

INTRODUCTION

Paul's final letter to Timothy, written around AD 66-67 from a Roman prison, stands as his last urgent charge before his impending execution. Building on chapter 3's description of perilous times, the infiltration of false teachers who hold a form of godliness yet deny its power, and the sufficiency of Scripture to equip the man of God, chapter 4 now delivers the climactic command. Paul knows his departure is near, so he solemnly charges Timothy to carry forward the ministry with unwavering fidelity.

In the last lesson, we saw Paul contrast his own persecuted but faithful course with the deceptive progress of false teachers. Timothy was urged to continue in the Scriptures, which he had known from childhood, Scripture that is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

Now in 4:1-8 Paul gives his most solemn charge, models his own impending departure, and points Timothy (and every believer) to the reward that awaits faithful endurance.

GRAMMATICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The section opens with a strong oath formula using the strong indicative διαμαρτύρομαι (*diamartyromai*) – to charge solemnly, to testify under oath. Paul invokes God and Christ Jesus as present witnesses. Key imperatives follow in rapid succession:

- κηρύσσω (*kēryssō*) – preach / proclaim as a herald
- ἐφίστημι (*ephistēmi*) – be ready / stand by
- ἐλέγχω (*elegchō*) – expose
- ἐπιτιμάω (*epitimaō*) – rebuke, warn, admonish, challenge a perceived wrong
- παρακαλέω (*parakaleō*) – exhort / encourage
- νήφω (*nēphō*) – be sound of mind, free from distraction
- κατοπαθέω (*kakopatheō*) – suffer hardships or endure evil (2 Timothy 2:9)
- ποιέω (*poieō*) – do, execute. Work of an evangelist
- πληροφορέω (*plērophoreō*) – to make fully known, to carry through to the end

It is important to make sure we understand that all of these imperatives are directed to Timothy alone. We can learn from these instructions, but we need to keep it in this context.

Verse 8 closes with the future passive ἀποδίδωμι (*apodidōmi*) – will award/render back and the articular perfect participle ἀγαπάω (*agapaō*) – those who have loved. Demonstrate a perpetual promise to all who “have loved his appearing.”

VERSE-BY-VERSE EXPOSITION

Verse 1 – I solemnly 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:

Paul places Timothy under solemn oath before God the Father and Christ the Son. The phrase “who is to judge the living and the dead” identifies Christ as the future Judge at the *judgment seat* for the living (βῆμα – *bēma*) where believers’ works are evaluated (2 Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:10). The dead will be evaluated at the Great White Throne (Revelation 20:11-15).

The charge is tied to two eschatological realities: Christ’s *appearing* (ἐπιφάνεια – *epiphaneia* – visible manifestation) and His kingdom. Timothy must act now because the Judge is coming and the kingdom is certain.

Verse 2 – preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.

Five imperatives flow from the oath:

1. Proclaim the word publicly and authoritatively.
2. Stand ready at all times—no convenient season or off-season exists.
3. Expose error. How is Timothy to expose error? Through Scripture.
4. Rebuke sharply when needed.
5. Encourage and strengthen with teaching.

All of this is to be done with great *patience* (μακροθυμία – *makrothumia* – long-suffering endurance). This always has to do with difficulty, opposition, or waiting while learners process information.

Instruction (διδαχή – *didachē* – systematic teaching). Timothy was to be intentional in his content and method.

Verses 3-4 – For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance with their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths.

Paul warns of a time when people will refuse healthy teaching. Instead, they will seek teachers who scratch itching ears, heap up instructors who suit their desires, turn from truth, and be turned to myths. The progression is deliberate

and intentional: rejection of truth leads to accumulation of error, then active turning to fiction. Who are the "they." This does not indicate a rejection of the Gospel but believers' rejection of sound doctrine.

Verse 5 – But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

As stated in the introduction, *be sober* (νήφε – nēphe – be sound of mind, free from distraction). This is not a prohibition on alcohol, but it is an instruction in opposition to those who do not tolerate sound doctrine.

The hardship, as indicated, is a repeat of previous themes. Be willing to put your life on the line and risk imprisonment and even death for the sake of the Gospel and sound teaching.

