

Watch your life and teaching

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[0 : 00] Well, the more valuable something is, the more care we should take in how we hold it. This was a lesson that was learned the hard way by a British reporter who recounts the day in 1970 that he dropped the priceless Stradivarius violin when interviewing the virtuoso Yehudi Menuhin on the stage of Canterbury Cathedral before his performance.

He writes of the incident. I asked, may I hold it a moment, peering at the violin? Be assured, these violins are very expensive. They're valued upwards of 20 million rand each.

This reporter goes on in recounting this incident. May I hold it a moment? By all means, said Menuhin. But be careful, he added.

As he handed me the precious instrument. I took it with both hands. My, my, I murmured appreciatively. To think I'm holding Menuhin's Stradivarius.

At that moment, the instrument started slipping out of my hands. I made to catch it, but as I did so, tilted the edge and sent it spinning gracefully and audibly down the ancient stone stairway.

[1 : 21] And it landed with a crash at the foot of the steps. Menuhin's many years of meditation had been but a preparation for this moment. He did not offer a word of reproach.

He closed his eyes briefly and took a deep breath. Then he walked down the stone steps to retrieve his broken violin. Carefully, he inspected the instrument. I think I'll have to use the other one, he said quietly.

I offered to fetch it for him from his car. Briefly, his face seemed to twitch. Eh, no, I'll fetch it. Thank you very much. This reporter actually goes on. It seems that he had a habit of this kind of thing. He writes, So this is someone that you don't want handling precious things.

You want to be very careful with who handles the most precious things in life. Well, now think about the Bible. The very truth that God has inspired and given to humanity.

[2 : 43] This is the most valuable thing we could ever have as humans. The word of God himself. And so we need to take great care in how we handle it.

That's what the passage is all about this morning. That Paul writes to Timothy. As he instructs this young minister, he now gets to the point in his letter where he says, You need to be very careful with this truth that has been entrusted to you.

Be very careful with how you handle it. And as we read through the passage, we see the various ways Timothy must be careful. But Paul ends by summarizing it in two main ways that Timothy and us need to be careful in handling this truth.

And it's in 16, verse 16, at the beginning of it. These are the two main ways that really sum up the burden of this passage. He says, pay close attention to your life and your teaching.

Pay close attention to your life and your teaching. And this morning what we're going to do is we're going to consider each in turn and how each of them are vital in making sure that we handle this precious truth carefully as Christians.

[4 : 03] So I want to start with careful teaching. Be careful in your teaching. And Paul talks about this from verse 13.

You can see he emphasizes this and explains to Timothy how he is to be careful in his teaching. From verse 13, look at what he says. Until I come, give your attention to public reading, exhortation, and teaching.

Don't neglect the gift that is in you. It was given to you through prophecy with the laying on of hands by the council of elders. Okay, so firstly, let's look at each of these verses in turn.

He says, until I come, give your attention. Give your attention to public reading, exhortation, and teaching. Another translation is devote yourself or concentrate very closely on.

So it's the idea that you should be putting into practice, for example, when you drive a car. When you're driving, you need to concentrate on what you're doing.

[5 : 12] When you're sitting at home on the couch, you don't need to concentrate on what you're doing. When you're in the driver's seat of a car, you do. You need to concentrate on the road. You can't be on your phone. You can't be WhatsApping people.

You need to concentrate on where you're driving. Because if you don't, you could seriously hurt or kill someone, right? Especially in the dark, as we've been experiencing when the streetlights go out and load shedding.

Or in the rain, as we're experiencing now as winter encroaches. When it's dark, when it's rainy, you've got to concentrate on your driving all the more, right? To make sure that you, your family, your passengers, and everybody out there is protected.

You've got to concentrate. Well, that's the sense that Paul is encouraging Timothy. Concentrate on your teaching. Concentrate where you're going.

Else you're going to do damage. Especially with all the false teachings that were going around in Ephesus at the time. All the rain and the darkness of teaching.

[6 : 12] Timothy really had to carefully concentrate on where he was going and what he was saying. And so how must he concentrate? Well, Paul goes on.

Concentrate. Give your attention to three things. Public reading, exhortation, and teaching. Public reading. So public reading was actually the...

Paul was referring to the exercise that happened in the Jewish synagogue. Where they read the Old Testament scriptures. Because remember back then, when Paul wrote this letter to Timothy. They didn't have the New Testament like we have it now. Their scriptures were the Old Testament. And Paul is therefore saying, well, you must continue that habit that the Jewish synagogues did of reading the Old Testament.

