

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD
Arlington Presbyterian Church (PCA)

A Hill to Die On
2 Timothy 4:1-5 (597)
March 3, 2002

In the history of military conflict, holding the high ground has always served a strategic advantage. Certainly this was the case in the pivotal battle of the American Civil War, **Gettysburg**, where General Robert E. Lee ordered General Richard Ewell to “secure possession of the heights.” You see “the terrain surrounding Gettysburg consisted mostly of ridges and hills to the south of the town. The most prominent [of these] were Cemetery Hill and Culp’s Hill. Cemetery Ridge stretched some two miles to the south and ended at Little Round Top and Big Round Top” (MilitaryHistoryOnline.com).

The title of my sermon, *A Hill to Die On*, has its roots in this tactical principal. The idea behind the saying is that elevated positions are of such strategic military value that holding them is worth dying for. For example, on the first day of the Battle of Gettysburg, July 1, 1863, the Iron Brigade led by Union General Solomon Meredith, in the effort to hold McPherson’s Ridge blocking the western approach to the city, suffered an enormous 1,153 casualties out of 1,829 men.

This principle of holding the high ground may also be applied to Christian life and work. In other words, there are certain tenets that are of such strategic importance that no cost is too high to preserve them. We refer to these as “essentials” of the faith. The word “essential” means “belonging to the very

nature of a thing and therefore being incapable of removal without destroying the thing itself or its character” (*Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*). Some matters, while important in their own right, are not essentials. Let’s consider the mode of baptism as an example. Whether a person is sprinkled or immersed is an important matter but the issue is not of the essence of Christianity. Let me illustrate what I mean.

Some years ago we purchased a game called **Jenga**. The actual material of the game consists of 18 layers of three 1” x ½” x 3” wooden blocks laid perpendicular to one other forming a stack about 11” high. The object of the game is to remove these little wooden blocks one at a time without the stack falling down. The loser, of course, is the guy who removes the block which precipitates the collapse of the stack. Many components of what we know as Christianity may be removed and the basic structure of Christianity still remain intact. In view today, however, is that block which, when removed, precipitates the collapse of historic, orthodox Christianity. Truth is the block which, when removed, precipitates the collapse of our faith.

At Gettysburg the strategic hills were Seminary Ridge, Cemetery Hill, Big Round Top and Little Round Top. Here in 2 Timothy the strategic hill is truth. In the defense of this hill the Church as a corporate entity and individual Christians who make up the body of Christ must be willing to die. By that I mean that revealed truth is to be upheld at all costs up to and including the sacrifice of our lives.

Beloved, everything hangs on revealed truth. When truth is removed Christianity collapses. When absolute truth is denied we can turn out the lights and go home. When objective truth becomes relative it's all over. When truth becomes secondary it's all over. It is in this light that verses 1-5 must be understood.

These verses constitute a divine command to stick tenaciously to the truth as revealed by God and as embodied in the Scripture. The primary concern of the Church; the great preoccupation of the Church, above all else, is to uphold and communicate the truth. In his first letter to Timothy, Paul wrote, *I write so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of **the truth** (3:15)*. Now what does it look like when a church is upholding and communicating the truth faithfully? I want you to see four things. **First** of all there is a seriousness about its ministry. This church isn't playing games. The atmosphere is not one of oppressive heaviness. Indeed, it is one of joy in the Holy Spirit. But for these folks the preservation of truth is a life and death affair.

Verse 1. *I solemnly 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:* Whenever a candidate for the gospel ministry in the PCA is taken under care, licensed to preach, or ordained to a specific work he is given a formal charge by the presbytery. In this charge a designated individual commands, instructs, or exhorts the candidate with the authority of the presbytery. This

charge is designed to inspire, motivate, and, yes, to obligate the man to faithfulness in upholding the truth in his life and ministry. Paul has just laid down such a charge to Timothy and by extension to you and to me. Paul cites three facts which reinforce the seriousness with which we are to uphold the truth.

