

## 2 TIMOTHY 4:1-5

### THE PASTOR IS THE CHURCH'S THEOLOGIAN

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

**F**or the average Christian, the study of theology appears to be about exciting as watching grass grow. That is a shame; knowledge of the Holy One and the study of His work in the world that He created should be more exciting than anything we could ever imagine. Annie Dillard has written, “On the whole, I do not find Christians, outside the catacombs, sufficiently sensible of the conditions. Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it? The churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning. It is madness to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews. For the sleeping god may wake some day and take offense, or the waking god may draw us out to where we can never return.”<sup>2</sup> When we worship, we are coming into the presence of the Living God! He is wild, unpredictable, exciting enough to make the head spin while taking away our breath!

That we are not awed by knowledge of the Holy One testifies to our distorted focus on things that must pass away together with this dying world. We live for just one more day so that we can perform some duty or continue the routine we have carefully crafted for ourselves, unconscious of the fact that as souls who are born from above we are standing in the presence of the Living God. We Christians have living within our lives the One who declared Jesus to be the Son of God by raising Him from the dead [see **ROMANS 1:4**].

We who believe in the Risen Lord of Glory are now living in the presence of Christ Jesus who conquered death and who has brought us life and given us immortality [see **2 TIMOTHY 1:10**]. We followers of the Christ have immediate access to the throne of Him “who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist” [see **ROMANS 4:7**]. Coming before His holy presence we should be prepared to be transformed. That we are not so prepared testifies to our preoccupation with the death we imagine to be “life.”

If members of the flock are not transformed in worship, it may be the fault of the Pastor. Of all people, pastors are responsible to be theologically perceptive; they are constantly to strive to inform themselves of the nature of God and to exalt the work of Christ the Son of God in securing salvation. Pastors are to labour in the Word, accurately dividing the Word, so that the people will be awed by the majesty, the grandeur, the glory of the True and Living God.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

<sup>2</sup> Annie Dillard, Wikiquote, [https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Annie\\_Dillard](https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Annie_Dillard) (Annie Dillard, **Teaching a Stone to Talk** (Harper & Row, 1982)), accessed 7 January 2015

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Never has it been more critical that the Pastor function as the church's theologian than in these days near the end of the Age of Grace. As ominous clouds forebodingly presage the Laodicean Era, the need for the pastor to speak boldly and clearly grows more urgent all the while. It seems as if many are drawing back, succumbing to the siren call to be those pitiful creatures that Paul describes in the text—teachers to suit the passions of those to whom they speak. Pastor and parishioner have complementary roles to play to ensure that the truth is declared. First in importance is the need for the Pastor to be the church's theologian.

**THE MESSENGER AND THE MESSAGE** — “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: preach the word.” The pastor must not have a private agenda. He is appointed by God as a herald. In his first letter to Timothy, Paul speaks of himself as a preacher. In his first missive to Timothy, Paul wrote “There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth” [1 TIMOTHY 2:5-7].

The Apostle refers to himself as a preacher in this current letter, as well. “Do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me” [2 TIMOTHY 1:8-12].

The concept of preacher in the contemporary view differs significantly from that which Paul uses in the Word. A preacher (a *kêrux*) is defined as a “herald, whose duty it is to make public proclamations.” He is also said to be “a messenger from God.”<sup>3</sup> Perhaps that doesn't sound so terribly different from our modern concept of a preacher; however, what distinguished this concept Paul used from our understanding is the stature and lack of freedom in declaring a message that the preacher might have. One scholar notes this of the word Paul used. “The *kêrux* was always under the authority of someone else, whose spokesman he was. He himself was immune. He conveyed the message and intention of his master. He had ... no liberty of his own to negotiate. His office had in every case an official character, even when he appeared in the market place as a public middleman or auctioneer ... He was, therefore, also the announcer of judicial verdicts. What he announced became valid by the act of proclamation.”<sup>4</sup>

I have taken some pains to emphasise the New Testament concept the preacher precisely because his responsibility is bounded by the Word. The preacher is not appointed to engage in speculation, to present specious philosophical arguments or to digress into fields of sociology, psychology or economic theory. He is to “Preach the Word.”

