

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Godly Church Activities

Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. (1 Timothy 4:13, KJV 1900)

Our present study began with Paul's teaching regarding proper conduct in the Lord's church, "...the pillar and ground of the truth." In our study passage, Paul directs Timothy to "...give attendance to..." three behaviors. This term, "...give attendance..." is rather forceful in context.

To have in addition, to hold the mind or the ear toward someone (Sept.: Jer. 7:24), to pay attention. As a nautical term, it means to hold a ship in a direction, to sail towards. Intrans. it means to hold on one's course toward a place.¹

Applying the nautical reference to Timothy's activities as a young pastor, Paul's words require Timothy to "Stay the course," not to deviate from these three activities. The words seem to outline a steady progression in Timothy's work.

1. **Reading.** We may read aloud to others, or we may read silently to ourselves. When Paul directed Timothy to "Study to shew thyself approved unto God..." (2 Timothy 2:15) he logically intended a literal reading of the material to be studied, but he also required more than a mere reading of the words. Timothy needed to think, to ponder, to "Study" what he read. The verse immediately prior to this one directs Timothy to "...put them in remembrance..." (2 Timothy 2:14) We should not miss the point. We must study Scripture to gain the knowledge and wisdom (God-given insight that enables us to apply the teachings of Scripture to the issues that we face in life) that enables us to teach the congregation what they need to keep in mind, in memory. The Lord no doubt directs his preachers to preach certain truths and themes to His people, truths that address their needs at the time. Biblical preaching is not random, sanctified rambling. It is the result of extensive reading and thoughtful—prayerful—meditation.

"So they read in the book in the law of God

distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading." (Nehemiah 8:8, KJV 1900) In this Old Testament passage, we find a precise description of what Biblical preaching should be. We start with the reading of Scripture, "...the book of the law of God." In this passage, the term likely refers to the first five books of our Old Testament, but the description quite reasonably applies to all of Scripture. We may find both instruction and help in the reading of old writings from our ancestors in the faith, but we must read God's Word to gain accurate knowledge of what we must teach His people. I can read old writings from our ancestors in the faith, and, depending on which man I read at the moment, I can find "historical support" for just about any bizarre doctrine I care to embrace. There truly is nothing new under the sun. Today's "New idea" was almost certainly someone's error in the past. Yes, I can also find rich truths, but I must filter truth from error, for no historical writing outside of Scripture bears the stamp of the Holy Spirit as our inspired Scriptures bear. I have known more than one man who started reading more historical writings than Scripture, leading him to dilute the impact of Scripture on his beliefs, and thus leading him to embrace error. Yes, we can also find rich truth in old historical writings. The challenge as we read such old writing is one of balance. Keep our balance, and keep Scripture in its exclusive role of authoritative preeminence over our faith. Sometimes Scripture approves these old writings, and sometimes it exposes old error, but Scripture must always hold the authoritative seat alone.

Not only did they "...read in the book...distinctly" but they also "...gave the sense..." They explained what they read. Then they also "...caused them to understand the reading."

All of this starts with a faithful, habitual, and consistent reading of Scripture. By placing this activity first in the list of three necessary activities, perhaps Paul intended to remind Timothy—and us—that every good

Sept (Septuagint)

¹ Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary : New Testament*, electronic ed. (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

outcome in the Lord's church begins with a faithful reading and study of Scripture.

2. **Exhortation.** This word in our King James Bible was translated from a compound Greek word that literally means "...to call alongside..." Simply stated, Timothy must start with the reading and study of Scripture. Then he must apply that reading to his personal life. He cannot call upon his hearers to do anything that he himself is not practicing. When I was very young in my faith, I recall hearing a preacher whom I knew from my infancy make a point in his preaching that he had not practiced in his personal conduct—and most of the people in the congregation knew that he had not so practiced what he then taught. As if the man realized that his conduct did not match his teaching, he paused and literally told the congregation, "Don't do what I do. Do what I say." Needless to say, the man's words lost their weight. If he didn't bother practicing what he taught, why should anyone else practice those teachings? More than once in our present study, we've noted that the preacher's feet must preach the sermon before he goes into the pulpit. No man whose feet are not practicing the gospel should be permitted to enter the pulpit to speak to others. Remember the order. We begin with reading. Next we exhort, we call our hearers to stand "alongside" us. You can't exhort someone to do what you are not doing yourself.
3. **Doctrine.** We sometimes confine this word "doctrine" to the essential and eternal truths of Scripture, juxtaposing "doctrine" to "practice," how we are to live in the here and now. The word itself simply means teaching. Now we see the three step sermon in its full force. It starts with faithful reading and study of Scripture, followed by an equally faithful application of Scripture's teachings to our own feet, to our own life. Then—and only then—are we directed by Scripture to "teach" others the truth of the gospel.

We have all at some time or another likely heard a preacher teach things that failed to resonate well with Scripture. Think about the folly of this kind of "preaching." If ever any sermon lived up to the "uncertain trumpet" sound, this is it. For a man to present ideas in a sermon that Scripture doesn't fully and comfortably affirm—and that he does not embrace with clear conviction—will produce a confused and obtuse sermon. Our eleven year-old grandson started taking "Band" this year. His parents bought the musical instrument that he decided to play. He started attending classes, reading the material, and practicing playing his clarinet. Of course, the first time he barely got to the point of playing a simple tune, he wanted to

demonstrate his new skills to his eager grandparents. And, yes, we enthusiastically congratulated him for a job well done. However, even I, his grandfather, must confess that the skill he demonstrated could only be appreciated by highly biased parents and grandparents. For a child beginning to learn to play a musical instrument, this slow beginning is quite acceptable. However, for a man in the ministry who stands before a congregation, to stumble through confusing and uncertain points is wholly unacceptable—indeed unbiblical. When a man who at one time preached with clarity and conviction now preaches with a distinct lack of clarity, beware. What caused the loss of clarity? We may not always agree with the man in the pulpit, but we should never be punished by being forced to hear a man who fails to preach his deep convictions with clarity.

Failure in Point Three, the teaching of doctrine, clearly exposes that the man who so fails actually failed at one of the two earlier points. Either he failed to study Scripture sufficiently or accept it exclusively as his sole authority, or he failed to apply the Scriptures he read to his personal conduct. His failure in teaching may exhibit the failure, but the actual event of failure likely occurred at one of the earlier points in this progression that Paul sets before us in this passage.

A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver. (Proverbs 25:11, KJV 1900)

Words that result from long hours of faithful reading and study of Scripture, that have been so respected by the man that he altered his personal conduct and applied them to his feet, become "A word fitly spoken..." in Solomon's wise teaching. "...apples of gold in pictures of silver..." may refer to a painting or carving. Either way, the fitly spoken word is an exquisite piece of art; it exhibits value and beauty.

There is a clear ring of beauty and value to a sermon preached by a man who lives what he preaches. We could easily say that such a sermon is a "Piece of art." A sermon preached by a man who does not practice what he preaches, such as the man from my youth, rings more of counterfeit than of authentic value. It is a pretense that invites hearers to reject it. So it should be.

Will you pray this week that the Lord so direct and burden your pastor that his message on Sunday morning will clearly "...give the sense..." of his Bible text and cause his hearers to understand the truth of the gospel clearly, that the sermon you hear will be the product of reading and exhortation.

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church
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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor