

## 2 Timothy 4:3-4 — What Is A Faithful Pastor? — Part 2

**May 23, 2021**

Take out your outlines. Turn in your Bibles to 2 Timothy 4. We are in the final chapter of Paul's final letter. In these verses Paul gave his final challenge to Timothy about what it meant for Timothy to be a faithful pastor when Paul was dead and gone. Remember Paul wrote this letter from the Mamertine prison in Rome. It wasn't long after Paul wrote this letter that Nero chopped off his head and the baton was passed from the hands of Paul to Timothy when it came to leadership in the early church.

The first five verses of 2 Timothy 4 summarize Paul's charge to Timothy about what it means to be a faithful pastor. While these verses summarize what it means to be a faithful pastor, they are not all of what it means to be a faithful pastor. If we look through 1 and 2 Timothy, there are many other instructions Paul gave Timothy. Here are a few:

- Timothy was to select proper elders and deacons. Paul gave him the criteria for finding those men in 1 Timothy.
- Timothy was to point out error and refute it.
- Timothy was to run from the love of money but to pursue righteousness, godliness, and gentleness.
- Timothy was to reproduce himself in other men, as it said in 2 Timothy 2:2.
- Timothy was to flee from youthful lusts.

As I was thinking about the more extensive job description that Paul gave Timothy in these two letters about what it means to be a faithful pastor, it occurred to me that all of them dealt with Timothy's character. They dealt with the

way Timothy spent his time and who he was as a person. Paul didn't say anything to Timothy about making sure he grew the church of Ephesus to a certain size. Paul said nothing to Timothy about making sure he had a certain number of people coming forward in altar calls. Paul said nothing about the size of the church or the size of the budget or the erection of a building.

Most of the measurements we use to determine church success and pastoral success were not Paul's concerns for Timothy. Buildings, budgets, and backsides in seats didn't define success in Paul's mind. Being a good pastor, a faithful pastor, was about Timothy's character and choices. It was who Timothy was as a person and how he chose to spend his life that mattered to Paul.

**I am to pursue excellence, not success.**

This reminds me of an article I ran across on the Internet that was very helpful on this issue. It talked about the difference between success and excellence.<sup>1</sup> The point of the article is that we often think of success and excellence as interchangeable terms. They are not. Success means you are admired in culture. Excellence means you are being the right person and doing the right things. Success is what people see on the outside. Excellence is who you are on the inside. A person can be successful and be a slacker. Success may have just fallen in someone's lap. A person can be successful in sales because he or she had one big sale at the beginning of the year that put him or her over a goal but he or she slacked for the next eleven months. That person may have only worked for a month but is still considered a success for the year. A

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<sup>1</sup> <https://thetobincompany.com/the-difference-between-success-and-excellence/>

person cannot do things with excellence and be a slacker. Someone who is excellent works hard all year long. It doesn't matter how successful he or she is. Let me define the difference between excellence and success for you.

Success is attaining the cultural goal of wealth, power, prestige, and privilege.

An athlete can be successful if he or she wins a gold medal. A person cannot be an excellent athlete if he or she took performance enhancing drugs in order to succeed.

Excellence is the pursuit of quality in one's work. It doesn't matter if it is recognized or not.

Success is about status and being the top dog. Excellence is about knowing you have done your best even if you are not at the top.

Success is only measured in relationship to other people. Excellence is measured in relationship to our potential.

Success can only happen if we win the gold medal in track. Excellence is not winning a gold medal but running the race and hitting your personal best.

Success is being admired by other people. Excellence is knowing that before God you have done your best.

Success is about pleasing other people. Excellence is about pleasing God.

Success is only available to the one who wins. Anyone can choose to be excellent.

Success steps on people and over people to achieve a goal. Excellence is loving your neighbor as yourself.

You can always take shortcuts to succeed. You can lie, cheat, and steal in order to win. You can never take a shortcut to excellence. It is about integrity and who you are as a person.

How does this apply to being a faithful pastor? Too many pastors are trying to be pastoral successes. They are not trying to be excellent. The inability to see the difference between these two different goals leads them astray. A pastor focused on success will be focused on getting promoted to the bigger church, the higher position, a position of more status, notoriety, and success in the eyes of other people. Paul would challenge pastors who think this way and say, "Don't focus on being a success. Focus on being excellent, just like I challenged Timothy. Strive to be the right person and do the right things. If there is notoriety and success, it will take care of itself but that is not your goal."

I like the way one author talked about this. Let me paraphrase it for you.