Its seriousness is reinforced **first** by the reality of God's presence. *I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus*. I recognize that "the eyes of Texas are upon me" and that's fine, but I'm supremely concerned about the eyes of God who observes my life and ministry. Michael Bentley is an English clergyman who has written a popular commentary on 2 Timothy. Not surprisingly he illustrates this point by using the example of the Queen. He says, "If we were to be given specific instructions while we were in the presence of Her Majesty the Queen and Her Majesty the Queen Mother, we would take very careful notice of what we were told to do. We would not easily forget it and, because it had their blessing, we would do everything in our power to see that we carried out the responsibilities which had been placed upon us" (*Passing on the Truth*, pp. 281-282). Beloved, I don't really care about what everybody else is doing or thinking. I want this church to work out its life and ministry aware that we are doing so *coram deo* ... before the face of God? That alone makes this serious stuff!

"The seriousness of the charge to Timothy [is] further reinforced by" (Bentley, p.282) the certainty of Christ's judgment – *who is to judge the living and the*

dead. Acts 17:31 establishes the fact that [God] *has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed.* Paul himself was keenly aware of some sort of evaluation in the presence of Christ. He wrote to the Corinthians, *For we must **all** appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that **each one** may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad (2 Cor. 5:10).* One of the keenest disappointments shared by pastors is the general hesitancy of the saints to be held closely accountable for their faith and practice in this life. God intends for us to be fully engaged, aware that our commitment to the truth will be scrutinized at last by Him who is the Truth.

“The seriousness of the charge to Timothy [is] further reinforced by” (Bentley, p.282) the hope of the consummation – *and by His appearing and His kingdom.* As you know, in recent months my father has suffered a stroke, two major surgeries, and two grueling recoveries. In fifty years I had never known my father to be down or depressed. However, he was so discouraged after the surgery to repair his aorta that he had to be put on anti-depressants. After the most recent surgery to remove the lung cancer, one of the main concerns of the medical staff and our family was that daddy would get so discouraged that he would just give up. In light of that concern one of our primary tasks was to keep assuring him that his body would recover; that the pain would subside; that within five or six days he would be free of all the machines, needles, and tubes. The rationale, of course, was that such an expectation would motivate him to do his

best to walk, to cough deeply in spite of the pain, and to willingly endure the humiliating aspects of recovery. Christ is coming again and will establish His eternal kingdom. Behind this appeal to the consummation of all things Paul is assuring Timothy that the “struggle with sinful flesh will [one day] be over” (Towner, p.203) and that, in the meantime he must pursue his calling with endurance. One day the church militant will be the church triumphant. Now we come to the specific content of Paul’s charge.

Verse 2. Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. What does it look like when a church is upholding and communicating the truth faithfully? **Second**, that church will be single-minded in its ministry. It allows for no competition. It won’t deviate to the right or to the left. On my recent flight to Tennessee I noticed a napkin on the Southwest Airlines plane – “30 years, One Mission, Low Fares.” The Church is to have such a narrow focus – “2000 years, One Mission, The Gospel.” **Colossians 4:3**, *praying at the same time for us as well, that God may open up to us a door for **the word**, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ.* The word here in **4:2** refers to all revealed truth with particular emphasis on the gospel of the grace of God in Christ. The gospel **is** our business. With every intention of will, every ounce of energy, every affection of heart, every exercise of mind this church centers its ministry on the gospel and makes the communication of the gospel its first and foremost task.

