

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD
Arlington Presbyterian Church (PCA)

Keepers of the Main Thing

2 Timothy 1:11-14 (585)

November 4, 2001

Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, or of me His prisoner; but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher. For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day. Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you.

The gospel, in terms of the raw historical facts, declares *that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures (I Cor. 15:1-4)*. The gospel, in terms of its occasion, is revealed on account of sin. *“And she will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21)*. The gospel, in terms of its efficacy, is the God-ordained means by

which sinners are saved. *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes (Rom. 1:16)*. The gospel, in terms of its Biblical emphasis, declares an objective, substitutionary transaction which propitiates the wrath of God. *He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross (I Pet. 2:24)*. The gospel, in terms of its theological heart, declares that *now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested ... even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe ... for we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the Law (Rom. 3:21-22, 28)*. The gospel, in terms of its design, is intended to humble the pride of man. *For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe (I Cor. 1:21)*. The gospel, in terms of its demands, requires that men repent and believe. *“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15)*. The gospel, in terms of its promise, offers eternal life to men dead in trespasses and sins. *“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life” (John 5:24)*. The gospel, in terms of its exclusivity, declares that *there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12)*. The gospel, in terms of its priority, is **the** central message of the church.

Because of these excellencies, we conclude that the message of the cross, the gospel, is the main thing. *For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God (I Cor. 1:18)*. The gospel is the main thing because it, above all else, reveals the character of God. The gospel is the main thing because it is the only message by which men may be reconciled to God. The gospel is the main thing because it is the message with which we have been entrusted by God. *God ... gave us the ministry of reconciliation ... He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ (II Cor. 5:18-20)*. Paul understood this very well and rejoiced in it. He lived his life as one under appointment.

I was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher. Here we discover three different aspects of Paul's one ministry. First God ***appointed*** him a ***preacher***. Paul, as a preacher, was called to publicly evangelize the nations. Second, God appointed him an ***apostle***. Paul, as an apostle, was called to authoritatively establish the church in terms of its faith, its practice, and its visible presence in the world. Third God appointed him a ***teacher***. Paul, as a teacher, was called to educate the saints. One of the most invigorating things for any Christian man or woman is to interpret one's life in terms of the advance of the gospel. You are, above everything else, an ambassador for Christ. The most valuable treasure you possess is the gospel. To the degree that you deviate from this, life becomes empty and confusing. To the degree that your primary vocation is the gospel, life will be fulfilling and very clear.

But it also means something else. Because of Paul's service in the gospel he **suffers these things**. "Because of the fulfillment of my assignment as an apostle of Jesus Christ I suffer here in this terrible Roman prison – a dismal underground dungeon with a hole in the ceiling for light and air -, with the prospect of execution as a criminal" (Hendriksen, p.234)! Inherent in Paul's appointment was suffering. **Acts 9:16**, "*I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake.*" The immediate reference is, of course, to his imprisonment with all the deprivations, indignities, humiliations, and hardships which were his on account of it. Even in the face of these things he says, ***I am not ashamed***. "He was not ashamed to proclaim the gospel message, and to live by it ... His physical and mental distress had not shaken his faith in his risen Lord and Saviour" (Bentley, p.213).

For I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day. "Paul says that he has made his deposit with God. He means that he has entrusted both his work and his life to him. It might seem that he had been cut off in mid-career; that he should end as a criminal in a Roman jail might seem the undoing of all his work. But he had sowed his seed and preached his gospel, and the result he left in the hands of God. Paul had entrusted his life to God; and he was sure that in life and in death he was safe" (Barclay, p.152).

In this letter Paul is encouraging Timothy to stay the course; to *fulfill* [his] *ministry* (4:5). There is an element of sober realism which permeates this letter. The sum of Paul's instructions to Timothy is no casual encouragement to "hang in there." The apostle is calling for a calculated resolve, a holy firmness on the part of Timothy. Part of this ministry steadfastness is that Timothy be absolutely unwavering in his commitment to the correctness and consistency of the message with which he has been entrusted. So firm must this commitment be that Timothy would be willing to *suffer for the gospel* (1:8). So in verses 13 and 14 the emphasis is clearly on the content of the gospel. By content I mean the substance, the gist, the elements, the parts, the subject matter, the objective statements he makes which constitute the good news. Paul uses two imperatives to instruct Timothy – *retain* in verse 13 and *guard* in verse 14.