*If you pursue success and try to move beyond your ability, you will only magnify your incompetence for everyone else to see.*

Does anybody know people who pursued success as their goal and they have moved to positions beyond their abilities and now they are just magnifying their incompetence in front of others? I think we know many people like that!

Instead of pursuing success in the world's eyes --- which involves size, numbers, status, and power --- no matter what we do, pursue being excellent in God's eyes. Being the absolute best we can be right where we are, knowing we are pleasing God because we have done our absolute best with the abilities God gave, is the right goal not just for pastors but for all of us.

In verses 1-5, Paul summarized what it would take for Timothy to be a faithful pastor, an excellent pastor. Let's read these verses again and then we will focus our study on verses 3 and 4.

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. 2 Timothy 4:1–5 (ESV)

In these verses there are eight requirements of what it takes to be a faithful pastor, an excellent pastor. Two weeks ago, we studied the first two verses and discovered the first three requirements. Let's briefly review what we learned.

**1. A faithful pastor must understand the seriousness of his job.**

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom... 2 Timothy 4:1 (ESV)

If you are going to be a faithful pastor, if you are going to pursue excellence, you must realize that you will be judged by Jesus. Jesus knows everything about what a pastor preaches, how he counsels, how he spends his free time, and the motives of his heart. As Paul said, pastors are ministering in the *presence* of God. God knows everything a pastor does and says. Today, politics is about keeping secrets. It is about not telling people the truth. Then it is about leaking lies to the media so people think lies are the truth. It doesn't work that way with Jesus. He knows the truth. You aren't fooling him. He knows everything there is to know about a pastor.

The book of James reminds us Jesus will judge preachers with greater strictness. They represent God to people, and they have great spiritual influence over people. This is why it is appropriate for pastors to be judged with great strictness.

Pastors must remember they will be judged with greater strictness, but it is not just pastors who will one day be judged and rewarded by Jesus, that is true for all of us. We all live in the presence of God and under the all-seeing eye of God.

## **2. A faithful pastor must understand the content of his message.**

...preach the word... 2 Timothy 4:2 (ESV)

A pastor's task is to teach, explain, illustrate, and apply the Word of God to the people of God. He must not get distracted by other things but stay laser-focused on his main task of preaching God's Word and praying for God's people. This is why in Acts 6, when there was a problem with some widows being neglected in the distribution of food, the apostles said it was not right for them to neglect preaching the Word to serve tables. The apostles chose what were the first deacons to focus on care in the church while the apostles stayed focused on their main job, which was preaching the Word of God to the people of the church. A faithful pastor must remember preaching the Word is the core of his job. God doesn't care about the size of a church or the size of a budget in a church; if the Word of God is not faithfully being taught from the pulpit in that church nothing else matters.

**3. A faithful pastor must understand the scope of his mission.** A pastor must be ready to share from the Word in season and out of season, when he feels

he is ready and when he feels he isn't ready. Essentially there is never a time when a pastor is off duty. A faithful pastor must always be ready and eager to open the Word of God to the people of God. Pastors cannot act like doctors, where it is hard to get an appointment with them and you need to schedule a month ahead because they are on vacation. Pastors must be available and eager to serve.

They are to preach the hard parts of the Bible, not just the fun parts. They are to reprove and rebuke. Reproving means to help people come to knowledge of sin. Rebuking means showing people how their lifestyles are stepping into sin. Pastors must have the courage to point out sin so they can point people to the incredible love of Jesus who died for our sin. Pastors are not just to point out sin but they are to encourage people in their weakness. They are to have complete patience with people and to constantly be teaching and encouraging people.

This brings us to our fourth point, which will be the focus of the rest of our time.

### **A faithful pastor understands the urgency of the time.**

For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. 2 Timothy 4:3–4 (ESV)

Paul told Timothy he should expect to face opposition when he preached the Word of God. Everyone will not be drawn to faithful preaching. There will be many people who are opposed to faithful preaching.

Paul began by saying “for the time is coming...” Earlier in the book of 2 Timothy, we looked at the Greek word for time. You may remember Greek has

two different words for time. There is the Greek word *chronos*, which refers to strict chronological time. It is the simple unadorned passing of time. It is where we get the English word chronograph and chronology. Paul didn't use that word in this passage. He used a different word for time. It is the Greek word *kairos*. This refers to periods of time that are notably different from other periods of time. We get the ideas of seasonal time from this word. For example, we have winter season, which is a hard season of time, and summer season, which is a great season of time. They are completely different experiences of time.

