

## The Responsibility of the Evangelist in Facing Issues

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### Introduction

The Lord's church is facing many challenges today as we have entered into the twenty-first century. Denominationalism is compromising God's scheme of redemption of mankind. God's prescribed worship is being challenged and changed. Men want to make worship entertaining, fun, emotional and exciting to man rather than glorifying to God. As Paul indicated to the elders from Ephesus in the first century (Acts 20:29, 30), there are false teachers arising even from within the church. The authority of God's ordained shepherds is being challenged and minimized. Humanism is having a great affect upon society. The home, as God would have it, is being challenged, and the stability of the home is threatened. Morality is no longer seen as absolute. Sexual freedom and promiscuity are becoming common place. Life is no longer respected as abortion and euthanasia are gaining acceptance.

These and many other issues are facing the church today. Everyone, from the people in the pews to the leaders of the church must be ready to face these challenges. Everyone has some responsibility. The purpose of this lesson, however, is to examine the responsibility of the evangelist in facing issues. The foundation for this study will be the charge given to Timothy by the apostle Paul, "I charge (thee) in the sight of God, and of Christ Jesus, who shall judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be urgent in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching" (2 Timothy 4:1-2 — ASV).

This charge was given Timothy in the context of Paul's second epistle. The epistle is filled with Paul's concern about false teachers, false doctrine and the difficulties the church would face as a result (2 Timothy 2:14, 16-18, 23-26; 3:1-8, and 13). Immediately following the charge, Paul wrote, "For the time will come when they will not endure the sound doctrine; but, having itching ears, will heap to themselves teachers after their own lusts; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and turn aside unto fables" (2 Timothy 4:3-4 — ASV). Paul, therefore, is expressing his concern to Timothy about those "issues" that would challenge the church, causing some to turn from the truth.

In addition, following the charge and this statement. Timothy was instructed, "But be thou sober in all things, suffer hardship, do the work of an **evangelist** [emphasis TLM], fulfil thy ministry" (2 Timothy 4:5). The term "evangelist" is found only two other times in the New Testament. Paul listed certain functions in the church, including evangelists (Ephesians 4:11), and Philip is referred to as an evangelist (Acts 21:8). According to Vines, the word evangelist literally means, "a messenger of good," which denotes a "preacher of the gospel" (Vol. II 44).

Therefore, considering the charge given to Timothy is a good foundation for studying the responsibility of the evangelist in facing issues.

It is of the utmost importance to note that the charge given by Paul to Timothy is in the sight of God and of Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 4:1 — ASV). Therefore, the evangelist, or preacher, must

always keep in mind that he is God's man doing God's work. "Anytime preachers are involved in a 'showdown,' they have no choice but to stand with God, and whoever, or whatever, is the opposition makes no difference at all. No time should be taken to 'feel the pulse of the crowd.' The choice was made when the decision to preach was made" (Hackworth 301). Peter and the apostles were examples of this when they stood before the Jewish council and said "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29 — ASV).

Let us now observe the charge given to Timothy.

### **Preach the Word**

Timothy was charged with preaching the word (2 Timothy 4:2). The preacher has the responsibility of preaching the word at all times, but especially when facing issues. To "preach the word" means to preach the word of God. We are to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15), and God's word is truth (John 17:17).

Jesus, in giving the Great Commission to the apostles told them to teach others to "observe all things whatsoever I commanded you" (Matthew 28:20 — ASV). Preachers today should follow that same charge, to preach what has been commanded of Jesus. For that is the word of God (John 12:48-49). All that, of course, was passed on to the apostles (John 14:26; John 16:13).

Paul wrote to Titus, the preacher, to speak only those things befitting sound doctrine (Titus 2:1). He, also, instructed Timothy that anyone teaching a different doctrine which does not agree to the sound words, the words of Christ, is conceited, knows nothing, and is obsessed about controversy and arguments over words (1 Timothy 6:3-4).

Coffman wrote concerning preaching the word in 2 Timothy 4:2, "Something of what this means has been lost in the modern definition of preaching. The true meaning is 'Herald the word of God in its completeness, not altering it in any way, nor adding anything of his own that is borrowed from another source'" (Coffman on 2 Timothy 4:2).