Be ready in season and out of season. What this means is that this church has equipped itself in advance and has shed all extraneous involvements in order to communicate the gospel. This church is ready when the word is bearing fruit and when it appears to be barren in its effect; when opportunity opens up and when doors are closed; when it's convenient and when it is not; when men are inclined to listen and when they are not. *Be ready* speaks of preparedness and availability. Let me illustrate how these two go together. Julia went into labor with David early on Sunday morning October 7, 1984. Her doctor, Bill Cutrer, met us at Baylor Hospital. It appeared that Julia had several hours before she would deliver so Bill took off to teach his Sunday School class and I left to drop Kathryn off at a friend's house. Upon my return to the hospital I discovered that my son had been born while both Bill and I were away. The umbilical cord had somehow wrapped around his neck, his heartbeat slowed to a dangerously low rate, and so the resident on call had to do an emergency C-section. That young man had equipped himself in advance and had set aside his other interests to be on call that morning and those two things proved to be the difference between life and death for my son and maybe even my wife. Many of you have spent years of time and thousands of dollars preparing yourselves for your profession. What have you done to equip yourselves to defend the faith, to lead someone to Christ, to instruct a new believer in the faith? In addition, many of you are so wrapped up in all manner of activities that you are simply unavailable for ministry. Single-mindedness.

Reprove, rebuke, exhort. The minister and the church intent upon upholding the truth will be consistently dealing with the matter of sin. **I Timothy 5:20**, *Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also may be fearful of sinning.* Remember, beloved, sin always and in every form kills. Truth gives life. We are after truth in practice as well as truth in doctrine. So sin must be responsibly dealt with if the high ground of truth is to be maintained and the church is to remain healthy.

Reproof is gentle correction which is carried out most often through the teaching and preaching ministry of the church. The goal of such reproof is change over time as the saints understand and conform to the Word of God. *Rebuke*, on the other hand, is a stern “warning or prohibition designed to bring about an immediate halt” (Towner, p.204) to sinful behavior. *Exhortation* is the positive urging to live a practical life of righteousness. Did you know that the exercise of these three is our mutual obligation to one another? But, for the most part, we don’t have a clue as to how to go about this. We are as awkward as if it was our first time on ice skates. I’ve been rebuked and heard others rebuked in the most insensitive and hurtful ways. As we correct and exhort one another we are never to do so out of anger, pride, self-righteousness or any other sinful motive.

Wisely does the Holy Spirit supply some guardrails to prevent abuse in the exercise of these responsibilities. The first is that these things must be done *with great patience*. Maturity is not an event. It is a process. The people of God

mature over a period of years not days or weeks. And whether you realize it or not, none of us has “arrived.” And so we must be “ceaselessly waiting and working” (Towner, p.204) to the end that each one grows in grace.

Reproof, rebuke, and exhortation must also be exercised with *instruction*. Beloved, do you realize that you are always teaching, not only in your formal instruction but in every aspect of your life? In every interaction you have with one another you must recognize that both in the content of what you say and in the manner of your approach you are teaching. And in every interaction your chief concern is that both you and your brother or sister learn the truth and thereby grow in the grace of Christ.

Now why is it important that the church be serious and single-minded in upholding and communicating the truth? Here’s the reason - because folks will “grow weary of the old plain gospel of Christ” (Matthew Henry, p.849). They’ll just get tired of it. **Verses 3 and 4. *For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths.***

Folks will get to the point where they simply won’t endure being told that God is God and that He does as He pleases; that His law is unflinching and that they themselves are guilty of breaking it; that man is desperately wicked deserving the

wrath of God; that their only hope hangs on the mercy of that same offended God; that Jesus Christ alone is God's gracious provision for man's condition; that God calls Christians to reject worldly values and passions; that rewards are in heaven not on earth; that we are called to be generous; that we are called to suffer for Christ's sake ... and on and on.

What does it look like when a church is upholding and communicating the truth faithfully? **Third**, there will be a sense of urgency in that ministry. That church will be driven by the recognition that we must speak while folks will listen.

You see, when truth is abandoned folks look for other routes to spirituality. Routes which will allow them to retain their attachment to the values, things, and passions of the world. Men are not only open to but looking for alternatives to the faith and practice prescribed in the Word of God. They want "a 'spiritual' answer that is more convenient" (Towner, p.205). And there are many out there who are all too ready to provide these alternatives. And so these weak, curious, and dissatisfied saints "accumulate for themselves" men and women who will teach them those things that will satisfy their sinful desires. Paul calls these things *myths* - fabrications designed to dupe the dull and spiritually deceived.

