

TBC – 11/3/02 p.m.

## EVERY CHRISTIAN'S PRIORITIES

1 Timothy 4:13

**Intro:** The verse I have chosen for my text tonight is 1 Tim. 4:13: “Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.” The words were written by the Apostle Paul to his “son in the faith” (see 1 Tim. 1:2). Obviously he was speaking about reading the Word of God, and paying attention to the exhortations of Scripture as well as to the teaching of Scripture. We recently read 1 Timothy in our daily Bible reading.

My thought were directed also to this passage because in our SS lesson for today, from Deut. 17, verses 14 through 20, Moses wrote what a king of Israel in the coming days should *not* do, and what he *must* do. He was not to buy himself a lot of horses. Nor was he to be involved in multiple marriages. Nor was he to seek to increase his own wealth. And a king would be in a perfect position to do all three.

But it is what he was to do on the positive side which was of particular interest to me. He was to write out his own copy of the law (not to have someone else do it for him). And he was to read it every days of his life as a king. With everything else he had to do, he must always take the time to read the Word. And the reading of the Word would do three things for him:

- 1) It would teach him “to fear the Lord his God.”
- 2) It would show him what he should be, and how he should live.
- 3) It would humble him so that he would be faithful in doing the will of God.

If he were faithful, the Lord promised that the king would live out his days as king, and it was assumed that his children would learn to live like their father lived, so that God’s blessing would be upon the family from generation to generation.

We know that this was not true with Israel’s first king, Saul. Whether of not David who succeeded him did as this passage indicates, we do not know. But we do know that David was a man of the Word, and that he was used by the Holy Spirit to give us much of the Word as we have it today. Solomon said in the book of Proverbs that his father taught him, and Solomon wrote Proverbs for one of his sons (or maybe all of them). But it was only now and then after that, that the kings of Judah were godly as the Lord wanted them to be. We don’t know if any of them ever

made their own copy of Scripture, but it is to be hoped that some of them did.

What is clear is that the kings were to give top priority to the reading of the Word of God *for themselves*. They did not have all that we have today, but what they had, they were *to read!* That much is very, very clear. And they knew that this was expected of them.

As you know, we are studying the book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ in the Tuesday Bible Class. The Apostle John did not get very far in the writing of that book before he had this to say:

3 Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand (Rev. 1:3).

And I will tell you that I am re-studying and re-teaching that book looking for the promised blessing.

Much, much more could be pointed out from Scripture which has to do with the reading of the Word. On many of the special occasions throughout Israel's history the Word of God was read publicly for several hours at a time. It goes without saying that if God called men and enabled them to write His words in a book, He expected them to be read. And it has been the habit of many Christians for many generations, to read through the Bible at least once a year. Sometimes you will run across a child of God who reads through the Bible every three months! We all need to read and read and read again this precious book, reading it from cover to cover, both the Old and New Testaments. The Bible is the one and only book that has ever been written which can truthfully be called *the Word of God*.

Going now to our text, Timothy was a preacher, younger than Paul, and trained by Paul. Paul wrote two of his last letters to Timothy – and I am speaking of his letters which were given by inspiration of God. Paul wrote these letters shortly before his own death. Obviously he was deeply concerned about what would happen in the Lord's work after he was gone. And so in 1 and 2 Timothy and Paul's letter to Titus we have what have been called *Pastoral Epistles*. No man should enter the ministry without some knowledge of these three books (and some would add Paul's letter to Philemon as a fourth Pastoral Epistle).

Now does this mean that only pastors should read these epistles? Absolutely not! The church would be in far better condition spiritually today if

believers today were familiar with what these epistles have to say.

But there is an added point to be made. The reason that standards for leadership in the church are so high, is because, *as the ministry goes, so goes the church*. Pastors are not a special class of Christians who are to be considered better than the rest of the people of God, but pastors are to be examples for the people to follow. Peter said this very thing in his first epistle as he addressed elders. I think most of you are familiar with his words, but let me read them to you so we will all have what Peter said about elders fresh in our minds. Here are his words:

1 The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed:

2 Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind;

3 Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.

4 And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away (1 Peter 5:1-4).

Pastors and elders are to live lives that please God because that is the way the Lord wants all of us to live. If the leadership of the church goes sour spiritually, it is only a matter of time until the church becomes like its leadership. So that is why everyone needs to read the Pastoral Epistles. The instructions which have to do with the Christian life are for all of us.

The words of my text would be appropriate in any book of the Bible. Paul was telling Timothy what he, Paul, had done, and what he wanted Timothy to do so that those who were under Timothy's ministry would do like he was doing. So I don't have to be speaking to students in a theological seminary in order to use this text. It is truth that was to go from Paul to Timothy and then on through Timothy to the people who were under his ministry. All of us, young and old, new believers and the most mature Christians, are to "give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine." And the only reliable place to find exhortation and doctrine is in the Word of God. So we need to read it.

So my first point is:

## **I. "GIVE ATTENDANCE TO READING."**

As soon as a person becomes a Christian, he, or she, needs to begin reading the Bible. And as long as we live we need to continue reading the Bible. In our younger days we may need someone else to read to us, but Paul was telling Timothy that *he needed to read the Word of God for himself. No pastor or other elder is really doing the will of God if he is not faithfully, day after day, reading the Word of God.* Different servants of the Lord will give different advice as to where to begin. I had a teacher who said that we should begin where God began – with the beginning book: Genesis. Others suggest a Gospel. I don't think we should be too long in getting into the Psalms and the book of Proverbs. But sooner or later get on a schedule that will take you through the Bible. And have a definite time and a definite place where every day you can in an interrupted way, read the Word.