First, in **verse 13**, Timothy is to ***retain the standard of sound words***. Retain here means to keep or preserve. He is to ***retain the standard of sound words***. Let's think together for a minute about the idea of a standard. The word used here may be translated *pattern*. It refers to an outline or sketch. Julia has done a lot of sewing over the years. She pins these thin paper patterns to a piece of cloth and cuts the cloth according to that pattern. That's the idea here. Now what determines the pattern? Timothy is to preserve ***the standard [or pattern] of sound words which you have heard from me***. The pattern is the body of truth which Paul preached and taught. To the Galatians Paul wrote, *For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according*

to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ (1:11-12). The gospel came by way of revelation from God and that gospel is to be passed on “uncorrupted and unperturbed” from generation to generation.

Beloved, there is but one correct and true gospel. This gospel is not a relative story to be changed in different times, different cultures, or different circumstances. For sure, the gospel is dynamic - *the word of God is living and active (Heb. 4:12)* – but it is not dynamic in the sense that it changes. The means by which the message is communicated vary widely but the content of the message remains constant. The gospel is a fixed message. Men are simply not free to be innovative in terms of what they do with the content of the gospel. Getting “creative” with the content of the gospel is a bad thing. We are simply not free to make attempts at improvement. Trying to enhance the value of the gospel is a bad thing. Men are simply not free to suggest new interpretations of the gospel which, heretofore in the history of the church, have been unknown.

Listen to **Jude 3**. *Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.* We simply have no right to monkey with the content of the gospel. Our charge is to retain it. Each succeeding generation must pass it on “uncorrupted and unperturbed” (Barclay, p.179) to the next generation (*contend earnestly*). It is a fixed body of

truth (*for the faith*). It is unchangeable. There is a finality about the gospel (*once for all*). Man did not discover or invent the gospel. It is a revealed message (*delivered*). It is a corporate treasure, not the possession of any individual (*to the saints*). “The servant of God is called upon to contend for the faith. He is to maintain an attitude of faithfulness to Christ, and to love the brethren; and as we walk in love toward our brethren and stand firmly for the truth we will commend to others that truth which we seek to proclaim with our lips” (Ironsides, p.177).

Several years ago Pam gave Randy a special gift, the Martin HD35 guitar he plays each Sunday morning. I called Randy and asked him this question, What makes a Martin guitar a Martin guitar? He told me that Martin guitars are individually handmade. The particular parts, like the solid spruce top, are carefully chosen and controlled. Martin guitars are constructed with a particular internal bracing design. Each instrument carries a lifetime warranty and is individually registered. If one deviates from these standards, like using another species of wood for the top or another bracing system, then you no longer have a Martin guitar. You’ve got something else. By looking at it you might not be able to tell. The sound would give it away. To the degree you deviate from the apostolic standard, you no longer have the gospel. It’s something else. It may be close but it’s not apostolic.

In verse 14 notice that Timothy is also to *guard the treasure*. This treasure is without doubt the gospel message. Timothy is to *guard* it. He is to keep it safe.

He is to keep watch over it. If you go to the Kimball you will see guards watching over the art treasures displayed there. Jean Miles is our next door neighbor. Whenever Jean goes out of town for a few days she brings her silver over to our house so we can watch over it while she is gone. Similarly the gospel is something of great value to God and we have been granted the privilege and responsibility of watching over it. Guarding is no passive activity. Indeed, it requires a measure of diligence. I remember one summer hiking the Appalachian Trail. Our group stopped for the night at Peck's Corner. A few black bears were prowling the neighborhood so we set up a bear watch for the night. Before dark we strung a perimeter of rope with tin cups and plates. Bears were grunting and snorting all night long. We sat up on 2-hour shifts to maintain a good fire. We remained alert and cautious as our friends grunted and snorted around us during the night.

