

“PAY CLOSE ATTENTION TO THESE THINGS.”

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church

February 14, 2021, 9 and 10:30 AM

Scripture Texts: I Timothy 4:11-16

Introduction.

Two weeks ago on Sunday January 31 Phama and I had the blessing of worshiping at our son Reed's church Avalon Community Church on Catalina Island. Unknown to any of us when we planned our vacation, in the glorious providence of God that was the Sunday he was elected as elder and I had the privilege of joining their pastors and elders in laying hands on him and praying for him.

That same loving providence of God is on display here today. He cares so much for the needs of our souls that in His good and sovereign providence God has sent another spiritual leader so that we are not lacking in spiritual care, in leading and guiding, in protecting and guarding.

Our confidence this morning is in the providence of God, this is His doing, this His best provision for our church at this time. Our purpose here this morning is to witness and formalize the call and ordination of Mike Brummel.

This service is like the memorial stones in the Old Testament, a celebration of the grace and providence of God. Our vows and the laying on of hands are actions meant to serve as reminders, that whatever lies ahead, we know that God was in this and He wills for us to be faithful to our vows that His grace and goodness may abound to His eternal glory.

Our text is specifically addressed to a young pastor but it has application *to every spiritual leader and to every Christian*. It applies to husbands and fathers, wives and mothers, bosses and managers. This applies to everyone who cares about their Christian witness, students, co-workers. What *must* be true for our leaders, *ought* to be true for all of us. The pastor must be an example to the flock, so the flock might follow his example. So this word applies to us all. With one ear listen to what is being said to Mike and with your other ear listen to what is being said to each of us.

Two Things.

In verse 15-16 Paul says be devoted to these things, take pains with these things, be absorbed with these things, pay close attention to these things, persevere in these things. What things?

The two things that everything in pastoral ministry and in each of our Christian witness rests on, the two things apart from which no other good thing will come. The two foundation stones which must have your devotion and your persistence and your prayer and which you must not neglect.

Thing one, pay close attention to yourself, to your life, to your conduct.

Thing two, pay close attention to your teaching, to your doctrine, to your creed.

Orthodoxy and orthopraxy, creed and conduct, faith and life, words and actions, head and heart, doctrine and duty, principle and practice, truth and integrity.

By whatever words, everything in your calling rests on these two great foundation stones. Build poorly and great will be your fall. Build well and great will be your call.

Let's consider these two things.

I. Pay close attention to yourself, verse 12.

Verse 12 gives us some clues on how we should pay close attention to ourselves.

Let no one look down on or despise you for your youth.

Martin Luther King Jr. was right to insist that no man should be judged by the *color* of his skin but by the content of his character. So no man should be judged by the *age* of his skin, but by the content of his character.

You will give no grounds to be despised for your youth if you make up for what you lack in years through holy and godly living. This will give more weight and authority to your ministry than your years. May people say of you, "he is mature beyond his years."

Some will see your youth as a weakness. Don't let anyone despise your weaknesses, and most of all don't you despise your weaknesses, it is these that God will most use for His glory. Don't despise His humbling that comes through them.

Remember how God answered Paul's plea to have his weakness removed, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness" (II Corinthians 12:9).

Paul lists five parts of godly character, five areas in which if we must watch ourselves closely, *speech, conduct, love, faith and purity*.

First, in speech.

He starts with speech. This isn't about preaching, this is about your mouth, watch your mouth.

Ephesians 4:29 Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.

Ephesians 5:4 There must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting.

Let your speech be God-honoring, *then* your words will have authority. Set an example in knowing when to speak and when to be silent.

Second, in Conduct.

This is about your life 24/7/365. Not just Sundays, not just when you are at church. You never clock out of being a pastor. Show by your manner of life you are worthy to be imitated. Live to be able to say with Paul, "Be imitators of me as I am of Christ"? (I Corinthians 11:1).

Where will your progress be seen more, more clearly, where will your progress be tested and tried more than in the crucible of your *home and family*?

This is your first call, your first congregation, your first pulpit, your first place to practice what you preach and practice godly discipline of yourself and of others.

Don't fall into the trap of setting this example only in public, only at the church house. Start at home, practice with your wife, accept her correction as she holds up a mirror to your words and actions. Learn the beautiful art of confession and repentance, of humbling yourself at home. Let your wife see your progress in these things before anyone else does.

“No Christian husband should presume to think that any spiritual good will be accomplished by his life without an effective ministry of prayer. And no husband may expect an effective prayer life unless he lives with his wife "in an understanding way, bestowing honor" on her” (Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter*, p. 146).

The man who is unloving, unkind, demeaning, unsacrificial and un-Christ-like can expect little divine assistance and little illumination from the Holy Spirit in study of Scripture and little power and authority in the pulpit or elder meeting.

Third, in love.

The pastor-shepherd must develop a deep heartfelt love for the people. Paul reminds the Corinthians:

II Corinthians 6:11-1 (we) have opened wide our hearts to you. We are not withholding our affection from you.