Do evangelist's work – this work is both the spreading of the Gospel and the training of the body (Ephesians 4:11-12).

Fulfill your ministry means to bring to full light the ministry that was entrusted to him and which Timothy pledged to.

Verse 6 – For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come.

Paul now models what he commands. *Being poured out* pictures the drink offering poured completely in worship (Philippians 2:17; Numbers 15:5-10). *Departure* is a nautical term for loosing from moorings or a military term for striking camp. Paul's death is a release into Christ's presence.

Verse 7 – I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith;

Three perfect-tense verbs declare completed victory:

- Fought the good fight
- Finished the course
- Kept the faith

Paul has contended strenuously, completed the assigned race, and guarded the deposit of apostolic truth, defended the doctrines of God, and did so to the end.

Verse 8 – In the future 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.

The *crown* (στέφανος – stephanos – victor's wreath) of righteousness is stored securely for Paul. The righteous Judge will award it "on that day" (the day of evaluation at the judgment seat (βῆμα – bēma). It belongs not only to Paul but to

“all who have loved His appearing.” This is not to the believer but the believer who loves and looks forward to Jesus’ appearing (return).

Titus 2:13 – Looking for the blessed hope, highly anticipating the promises.

1 John 2:28 – Abiding in Christ is synonymous with loving his appearing.

2 Timothy 4:10 – This stands in opposition to loving the world.

The primary imploration here is to maintain belief and confidence in Jesus Christ. Coupled with that is having the focus and values of God in this world. Think of it as “Do you love this world and what it offers or do you love the eternity God promises?”

Theological Impact and Crowns / Rewards

For Timothy and the Ephesian church, this charge countered the rising tide of false teachers and prepared them for Paul’s absence. They were to proclaim truth boldly, endure suffering, and live expectantly, knowing the Judge is coming and rewards are certain.

When the letter circulated through Asia Minor churches, it equipped believers to resist ear-tickling myths, guard sound doctrine, and persevere under Nero’s growing persecution.

Today, the passage calls us to the same vigilance in a culture saturated with pleasing fables and speculative teaching. We respond by proclaiming the word accurately, enduring pressures, and living with genuine love for Christ’s appearing. This alignment with our identity in Christ produces present contentment and peace and secures future rewards.

Believers already possess eternal life and full positional forgiveness through believing the gospel proposition: Jesus Christ, God in flesh, died for the sins of the world, was buried, rose again, and gives eternal life as a gift to all who believe that message. Rewards, however, are distinct—they are earned through faithful stewardship and endurance.

Scripture identifies four crowns (all στέφανος – stephanos, victor’s wreath):

- Crown of righteousness (2 Timothy 4:8) – for those who love His appearing
- Incorruptible crown (1 Corinthians 9:25) – for disciplined self-control in the race
- Crown of life (James 1:12; Revelation 2:10) – for enduring trials while loving the Lord
- Crown of glory (1 Peter 5:4) – for elders who shepherd faithfully, willingly, and as examples

These rewards are evaluated and awarded at the judgment seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:10). A believer who functions outside God's will may lose rewards but never loses eternal life, sonship, or fellowship (John 10:28-29; 2 Timothy 2:13). Rewards motivate joyful, grace-driven service—not fear of losing salvation.

Paul models the path: fight the good fight, finish the course, keep the faith—not to earn favor (already ours by grace) but because we have obtained favor and now live in light of our identity.

The Final Charge: Paul's Last Mandate to Timothy

The Victor's Reward

A Life Poured Out:
Paul models the end, having fought the fight and kept the faith.



The Righteous Judge:
Christ will award the victor's wreath to all who love His appearing.



Crown of Life:
For those who endure trials while loving the Lord.



Incorruptible Crown:
For disciplined self-control during the spiritual race.

The Minister's Mandate



Preach the Word (Kēryssō):
Proclaim the gospel publicly and authoritatively, standing ready in every season.



Combat Itching Ears:
Use Scripture to reprove, rebuke, and exhort those turning from truth to myths.



Full Ministry Fulfillment:
Remain sober-minded and endure hardship to complete the work of an evangelist.