Now notice that our charge is to *guard*. When Mrs. Miles hands her silver over to us she is not asking me to reshape the tines on the forks or to exchange her silver for another design Julia likes better. She just wants us to take care of her stuff. That's how it is with God. Our charge is simply to guard. My job is not to do anything with the gospel but to pass it on uncorrupted to the next generation. The gospel is revealed just as God wants it. God hasn't authorized us to compensate for the gospel; to cover its perceived defects or strengthen its perceived weaknesses. God hasn't authorized us to compromise the gospel by equivocating on points which sinners find objectionable. God hasn't authorized

us to correct the gospel by redirecting its main thrust. God hasn't authorized us to customize the gospel; to enhance it; to make it more attractive or appealing; to put some makeup on it or dress it up. God hasn't authorized us to confuse the gospel; to muddle its simple message. Our charge is to communicate the gospel as it was revealed to the apostles and as it has come to us through faithful men.

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Keepers of the Main Thing

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8 Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, or of me His prisoner; but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, **9** who has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, **10** but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, **11** for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher. **12** For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day. **13** Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. **14** Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you.

The gospel, in terms of the raw _____ facts, declares that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures (I Cor. 15:1-4). The gospel, in terms of its _____, is revealed on account of sin (Matt. 1:21). The gospel, in terms of its efficacy, is the God-ordained means by which sinners are saved (Rom. 1:16). The gospel, in terms of its _____ emphasis, declares an objective, substitutionary transaction which propitiates the wrath of God (I Pet. 2:24). The gospel, in terms of its _____ heart, declares that now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested ... even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe ... for we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the Law (Rom. 3:21-22, 28). The gospel, in terms of its _____, is intended to humble the pride of man (I Cor. 1:21). The gospel, in terms of its _____, requires that men repent and believe (Mark 1:15). The gospel, in terms of its _____, offers eternal life to men dead in trespasses and sins (John 5:24). The gospel, in terms of its _____, declares that there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12). The gospel, in terms of its _____, is the central message of the church.

Because of these excellencies, we conclude that the message of the cross, the gospel, is the _____.

For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God (I Cor. 1:18).

The gospel is the main thing because it, above all else, reveals the _____ of God.

The gospel is the main thing because it is the **only** message by which men may be _____ to God.

The gospel is the main thing because it is the message with which we have been _____ by God.

God ... gave us the ministry of reconciliation ... He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ (II Cor. 5:18-20).

1:11

Paul, as a **preacher**, was called to publicly _____ the nations.
Paul, as an **apostle**, was called to authoritatively _____ the church in terms of its faith, its practice, and its visible presence in the world.
Paul, as a **teacher**, was called to _____ the saints.

One of the most invigorating things for any Christian man or woman is to interpret one’s life in terms of the _____ of the gospel.

1:12

“Paul says that he has made his deposit with God. He means that he has entrusted both his _____ and his _____ to him ... Paul had entrusted his life to God; and he was sure that in life and in death he was _____” (W. Barclay).

1:13

Part of this ministry steadfastness is that Timothy be absolutely unwavering in his commitment to the _____ and _____ of the message with which he has been entrusted.

Jude 3. *Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.*

Each succeeding generation must pass it on “uncorrupted and unperturbed” (Barclay, p.179) to the next generation (**contend earnestly**).

It is a fixed body of truth (**for the faith**).

It is unchangeable. There is a finality about the gospel (**once for all**).

Man did not discover or invent the gospel. It is a revealed message (**delivered**).

It is a corporate treasure, not the possession of any individual (**to the saints**).

1:14

Timothy is to **guard** it. He is to keep it safe. He is to keep watch over it.
God hasn’t authorized us to _____ for the gospel.
God hasn’t authorized us to _____ the gospel.
God hasn’t authorized us to _____ the gospel.
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God hasn’t authorized us to _____ the gospel.

Questions for use in your Care Group discussion :

Verse 11. Given **I Peter 4:10**, in what sense are we, like Paul, “appointed” to gospel ministry?

Verse 12. What is Paul communicating by saying *I know whom I have believed* rather than *I know what I have believed*?

Verse 13. Name some specific ways in which men compromise (equivocate) the gospel? Seek to “correct” (amend) the gospel? Customize (enhance) the gospel?

Verse 14. (a) Name specific ways in which a local church can “keep the main thing the main thing.” (b) What damage is done to the church corporately and to the faith of individual believers when the gospel is displaced as the #1 priority?