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<sup>3</sup> William Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, **A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature: A Translation and Adaption of the Fourth Revised and Augmented Edition of Walter Bauer's Griechisch-Deutsches Worterbuch Zu Den Schrift En Des Neuen Testaments Und Der Ubrigen Urchristlichen Literatur** (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL 1979) 431

<sup>4</sup> L. Coenen, “Κηρύσσω,” ed. Lothar Coenen, Erich Beyreuther and Hans Bietenhard, **New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology** (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 49–50.

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I am always amazed, and somewhat perplexed, by those preachers who say they have nothing to preach, or who crib a sermon from some well-known expositor and deliver the sermon as though it was their own, or who resort to book reports, or pretend they are experts in economic theory. God has revealed Himself through this Word. The Infinite God has given us a perfect revelation of Himself in His Word. Therefore, the Apostle commands the young theologian, “Preach the Word.”

There is a truth that is obscured by translation into English which demonstrates this point. In **1 TIMOTHY 5:17** the Apostle states, “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.” This is the translation that addresses what was literally written: “Give double honor to spiritual leaders who handle their duties well. This is especially true if they work hard at teaching the word [of God].”<sup>5</sup> The elders are expected to “work hard at teaching the Word.”

People do not come to church to hear economic speculation, nor are they particularly interested in some individual's scientific suppositions. The man who just heard his physician say, “I'm sorry, it's cancer,” wants to know if there is hope from God. The wife who just heard her husband shout, “I never did love you,” wants to know if God loves her. The husband and father who is struggling to provide for his family in uncertain times isn't interested in whether the speaker has a grandiose idea for wealth redistribution; he wonders if God will speak to encourage him not to give in to despair. The people come to the House of the Lord to hear, “Thus saith the Lord.” Therefore, the preacher is commanded, “Preach the Word.”

If the preacher is so rushed in his workweek that he hasn't sufficient time to prepare a message to fill the time normally allotted, let him focus on a smaller portion of the Word and reveal the mind of the Lord to the congregation. Five minutes of solid meat are superior to an hour of cotton candy. Nor should he be overly concerned that he may neglect spiritual infants; there will be enough milk delivered with the meat to ensure that the toddlers are well fed and to allow the mature to wash down the solid food. Let the listeners leave sated by having feasted on the meat of the Word. Those who find themselves discomforted by solid food may well discover themselves convicted by the Spirit of God as He works through the message that was delivered.

The preacher prepares himself through study of the Word. He must steep his life in the Word, investing great amounts of time in the presence of the Living God listening to hear the divine voice directing his steps. He must labour to be on speaking terms with heaven, ready at a moment's notice to speak with the Risen Son of God. The preacher must be a student of the Word, reading until his spirit is flavoured by the Word of the Lord and his blood is bibline—the very essence of the Bible flowing in him. The preacher must be a scholar; he must always strive to educate himself so that he speaks with clarity and with authority. He must not be pretentious or hold an exaggerated opinion of himself; but he must labour to train himself in the knowledge of the Holy One. Paul urged Timothy, and thus urges all who would bear the title of a preacher, “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” [**2 TIMOTHY 2:15**].

I know that some people are concerned that the preacher's language may betray too much education or even that the preacher may be exposed as uneducated. The learned scholars of ancient Jerusalem disdained Peter and John as “uneducated, common men,” but they recognized they had been with Jesus [see **ACTS 4:13**]. Consequently, the leaders could bluster and threaten, but they could say nothing against them [see **ACTS 4:17**]. What is missed by many is that the Apostles were scholars, always seeking to know more of Christ and of His great salvation.