Verse 5. *But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.* What does it look like when a church is upholding and communicating the truth faithfully? **Fourth**, there will be a sense

of security in that ministry. This church enjoys the quite confidence that it is doing the right thing. This church is not particularly impressed with notoriety, size, or the latest religious fad. ***Be sober in all things.*** This is Paul's way of saying, "keep your head." This church maintains self-control in every situation and circumstance, examining everything carefully and critically. ***Endure hardship.*** The spirit of the age "writes suffering right out of their manual on discipleship" (Towner, p.205). This church knows better. ***Do the work of an evangelist.*** People in this church will be out there personally sharing the gospel with others. Timothy had a sedentary ministry in the sense that he ministered in one church in one city. The pastors, the elders, the members of this church are deliberately and with forethought communicating the gospel to those who have never heard it. ***Fulfill your ministry.*** If ministry were an athletic contest Paul would be saying, "Play hard until the horn blows or the gun sounds." Paul has run the race but we are still on the track. Paul has fought the fight but we are still in the ring. And his encouragement, yes, his command, is for us to fervently and faithfully uphold and communicate the truth to a world lost in error and blinded by the lies of the devil and the sinful passions of evil men.

We continue now in the spirit of this sermon and in preparation for the sacrament by singing Hymn # 542.

Benediction

And now as a member of *Christ's Church*,

go forth into the world in peace;

be of good courage;

hold fast that which is good;

render to no man evil for evil;

strengthen the fainthearted;

support the weak;

heal the afflicted;

honor all men;

love and serve the Lord, rejoicing in the power of the Spirit.

And the blessing of God Almighty,

the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,

be upon you and remain with you forever. Amen.

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a strategic advantage.

Gettysburg

This principle of holding the high ground may also be applied to Christian life and work.

The word “essential” means “belonging to the very nature of a thing and therefore being
incapable of removal without destroying the thing itself or its character”
(*Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*).

Jenga

Many components of what we know as Christianity may be removed and the basic
structure of Christianity still remain intact.

_____ is the block which, when removed, precipitates the collapse of our faith.
Here in 2 Timothy the strategic hill is _____.

EVERYTHING HANGS ON REVEALED TRUTH.

When truth is _____ Christianity collapses.
When absolute truth is _____ we can turn out the lights and go home.
When objective truth becomes _____ it’s all over.
When truth becomes _____ it’s all over.

The primary concern of the Church; the great preoccupation
of the Church, above all else, is to _____ and
_____ the truth.

*I write so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God,
which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of **the truth** (1 Tim. 3:15).*

What does it look like when a church is upholding and
communicating the truth faithfully?

First of all there is a _____ about its ministry.

**Verse 1. I solemnly 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**

This seriousness is reinforced by ...
the reality of God’s _____
I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus

the certainty of Christ’s _____
who is to judge the living and the dead

the hope of the _____
and by His appearing and His kingdom

Verse 2. Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.

What does it look like when a church is upholding and communicating the truth faithfully?

Second, that church will be _____ in its ministry.

Preach the word

The word here in 4:2 refers to _____ revealed truth with particular emphasis on the _____ of the grace of God in Christ.

Be ready in season and out of season

This church has equipped itself in advance and has shed all extraneous involvements in order to communicate the gospel.

Be ready speaks of _____ and _____.

Reprove, rebuke, exhort

The minister and the church intent upon upholding the truth will be consistently dealing with the matter of _____ (I Tim. 5:20).

NOW WHY IS IT IMPORTANT THAT THE CHURCH BE SERIOUS AND SINGLE-MINDED IN UPHOLDING AND COMMUNICATING THE TRUTH?

Because folks will “grow weary of the _____ gospel of Christ”
Matthew Henry

Verses 3 and 4. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths.

What does it look like when a church is upholding and communicating the truth faithfully?

Third, there will be a sense of _____ in that ministry.

Verse 5. But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

What does it look like when a church is upholding and communicating the truth faithfully?

Fourth, there will be a sense of _____ in that ministry.