

A Charge to Keep

Paul to Timothy: a pastor's job description.

"I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine." 2 Timothy 4:1-2, KJV

A standard joke about pastors is that they have the easiest job in the world—they only work an hour a week on Sundays! However, for those inside the ministry, who daily face the emotional, mental and spiritual stress that God's calling places upon them and their families, it is no joke. There are people to counsel, meetings to attend, hospital calls to make, funerals to conduct, administrative duties to attend, and sermons and Bible studies to prepare. Incessantly, the beat goes on. God's high calling oft times extracts a high price on those involved in local church ministry, which is why quitting the ministry in these times has become epidemic amongst pastors. In local church ministry, the stay of youth pastors can be measured in months and senior pastors in a few years.

He, that is the Apostle Paul, was finishing the course of his ministry, and he knew it. At Ephesus, a young pastor was struggling in a congregation that Paul had founded. As a young man facing the "dark days" of ministry in that place, pastor Timothy too, like so many others down through the years, had been tempted to quit, to walk away from it all. So to his young apostolic legate, Paul gave a charge consisting of nine imperatives (2 Timothy 4:1-8). These orders were given to Timothy by the elder apostle **"in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus"** (2 Timothy 4:1). Before God the apostle charged Timothy, and in doing so, set forth a pastor's job description.

"Preach the word," the apostle ordered. Timothy was not to invent his message to satisfy his audience. The message he was to preach was ordained by God. In a day when church members were not enduring **"sound doctrine; but after their own lusts [were heaping] to themselves teachers, having itching ears, [turning] away their ears from the truth, and [turning] unto fables,"** Timothy was to be the mouthpiece for the Word, and woe to any pastor who might mess with the Message (See 2 Timothy 4:3-4.).

"Be ready in season and out of season." Scottish Protestant Oswald Chambers (1874-1917) once wrote:

We are to be ready to preach whether we feel like it or not. If we do only what we feel inclined to do, some of us would do nothing for ever and ever. . . . The proof that we are rightly related to God is that we do our best whether we feel inspired or not.

"Reprove." By careful biblical argumentation, the godly pastor is to expose and refute false doctrine. In today's context, this means that a pastor is to do so in face of the fact that many congregation members no longer care whether what they believe is true or false.

"Rebuke." Like John the Baptist who **"reproved"** Herod for the wickedness of his illicit affair with his brother's wife Herodias, the pastor is to speak out against immorality (Luke 3:19).

"Exhort, with great patience and instruction." If his sheep are discouraged, the pastor should try and encourage them. If a ram becomes proud, the pastor needs to warn him.

"Be sober in all things." The pastor is to be free from drugs and intoxicants. He must also be realistic about his ministry. He must not allow himself to feel too high for reason of people's praise or too low for reason of people's criticism.

"Endure hardship." Things that are worthwhile in life don't come easy (See 2 Corinthians 11:23-27.). Charles Spurgeon asked: "Doth that man love his Lord who would be willing to see Jesus wearing a crown of thorns, while for himself he craves a chaplet of laurel?"

"Do the work of an evangelist." Pastors are like pediatricians. For the most part, they take care of children. Evangelists on the other hand, may be compared to obstetricians. They are gifted by the Spirit of Christ to help give birth to God's children (1 Corinthians 12:11; Ephesians 4:11). Nevertheless, though they might not be gifted evangelists, pastors are to do the work of evangelism.

"Fulfill your ministry." Though they might be dismissed by their congregations, pastors should not quit. When the going gets tough, the tough get going. The pastor is to faithfully pursue his ministry in spite of any *feel-good and have-fun apostasy* that might be going on. With his heart set upon eternity, a pastor is to pour out his life like a drink offering to God with the promise that **"the crown of righteousness"** awaits him (2 Timothy 4:1-5, 8). When he dies, a pastor's cup ought to be empty.