

Redeemed Sinners Devoted to *God's Word*

1 Timothy 4:11-16

Intro: Devotion

[Continuing series on distinctives: *We are redeemed sinners devoted to God's Word, God's people, God's mission, all for God's glory. Today—devotion to God's Word.*]

“Devotion” is a strong word. Paul uses it in **[v13]**. That verse is a beautiful description what takes place in this room every Sunday morning starting around 11am. A man gets behind this pulpit, reads the Word publicly, explains it, and exhorts from it. That's preaching—a exposition and application of God's Word.

Paul writes this to a young Timothy whom he sent to lead the church in Ephesus back to spiritual health: “*Devote* yourself to preaching.” It means to “occupy yourself with” or to “apply yourself to” something (BDAG, 880). It's the same word in 3:8 that says deacons mustn't be “*addicted* to much wine.”

When you *devote* yourself to something, it consumes you, guides your life, rules your affection, it takes up time/ energy/ thinking. You'll make sacrifices for it. You give up other valuable things for it.

What is that for you? You're job? A hobby? A sport? A relationship? Your phone? Food? Money? Status? Approval of others? Leisure? What are you *devoted* to?

How about corporately as a church? What are WE devoted to? If we are gonna continue to be a healthy church, we must be devoted to the written of Word God. It's non-negotiable.

That's the basic message of Paul to Timothy in this passage. When Paul sent him to pastor the church in Ephesus, it was in disarray.

- False teaching needed correction, as Paul says in 1:3, "...remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine..."
- There was disorder in roles—men were fighting with each other rather than

praying with each other (2:8). Women were leading as teachers (2:12).

- Members were getting wrapped up in silly teaching that Paul calls “myths” in ch4.
- Widows were prone to slander/gossip and Timothy needed to correct them (ch5).
- People whom Paul describes in ch6 as “having an unhealthy craving for controversy,” that produces “constant friction” among the members.

This why Paul says to Timothy in ch3, “I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church...”

That’s the whole purpose of this letter.

“Timothy, you gotta know how the church must function.” And it begins with a devotion to the Word of God.

Every healthy church is devoted to God’s Word and to be devoted to God’s Word means being devoted to the preaching of God’s Word, because *the preaching of God’s Word is essential to the health of a church.*

That's the point of this passage. Paul makes that point in three ways.

First, the preaching of the Word will be seen. Notice the connection between v11 and v12—Paul tells Timothy to preach the Word and then to model it. **[vv11-12]** “Command and teach...Set an example.” There's a connection—live what you teach.

What must he “command and teach”? Paul said in **[vv7-10]**. In other words, “Timothy, command/teach a way of life that flows from the hope we have in Christ our Savior.”

There's a strong connection between *right belief* and *right living* in this book. You gotta believe the true gospel to live a life pleasing to the Lord. And that's why Paul tells Timothy to model right living. “Teach the truth and then model it.” **[v12]**

Clearly, the members of the church in Ephesus that Timothy was sent to pastor looked down on him because he was young. And Paul says, “Don't let them.”

How? How does Timothy have any control over what they think of him? What's he supposed to do? Go up to those who despise him and say, "You shouldn't despise me because I'm young. You should respect me!"

Even feeling that demand in your heart without saying it out loud will be felt by others. Don't go there. Don't demand respect. You need to earn it. How? **[v12]**. That's how you don't LET people despise you. You give them reason not to despise you but to respect you by virtue of your godly life.

Listen, I know the temptation to crave admiration...to crave credibility...to want to feel important...to want to be someone worth listening to. Believe me I know it! *When I came to this church, I was 33, and 95% of the members were old enough to be my parents or grandparents. But I had to guard against the craving for respect.*

If you sense that in your own heart, your focus should NOT be on gaining respect from people. Your focus should just be on the Lord

and giving yourself to godliness and in due time, the Lord will show it. As Paul says in ch5, “good works are obvious, and even those that are not cannot remain hidden.” (5:25)

What “good works” must Timothy model?

- *Speech*. His words are true and upright and good and edifying.
- *Conduct*. Lit. “manner of life.” It’s a principled life. A life governed by conviction in the truth.
- *Love*. “You need to show people, Timothy, what it looks like to willingly sacrifice yourself for the good of others.”
- *Faith*. “Model what it looks like to trust God in everything.”
- *Purity*. Referring to *sexual purity*, which is why Paul tells him to relate to younger women *as sisters in all purity* (5:1).