Paul said to Timothy, "You are in spiritual summer season right now. People are receptive to the preaching of the Word of God but there is coming a time that will be a spiritual winter when people will not tolerate the preaching of the word of God. They will hate it. They will reject it."

Paul told Timothy, and us, there will be seasons of time when people will not want to hear the preaching of the Word of God. Jesus talked about these seasons of time.

Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles... and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. Matthew 10:17–18, 22 (ESV)

Contrast the spiritual winter Jesus was talking about with what it was like at Pentecost when thousands of people responded to the first gospel message. That was a spiritual summer.

Jesus promised troublesome times will come when people no longer want to listen to the truth, and a faithful preacher knows these times are coming. They know the door of opportunity for them to preach the Word of God and for people



to hear and respond positively to the Word of God is limited. It will not always be open. It is only open for a season. There are seasons when people's receptivity to the gospel message will shut down. The more progress the gospel makes in people's lives, the harder Satan will work to shut off people's hearts and bring about a spiritual winter like the white witch did in the Chronicles of Narnia. We must expect this.

Next, Paul told us people will eventually not endure sound teaching. The word *endure* means to tolerate. There will come seasons where simple unadorned biblical teaching will not be tolerated. It will be despised. We must expect those seasons.

Paul also called this kind of teaching sound teaching. The Greek is interesting. It is the Greek word *hygianos*. It is the root word for the English word hygiene or hygienic. It means clean and healthy. Think about what Paul was saying. There will come seasons when people will not tolerate the simple, clean, healthy preaching of the Word of God. A faithful preacher must expect those seasons of opposition to God's Word. Do not be surprised by those seasons.

Here is where it gets interesting. Who are the people Paul said will not tolerate and simply clean, healthy, preaching of the Word of God? Was Paul talking about the people of the world who do not know Jesus or people in the church who claim to love and follow Jesus?

In context, Paul was talking to Timothy about people in the church. Those were the people Timothy was preaching to. Those were the people who would eventually reject simple, clean, and healthy Bible teaching.

This is about to get uncomfortable for us. What Paul warned Timothy about is just as true today as it was 2,000 years ago. There are coming seasons of time in the church when Christians will not want to hear the simple, clean, healthy preaching of God's Word. Just like Paul warned young Timothy those times were coming, he was warning us those time are coming. In some ways, they are already here.

Instead of the teaching, explaining, and applying of God's Word, what will Christians want to hear?

...but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions... 2 Timothy 4:3 (ESV)

What are itching ears? Some of you know we have a miniature Dachshund. She is only seven pounds but she has the attitude of a German Shepherd and isn't afraid of anything. One thing she loves is belly rubs. When you are standing in the living room, she will walk up to you, sit down and stare at you. If your eyes meet hers she will flop over on her side asking for a belly rub. She is so cute she gets one every time. When you finish rubbing her belly and you walk across the room, she will follow you and sit down next to you. If you look at her and your eyes make contact with hers, she will fall over on her side again asking for a belly rub. You could rub her belly all day and she would not get tired of it. The belly rub is her favorite. She lives for the belly rub because it makes her feel good.

Paul told Timothy there would be seasons of time when all Christians would want was spiritual belly rubs. They would have itching ears that they would

want people to tickle with their words. They came to church not to hear the truth but to feel good about themselves.

When this happens, the church is looking for entertainment rather than preaching. Churchgoers want a pastor to make them feel good, not open the Word of God to show them the truth. In those seasons, people in the church reject healthy, clean, faithful Bible preaching as they accumulate piles of teachers who tell them what they want to hear and entertain them in the process. It is an entire church full of people falling on their sides asking for a belly rub every week so they can feel good.

If you think about this for a moment, it can get very uncomfortable. If you are like me, I am sure you are thinking about churches and preachers that are more about entertaining the crowd rather than proclaiming biblical truth. All of us can think of some mega-church pastors whose worship services resemble a Super Bowl halftime show rather than preaching and teaching about Jesus. Those are Christians who have collapsed into the mindset of pleasing people rather than pleasing God. They are preachers who are pursuing success in the eyes of the world more than they are excellent in the eyes of God.

Before we get comfortable pointing our finger at pastors and people who are far from us, we want to look in the evangelical camp and stare in the mirror. There are plenty of evangelical churches, camps, and conferences that are focusing on entertainment, on pleasing people, rather than preaching the Word. It is easy to fall into that groove.

For example, think about summer Christian camps. I grew up going to a summer Christian camp each summer. Every year the camp's brochure came out and told us who the famous Christian speaker would be for the week and who the music for the week would be. We decided which week we would go based on who was more entertaining.

