



“THE PAINFUL PROGRESS IN FAITH”

1 Timothy 4:13-16

Theme: *Our obedience to Scripture significantly impacts the faith of those around us.*

Introduction: It must be the will of the Lord, for it seems so right to me! This is how many Christians live their lives. Last night I spoke with a woman who had been confronted by another Christian woman about things she would say, “The Bible says ...” and it didn’t; she just thought it sounded biblical. Conventional Wisdom, popular morality, and secular logic often serve as the basis for decisions more than God’s Word. For some professing believers, studying God’s Word or seeking divine wisdom through prayer is too hard. They live “popular” lives – blending with those around them.

Yet, when God saves us, He makes us new creatures. The way we used to think is exchanged for the mind of Christ. Conventional wisdom is replaced with revealed truth. We begin to distrust our impulses and search for God’s ways. As our lives change, people around us who are stuck in their sin begin to observe the changes – not just in our conduct but in our love, joy, and purpose.

Our text informs us that this progress in transformation is a long and often painful process. It is not a single event – but a process. Yet as we progress, others observe it. Other Christians are inspired by it and motivated to greater zeal in their own lives so that we are mutually spurring one another toward Christlikeness. When unbelievers observe our progress, they are drawn to consider the powerful influences of grace they can observe. They begin to desire what we have. With either group, our text convinces us that ***“Our obedience to Scripture has a significant impact on the faith of those around us.”***

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I. THE PRIORITY OF A SCRIPTURAL MINISTRY – 4:13

A. **The Concern for a Scriptural Ministry**

1. Throughout the book of 1 Timothy, Paul demonstrated his great concern for preserving truth against the onslaught of false teaching.

2. He intends to return to Ephesus and tells Timothy that his priority must remain biblically focused – *“Until I come, give attention to ...”*
3. *“give attention ...”* [προσέχω] – means to be in a state of alert or to be concerned to the point where you pay close attention to something, to follow it; it means to apply yourself to something.
4. Essentially, Paul tells Timothy that his top priority is to ensure his ministry, and everything connected to it, is occupied with attentiveness to God’s Word.
5. Too often, we are inattentive to spiritual realities and responsibilities – living “common sense” Christianity instead of a biblically directed faith.
6. I was grateful to interact with a Christian businessman this week who was struggling with an employee and sought counsel to address the problems biblically.
7. You might be a parent struggling with a child, a young person attempting to determine whether you ought to date someone, a couple wondering whether or not to move, a drug addict battling your desire to remain sober – whatever circumstance you encounter in life – no matter its significance – are you attentive to whether your decisions are directed by God’s Word and God’s Spirit?

B. The Components of a Scriptural Ministry

1. There are three means by which a ministry can remain biblically focused.
2. First, Timothy is to *“give attention to the public reading of Scripture ...”*
 - a) *Literally, this reads: “to the reading” [ἀνάγνωσις] – the content of what is read.*
 - b) *It is implied that it is to be read publicly – a reference to the Old Testament Scriptures in the assembly, something that the New Testament books would have superseded as they were supplied.*
3. Second, Timothy is to *“give attention to ... exhortation ...”* [παράκλησις] – a reference to the encouragement of another person to do what they know to be right.
 - a) *It is the appeal to someone to obedience to the Word.*
 - b) *It can include rebuke, warnings, counsel, and comfort from the Word.*
4. Third, Timothy is to *“give attention to ... teaching”* [διδασκαλία] – the explanation of what the Scriptures say to make it applicable and able to be obeyed.
5. Paul is here emphasizing the centrality of God’s Word in authentic

ministry – as the church assembles, the church's primary focus must be the reading of Scripture, exhortation from Scripture, and teaching what the Scriptures mean.