The benefits from daily Bible reading are tremendous. You will find as you read that you are learning about God and His glorious attributes or characteristics. You will learn more about yourself than you have ever known before, both your old nature and your new nature. If you are reading carefully, thoughtfully, and prayerfully, you will find your heart moved to pray, and pray you should! Think of verses like 1 Pet. 2:2-3; Psa. 119:11; Jer. 15:16. Psalm 119 is a Psalm all about the Word, and it is the longest chapter in the whole Bible.

Now none of us has complete control over our schedule. Interruptions may come. There may be morning when we will oversleep. Lots of things can happen to force a change upon our plans. But when anything like that happens, let us get back to the reading of the Word as soon as we can. Become like Job Who said, speaking of God's Word, "I have esteemed the words of His mouth more than my necessary food" (Job 23:12b). We must not let anything keep us from the daily reading of the Word.

But what did Paul mean when he said, "Give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine"? In a way, this was a warning. It is possible to read the word carefully, or carelessly. We can be paying attention to what we are reading, or we can let our thoughts go to other things so that we really are not reading; we are just going over words. It means to read with understanding what you read as your objective. No one understands it all, but make a point of understanding something that you have not really understood before. To "give attendance" means to think about how what you are reading can apply to yourself. One reason I like to read in the

morning is because my mind is fresh for the day, and it is less likely to be time when interruptions will start to come.

But now we are told in our text to pay particular attention to two things as we read: “exhortation” and “doctrine.” Let’s take “exhortation” first.

## **II. “GIVE ATTENDANCE . . . TO EXHORTATION.**

The Greek word for “exhortation” really means two things. It means comfort or encouragement, but it also mean where God tells us what He wants us to be, and what He does not want us to be; what He wants us to do, and what He does not want us to do. Remember that though we might be reading a book written by Paul, or one of David’s Psalms, or Isaiah, or Matthew, it is all the Word of God. They were the writers; the Holy Spirit is the Author of every one of the sixty-six books of the Bible. Make your reading of the Bible as practical as the Bible is itself. Ask God for the desire and the strength to be what He wants you to be, and to do what He wants you to do. Pay close attention to exhortations in Scripture. It might be a promise, or it might be a command, but both fall into the category of an exhortation.

But let us move on to:

## **III. “GIVE ATTENDANCE . . . TO DOCTRINE.**

This is where Christians today are lamentably weak. The Bible does not say a lot of contradictory things. There is a marvelous harmony about the doctrines of Scripture. Doctrine in the Christian life is like the foundation of a building or a home. Basic to all of the doctrine of Scripture is what it teaches about God. And this includes not only God the Father, but God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. It is impossible for us to understand ourselves unless we understand what the Bible teaches about man. And when you realize that man has a major problem that he is incapable, and of unwilling even to try to solve, that is where the Gospel comes in.

Doctrine simply means teaching. Doctrine is extremely important because it is only as we understand the teaching of the Bible that we will be able to know when someone else is trying to get us to believe something that is not true.

Cf. 2 Tim. 3:10, 16-17. Doctrine is what God wants us to know, and what

He wants us to believe. So rather than being unimportant it is extremely important. You can't understand anything that the Bible says if you try to eliminate doctrine because that is what the Bible is, doctrine, teaching, the truth which God has been pleased to reveal for us.

Now a final word about the first three words of this verse:

#### **IV. "TILL I COME."**

Did Paul mean that when he came Timothy could forget about these words, and just depend upon Paul's teaching?

Dr. Kenneth Wuest, who for many years taught Greek New Testament at the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, said about this verse that the idea is *while I am coming*. Most of the recent translations of the book of 1 Timothy retain the reading of the KJV. But the idea is not that he could stop reading when Paul came, but Paul did not want Timothy to wait until he came before Timothy would begin and continue reading. The Ethiopian eunuch did not think that he could understand what he was reading in Isaiah's prophecy unless someone guided him. And the Lord had sent Philip to teach him.

I have had the privilege of sitting under some really great Bible teachers, and I owe a great deal to them in the Lord not for what they taught me, but from what I have learned from their lives. I have also learned a great deal from books I have read which were written by godly men and women. But all of them have been instruments, very necessary instruments in God's hand in my life. But I have had to learn, and I believe that this is what Paul was seeking to teach Timothy here, that as wonderful as our teachers are, the Lord desires time with us each day when through the reading of the Word of God, He will minister to each one of us personally and directly, so that Paul's delay was not to mean that Timothy should delay in getting into the Word for himself so that when Paul came they could have an even greater time as they had the added privilege of fellowship together in the Lord.

So don't wait any longer. Start today if you have not already done so. Get into the Book. Read it. Pray over it. Believe it. And then as the Lord sends a "Paul" or someone else in your life to help you, it will just be adding to what the Lord has already been teaching you, and will continue to teach you as long as you live.

**Concl:** There is a lot of truth even in a short verse like this one, isn't there? Understanding this verse, you understand more about what the ministry of the church should be. And you can understand also what is the basis of your life and ministry to others – because we all have a ministry. It may not be as a pastor, but parents minister to their children, and children often minister to their parents, and friends minister to friends. The basis of our ability to be a blessing to others, goes right back to our daily relationship with the Lord through His Word.

If this verse has in any way pointed out a weakness in our lives with respect to the Word of God, I trust that by God's grace we will take steps to night to get back to the Word, and to give our greatest attention to what we read there. There is no greater priority for any of us than the place that we give to God and His Word day by day.