

GUIDED BY SCRIPTURE ALONE

Sermon for the 5th Sunday after Pentecost, 2017

2 Timothy 4:1-4

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is 2 Timothy 4:1-4: **I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of His appearing and His kingdom: ² Preach the Word! Be ready whether it is convenient or inconvenient! Correct, rebuke, and encourage, with all patience and teaching! ³ For a time will come when people will not endure sound doctrine. Instead, they will follow their own desires, and, because they have itching ears, they will surround themselves more and more with teachers. ⁴ They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ

One of the catch cries of the Reformation was “Scripture Alone.” This particular catchcry is sometimes called the formal principle of the Reformation, since it is the source and norm of the material cause or principle, the gospel of Jesus Christ that is received through faith alone by God’s grace alone.

Scripture does not stand alone apart from God, but rather, it is the instrument of God by which He reveals Himself for salvation through faith in Christ. The fact that the Holy Scriptures differ from all other writings, in that they alone are the inspired Word of God, necessarily means that they alone are the sole norm from which all teachings of the church are to be taken, and by which all teachers and teachings of the church must be judged and evaluated. This authority of the Holy Scriptures is the authority of God Himself, so that to heed and obey the inspired Scriptures is to heed and obey God. Since divine inspiration extends to all its words and passages, the divine authority of

Scripture must extend to *all* the words and thoughts that are expressed in Scripture.¹

It is so sad, therefore, that the Word of God is often cast aside today, making way for the teachings of man. Even in so-called Christian churches, the Word of God is often placed on the same level as man's teaching. It can be disheartening to find much of this kind of teaching done "in the name of God," and leading many away from the truth of Scripture to their own ruin. Really though, we shouldn't be surprised. We're not surprised because, centuries ago, St. Paul said to Timothy, and to us today, that the day would come when the Saviour's people and His message of salvation would find themselves under attack. Speaking by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul said, ³ **For a time will come when people will not endure sound doctrine. Instead, they will follow their own desires, and, because they have itching ears, they will surround themselves more and more with teachers.**

There is a warning here for us. We must never be smug in our church, thinking that we shall never come under attack, because any Christian church that teaches and confesses the central doctrine of Scripture - *that we are justified through faith alone by Christ alone* - can expect to be attacked. The enemy of our God, the devil himself, has become our enemy. We are not in a neutral position. When Christians gather as the church, we become a real threat to Satan. We are there to worship, to pray, to teach and to encourage one another to live and proclaim the Kingdom of God and as such, proclaim the enemy's defeat. It is apparent that he will do all he can to prevent that from happening.

Having made the prophecy of people not enduring sound doctrine, and so God's people might be prepared for the attack, the Holy Spirit described what this day would look like. A little earlier in his Letter to Timothy, Paul listed a couple of warnings. Listen to these warnings, and see if they don't accurately describe our generation today. First: God says, speaking through Paul, that *all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted*, (2 Tim. 3:12). Second, enemies of the cross, that is, pretend pastors and preachers, *will go on*

¹ Statement of Faith, The Holy Scriptures, Authority

from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived, (2 Tim. 3:13). Then there is the warning contained in our text, namely, that the truth of God's Word is going to be ignored. People **will follow their own desires, and, because they have itching ears, they will surround themselves more and more with teachers.** ⁴ **They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.**

Paul seems pretty accurate. What do you think? There is no doubt that our generation's unbelief is larger, stronger, and better organised than it has been in the past. While other sins seem to rise and fall in popularity, man's thinking that he could do better than God has never gone out of style.

In the Garden of Eden, Satan inferred that the triune God had been lying to our original ancestors. Adam and Eve agreed and tried to take control. The builders of Babel begin their work with a verbal challenge to God's authority. During the wilderness wanderings of Exodus, Moses found he couldn't take a step without the children of Israel complaining, criticising, and condemning the Lord. Although these people of Scripture nagged and nit-picked at God's graces, it's our generation that has taken humankind's disapproval of the Lord and raised it into an art form.

True, other times and other civilisations have taken shots against God, but surely our age is different – more bold. Our century has seen the rise of an attitude of ingratitude, the development of a gleeful, glad spirit that denies God's great grace and denigrates His hand in the affairs of men. Today, it's become fashionable, trendy, and even stylish for average, common people to say there is no God. Amazingly, they don't make this claim with any hesitation. On the contrary, they spout their lies with a smirk, a smile, or even a boast. Even places of learning, founded by Christians for the purpose of educating Christian men and women no longer feel shackled by the old-time Bible "myths."