This is the kind of pastor worth following. Age is not the primary factor, but age is also not unimportant. The fact that Paul has to say this implies that the normal pattern is pastors have some life experience behind them.

That's why I was comfortable nominating Bill as an elder after he had been at our church for a little over a year. He was in his 70s. He was a retired past. He had experience, and so there was more weight in his credibility bucket.

BUT, v12 was also a key verse that compelled me and Bill to nominate Logan and Dillon as pastors. Though they were on the younger side, most people didn't know it because they have a humble, mature, godly way of life that made us say, "These are the kind of guys that we want other guys in the church to emulate."

Why? If Timothy does NOT *practice* what he preaches, he'll have no credibility in his preaching. They're not gonna listen to him! It doesn't matter how good of a preacher he is! If his life doesn't match his what he says, they'll dismiss him as a hypocrite.

And the church will remain disordered because a church will be healthy when preaching is heeded. The preaching of the Word must be seen in the life of the preacher.

Second, the preaching of the Word will be central. Not a tack on. Not icing on the cake. Not a cherry on top. Not merely a helpful or even important *part* of the church. It is central to the health of a church. **[v13]**

“Devote/give yourself to this, Timothy. What should consume your time and attention and energy and preparation and desire is THIS, Timothy: public reading, teaching, and exhortation of Scripture.” Read it, teach it, exhort from it. That’s preaching, and it’s central to the health of a church.

Think of the preaching of the Word in the church as the hub on a wheel and all the spokes are all the other very important and vital aspects of church life. Discipling, evangelism, music, hospitality, service, small groups, discipleship groups. All these others areas are guided and fueled by the preaching of the Word of God.

I’m not saying this because I’m the main preacher. I got in to preaching because I already had this conviction.

There is something unique, powerful, church-culture shaping in preaching. One man opens this book and stands before the whole church AT ONCE, where the members listen to one voice. It's an awesome and weighty reality...

A reality that's different than one-to-one discipling or counseling. It's different than small / discipleship groups. Those are important Word ministries, but they're not the same. There's something powerfully unique about the preaching of the Word of God to the people of God. That's why Paul tells Timothy, "You cannot neglect this." **[v14]**

This is essentially talking about Timothy's ordination to ministry. I take the "laying on of hands" by the elders to be the recognition of his qualification to ministry and the "gift" to refer to preaching (as the context suggests.)

"Don't neglect that gift, Timothy. You were called this." Oh how easy it would've been for him to neglect this in the face of so many obstacles in false teaching, disordered church membership, lack of respect he was

getting because of his age, in the many, many, many things that need to be done to help a church become healthy!

Believe me, it is so easy to neglect devotion to the preaching of the Word. We got this event that needs planning. There's a member in serious sin. Some are suspicious of a recent decision that was made. This marriage is falling apart. That person's kid is walking away from Christ.

And the temptation of the pastor is to devote all his time to putting out one fire after another, when what he needs to do and what the church most needs him to do is to devote himself to the preaching of the Word.

If you're visiting with us and you're looking for a new church, a non-negotiable is whether the church is devoted to God's Word. And a litmus test of a church's devotion to God's Word is the kind of preaching they have.

The steady diet of preaching should not be the pastors' opinion on the latest cultural hot

topic. It should not be based on his own feelings. It shouldn't consist of a bunch of feel-good stories where you remember just the story and not the Scripture!

I read an article from a pastor named Kent Hughes called "Preach the Bible, Not Your Dog." He said, "One of the big dangers that faces pastors today comes from a desire to connect with people...After you preach a while, you begin to see that when you are... explaining a passage..., people can get kind of restless. But when you stop and tell a story, they'll ease back and listen. They'll get even quieter if you tell a...story [about yourself]."

So, it would go something like this: I'm explaining the text, there's a little coughing and people are restless, and then I say, 'You know, last week I had a hard time. Let me tell you about it.' As soon as you do that, everything goes silent. I mean the babies stop crying. They want to know how you feel.

That's a good thing...But...when you use inner-directed stories—you spice it with a little

humor and you put a little Bible with it—you'll have people telling you it's the best sermon... you...ever preached...

The way I accomplish it is to tell them about my dog, Sunday, a preacher's dog. Great dog! He was just the most beautiful golden retriever you've ever seen. He was wonderful. When I came home and he was sitting there, he would look at me, smiling. No matter what my day was like, Sunday was always there.

He was my buddy. I used to jog with him and swim with him. [But] One day I took him out for a run and he [couldn't] get in the car. I took him...to the vet and found out that he had a raging case of leukemia. I had to put him down then and there. [I] walked out [of the vet] carrying [only] his collar [in my hand].