In facing issues that challenge the church, the preacher's responsibility is to preach the word. His responsibility is to hold fast to sound doctrine, to speak that which is befitting sound doctrine. His opinion might be appreciated, but one's opinion is not a commandment. The preacher has the responsibility of preaching book, chapter, and verse. What the preacher believes does not matter. What the preacher's instructors believed does not matter. The opinions of the elders of the congregation and the members of the congregation do not matter. It does not matter what the preacher has read or what he has been told by others. What matters is, "What does the Bible say?" The preacher has the responsibility of proclaiming to others "what the Bible says" about the issue.

With that in mind, the preacher must be thorough and preach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). Paul reminded the Ephesian elders, "I shrank not from declaring unto you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly, and from house to house" (Acts 20:20 — ASV). The preacher has the responsibility of preaching all of God's word. The preacher cannot shrink back and withhold a part of God's word for fear of "being fired." The preacher cannot be fired from

preaching the word. A weak eldership or congregation may work to rid themselves of a good and sound man so that he cannot preach the whole counsel of God in their congregation, but he cannot be fired from preaching the word. In other words, he cannot be silenced. He has the responsibility of teaching the hard things when they might not be appreciated. He must preach the truth, even when it is unpopular. He cannot “hedge” just to “keep his job.” Souls are at stake. Even when people do not want to hear, the preacher must preach what God wants proclaimed. “This often becomes the acid test of a man’s faithfulness. It is easy to preach a message that people want to hear. But to preach it when they do not wish to hear it separates the men from the boys” (Waddey 56).

### **Be Prepared**

In the second place, Timothy was charged to “be urgent in season, out of season” (2 Timothy 4:2). According to Vincent, the term translated “be urgent” (ASV), or “be instant” (KJV), literally means “stand by, be at hand, be present, To come suddenly upon . . . Hence, be ready” (Vincent, Vol. II 1067). “The force of the exhortation [be instant] must be found, not in the verb itself taken alone, but by coupling ἀσπάζεσθαι closely with it. Be at your work, attend to it always, in and out of season; let nothing stop you; be always ready, always at hand” (Hervey 67). The phrase “in season, out of season” is from two Greek adverbs meaning “when the time is right; when convenient” and “when the time is not right” respectively (Newman). It is the evangelist’s responsibility, therefore, to always be prepared, ready to defend the truth of God’s word and ready to attack false teaching. Peter wrote, “but sanctify in your hearts Christ as Lord: (being) ready always to give answer to every man that asketh you a reason concerning the hope that is in you, yet with meekness and fear” (1 Peter 3:15 — ASV).

Paul wrote to the young evangelist, Timothy, charging him to “war the good warfare” (1 Timothy 1:18). Every evangelist should realize in facing the issues challenging the church that he is in a war with Satan. Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against Satan (Ephesians 6:12). Writing about warring the good warfare, John Waddey wrote,

We must know the issues that demand the confrontation. No army will fight valiantly and endure unto victory that does not clearly understand the issues at stake . . . A favorite saying of Paul was, “I would not have you ignorant, brethren.” So today we must inform and alert congregation leaders (84-85).

That means, also, that evangelists must be informed. They should subscribe to and read periodicals that keep them informed about the issues. They should attend lectureships that inform them about issues. They should try to study the issues and know what they are.

Waddey further wrote that the soldier must know his weapon and how to use it. The word of God is the weapon of the evangelist (Ephesians 6:17), and he must be familiar with it, understanding it (85). That means one must spend time in study of God’s word. Paul wrote to the young evangelist, “Give diligence to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15 — ASV). One must study

diligently God's word so to be able to handle every doctrine and precept properly. Even Paul, though inspired, requested the books and parchments when he was imprisoned (2 Timothy 4:13). We know not what the contents of these were, but if the apostle Paul wanted to spend time in reading and study, certainly today's evangelists should do the same.

Waddy also noted that, in warring the good warfare, one must know the enemy. "Preachers and elders must inform themselves not only of issues, but of men and institutions" (86) In addition, one must know the terrain where one does battle. "Congregational leaders must acquaint themselves with spiritual conditions of the brotherhood in their region. Some are not even aware of preachers and churches that have apostatized in their own locality" (Waddey 86).