Countries that were founded by Christians and whose stability, success, and legal system were based on Scripture now find it is politically correct to keep their distance from anything that smacks of Scripture or makes reference to the Redeemer. "*Look at what we've done on our own,*" is the boast of the godless crowd. Fanning the flame of doubt, adding fuel to the fire of denial, are TV

shows, books, movies, and magazines that make big money by disrespecting the Almighty God. With **itching ears**, the general public awaits the newest chapter in the Lord's denunciation.

But there's more. Today, bold revisers of history break out their erasers and remove any and all references to the Redeemer and the positive things His Church has done. With bogus bravado, these men attack the pages of Holy Scripture so their speculations and assumptions, their doubts and denials, their refutations and repudiations may make the front page of the local paper or a scientific journal. And gullible souls, intrigued by the lies and impressed by the false revelations, "**turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.**"

Sadly, we've just begun. The ranks of these enemies surrounding us have been increased by some media ministers who claim they're rooted in God's Word. True, they may be called "Reverend," but their preaching is hardly centred on the Redeemer. Ask them, "*Is Jesus the only name under heaven that saves?*" and they're indecisive. Inquire, "*Is a person saved only by grace through faith?*" and they hesitate. Challenge them by asking, "*Why do you speak more of your ministry than Christ's? Why do you mention your name more than His and your plan to get earthly riches rather than a heavenly home - His plan to seek first the kingdom of God?*" Challenge them, and you'll find God's sure and certain plan of salvation has been placed on a most slippery slope.

Do we need to identify other enemies that surround us? Should we speak about the pseudo scholars who've stripped Christ of His miracles, scratched out His teachings, and rebranded Him as a social worker and not the Redeemer? Should we mention those who've made the Saviour into a warehouse Santa whose job it is to give us stuff and more stuff, who've made Him a good guy rather than God's great gift of grace? Should we speak of those who've denied doctrines of Scripture and substituted their opinions? Should we speak of countries that have declared conversion to Christianity to be a capital offense, where Christmas and Easter worshippers become targets for murderous militants? Should we talk of those who have, in spite of obvious and opposing differences, declared all gods to be the same, all heavens the

same, all paths to forgiveness the same? Truly, the time of which Paul spoke in our text has arrived. We could quite rightly say that the time when people do not endure sound doctrine is now. *Instead, they follow their own desires, and, because they have itching ears, they surround themselves more and more with teachers. They turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.*

People no longer endure sound teaching, but prefer to find teachers who tell them what they want... and what they want bears no resemblance to God's inspired, inerrant Word at all. What, therefore, shall we do?

Some good-intentioned Christians will say, "*Why not just quietly coexist and know what we believe, even if nobody else agrees? Just keep the peace.*" Of course, we are to act peacefully. We are not like some other religions that includes violence in their religion, but there is a danger if we take the attitude of just quietly co-existing, turning a blind eye to things we know are contrary to God's commands. Years ago, there was a cartoon published where the first panel showed a rough-looking fellow who was walking through the streets of Sodom and Gomorrah. He carried a sign that read, "*Repent! The end is near.*" The second panel showed the man being asked, "*Why do you carry that sign? You've been carrying it for twenty years, and it hasn't made any difference.*" The last panel showed the sign-carrier's reply. He said, "*For the first nineteen years, I carried the sign in hopes that I would change them; now I carry it in hopes they won't change me.*"

In many ways, that cartoon explains what we Christians are to do. This church, this pulpit, are here so that you can hear for yourselves how much God cares for you, and you in turn can go out into the sinful world and tell its people just how much God cares for them. While the Apostle Paul wrote this letter to Timothy, giving advice for a young pastor, yet every one of us exists so the Spirit can use us to reach out and let everyone know there's good news and great joy that has come into this world in the person of Jesus Christ. We come together, gathering around Word and Sacrament, confessing our sins and receiving absolution, having our faith strengthened, so that we may go out together and let the world know that: "*No matter what you've done wrong, no matter the magnitude or multitude of your sins, Jesus Christ has fulfilled all of God's laws for you. He has resisted temptation for you, He has carried your*

sins for you, and He has, unfairly and unrightly, died for you. Now, with Holy Spirit-given faith in the risen Redeemer, you are forgiven, saved, and strengthened. As one of His pardoned children, you have been rescued from the punishment that awaited you and have been given a new life, a recycled life, a life where sin, death, and Satan no longer own or control you.”

That is the job of every Christian. While God calls men into the Office of the Ministry so that His children can gather regularly around the means of grace, yet every one of us can go out into our lives carrying the story of salvation in every direction. Paul told Timothy as a pastor to “**2 Preach the Word! Be ready whether it is convenient or inconvenient! Correct, rebuke, and encourage, with all patience and teaching!**” While the preaching of God’s Word takes place through called pastors, yet every single one of us ought to be prepared to correct, rebuke, and encourage. And indeed, sometimes it takes a lot of patience! But I am sure we all run into people every day in our own lives who need to hear the Good News of Jesus crucified.