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<sup>5</sup> **God's Word Translation** (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI 1995)

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I've heard some church members complain that a preacher had poor grammar; and to be sure, grammatical faux pas can grate on the ear. Preachers need to work at speaking well to ensure they communicate effectively. However, I want to address this matter in pointed fashion. I would rather hear a preacher say, "I seen him when he done it" and know that he did see someone, than to hear a preacher say, "I saw him when he did it" when he saw no one. I am all for education; I have a few letters that I can write after my name. Nevertheless, I would rather a man learned his ABCs in heaven than spouted Hebrew and Greek in hell.

It is essential that the preacher be a master of the Bible in the vernacular; he needs to know what is written in the language in which he preaches. He must study constantly, however onerous the task of reading may be. If possible, he needs to endeavour to be conversant with the Bible in the original languages of Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. There was a day when those choosing to attend seminaries would be expected to come out with a working knowledge of these ancient languages in addition to having been trained in homiletics and hermeneutics and having to more than a passing understanding of biblical and/or systematic theology. Today, few seminaries require students to master biblical languages or even to gain competence in systematic theology. Today's seminarians are trained in self-actualisation (whatever that is), counselling, music theory, worship strategies and sociology. Consequently, these graduates may be capable of generating a particular feeling from a crowd and they may be well versed in making people feel good about themselves, but they are unable to speak with authority. The flock of God looks up expecting to hear the voice of the Chief Shepherd echoing through the biblical words of the under shepherd, only to hear the hollow clanging of a noisy gong.

The man who would be God's messenger must prepare by consuming the Word, always striving to ensure that the flock of God receives rest, refreshment and restoration from the Word that God has given. Sheep that are prone to stray must be confronted by their wayward movement by being confronted by the Word. Note that it is the Word that is the message. Paul commands, "Preach the Word." The word used for the command "Preach" (*kērússon*) is a cognate of the word that was used for the preacher—*kêrux*; the noun "preacher" is derived from the verb "preach."<sup>6</sup> As suggested by the noun, the verb speaks of heralding a message that has been given by another. We need not wonder what message the preacher is appointed to preach, for the Apostle declares that the preacher is to "Preach the Word." Define what "the Word" consists of and we will know the message that is to be preached.

Whenever we speak of "the Word," we speak of the written revelation of God's Person; thus, the Word is also a revelation of the divine will. Therefore, we can say with certainty that the Word consists of the Scriptures—the Old Testament and the New Testament. We receive these writings as given by God for His glory and for our good. I am not ignoring the fact that Christ the Lord is identified as "the Word" in John's Gospel. He is very God in human flesh and He has chosen to reveal Himself as "the Word of God" [see **JOHN 1:1-4**]. Nevertheless, Jesus Himself often identified the Scriptures, the writings of the Old Covenant, as "the Word of God."<sup>7</sup> Establish in your mind, then, that the message the messenger is to preach the Word.

The preacher has no warrant to declare his specious speculations or to deliver his philosophical perceptions; he is to preach the Word. He is to be a student of the Word, declaring the Word so that the mind of God may be known by those who listen. Whether those who listen heed what God says through His Word or ignore what is said is on their head and not on the head of him who declares that word. The work demands exertion, intense labour from the messenger.

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<sup>6</sup> L. Coenen, op. cit., 48–50.

<sup>7</sup> E.g., **MATTHEW 15:6**; **MARK 7:13**; **JOHN 10:35**

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Spurgeon perceptively wrote, “An idler has no right in the pulpit. He is an instrument of Satan in damning the souls of men. The ministry demands brain labour; the preacher must throw his thought into his teaching, and read and study to keep his mind in good trim. He must not weary the people by telling them the truth in a stale, unprofitable manner, with nothing fresh from his own soul to give force to it. Above all, he must put heart work into his preaching. He must feel what he preaches: it must never be with him an easy thing to deliver a sermon.”<sup>8</sup>

