

READING THE BIBLE

1 Timothy 4:13

Intro: As I think most of you know, the two epistles to Timothy and the one epistle to Titus, are known as *The Pastoral Epistles*. And they are given that title because it was written to two young men in the ministry, telling them how to carry on the work of the Lord. Sometimes the epistle of Paul to Philemon is also included as a pastoral epistle because it has to do with the acceptance of Onesimus by the church in Colosse, which definitely was a pastoral matter. Now these were not just written for men who were going into the ministry, as we call it. They were certainly written for them, but they were written for the whole church so that all believers would have access to them and learn about the work of the local churches.

But we must also recognize that they are not the only books of the Bible that pastors are to read. The whole Bible is for the whole church. We all must continuously read the Bible from cover to cover, reading it over and over again.

The particular verse that I have chosen for my text tonight is 1 Timothy 4:13, and you might be surprised that Paul would give Timothy such an exhortation. Doesn't every minister know that he needs to be reading the Bible? I think that some translators of this epistle feel that Paul was telling Timothy to "give attendance to the *public* reading of the Word of God" because that is the way they have translated it. But from what I have been able to learn about the word "reading" it does not have to do exclusively with the public reading of the Word of God, although reading it publicly is certainly a wonderful thing to do. No, I think that Paul was speaking to Timothy about his own personal reading of the Word. Of course there was a lot of public reading of the Scriptures in those days because copies of the Scriptures were not as plentiful as they are today. But I still believe that Paul was saying, in effect, "Timothy, you give attendance to the reading of the Word for your self!"

One of the dangers in the ministry is that we read the Bible looking for texts for sermons. But Paul knew, and I am sure that Timothy also knew, that they both needed to be reading the Scriptures.

But some skeptical person might ask, How do you know that Paul was talking about the Bible? And my answer to that question would be that he

went on to say, “to exhortation, to doctrine.” And then if you will read the rest of the chapter you will see that Paul was very definitely speaking about the Bible, and, I might add, Paul indicated very clearly that he was thinking especially about Timothy. All of this was for Timothy.

You might be surprised at how little some preachers read the Word. Some preachers never read it, and you can tell that they don’t when you listen to them preach. Of course, I think we all know that just because a man is a pastor is not evidence that he is a Christian. But we are considering tonight an apostle’s exhortation to a man who really knew the Lord, and who was giving his life to the ministry of the Word to other people. The point is that pastor’s need to take time for the nourishment of their own souls, and none of us can grow spiritually without the Word.

Now I am not sure, and I don’t know that anybody can be sure, how much of the Bible Timothy had. It is clear that Paul had just written this letter which was to become a part of the combined Word of God. So he didn’t have it all. But what he had Paul wanted him to read. Paul’s actual words were, “Give attendance to reading.” And the words “till I come,” or *until I come*, meant that Timothy needed to be reading it even when he and Paul were not together.

I want to call your attention to the words “give attendance.” They are the translation of a single Greek verb. It means that as Timothy read the Word he was *to hold his mind toward* what he was reading. This meant that he was to pay close attention to what he was reading. He was not to let his mind wander to other things. He was to apply to himself what he was reading. And that is emphasized by Paul’s addition of the words, “to exhortation, to doctrine.” In his ministry Timothy was going to be encouraging the Lord’s people to read the Word, and to live by the Word, and so he needed to be very careful that he was doing for himself what he was asking them to do for themselves. The pastor is not just to be a teacher passing on Biblical information, but he is to be an example for the people of God to follow as far as their daily habits are concerned. And this is an overwhelming thought for any man who has really been called by God to the work of the ministry. We all know how far we fall short of being what we ought to be, but we need to be growing too.

And let me add this. The verb translated “give attendance” is a present active imperative which means first that this was a binding obligation upon Timothy, and the present tense means that he was to do it day after

day for the rest of his life! We need to read and re-read our Bibles day after day. We read for ourselves, and we are to apply it to ourselves, but this is one way we encourage the Lord's people to do the same. I think it was George Mueller who used to say that we need to read the Word the first thing in the morning before we read anything else! Life has always been full for everyone, and it is so easy to miss reading the Word unless we plan specifically that a certain time every day is to be reserved exclusively for us to be in the presence of God with His Word open before us.

Now as Dr. Lockwood indicated this morning in talking about my text for this evening, it is hard to deal with one verse without dealing with the words that lead up to it, and the words that follow. So let us look at verse 12. We won't take the time tonight to go back any farther.

What does verse 12 say? (Read.)

Often young people, even young men who are looking forward to the ministry, are inclined to feel that they are handicapped because they are young, and that they have to put on some years before anyone will listen to them. But that is not true. Robert Murray M'Cheyne, a young Scotch pastor, was only twenty-nine years old when he died, but his life and messages have been a blessing to pastors and to other Christians in the English speaking world for over 150 years. He died in 1843.

So, young people, this is for you, just as it was for Timothy. It is amazing how the Lord may use any of us if we really read, pay attention to what we read, and seek to apply what we read to the way we live.

How could Timothy be an example to people who were even a lot older than he was? Age makes no difference where the Word is concerned. It is the faithful reading of the Word, as Paul went on to say, that will enable us, living a wicked, wicked world like we live in, to be an example of what all believers should be and do. Greater maturity will come with age, but even then we never outgrow our need for the Word of God. Look at those words in verse 12 which we need to pay attention to. (Read again and explain briefly.)

But now let us go to our text. Notice the words "exhortation" and "doctrine." As you and I read our Bibles we need to pay particular attention to what the Lord wants us *to be*, and what He wants us *to do*. It is good to mark verses or make notes as we read to help us remember. The Bible is

full of exhortations. But there is another read that we need to read the Word, and that is for “doctrine.” The pastor must never let people turn him away from doctrine. Doctrine is what we are to believe. Although they are mentioned in the reverse order here, doctrine is the foundation upon exhortations rest. Even pastors can do a lot of stupid things if they do not know the doctrines of Scripture. We need to read so we can learn the truth of God. Go to the Word first, and then to books about the Word. If you and I don’t know what the Word teaches, how are we going to be able to judge the writings of men. God’s thoughts and God’s ways are completely different from ours, and they are infinitely higher. If we are to know God’s thoughts and God’s ways, we must learn them from the Bible. If we are to know what God wants us to believe, we can only find it in the Bible. And if we are to live the way God wants us to live, that life is fully described in the Bible. *But it all begins with reading, or having it read to us.* When we visit people who are sick or unable to get out to church, especially those who know the Lord, that is a wonderful time to read the Word to them.

Verse 14 would apply to Timothy and anyone else who is considering the ministry. God enables us to do what He calls us to do. But our God-given gifts grow as we grow. “Prophecy” here would speak of preaching. Remember that even the OT prophets were primarily preachers, men who brought the Word of God to the Lord’s people in their generation.

We find that reading the Word usually leads us to prayer. It is hard to read the Word like Paul was telling Timothy to do without finding our hearts drawn out in prayer to God, either for thanksgiving, or confession, or intercession, or requests for ourselves.

But another thing that needs to be connected with the reading of the Word is what Paul mentioned in verse 15: meditation. This means that we are to think about what we are reading. It means that we read slowly and thoughtfully and prayerfully. Much of our reading does not really profit us because we do not meditate on what we are reading. Cf. Joshua 1:8. See also Psalm 1, and there are several verses in Psalm 119 which speak of meditation. I have a whole book in my library of several hundred pages devoted to meditation, and how to do it. That word has been taken by cults which falsely claim that they can communicate with the unseen world, but don’t let the misuse of that word keep you from the proper use of it. Meditation is Biblical, and every child of God needs to practice it daily. We are not trying to get some fresh revelation from God. He has

given us all that we are going to get until we get to heaven. But we meditate trusting the Lord by His Holy Spirit to help us to understand what He has given us in His Word.

And then look at verse 15.

Paul was saying all of this to Timothy because this is what Timothy needed to put to use in his own life, and this basically was going to be his ministry to the people of God, getting the Word into their minds and hearts so that they would walk in fellowship with the Lord, living their lives to please the Lord. We don't do what we do to be seen of men. That is what the Pharisees did. But nevertheless we are seen of men, and we ought to be living in such a way that others will see that we are "profiting," that we are moving ahead and growing in our relationship with the Lord.

Finally we have verse 16 where Paul admonished Timothy to always turn the Word upon Himself, that is, the exhortation, and the doctrine. And he was never to change his way of living. And then he added these words: "for in doing this thou shall both save thyself, and them that hear thee."

We know that Paul did not actually believe that we save ourselves. His epistles are absolutely clear that Christ, and Christ alone, is the Savior. But what he is saying here is that we have a great responsibility as pastors and as the Lord's people, to live in such a way that we will be growing ourselves, and others who hear us will be growing if they do what we do in our relationship with the Word of God.

Concl: But it all begins with the Word, and it continues with the Word.

Campbell Morgan, who was Martyn Lloyd-Jones' predecessor at Westminster Chapel in London, was a man who devoted his life to the practice and teaching of the Word of God. Jill Morgan, who was either his daughter or his daughter-in-law, wrote his biography after he died, and entitled it, *A Man of the Word*. That is what Paul was, and that is what he wanted Timothy to be. And that is what we all should be. But by the grace of God much depends upon the place that we give to the Word in our lives. If the Word has the greatest priority, we are going to be growing, and people will see that we are growing, and those who are under our influence will be growing as they follow our example.

May the Lord make all of us increasingly men and women, young people, and even boys and girls of the Word. That is the pathway to blessing, and that is how we can glorify God.