6. **“to give attention”** to these things requires several things:
 - a) *Personal – context would mean reading, listening to sermons, and inviting others to provide encouragement on how your example can be improved.*
 - b) *Family – pursuing a daily focus on God's Word with your spouse and children, allowing God's Word to be a lamp to your feet and a light to your path.*
 - c) *Corporately – assemble with the Body of Christ to hear the Word of God proclaimed and gather with other believers to discuss how to apply God's Word better.*
7. Churches that replace the exposition of Scripture with issue-oriented seminars of self-help or improvement, stories that moralize or fixate on current events and a religious commentary on politics, social devolution, or affirmation starve the church of the supernatural power to sanctify their members into greater conformity to Jesus Christ.
8. Do you value the preaching and teaching of God's Word? Are you at Grace because you expect the Word of God – indeed the whole counsel of God – will be proclaimed with authority and power?

II. THE PRIORITY OF SPIRITUAL MINISTRY – 4:14

A. The Reliance on God's Spirit

1. There are indications that Timothy was struggling with the charge he had been given in confronting false teachers and their teaching.
2. We see an indication of it here when Paul says: **“Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you ...”**
3. The word **“neglect”** [ἀμελέω] – means to become unconcerned or dismissive.
4. It is essentially the antithesis of **“paying attention”** mentioned above.
5. Paul consistently confronted an apparent temptation on the part of Timothy to quit – perhaps recalling how John Mark had abandoned his calling, or Demas had defected to the world because it got too hard – cp. **2 Timothy 1:6—9; 2:3.**
6. The Christian life is so hard that it is impossible to live independently of the enabling grace God gives us through the Holy Spirit **Philippians 2:13; John 15:5; Romans 8:13.**

7. As we seek to serve Christ but fail to regularly take advantage of the grace provided by God's Spirit, we fail to impact the church to the glory of Christ.
8. Each of us has received a spiritual gift imparted the moment we are saved and indwelt by the Spirit – a gift designed to be exercised within the context of the church to edify other believers – *1 Corinthians 12:4-7; 1 Peter 4:10.*
9. Since these gifts are given by God's Spirit, empowered by God's Spirit, and fruitful in God's Spirit, we cannot be lax or dismissive of our reliance on God's Spirit to use them.
10. Nor are we able to exempt ourselves from the stewardship

B. The Responsibility for Our Stewardship

1. Paul reminds Timothy that not only did he receive such a gift, but it was affirmed by others within the church – *“which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery.”*
2. Paul declares that a responsibility or stewardship had been officially given to him by godly men who, by *“laying on of hands,”* had symbolically set him apart for his ministry – cp. *1 Timothy 1:18.*
3. The *“prophetic utterance”* [προφητεία] – describes **“the utterance of one who interprets divine will or purpose”**¹ – *“the presbytery”* or elders (*the collective deliberative body of qualified spiritual leaders*) affirmed Timothy in the role to which Timothy testified he had been called.
4. All of us who are saved, given a spiritual gift by the Holy Spirit, and are members of the church are expected by God to be engaged in fulfilling the responsibility of serving the Lord in the advancement of the truth.
5. Hence, not only are we to seek a Scriptural ministry, but we must also engage in a spiritual ministry empowered by God's Spirit.
6. A Christian life that can be lived without the Spirit's enabling is not a Christian life.

¹ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 889.

- a) *Men, you have had a stewardship bestowed upon you in a prophetic utterance, even the laying on of hands – at your wedding when you were declared to be the husband on your wife; it is the same with you wives – how are you going to fulfill these weighty responsibilities without the enabling of God’s Spirit?*
- b) *It is the same within any ministry in the church – ushers, nursery workers, sound techs, VBS workers, coffee cart baristas, deacons, elders, and so on – Ephesians 3:16-17.*

III. THE PRIORITY OF A SANCTIFYING MINISTRY – 4:15

A. The Cultivation of Scriptural Awareness

1. Instead of “neglecting” what God’s Spirit desires to do through us, we need to *“take pains with these things”*
2. That is, we cannot think that somehow, we will gain awareness of the truths of God’s Word through osmosis – but we need to *“take pains” [μελετάω]* – to “fix one’s mind on something – to improve by care or study, to cultivate.”
3. It refers to the discipline Paul advocated earlier for godliness and its development.
4. It is only through the knowledge of God’s Word that we are sanctified – cp. John 17:17.
5. The *“these things”* refers to everything to which he has been presenting in chapter 4 – Defection from the truth is coming (**v. 1**), our defense is in the word of God and prayer (**v.2**), we need to be pointing out the truth of God’s Word and sound doctrine (**v. 6**), we need to be disciplined to focus on the Word of God for the purpose of godliness (**v. 7**), our hope must remain fully fixed on Christ as we encounter Him in the Word (**v. 10**), we need to not only prescribe and teach “these things,” we also need to be the example of what *“these things”* produce in practical living (**vv. 11-12**). Finally, we need to be in the Word and minister to one another in the power of God’s Spirit (**vv. 13-14**).
6. *“These things”* must remain that on which we constantly cultivate – a spiritual awareness through exposure to the Word of God.

B. The Corroboration of Spiritual Advancement

1. Considering the influence that setting a good example produces, Paul emphasizes the need for others to be able to see our growth in conformity to Christ.
2. He states – *“... so that your progress will be evident to all.”*

3. **“progress”** [προκοπή] – is a reference to seeing advancement toward a goal – a term commonly used for an advancing army – cp. ***Philippians 1:12, 25.***
4. God expects that believers are “advancing” in Christlikeness so that others will observe the **“progress”** and know that it results from God’s grace transforming us through the Spirit using His Word.
5. It will be **“evident”** [φανερὸς] – plainly visible or apparent – not only that there is a change, but from where the change comes – ***Acts 4:16.***
 - a) *This requires that we be engaged in community with other believers in ways that put the power of God’s Spirit in our lives in plain view.*
 - b) *Our participation in ministry, discussions, studies, fellowship, worship, and other activities within the life of the church is the context where these things will be “evident.”*
6. This is important because it inspires others to pursue Christ in the Word themselves to be transformed even as we are.

IV. THE PRIORITY OF A SAVING MINISTRY – 4:16

A. The Obligation in Sound Teaching

1. Paul states that the first responsibility of someone who will serve Christ is to ensure that the truth is making a difference in their lives – **“Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching”**
2. Literally, this reads: **“Have these teaching for yourself”**
3. We must concern ourselves with how God’s Word applies to us first – and cannot be consumed with how these things ought to be heard by others.
4. How often do we listen to God’s Word, assume that we are good enough, and begin to think about who should pay attention because “they need to listen to this and change!”
5. Immature believers will go to the opposite extreme and say something like this: “I have too much to work on myself to be involved in others’ lives, so I won’t try to be an example.”
6. Yet Paul has just said that we need to allow our progress to be **“evident to all”** – that is, those around us on whom we have influence need to see the progress because we are **“paying close attention”** to how we ourselves need to be more like Christ.

B. The Outcome of Sound Teaching

1. Our **“persevering in these things”** enables the credibility of God’s grace

to produce an even more significant impact.

2. The burden of those who serve the Lord extends beyond our own salvation and desires that others be saved.
3. We mentioned this last week by stating that we must not be the terminus of the gospel but rather a terminal advancing the Gospel to others to be saved.
4. Were you able to share your faith with someone this past week? If not, would you look for an opportunity this coming week? Think of someone unsaved and pray for the Lord to open a door for you.
5. Here Paul declares this priority – *“... for as you do this, you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.”*
6. The glorification of being saved from the presence of sin itself is referred to here.
 - a) *We have been saved from the penalty of sin - [Ephesians 2:8](#).*
 - b) *We are being saved from the power of sin - [1 Corinthians 1:18](#).*
 - c) *We will be saved from the presence of sin - [Romans 5:9](#) - this is the aspect of salvation referenced here.*
7. Yet for any of us to be ultimately saved, we must first be saved from the penalty of sin through faith and repentance, and we must seek to intentionally help “more anothers” follow Christ!

So What?

1. There is only one way for your faith to grow – by being in the Word and submitting to the Spirit of God to seek the necessary changes to be an example to others.
2. Do you neglect God’s Word in your life?
3. Do you quench the Holy Spirit’s power in your life by ignoring God’s Word when you are rebuked or corrected by it?
4. What would you change immediately if someone’s eternal destiny depended on your life displaying the sanctifying influences of God’s grace?

Our obedience to Scripture has a significant impact on the faith of those around us.