Because this is God's word. You haven't gone beyond that as Christians, as Gentile Christians that he's writing to. He's saying you've still got to keep that habit up. But that's not all.

[7 : 12] He also says teaching. So he's got to devote himself to both reading the Old Testament to the people. And as well as teaching. And the word for teaching actually referred to teaching the apostolic doctrines.

That he was being taught now. That Paul was passing on to him. And the gospel of Jesus Christ. Which fulfills the Old Testament. And so essentially, what Paul is saying to Timothy here by saying, you know, do the public readings.

Like in the synagogues of the Old Testament. But also do teaching of what I'm telling you. Is he's saying teach the whole Bible essentially. Our whole Bible today. Teach the whole truth.

Don't pick and choose. Don't only look at what I'm teaching you and neglect the Old Testament. Don't only teach the Old Testament and neglect what I'm teaching you. And neglect how Jesus fulfills it.

Teach the whole counsel of scripture. Is the essence of what Paul is saying here. And that I think is a timely reminder. For us in today's world. Where preachers often will pick and choose what they want to preach from the Bible.

[8 : 12] Depending on what they're interested in. Or depending on, you know, what stimulates the congregation. Or what is relevant at the time. But this is a reminder. The whole Bible is always relevant in every generation.

The whole counsel of scripture is what must be taught. But what's interesting in the middle of those two instructions. He doesn't only say that Timothy must teach this.

As a kind of a academic lecture. He says, look in your Bibles again or on the verse behind me. He says you must exhort. Exhortation. Give yourself to exhorting.

Not just teaching. You see, exhorting is not just telling people facts. It's calling them to really take on board what is going on here.

Passionately. Emotionally. Urgently. Calling people to obey this. That's exhorting. And Timothy needs to do both.

[9 : 10] Not just tell people these truths. But apply it into their lives. And call them to obey it. And chase after them if they're not. You see, this is what we're doing here on a Sunday.

This is not just a lecture theater. Don't treat it like a lecture theater. We're not just here to teach. But we're here to call you to obey.

We're here to exhort you. Exhort you to actually not just go away and having learned something new. But to let this change you.

To put it into practice. And that is why it's important that this is a public thing. That we come together to do this.

You see how, again, Paul exhorts Timothy. Give yourself to the public reading. Exhortation. And teaching. This needs to be a corporate coming together to hear God's word.

[10:09] Yes, it's important, as Adrian rightly mentioned earlier, to read the Bible privately at home. We have the great privilege of being able to do that. And connect with God through His word privately.

But that is not enough. That is not enough. There needs to be a public gathering to sit together under God's word and be exhorted.

You're not going to tell yourself the hard things when you're reading privately at home, necessarily. You're not going to exhort yourself every time.

You need someone else to do that. We need each other to exhort and to spur each other on. That's why we need to come together on a regular basis, at least once a week, to sit and hear God's word. Not just taught, but exhorted. But one of the other reasons that this needs to be a public thing, like we're doing now, we see in verse 14. The next verse. Look at what Paul says to Timothy.

[11:12] Don't neglect the gift that is in you. It was given to you through prophecy with the laying on of hands by the council of elders. One of the other reasons that this public gathering to sit under the teaching of the word is important is because God has gifted some people to teach this.

God has given particular important gifting to some people to teach this. And so this, what's happening here, what Paul is referring to when he talks about this gift that was given to you through prophecy with the laying on of hands by the council of elders.

He's referring to essentially Timothy's ordination. Now, ordination, if you don't know, is the official recognition of someone to teach the Bible. And the reason ordination is important, the reason there has to be this official recognition of someone to teach the Bible is because this is serious.

What we're doing is serious. If you have to go have open heart surgery, you want the doctor who's performing that surgery to have been affirmed, right, by someone that he knows what he's doing, right?

You don't want just someone who fancies himself a surgeon, but nobody's actually confirmed, no, this guy should be operating on you. Do you want someone like that operating on your heart?

[12:43] No. So why do you want someone like that operating on your soul? How much more do you want someone like that?

Now, he's been confirmed in two ways. We see in this verse, through prophecy and through the laying on of hands. And so it's two directions.

God has indicated that he wants this man, Timothy, teaching his word. But also it's been confirmed by the church, the laying on of hands of the elders, the people who represent the church.

And so here there are these two directions of affirmation from God and from the church. And it's the same as ordination today for preachers of the word.

There's an indication by God. Now, we don't quite know what, in this case, this was given to you by prophecy.

[13:52] We don't know quite what that looked like in the early church. But today, what it is, is a sense of calling, but also not just an inner sense of calling. It's a calling that is confirmed by the church around a person.

So there is this indication by God, but it's also something that is affirmed by the church. And that is typically accompanied by taking vows. So that's how an ordination happens today.

God calls someone in a variety of ways to teach this word full time. And then the church confirms that.

And then they publicly take vows, committing themselves to it. That's ordination. Now, I've got to say, ordination is not foolproof, literally. There are many fools who are ordained.

And you see a lot of people wearing these who shouldn't be. A lot of people ordained who shouldn't do that because the process isn't foolproof.

[14:58] There's a lot of holes in it because we live in a broken world, obviously. But it should still be the minimum requirement of someone to head up the teaching ministry in a church.

That they've been publicly recognized and that they've had this some kind of confirmation that this is a person called to ministry. Because you get a lot of armchair preachers. A lot of people who fancy themselves teachers of the word.

And they sit behind their keyboards. And they teach as many people as they can. But nobody's affirmed them. Nobody said this person should be teaching. They've just taken it upon themselves. And that's why this process of ordination is not just something that the church has come up with. It's here in the Bible. And we take serious vows when we get ordained to preach this word.

And it's important because of what Paul reminds Timothy next. Look at verse 15. He says, Practice these things and be committed to them. Be committed to them.

[16:00] Again, in the original that has the sense of to immerse yourself in this thing. This activity. This calling that you've been called to.

Immerse yourself in it. I don't know what you immerse yourself in. But if you want to do anything properly, really properly, you should immerse yourself in it.

Right? If you're a rugby player and you want to make the Springbok team, the best team in the world. Right? If you want to make the Springbok team, you can't just practice on the weekends.

Okay? You can't just play rugby part time. You have to immerse yourself in that. You've got to prioritize that above all other things if you want to make that team.

It's the same for a preacher of God's Word. If he wants to do this properly, he needs to immerse himself fully in this task. It's not just a hobby.

[17:02] I want to read to you some of the parts of the ordination service. And some of the vows that we have to take that I took.

The bishop says, Now we exhort you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to keep uppermost in your mind how high a dignity and to how weighty an office and charge you are being called.

It is therefore your duty never to cease your labor until you have done all that you can to bring each one committed to your charge to that understanding and faith and knowledge of God.

And to that maturity in Christ which leaves no place for error in doctrine or wrong conduct in life. And then in our vows, the bishop says, Will you be diligent in prayer and in the reading of the Holy Scriptures and in such studies that help to a fuller knowledge of them turning aside from studies for self-indulgence and worldly gain?

When I read these vows before I took them, that was probably one of the hardest things that I had to get my head around. That I was going to promise publicly that I was no longer going to use my time and energy towards secular financial gain.

[18:32] Or pursuing any studies that were going to make me more successful in the world. I was going to devote instead for the rest of my life, my entire energies to the study and the teaching of the word.

These are serious vows that we take. And so you want to listen to people who have committed their lives to doing this.

Not to people who do it as a hobby on the internet. And the reason for all of this, the reason that Paul is saying that this is so serious, Timothy, and you've got to take it seriously.

Is because what we teach is vitally important for your salvation. Eternally. Look at verse 16. This is a key verse.

Pay close attention to your life and your teaching. Persevere in these things. For in doing this, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

[19:37] I can't overemphasize enough how important what Paul is saying here is to Timothy. Why this activity of teaching this word is so serious.

Because this saves people from going to hell. This saves people. This. This word. This word. This word. This reveals the way of salvation that God has made known through his son Jesus Christ.

The salvation from sin that God has made available to all who listen to and believe it. Only here can you find this way of salvation. Only here is the way that you can find how to be saved from hell.

This is not here primarily to comfort you. This word is not here primarily to teach you ancient history or to stimulate your mind or to motivate you.

This is here to save you. What we do here every Sunday is to save you. And to keep you saved.

[20:42] As you continue to hear it taught. Notice again verse 16, the future tense. It's very surprisingly in the future tense in the Greek.

And it's translated here in the English. For in doing this you will save both yourself and your hearers. Not by doing this you have saved.

But by doing this you will save. Paul is saying to Timothy, your hearers still need to be saved. Sure Paul, yeah.

The non-Christians, right? No, the Christians who are saved now still need to be saved in the future. And so do you, Timothy. Look, again.

For by doing this you will save both yourself and your hearers. What? You're saying I'm not saved, Paul? Timothy might say no.

[21 : 43] Paul will say no, you are saved and you still need to be saved. That's how the Bible talks about salvation, by the way. Both as a past event for a believer but also as a future thing. I mean, Paul himself, listen to what he says in 1 Corinthians 9.

He says, I discipline my body and bring it under strict control so that after preaching to others I myself will not be disqualified. Even Paul realizes that even though he is saved and he has confidence in that salvation, he still needs to be saved in the future.

So do I. And so do you. If you have been saved by this, if you have come under the teaching of the word, the gospel of Jesus Christ, and you have believed it and God has opened your eyes and this has saved you, then praise be to God that you are part of his covenant people and that you have been reconciled with him but you need to keep being saved by this.

It's like chronic medication. If you have a chronic disease, a disease that doesn't go away, and many people suffer from chronic diseases, and you go to the doctor and he gives you a cure for this chronic disease, and he says, don't worry, there is a cure.

Here's the medicine for this chronic disease. If you take this, your disease is dealt with. And that gives you great assurance. You can rest now that you have the cure.

[23 : 17] But the doctor also says, you must keep taking this medication for the rest of your life. So that it doesn't recur. And you know, no one likes to be told that by the doctor, do they?

Maybe you suffer from a chronic disease. And you've sat in that doctor's office and he says, listen, it can be treated, but you have to, it's not going to go away.

You've got to take this for the rest of your life. And nobody likes to hear that because it undermines our pride. It undermines us wanting to be independent and not to be dependent on anything.

But that is how it is with sin, brothers and sisters. It is a chronic disease. And so we need to keep taking this. We need to keep taking this if we don't want it to recur.

If we don't want it to take us out. And I can't stress enough the importance of this. You know, it's Christians, it's Christians who don't realize that the Bible speaks of salvation in both, in both the present and the future tense.

[24 : 25] That it is both a past thing and a future thing. It's Christians who only concentrate on salvation as a past thing and think it's done and dusted. Now I can just sit back. Who neglect the very thing that is going to keep them saved.

And neglect the disciplines that is required to keep them on the straight and narrow. And neglect the medicine that God has given us to keep us saved. And that is why Timothy is to devote himself to teaching it.

And to give his full attention to it. Because it is serious. This is not just a hobby we do. And this is not just something that you come and sit under when you feel like it. This is essential to your ongoing perseverance in the faith.

And your ongoing fight with sin. It's more serious than you think. And so, Paul says to Timothy, devote yourself to it.

Give your full attention to it. As to all who teach this word. In every generation. If you do in any capacity, you need to make sure that you give your full attention to it.

[25 : 32] That you are not falling asleep. That you are not taking this half-hearted. That you don't treat it like a hobby. But even if you don't. Even if you don't give your full attention to teaching the word.

And even if you are not called to teach the word per se. Let me ask you this. Are you devoted to being taught? As we are called to be devoted to preaching this.

Are you devoted to hearing it? Do you take what we do at church seriously enough. That you will put aside all distractions to be here on a Sunday.

And to concentrate fully on what you hear. Or is it the case of, I'll come if I feel like it. If it's not too cold outside. God. Well if.

If that's your attitude to church. If that's your attitude to what we're doing here. You know I'll come if I think I need it. You are playing with your eternity. This is much more serious.

[26 : 43] And you need it much more than you think. And so we who teach it. Whether it's pastors. Or those who teach children's church.

Or those who teach kids club. Or youth. Or whatever capacity it is. We must be seriously careful. With how we handle this truth. And how we teach it. But that's not all.

It's not just careful teaching. It's also careful living. You see Paul said to Timothy. Pay close attention to your life. And your teaching. Not just your teaching. And so before we end.

We've got to spend some time seeing. What this careful living is about. And. Paul really.

Emphasizes it in verse 12. Have a look. Don't let anyone despise your youth.

Okay. So Timothy by the way. Was probably in his 30s. Maybe early 40s. And. It seems like most of the people.

[27 : 44] In his congregation. Were older than him. Which is often the case. Especially with people. Who have devoted their whole lives. To it. And a call to this as a career. That. That younger people.

Will teach older people. And so Paul. Because those older people. Older people are less inclined. To take on. What someone younger than them.

Is saying. Paul says. Now. Well you've got to set them. An example. Of what you teach then. Don't let anyone despise you. For your youth. But set an example. For the believers.

In speech. In conduct. In love. In faith. In purity. In other words. Paul is saying. To Timothy. Show them. That what you're teaching. Is valid. And legitimate. Because. Of how it has changed you.

First.