Reading the sermons of this powerful spokesman of God, it is easy to forget that he was unhindered by education. He likely would not have been allowed to pastor one of our “better” churches in this day since he was one of those men who was “unlearned and ignorant”<sup>9</sup> whom God delights to use in such a powerful fashion. One should not imagine, however, that Spurgeon was without knowledge. The godly pastor spent hours in the Word and invested hours reading the Puritans; he mastered the English Bible and he was thoroughly conversant with the Puritans. His personal library in his Westwood home boasted an estimated twelve thousand volumes of Bible commentaries, systematic theologies, linguistic aids, church histories and Christian biographies. So familiar was Spurgeon with his books that it was said he could walk into his study in the dark and put his hand on any desired work. He believed that if he was to be used effectively in evangelism, he must have a comprehensive knowledge of the Scriptures. Consequently, his sermon preparation was marked by thorough study of the biblical text throughout the week. The master pulpiter testified to his students: “Be masters of your Bibles, brethren. Whatever other works you have not searched, be at home with the writings of the prophets and apostles. ‘Let the Word of God dwell in you richly.’”<sup>10</sup> As Spurgeon saw it, a preacher’s depth in the Word would ultimately determine the breadth of his ministry.

There is yet another admonition from Spurgeon’s keen mind that applies in this matter. The great man of God pleaded, “May I beg you carefully to judge every preacher, not by his gifts, not by his elocutionary powers, not by his status in society, not by the respectability of his congregation, not by the prettiness of his Church, the grandeur of the ceremonial, or the peculiar beauty of his vestments, but by this—does he preach the Word of truth, the gospel of your salvation? If he does, your sitting under his ministry may prove to you the means of begetting faith in you; but if he does not, you cannot expect God’s blessing, for you are not using God’s ordinance, but the ordinance of man.”<sup>11</sup>

The messenger is to labour to preach the Word. He has no message other than this Word which is given by the Lord God. This is the message God delivered through Ezekiel long millennia past. “Son of man, speak to your people and say to them, If I bring the sword upon a land, and the people of the land take a man from among them, and make him their watchman, and if he sees the sword coming upon the land and blows the trumpet and warns the people, then if anyone who hears the sound of the trumpet does not take warning, and the sword comes and takes him away, his blood shall be upon his own head. He heard the sound of the trumpet and did not take warning; his blood shall be upon himself. But if he had taken warning, he would have saved his life. But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, so that the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any one of them, that person is taken away in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at the watchman’s hand.

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<sup>8</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, **The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons**, vol. 19 (Passmore & Alabaster, London 1873), 462

<sup>9</sup> See **ACTS 4:13** (Authorised Version)

<sup>10</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, **An All-Round Ministry: Addresses to Ministers and Students** (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009), 36.

<sup>11</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, **The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons**, vol. 10 (Passmore & Alabaster, London 1864), 552.

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“So you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. If I say to the wicked, O wicked one, you shall surely die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked person shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, that person shall die in his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul” [EZEKIEL 33:2-9].

Let the messenger assure himself that God has appointed him to the task he takes up. Thus assured, let him devote himself to the Word, eating into that Word and delivering that Word so that the people of God are nourished richly on the Word of the Living God and refreshed by draughts from the wells of living water and rested in the verdant pastures that mark the blessings of the True and Living God. Let the pastor point the people to God Himself, declaring the Word that he hears echoing in his own ear as the Spirit directs him in his speech.

**THE PREPARATION** — “Be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.” I’ve already alluded to the preparation required of the theologian of the church. Paul admonishes Timothy, and thus admonishes all who would stand in the pulpit, “Be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.” The preparation requires study—diligence, exertion, stretching one’s intellect to grasp the deep things of God. The preparation Paul anticipates will place demands on the preacher as he struggles to understand the mind of God and endeavours how best to communicate that mind. The rewards of his effort are great, however; the people will be strengthened and the Lord God will be magnified through the expenditure of time in study.

The message the preacher is to deliver is not simply a matter of disseminating information. Many people imagine that all the preacher need do is dispense information much as any boring lecturer might disperse. To be sure, the preacher is responsible to provide insight into the character of God as revealed in the Word and to express the truths that God has hidden in that Word. However, according to what the Apostle has written, the preacher has an even more onerous responsibility as he acts in the capacity as theologian of the congregation. Paul says the preacher must be prepared to “reprove, rebuke and exhort”; moreover, he must perform these duties “with complete patience and teaching.”