I am not saying Christian camps and Christian entertainment is all wrong but that it is easy to start to think of our faith as entertainment, as scratching itching ears, as spiritual belly rubs.

Our faith being more about entertainment than truth is not just something God's people struggled with in New Testament times. It is also something God's people struggled with in the Old Testament. Isaiah wrote about this.

And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here I am! Send me." And he said, "Go, and say to this people: 'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.' Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed." Isaiah 6:8–10 (ESV)

"Preach the word Isaiah, but people won't listen. There is only a small remnant that will hear the truth and be interested in the truth. Most people won't tolerate the truth I am telling you to preach."

Look at our country.

At one time referencing God and the Bible was considered a sign of maturity and good character. Now it is considered a form of hate speech. I recently read about a high school senior who graduated first in his class. He was selected to give the commencement speech but was instructed to have no mention of God, Jesus or the Bible in his speech. He is a Christian and was

frustrated that the school barred him from thanking God at graduation. He made a good point. He said our money says, "In God we trust. On graduation day why can't I say it is God we thank?" As Paul said, there is coming a time when people will not tolerate the Word of God.

It is not just our country that no longer tolerates Bible teaching but Bible teaching is no longer tolerated in the church. For example, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the largest Lutheran church body in the United States, allows for LGBTQ marriage and clergy. The Bible clearly says in Romans 1, as well as many other places, that this kind of lifestyle is not pleasing to God.

We even find the United Methodist Church, a denomination that for years was a proclaimer of truth, now focused on pleasing people rather than preaching the word.

The United Methodist Church website claims it has made great progress in the ordination of women pastors. It hopes to have more than half of its pastors as women because more than half of the denomination is women. Here is a brief quote from its website.

"The United Methodist Church, as a community conceived as a corporate expression of Christ's love for us all, has declared its belief in the full equality of women and its desire to embrace women, and has historically decried institutional sexism in all forms..."<sup>2</sup>

They consider the lack of women pastors leading churches to be a form of sexism in the church. This comes from the cultural pressure of feminism in our society. The problem is the Bible is clear that men are to be the spiritual leaders in the church.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.umc.org/en/content/book-of-resolutions-every-barrier-down-toward-full-embrace-of-all-women-in-church-and-society>

I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. 1 Timothy 2:12–14 (ESV)

This is not because women are not capable or that they are inferior. We know that is not true. It pertains to the role God gave men to play in spiritual leadership in their homes and the church. Paul's words on this matter are not culturally comfortable but they are abundantly clear. "I do not permit a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man in the church." Many times men are just as guilty in this matter because they do not step up and assume the leadership positions in the church they were meant to take so women feel forced to fill the void.

Many Methodists claim 1 Timothy 2 was a cultural issue we can ignore and Paul was a misogynist so we can skip this verse for modern culture. That is wrong. Paul claimed this prohibition was not a cultural issue. It is a creational issue. Paul claimed the fact of Adam being formed first and Eve being the one deceived is the reason women are not to be in a position of teaching authority over men in the church. That may not be what we want to hear, but that is what the Bible says.

Incidentally, Jesus and the rest of the apostles gave incredibly elevated positions to women in the early church, far more elevated than the culture of the day. While women were highly elevated in the early church, the teaching and authority positions in the church were not open to women according to the Bible. I realize I just opened a huge can of worms for some of you. I don't have the time to get into all the details explaining 1 Timothy 2. I have taught on this subject

three times in the last 13 years. In your notes I put the web links for more detailed teaching about 1 Timothy 2 and this subject for you to examine this week.<sup>3</sup> I encourage you to read the manuscripts or watch the messages.

The simple point I am making this morning is 1 Timothy 2 clearly excludes women from the lead teaching pastor in the church but rather than preach the word, many churches are more interested in pleasing the culture so they ignore this verse completely. The reason is because people have itching ears. They do not come to church to hear the truth. They come to church to feel good and have what they already believe affirmed rather than have it challenged by God's Word so they would repent and know the truth.

What do people want to hear?

...they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions. 2 Timothy 4:3 (ESV)

They are looking for teachers who will suit their own passions. The word passions means lusts. There will be seasons of time when Christians will say, "Give me people who say what I want to hear, to reinforce what I already believe. Do not rebuke me and change my belief." That is the issue. In fact, Paul said people will accumulate these types of teachers. They will heap them up and make piles of teachers whose have as their goal to be popular with people and make them feel good. In all honesty, these types of pastors are not pastors. They are entertainers. They belong in Hollywood, not the church.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.christ2rculture.com/offsite/sermons/files/1timothy21115theroleofwomeninthechurch.php>  
<https://www.christ2rculture.com/offsite/sermons/files/category-0023trending.php>

This is not new. We find the pastor seeing himself as an entertainer to please people happening in the Old Testament. God spoke about this through the prophet Jeremiah.