[Now,] I can tell that story and have grown men weeping and invariably have somebody come at the end of the sermon and say "Pastor, that is the greatest sermon...you've ever preached." And it was about my dog.

...we have to remember that the Word is sovereign. We need to preach the Word. Here's the preacher. Here's the Bible. And there are the people. The Bible is what [the preacher is] to [give] to the people". <https://www.crossway.org/articles/preach-the-bible-not-people>

This is why the steady diet of preaching in a church should be expositional preaching, where we work through books of the Bible, passage by passage. *Yes, sometimes we'll be eating broccoli. But if you're getting cotton candy every week, you will be malnourished.*

Teens, as you think about going off to college or getting out on your own at some point, you're gonna be tempted to find a church filled with people your age and people you like hanging out with. That's not top priority. Top priority is to find a church that is faithful to the Word. If that means all old people, so be it!

The church needs the preaching of the Word to be central. And it must continue to be central. That's the last point Paul makes to Timothy. In a healthy church...

Third, the preaching of the Word will stay.

[v15a] “Keep working on these things (reading, exhorting, teaching). Don’t stop, Timothy. *Immerse* yourself in them.” Literally, “Be in them. Don’t dip your toe in the public ministry of the Word, Timothy. Jump in.”

Toward what goal? **[v15b]** Isn’t that interesting? “Keep practicing. Keep working on this. Devote yourself to it. Immerse yourself in it SO THAT...the church can see your progress. They can see you’re getting better at this.” Why does that matter?

Bad preaching doesn’t benefit the church. But you know what does? Not perfect preaching! There was only one perfect preacher and his name was Jesus. But *progress* in preaching. When the church sees the pastor’s progress, it’s it builds up the body.

One of the funniest things Pastor Bill has said to me on several occasions after I’ve preached a sermon is, “You know, one day you’re gonna be a pretty good preacher.” Of course, he’s joking. He’s been one of my

greatest encouragements. He often says, “You just keep getting better.” And he said this at times when I was tempted to feel, “Is this doing anything? Does the Word work?” And he’d say, “Keep preaching the Word, brother.”

Just like Paul says to Timothy. “Keep preaching the Word so that your progress can be seen.” Look how Paul puts it in...**[v16a]**

“Pay careful attention to two things: *yourself* and your *teaching*. How you *live* and what you *say*. The two must match if you’re gonna have credibility. And when you feel like you’re getting nowhere, keep going.” **[v16b]**

Could be translated “persevere.” It’s a word often used in the context of the Christian life—we keep going/persevering even when we feel like giving up. (Rom. 11:22-23; Col. 1:23) “You gotta press on in preaching the Word, Timothy.” Why? **[v16c, “save”]**

How can he say, “YOU will save yourself and your hearers.” Timothy doesn’t have that kind of power! He’s not the Savior. Paul knows that.

He said in v10 that the living God is the Savior of all people. He simply means that Timothy's persistent preaching of the Word is the vehicle through which God will bring final salvation to both Timothy and to the church.

What an amazing thought! The way we will get to heaven (be saved at the end of this life) is if we persist in believing the gospel that we hear preached Sunday after Sunday. "That's why you gotta keep preaching the Word, Timothy. Salvation is at stake!"

This is why every sermon must include the gospel message. Christians regularly need to be reminded of what they must keep clinging to. And non-Christians must know what they must cling to to be saved. It's this... **[Gospel]**.

Do feel the weight of what's taking place when someone stands behind this pulpit and heralds God's Word to you? In so far as the preacher accurately interprets and applies what is in the Bible, it is as though God is speaking through a man. We're not in a good place if we treat this casually.

Pastor Bill told me that when he was a lead pastor, a Sunday would rarely go by that he didn't throw up before he preached...not because he was nervous about public speaking but because he felt the weight of the reality of what is taking place.

Lemme encourage you, during the week, make plans to be here. Read and pray over the passage that will be preached on Sunday. Get a good night sleep. Eat breakfast. Come early.

Take notes if it helps you pay attention. Stand in the back if it helps you stay awake. Be an active listener, not passive. Think of ways the text applies to your own life. Pray during the sermon for your own heart, for the hearts of others, for the preacher.

Conclusion

Because in any healthy church, the preaching of the Word must be *seen* (in the life of the preacher), it must be *central* (the hub from which everything else flows), and it must *stay* (persist, continue). May we always be a church devoted to God's Word.