The preacher is to “be ready in season and out of season.” When Paul speaks of readiness whether “in season or out of season,” it is unclear whether he means this for Timothy or for those who listen. If Timothy is the focus of Paul’s command, it would mean that he is to be ready regardless of how he feels. Perhaps he wouldn’t feel like preaching. The implication of the command would be, “Do it anyway!” If the apostolic emphasis is on the hearers, then it means that the preacher must not consider whether they want to hear what will be said—speak out boldly! Don’t stop! It seems best to understand that Paul’s focus is on the hearers, however.

I have had people seated in the congregation who neither wished to be present nor wanted me to speak. I’ve had church leaders clean their fingernails while occasionally glaring toward the pulpit as I spoke. I marvelled that these slovenly individuals would come to church with dirty fingernails. Other angry saints made faces at me, some have shook their fists at me and still others have made rude gestures as I delivered the message God had given. Long years ago I took to heart God’s admonition to Jeremiah when he began his service before the LORD God. “Now, gird up your loins and arise, and speak to them all that I command you. Do not break down before their faces, lest I break you before them” [JEREMIAH 1:17].<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Institute for Scripture Research, **The Scriptures** (Institute for Scripture Research (Pty) Ltd, South Africa) 2000

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As intimidating as his listeners may be, the preacher must watch that he does not he jump from the frying pan of congregational opposition into the fire of God's humiliation. When a preacher seeks peace with man, he can find himself at war with God. Since I've just cited God's command to Jeremiah, it is appropriate to examine Jeremiah's appointment to preach. When God first called Jeremiah as His servant, the young man hardly qualified as a fire-breather. In fact, his initial reaction to God's call was decidedly timid. Protesting that he was but a youth, Jeremiah, like Moses before him, attempted to decline the divine commission [see **JEREMIAH 1:6**].

Do you blame him? Jeremiah was a member of the priestly clan [see **JEREMIAH 1:1**]; and the LORD gave him a devastating message. Jeremiah must have shuddered at the thought of telling his countrymen and his fellow priests that everything they held dear—the nation of Israel, the city of Jerusalem, even the temple of the LORD itself—was about to be judged and destroyed.

In spite of the young man's fears, God pressed His demand—"Dress yourself for work." The life of priestly ease Jeremiah once enjoyed was finished. Jeremiah was now a prophet of God given one mandate: "Say to them everything that I command you" [see **JEREMIAH 1:17**]. From this point onward he would be under appointment from the True and Living God.

The newly appointed prophet had every reason to be fearful—literally all the great men of Israel would stand against him [see **JEREMIAH 1:18, 19**]. Therefore, The LORD commanded him, "Do not be dismayed by them, lest I dismay you before them." The Hebrew word "dismayed" (*hata*) also means "broken" or "cracked." If Jeremiah abandoned his confidence in the LORD and cowered before men, then God would break him. Only confidence in the LORD would enable him to succeed in his new appointment.

Jeremiah was charged to say all that God commanded him to say [see **JEREMIAH 1:7**]. This same concept is conveyed in the text today, "Preach the Word." We who preach are to preach "the whole counsel of God" [**ACTS 20:27**] and not merely preach the parts that give no offence. It is Christ the Lord who empowers His servant for this holy office of declaring the truth of God. Of this you may be certain, the faithful pastor will offend—not out of any love for controversy, but because preaching Christ crucified is an offence [see **1 CORINTHIANS 1:23; 1 PETER 2:8**]. One has to wonder how many preachers are determined to avoid "controversial issues" so as to avoid offending. How many preachers measure their success by how few people they have offended with their preaching, as if it were a virtue to be more conciliatory than Jesus? Preachers who ignore biblical truth on "controversial issues" may think they serve kindness and unity, but fear may be their master.

