching ears, they had. What they heard wasn’t convenient.

Long ago I attended a worship service with a relative in which the sermon was just moralizing—telling the listeners how to be better people. More recently, but still long ago, I attended a worship service at a megachurch. There, the name of Jesus was never mentioned. There were vague references to God, but which God and what he has done for people was never mentioned—not in the songs, not in the message, nowhere. The whole service seemed to be nothing other than a Ted Talk—some self-help, self-improvement, self-esteem speech given to the hundreds of people in attendance. In neither case did the pastor feel it was convenient to speak the message of sin and grace.

III.

“I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and Christ Jesus, who is going to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom” (2 Timothy 4:1, EHV). Paul is speaking to Timothy, a young pastor. He reminds him that Christ Jesus will return. At Judgment Day Jesus will not be coming in humility, but to judge all humanity. His judgment will not be on the basis of what you as an individual or any congregation finds to be a convenient message.

“Preach the word. Be ready whether it is convenient or not. Correct, rebuke, and encourage, with all patience and teaching” (2 Timothy 4:2, EHV). Timothy—and every pastor—has a job to do: to preach the Word, no matter how inconvenient it might be. Both Law and Gospel are to be used. The Law is to correct and rebuke. The Gospel is to be used to encourage.

Both are necessary, no matter how convenient or inconvenient it might seem. If the pastor doesn’t preach about sin, his hearers might begin to think they don’t really need forgiveness. Jesus’ death on the cross is the only way forgiveness for sins could be obtained, and faith in Jesus is the only way for a person to receive what Jesus has done. If the pastor fails to talk about Jesus’ work of salvation, there is no reason for the congregation to exist.

“As for you, keep a clear head in every situation. Bear hardship. Do the work of an evangelist. Fulfill your ministry” (2 Timothy 4:5, EHV). Timothy—and every pastor—needs to realize that it is of vital importance to keep teaching what God’s Word says. No matter what. Even when the itching ears are begging to hear something else. Bear hardship when some walk away from the truth and turn aside to myths. Bear hardship even of society itself.

IV.

These words aren't just for Timothy. They aren't just for pastors. You are still to hold pastors accountable to the Word of God, as John said, by testing what they say and comparing it to God's Word. You are to put up with and demand the sound doctrine of God's Word. You are to put the salve of the gospel on your itching ears and listen to the truth, rather than turning aside to myths.

"You see, I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come" (2 Timothy 4:6, EHV). Paul was convinced he was near the end. He did not think he was going to retire from the ministry of the gospel and go live a quiet life in his cabin up north, he was convinced he was nearing the end of his life.

"I have fought the good fight; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7, EHV). Whether it is convenient or not, this is what you want to be able to say when you get near the end of *your* life. Maintaining your faith in a secular world is a fight. At the end, stand firm and say that you have kept the faith.

"From now on, there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness. The Lord, the righteous Judge, will give it to me on that day, and not only to me but also to everyone who loved his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:8, EHV). The prize for winning a race in those days was a victor's wreath—or crown. Keeping the faith as he finishes his race means that Paul will receive the victor's crown.

At the beginning of today's Reading Paul said that Jesus would come to judge the living and the dead. Everyone who believes in Jesus at the end of his or her race will receive that same victor's crown—the crown of everlasting righteousness in heaven.

Whether it "feels" convenient or not, keep running the race of faith, against all odds. Keep persevering. You and I, with our victor's crowns, will find ourselves with Paul and our Lord Jesus in heaven.

God bless you as you cherish sound doctrine, even when it isn't convenient. Amen.