An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule at their direction; my people love to have it so...  
Jeremiah 5:30–31 (ESV)

A horrible thing happened in Israel. What was it? The prophets prophesied falsely. The priests ruled under their own authority. God's people loved it! They loved it because the priests were just saying what the people wanted to hear, not what God spoke.

Ezekiel experienced a similar thing.

And they come to you as people come, and they sit before you as my people, and they hear what you say but they will not do it; for with lustful talk in their mouths they act; their heart is set on their gain. And behold, you are to them like one who sings lustful songs with a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument, for they hear what you say, but they will not do it. Ezekiel 33:31–32 (ESV)

"Ezekiel, you are a great speaker but you are nothing more than a form of entertainment. You are like a woman with a beautiful voice or like someone who plays an instrument well. People love to hear you speak but they have no intent of actually listening to your words. You are entertainment." What a terrible thing to tell a preacher. "You have a great audience of people who love you but rest assured nobody is listening to you."

What is the result of people fawning after preachers who are entertainers that just say what they want to hear?

...and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. 2 Timothy 4:4 (ESV)



There are two things that happen when Christians have itching ears because they want entertainment more than the truth.

First, they will turn away from listening to the truth. When people turn away from hearing the preaching of the Word, they will turn away from truth. The result of this is people can't help but wander into myths. If you turn away from truth, you will wander into something. What you will wander into is speculation. You will wander into Satan's errors. You will wander into baseless opinions. You will wander into lies. Turning away from the preaching of the Word to have your ears tickled is rejection of the truth. God's Word is the truth. Society doesn't tell us the truth. Only God can tell us the truth about ourselves, about how to solve our problems and how to be restored to God.

The Greek word used in this verse that means "to turn aside" literally means to dislocate something and take it out of joint. Those who choose to turn away from listening to the truth of God's Word will end up spiritually dislocated.

This is why faithful pastors must stay committed to preaching the Word of God, even if people do not want to hear the Word of God. Even if the numbers in the Bible preaching church go down because people start switching to the entertainment, itching-ear church across town that just gives spiritual belly rubs, telling people what they want to hear, Timothy was not to change. We are not to change. We are to preach the Word in season and out of season, even if people want entertainment instead of the Word. We know the Word is what they desperately need because that is the only way they will know the truth.

Let me share with you an example of this right in our area. Right now the big cultural thing is pronouns. Make sure you address people by their chosen male, female, or gender-neutral pronouns. Make sure you use either he, she, they, Ze, or Zirs according to a person's gender preference. I was talking with someone at CrossWinds last week who was telling me about their experience at another church in the lakes area where that pastor is taking the pronoun thing into church. The pastor of that church was no longer referring to God the Father in the masculine. He is no longer referring to Jesus as masculine because he considers that oppressive to women. In his preaching he refers to Jesus as "they" or "their" because he considers Jesus sexless.

When he was asked why he did this, he said it was because as a church he has to "conform to the people." No he doesn't! As a pastor, his job is not to conform to the people! His job is not to entertain the people! His job is not to give people what they want! His job is not to entertain people! His job is to preach the Word! His job is to unleash the truth, not just say what people want to hear! His job is to be a faithful mouthpiece for God, not to be popular in the culture.

This pastor is striving for success in the world's eyes. He is trying to be popular. He wants a bigger church. He wants a bigger budget. He wants to be hip. Don't strive for those things. That is the wrong goal. The goal is to be excellent in God's eyes. Success is who he is before God on the inside and to make the right choices before God on the outside and let God determine the results!

## Conclusion

My friends, at CrossWinds Church, we are not trying to be the biggest church in town. We are not trying to have the biggest budget or the most campuses. We are not striving for success in the eyes of the world. We are striving for excellence in the eyes of God. We are striving to preaching the Word in season and out of season. Even if it is not what people want to hear, we know that is what people need to hear. If we fail in that task we will deny people the truth and as a church we will wander into myths.

We realize the time is short. There are seasons of time when the last thing people want to hear is the preaching of the Word of God because they will desire entertaining words to tickle their ears, but that is not what we are doing. As Paul challenged Timothy, we want to be people who keep our fingers in the text and preach the Word.



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