God's man encourages where the Word encourages, teaches where it teaches and rebukes where it rebukes, even if the whole world takes offense. It is a joy to preach the Word—all of it—without dismay. By God's grace, the preacher's chains of fear drop away. Thus, the preacher is admonished to "reprove, rebuke and exhort." We must understand what is meant by these three imperatives if we hope to understand how the pastor is to conduct his ministry.

The first of the three imperatives under review that we will consider is "reprove." "Reprove" is a word that is not often used today. This is admittedly a negative command. Whenever we speak of reproofing someone, we are speaking of exposing the sinfulness of a particular action, attitude or doctrine. This is the point to hold in mind, to reprove someone is to point out the sinfulness of a particular conduct—it is refuting error when such error is apparent. Reproof is reasoning with an individual to help them see how a given act or attitude displeases God. To do this, the preacher uses the Word. We are taught that "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness" [**2 TIMOTHY 3:16**]. Thus, reproof seeks to correct misbehaviour or errant doctrine.

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Just as the word “reproof” is absent from much of modern speech, so “rebuke” is not a word commonly found in modern vocabularies. Rebuke is more personal than is reproof, seeking, as it must, to expose the sinfulness of the sinner. This is the primary distinction between these two negative commands—reproof seeks to refute error or misconduct through careful biblical argument; rebuke is much more pointed, seeking to bring about repentance. Rebuke is personal confrontation that endeavours to bring the sinning individual to repentance. The rebuke may be private, as when confronting a brother or sister, or it may be public, as when confronting a congregation. Nevertheless, rebuke speaks of confrontation that brings an individual under conviction of guilt.

The messenger is not always negative, for he has received a positive command as well—he is to “exhort.” Again, though the word is not used as often as it once was in our English tongue, the concept is that of comfort or consolation. Exhortation does not speak of the smooth petting of the pitiful lout who avoids ever saying anything that appeared negative, rather it is the hope that grows out of the knowledge of God’s grace declared through His Word that is in the Apostle’s mind. The word Paul used is related to the Word that was translated “Helper” when Jesus promised the Holy Spirit [see **JOHN 14:16, 26**]. Having reproofed and rebuked, the preacher will then come alongside to encourage those who are confronted to change so as to please God.

The Apostle’s ministry among the churches was marked by such consolation. “You know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory” [**1 THESSALONIANS 1:11, 12**]. He expected that the churches would act with similar integrity toward those saints who were wayward, restoring them when they repented. Near the end of the first Letter to the Church in Thessalonica, Paul admonished, “We urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all” [**1 THESSALONIANS 5:14**].

It is vital that we see a final matter on this point. Paul writes, “Be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.” Do not pass by those final nouns in this second verse too rapidly and miss what God is saying. The pastor is to conduct his difficult ministry “with complete patience and teaching.” The preacher is not to insist that people salute his flag as though he were the authority and they must immediately snap to attention when he speaks—he is to patiently build the flock. Here is a truth that is easily overlooked by many immature preachers—the work of building a church is the work of a lifetime. Just as a life is not built in a single, blinding flash, so a church is not built in one dramatic moment. How the preacher speaks is as important as what he says. If his voice betrays irritation and impatience, it may be that he is displaying his own immaturity.

The flock will not always enjoy what is being said from the pulpit and the sheep may resist the direction in which the shepherd endeavours to lead. The preacher must not become exasperated or angry, berating the flock because they are not doing as he wishes. Rather, he must bear in mind that it is not his flock—he is an under shepherd serving the Great Shepherd. The sheep belong to God; they do not belong to the preacher. We who preach do well to remember the patience of Christ expressed toward us. Paul asked, “Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance” [**ROMANS 2:3, 4**]? If Christ has shown the preacher this measure of patience—saving him, appointing him and bearing with him—then surely the preacher should be as patient with the flock over which the Master appointed him. In the same way, the entire church is to grow in precisely such patience.