Dear friends, in is becoming increasing difficult, and dangerous, being a child of God in our age, but know this, standing firm on the unadulterated Word of God, the message of Scripture alone, we stand fast when everyone else is deserting. We share God’s truth to counter any of the lies of the devil. “*It is written*” becomes our catchcry. We proclaim the Word of God. It is who we are. It is what we, as His children do. By the grace of God, may it always be so. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Almighty God, eternal Lord and Creator of all things, You are our light and our salvation; You are all we ever need. We, Your children, come before You in prayer, and ask You to place Your hands on us in blessing.

Bless us with sincere faith in Your Son Jesus Christ. Grant that we may believe in Him with all our hearts, trust in Him alone for salvation, and have the assurance of everlasting life through Him. Renew us through our baptism day by day, as we live in hope and wait for our complete salvation in the new creation.

Keep us in Your fatherly care in this world, which has been ruined by sin. Guard us in all times of danger, and protect us in every peril. Keep us safe, by Your grace, that we may never lose our faith because of our sins and frailty. Grant that we may keep growing in faith and spiritual understanding. When death approaches, make us strong by Your sure promises, and finally give us the joy of Your eternal presence, complete redemption of our bodies, and resurrection to life eternal.

Fill Your Church with Your grace and power, O Lord, so that the light of Your truth may shine throughout the world. May all people know Your will and rejoice in Your salvation. Equip our pastors to be Christlike in mercy and love, and true leaders of Your people. Bless our Vicar Jake with Your grace and eagerness to continue his calling. Give us true joy as we serve You and one another, living in newness of life.

Hold Your hand of blessing over our land. Preserve us from war, earthquake, destructive storms, famine, disease, violence, tyranny, persecution, treachery, and rebellion. If it is Your gracious will, please send rain to quench the earth. Guide those in government, business, education, and entertainment, so that they may live in the knowledge that You are Lord, and no other god may share Your glory.

Be gracious to all our homes and families. Enable children to grow in body, mind, and spirit, enjoying favour with God and man. By Your Spirit equip all parents with Christian faith and insight, and the constant desire to obey Your will.

Be merciful on all who suffer sickness, sorrow, the weakness of age, the weariness of hard work, separation from loved ones, uncertainty about the future, broken relationships, or any other burden. Give them Your rich peace. Show Yourself to be a God always ready to help, and give faith, trust, courage, and hope to all in need.

We pray for these things to You, heavenly Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, who, together with You and the Holy Spirit, is the one God, to be praised for ever and ever. Amen.

⁹ “Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, daughter of Jerusalem! Look! Your King is coming to you. He is righteous and victorious. He is humble and is riding on a donkey, yes, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. ¹⁰ I shall cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem. The bow of battle will be eliminated. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His dominion will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth. ¹¹ As for you also, because of the blood of your Covenant, I shall release your prisoners from the waterless cistern.

¹² “Return to your fortress, you prisoners who have hope! Even today I declare that I shall restore twice as much to you.

Romans 7:14-25a

¹⁴ For we know that the Law is spiritual; but I have sinful human nature, and am sold under sin. ¹⁵ For I do not understand what I am doing. For I do not do what I want to do, but I do what I hate. ¹⁶ If I do what I do not want to do, I also agree that the Law is good. ¹⁷ However, now it is no longer I who am doing it, but it is the sin that is living in me. ¹⁸ For I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful human nature. For the willingness is present with me, but doing what is good is not. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good that I want to do. Instead, I do the evil that I do not want

to do. ²⁰ If I am doing what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who am doing it, but the sin that is living in me. ²¹ Therefore I find this to be the rule: Although I want to do what is good, evil is present with me. ²² For according to the inward human being I delight in God’s Law, ²³ but in the members of my body I see another law, which is waging war against the Law of my mind, and making me a prisoner to the law of sin that is in the members of my body. ²⁴ What a wretched person I am! Who will rescue me from this body, which is bringing death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Matthew 11:25-30

²⁵ At that time Jesus said, “I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from wise and intelligent people and have revealed them to infants. ²⁶ Yes, Father, I praise You that this is how You have graciously wanted it to be. ²⁷ All things have been committed to Me by My Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and the one to whom the Son wishes to reveal Him.

²⁸ “Come to Me, all you who are working hard and carrying a heavy burden; and I shall give you rest! ²⁹ Take My yoke on you and learn from Me! For I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your

souls. ³⁰ For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.”