### **Reprove, Rebuke, Exhort**

Third, Timothy was charged to "reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching" (2 Timothy 4:2 — ASV). Reprove (*elencho*) means "to convict, rebuke, reprove" (Vines, Vol. III 283), "Generally with the idea of bringing the fault home to the offender" (Hervey 57). Moffit adds, "It is a word used of preaching when a preacher tries to convince, convict, or even confute someone" (400). Rebuke (*epitimao*) means to "censure severely" (Thayer 245). "Its primary idea is 'to rebuke,' or 'to censure.' It has a little of the idea of 'speak seriously' to someone or 'warn'" (Moffit 401). Rebuke is "a stronger word . . . implying more of authority and less of argument" (Hervey 57). Exhort, according to Vines, comes from the Greek word meaning "to admonish, exhort, to urge one to pursue some course of conduct" (Vol. II 67). Moffit wrote,

The word *parakaleo* ("exhort") is difficult to render . . . The word is often rendered "exhort," or "comfort." Lenski goes, however, to the context, and is probably right: "'Admonish!' or urge, encourage [here the meaning can scarcely be *comfort*]" (400).

Thus, when issues are challenging the church, it is the responsibility of the evangelist to convince, or convict, those who are caught up in error, hoping they will turn back to truth. Those who will not are to be censured, seriously warned of their error. Finally, the evangelist is to admonish, urge, one to do what is right.

Paul adds that the reproving, rebuking, and exhorting are to be done "with all longsuffering and teaching" (2 Timothy 4:2).

The combination is suggestive. Longsuffering is to be maintained against the temptations to anger presented by the obstinacy and perverseness of certain hearers; and such are to be met, not merely with rebuke, but also with sound and reasonable instruction in the truth (Vincent Vol. II 1068).

Remember the words of Paul,

"And the Lord's servant must not strive, but be gentle towards all, apt to teach, forbearing, in meekness correcting them that oppose themselves; if peradventure God may give them

repentance unto the knowledge of the truth, and they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him unto his will (2 Timothy 2:24-26 — ASV).

The purpose of reproof, rebuking, and exhorting is not to drive the one in error away, but to teach them and bring them to repentance for the sake of his soul and the souls of those who might be affected by the error.

Too many preachers have been affected by the cry for no negative preaching. Certainly, the evangelist should edify and try to build up. He should preach of the love of God and of His grace. People need to know of the crucifixion and the resurrection of our Lord. Preaching should include how to live the Christian life and how to deal with difficulties and temptations. Yet, as already mentioned, one must preach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). When it comes to issues, there will be times the evangelist must become “negative” in his preaching. For he has the responsibility of reproof, rebuking, and exhorting regarding error. As Paul wrote, “For God gave us not a spirit of fearfulness; but of power and love and discipline. Be not ashamed therefore of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but suffer hardship with the gospel according to the power of God” (2 Timothy 1:7-8 — ASV). The preacher should not be ashamed of God’s word, but should proclaim it boldly in all cases.

For example, John the Baptist did not hesitate to reprove Herod for his adultery (Luke 3:19cf). Regarding the unruly men, vain talkers, and deceivers (Titus 1:10), Paul wrote to the evangelist, Titus, “reprove them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith” (Titus 1:13 — ASV). Regarding the problem caused by the brethren from Judea that Paul and Barnabas referred to the Jerusalem brethren, Judas and Silas went to Antioch and “exhorted the brethren with many words” (Acts 15:32 — ASV). Paul, as he dealt with the problem of division in the Corinthian church, wrote, “Now I beseech you, brethren, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing and (that) there be no divisions among you; but (that) ye be perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Corinthians 1:10 — ASV). The word, “beseech,” is translated from the same Greek word translated “exhort” in 2 Timothy 4:2.

The evangelist that does not reprove, rebuke, and exhort in his public preaching and individual teaching is shirking his responsibility. Not only is he shirking his responsibility, but he could lose his own soul. As with the prophet Ezekiel, the evangelist is a watchman who must sound the warning. If he does not do so, he will be held responsible (Ezekiel 3:17-21).

### Conclusion

The issues facing the church today are drawing many away from the truth. It is the responsibility of the evangelist facing these issues to accept the charge of Paul.

I charge (thee) in the sight of God, and of Christ Jesus, who shall judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be urgent in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure the sound doctrine; but, having itching ears, will heap to themselves teachers after their own lusts; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and

turn aside unto fables. But be thou sober in all things, suffer hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfil thy ministry (2 Timothy 4:1-5 — ASV).

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