Be a demonstration. Of the reality. Of what you're teaching. In your life. Because that is what validates it. And that is. That is true for teachers. We are held to a high standard.

[28 : 41] And God gives us grace. In. You know. I must say. Even though this is a very serious job. It is a huge privilege. It is a huge privilege. To be paid.

By you. To study this all week. I must say. Thank you. Because. And I thank God. Because it is. Yes. It is. It is. It is very difficult. And sometimes very frustrating.

Especially when. People don't listen. But. But it is also. A huge privilege. And it is through it. That God works. In us. As we. Prepare this. God works.

In the preacher. Way before. He works. In the listener. And it has to be that way. Because the preacher's life. Must validate. The truth he teaches. But. It is not just true. For those who teach. It is true. For all Christians. That our life. Needs to validate. Our message. Because. Think about this. All Christians. Are in some way. Carriers.

[29 : 36] Of this truth. In the world. And so. Their life. Needs to match. Their message. They need to show. They need to show. The world. What it looks like.

To be saved. From the power. Of sin. We can't go out there. And tell people. About Jesus. Saving us. If we don't show them. What it actually looks like. To be saved. From the power.

Of sin. And that is why. Timothy. And all of us. Must watch. Our life. Closely. Timothy.

Paul says. Must watch his life. As he teaches this. He mustn't be so focused. On other people. That he neglects. His own walk. With the Lord. In fact.

He must prioritize that. In a way. Think about. When you're on an airplane. And you know. Those safety instructions. At the beginning. They say. If there's a sudden. Cabin depressurization.

[30 : 29] Oxygen masks. Will drop down. And you know. What they always say. They say. Attend to yourself first. Before you attend to others. And that's always a strange thing. Because you've got a mother. With five children.

And you would think. The mother's instinct. When the oxygen masks drop down. Is to make sure. All her children. Have their oxygen masks on. And then she can deal with herself. But no. That's not going to be very good.

Because she's going to faint. Halfway through. From lack of oxygen. She needs to attend. To herself first. To make sure. She's got the oxygen. Before she can attend to others. It's the same with Timothy.

He's got to attend to himself first. Before he can help others. To grow in godliness. But it is also true. For all Christians. We've got to watch. Our own lives. You've got to watch.

Your life. As a Christian. So that you can help others. Keep a watch. On yourself. Guard yourself. Keep a watch. A careful watch.

[31 : 25] On yourself. Now accountability partners are great. People. Other Christians. Who can come alongside you. And help you to see your blind spots. And where you might be drifting into sin. And things that you should change. And challenge you. Because other people are much better at challenging you. Than you're challenging it yourself. Accountability partners are great. But don't rely on them alone.

To point out your sin. And to show you. Where you need to work on. Hold yourself accountable. As well. Especially in those areas of life.

That no one else can see. And you hide very well. Because. The truth. We are called to take to the world. Is vital.

And it is precious. And so we must be very careful. How we carry it. In how we teach it. Not negligently. Interpreting.

[32 : 22] Verses. However we want. To fit what we've already decided to believe. But. Paying close attention. To what it really says. And we must be careful. In how we live it.

Making sure that the truths. That are here. Take root. Here. And that our lives. Are living examples. Of the gospel we preach.

And so. Congregation of St. Mark's. And those listening. On the recording. I want to commit to you. Once again. As I did in my ordination vows.

I want to commit to you. This morning. That I will be ever. Careful. And give my full attention. To how I teach. This word.

I will put in. Every ounce of energy. I have. To teaching this. As best I can. I want to ask you. Will you commit. To giving your full attention.

[33 : 22] To hearing it. And obeying it. Let's pray. Oh Lord.

You have given us. Such. A precious thing. In your word. You have. You have revealed. To us the way. To eternal life. The way. To salvation. From our sins.

And we thank you. Lord. For not leaving us. In our sins. For not leaving us. In our own. Devices. But. For showing us.

A way of salvation. Through your son. Jesus Christ. Lord. Would you. Cause us. To be. Careful. In reading this. In paying close. Attention.

To this. And help us. Ever to remember. That as you. As this word. And the spirit. Who inspires it. And. And teaches it.

[34 : 16] To us. Has saved us. From our sin. Help us. To remember. That it's by this word. That we keep. Being saved. And to. Therefore.

Take. What we do here. On a Sunday. Very seriously. Lord. I pray. That you would help us. To take this word. So seriously. And prioritize it. Properly in our lives. And help us also.

To be examples. Of what this word. Teaches. So that those around us. Can be drawn. To find the truth in it. As well. In Jesus name. We pray. Amen.