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**THE PASTOR IS THE CHURCH'S THEOLOGIAN**

The message the messenger is to deliver is the Word, and he is to do this “with teaching.” In short, the pastor is to be the church’s theologian, teaching God’s truth. The pastor is to be a teacher, instructing the people of God in the Word at every opportunity. Whether from the pulpit, in small groups and Bible studies or in private conversations, the pastor is responsible to constantly refer back to the Word, bringing it to bear in the life of God’s people. The sole means given to the messenger of God to accomplish all that God has assigned is careful teaching of the Word. Unbelievers will be convicted of their sin only through the preaching of the Word; there is no hope of salvation outside of instruction of the Word. How will the lost know they are lost, if their condition is not revealed through the Word? How will the seeking soul find grace except through the Word? Just as outsiders must be confronted with the Word, so believers who stray will be convicted of their sin and brought to repentance only through the Word. There is no hope of restoration of the penitent except through the Word working in the heart.

John MacArthur is correct when he testifies, “It is not by a preacher’s personal authority or persuasiveness—no matter how well he knows Scripture or how highly he is gifted—but solely by the authority and power of Scripture itself, illuminated and applied by the Holy Spirit, that any ministry or Christian service can be spiritually effective and pleasing to the Lord.”<sup>13</sup>

**THE REASON** — “The time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.” Why must the pastor serve as the church’s theologian? The simple answer is because it is what he is appointed to be. The more extended answer is because the times demand it and the flock requires it.

It is no secret that times will grow more difficult and the light will burn less brightly as the time draws closer to the end. Though wickedness will become more pronounced, the majority will be less aware of what is happening. Though the hearts of those who look for Christ’s return will become increasingly grieved at the wickedness of the day and though His people will long for home, they are appointed to stand firm in difficult times, shining brightly in the midst of the darkness. And even within the Zion of God, the wicked will have increasingly infiltrated to dampen the ardour of the faithful.

Jesus spoke of those last days as He prepared His disciples for His exodus. “They will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake. And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold” [MATTHEW 24:9-12]. Paul’s words in our text echo these dark words spoken by the Master.

I’ve often heard the sad bleat of dyspeptic sheep, “Don’t preach doctrine. We don’t want doctrine.” Few understand that the preacher who will honour the Master and who will strengthen the flock will be a doctrinal preacher. He is compelled by the Word itself to declare the Word, knowing that those who listen will be blessed. At the same time, the man of God who faithfully fulfils the appointment he has received is grieved because he knows that the same Word which reproves and rebukes and encourages must ultimately judge those who reject it. He knows, because he is appointed by the Judge of all mankind, that those who have rejected this Word must give an account to the Risen Christ.

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<sup>13</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., **2 Timothy, MacArthur New Testament Commentary** (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 178

**2 TIMOTHY 4:1-5**  
**THE PASTOR IS THE CHURCH'S THEOLOGIAN**

It is at once a comfort and a deep sorrow to know what is coming at Christ's return. The Word of God informs all who will hear it, "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" [**PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11**].

It is a comfort to know that I serve Him who extends grace and mercy to all. It is a grief to know that should such grace be rejected, there remains only a fearful expectation of judgement. Those are dark words that the writer of the Letter to Hebrew Christians has penned. "If we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, 'Vengeance is mine; I will repay'" [**HEBREWS 10:26-30a**].

Paul's words written in **2 CORINTHIANS 5:17-6:2** give comfort for all who will receive them. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

"Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For he says,

"In a favorable time I listened to you,  
and in a day of salvation I have helped you."

"Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation."

Perhaps there is one who now seeks mercy? This is the promise of God to you. Christ the Lord has taken your punishment so that you may be free of all condemnation. His call to you is to believe the message that I bring. The Apostolic message is, "If you agree with God that Jesus is Master, believing in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be set free. It is with the heart that one believes and is made right with the Lord God and with the mouth one openly agrees with God resulting in freedom." Paul concludes that statement of promise by citing the Prophet Joel, "Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord will be set free, will be saved" [**see ROMANS 10:9-13**]. Freedom, God's salvation, awaits all who will receive Christ Jesus as Master over life. Will that be you? Amen.