II Corinthians 7:3 You have such a place in our hearts that we would live or die with you.

Was any church loved more than the church in Ephesus where for three years Paul went from house-to-house day and night with tears admonishing and calling to repentance and declaring what was most profitable (Acts 20:17-38)? When Paul left them there was much sorrow and weeping and kissing. Timothy was being left in Ephesus with big shoes to fill.

Demonstrate your love by your presence.

Fourth, in faith.

Show your faith, wear your faith on your sleeve. Grow in your faith. Confess your unbelief and ask God to help you increase in faith.

Show your faith by being a non-anxious presence in the flock especially in times of conflict or crisis. Show your faith by continually entrusting yourself and your family and your ministry to God when life is hard, and sin abounds.

Fifth, in purity.

Speaking of Ephesus, Paul had urged young Timothy to remain at Ephesus as their pastor. This was a call fraught with spiritual and moral dangers, in a time and place of pagan, ritual sexual immorality. Timothy would be ministering in the shadow of one of the seven wonders of the world, the great Temple of Artemis (Diana), the mother goddess of all of Asia.

The temptation to idolatry and sexual impurity would be great and as ever-present as it is today. An impure life will expose you to dishonor and will cause others to despise you and the ministry and the Bride of Christ, bringing shame on the Gospel.

Paul will highlight this point again in his second letter to Timothy.

II Timothy 2:22 Flee from youthful lusts.

Keep yourself sexually pure. Don't surrender any ground to the enemy on this, don't let him get a foothold. This is the front where Satan is claiming some of his greatest victories today.

Ours is a high calling, but it is a perilous height from which to fall, one fraught with many and great temptations.

Peter says, "abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul" (I Peter 2:11). Your sinful desires are out to kill you, your marriage, and your ministry. In the well-known words of John Owen, "Be killing sin or it will be killing you."

In these five areas practice what you plan to preach, so your preaching will have authority and power. Pay close attention to your mouth, hands and feet, your heart, soul and conscience.

II. Pay close attention to your teaching, watch your doctrine.

You have been trained and taught well, but many have begun well and made shipwreck of their faith and doctrine. Evangelicalism is awash in older men who have not guarded the good deposit, and are now bankrupt in their teaching and usefulness.

Verses 13-14 speak to how we must pay close attention to our calling to teach and preach.

I Timothy 4:13-14 Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. 14 Do not neglect the gift you have.

Give yourself over to God's Word, reading it, studying it, meditating on it, memorizing it. Be a man of the Word. Notice the order, read the Word of God before you set out to teach and preach.

Joshua 1:8 This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.

The priority of the pastor is the Word and prayer.

Notice Paul warns the divine gifting of the Holy Spirit personally given to you can be neglected. Don't despise your gift by neglecting it.

Remember the warning of Jesus, "You are in error because you don't know the Scriptures" (Matthew 22:29). Pay close attention to Scripture by which you will guard your teaching.

Verse 15.

I Timothy 4:15 Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress.

Apply yourself with constant and close attention. There is no room for slothfulness, for laziness, for casualness.

Verse 16.

I Timothy 4:16 Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.

Verse 16 is enough to make a man pause and reconsider what he has gotten himself into. Do you really want to embark on a task where lives are at stake, where the eternal destiny of souls rest in the balance, where what you do and how you do it will have such serious consequences.

No wonder James warned:

James 3:1 Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment.

Paul admonished the elders at Ephesus:

Acts 20:28 Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

Every Sunday souls are at stake, depending on us to give faithful attention to our personal holiness and our sound preaching.

Pay attention to your life and your teaching, they are God's means, God's chosen instrument for salvation.

The way of salvation for your souls and the souls of your hearers is along the path of right living and right preaching of the Scriptures "which are able to make you wise for salvation" (II Timothy 3:15).

Just as unholy living and unfaithful teaching is deadly to the church, so holy living and faithful teaching is life-giving. Yes, God is the author and finisher of all faith and salvation, but that in no way removes or excludes the instruments He is pleased to use.

Start now and start well so that you may say:

Psalm 71:17-18 O God, from my youth you have taught me,
and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds.

18 So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me,
until I proclaim your might to another generation, your power to all those to come.

Conclusion.

Set an example, devote yourself, do not neglect, practice these things, keep close watch, persist in this, salvation is at stake, eternity is in the balance.

“Who is sufficient for these things?” (II Corinthians 2:16).

II Corinthians 3:5-6 Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, 6 who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant.

We must always be looking to Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith, apart from whom there is no good in us and apart from whom we can-do no-good thing. Look always to our great example, the great Chief Shepherd.

I Peter 5:4 And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

I Timothy 1:17 To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

Prayer: Holy Father, indeed as the Apostle Paul said, who is sufficient or worth for these things? We know apart from you we can do nothing, but through you and by you all things are possible. Send your Holy Spirit upon us a pray, fulfill all your purposes for us and build your church for your glory. Your kingdom come, your will be done. For the sake of Jesus and in His name. Amen.