

## 2 Timothy: 4:1-5 Is spirituality enough?

Why is the Bible so crucial to everything Christians do, to their every day life not just church services on Sunday? God says that everything Christians do must hang on His God-breathed Word. His Word will open the door to eternal salvation and every other kind of salvation people need in this life. It will protect us from every error and fear, correct every flaw, and lift our spirits when we most need it.

**4:1**, the beginning of this tells you just how serious this is: Paul is solemnly charging Timothy in the presence of God and Christ, Jesus, who will judge everyone, both the living and dead when He returns to establish His Kingdom (1 Corinthians 3:10-15; Revelation 20:11-15 cf. John 5:22, 28-29). This is deadly serious; Timothy is standing before the King of kings and Lord of lords, who is now asking him to do something. What is Jesus asking Timothy to do and what aid does He give him to accomplish what He's asking of him?

**4:2**, Timothy has been in Ephesus for about five years and now Paul writes him again. If you recall, Timothy had a very difficult task (1 Timothy 1:3-7, 18-20; 2:8-15; 4:1-3, 7; 5:3-16; 6:1-10, 17-19, 20-21) and those problems still exist and have gotten worse (2 Timothy 1:15; 2:14-18; 23-26; 3:1-9, 13). On top of all that, death is in the air, i.e., Nero has begun persecuting Christians all over the Roman Empire. In fact, as Paul writes this, he's in Rome on death row (4:6-8). Now, notice the solution that God offers Timothy to all his problems and to the threat of death: His Word! What role does God's Word play in 2 Timothy (in fact, it was the key five years ago when Paul first wrote Timothy, 1 Timothy: 4:13-16)? How can Timothy fulfill his mission in Ephesus? He's got to use what God gave Him, which has thoroughly equipped him to tackle everything he's currently facing (3:14-17). And what he's facing is a lot of pushback from the false/erroneous teachers in Ephesus and death from Nero's persecution.

"Be ready in season and out of season." Timothy must always be prepared to publicly proclaim God's Word, whether "in season," meaning when people want it and accept it, and "out of season," meaning when preaching God's Word is rejected, is profane, is anathema, is even criminal and can get you in trouble, even killed, of which Paul is so acutely aware. Despite the opposition—whatever form it takes—Timothy must take God's Word and "convince," i.e., strongly correct someone's actions, "rebuke," i.e., strongly rebuke someone, "exhort," i.e., strongly encourage someone. And he's to do this "with all longsuffering and teaching." That is, he's in for a lot of uphill battles that will require a lot of patience and endurance. But the key will be teaching God's Word, i.e., bringing God's Word to bear on those who oppose him, both the ones who will repent and be set free from Satan's captivity (2:24-26), and those who refuse to submit to God's Truth but whose folly needs to be rebuked and exposed (3:1-9).

**4:3-4**, God warns Timothy that there will come a time when people will not want to hear from God. They will not want God's Word taught from the pulpit; the thought of sound biblical, contextual, expository preaching will be abhorrent to them. They will hate it and want none of it.

However, it's strange because they will have a desire for something related to God. In a sense, they want to hear about God but not really. They want to hear a lecture on the subject of God or the Bible, but not as transforming truth. Thus, they don't want sound biblical teaching but they do want to hear about the Bible, which sounds strange, but not really. It's kind of what people are like now and have been for some time. They would never consider themselves Christians or religious but they would call themselves "spiritual." They love all things "spiritual." What exactly does this mean? Who knows, but they sure love it. It makes them "feel" wonderful without all of those pesky commands and expectations from an actual God who holds you accountable to His standard. No, instead, they get to define who God is and what He's like, if He even exists at all. And what do these millions of "spiritual" individuals do?

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“[H]eap up for themselves teachers.” This means to accumulate, to collect, to surround yourself with many teachers. Why would someone surround themselves with many preachers, why would they go from church to church or listen to preacher after preacher or chase one spiritual gimmick after another? God says, “Because they have itching ears,” i.e., they’re not interested in what God actually has to say. They just love hearing something else, something new “about” God or about His Word. But they never really meet with the God of the Bible; they learn many things “about” Him and His Word, but He never actually becomes real to them. They never have a relationship with Him, live their lives with Him on a daily basis. They’re saved and will go to heaven when they die, but they never actually walk with Him. They walk with Him on the edges of their lives, but they never let Him in all the way. They never let Him confront the way they live and react to life.

Does this remind you of anyone? Remember the gullible women in 3:6-7 who are “always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the Truth”? That’s what these individuals are like; they pick from their collection of spiritual teachers and sooth their itching ears. And next week, they’ll pick another one to do the same. And what they’re doing in the end is turning their ears away from God’s Truth and instead turn them to fables, i.e., to whatever spiritual nonsense makes them feel good at the time or scratches their latest itch.

A warning to those of you who love Bible doctrine. To want a superficial version of God and His Word in order to satisfy itching ears is obviously wrong. However, there’s an error in the opposite direction: some Christians love to hear sound biblical, contextual, expository preaching. They love it, can’t get enough of it. The problem, however, is that they too “never come to the knowledge of the Truth.” What?! How can this be?! It is because they essentially do the same thing that the first group does: turn God into a subject to be studied instead of seeing Him as a Father you’re supposed to walk with. The itching ears types love hearing something spiritual “about” God or His Word. But so do the doctrinal ears types; they too love hearing another piece of information about God or His Word. How can you tell when you’ve fallen into the second group? Ask yourself this, “Am I still the same person I was when I started? Am I still bothered by the same things that bothered me a year ago, five years ago, etc? Is my life different; do I treat people differently or the same?” and “How many disciples have I made since I started (Matthew 28:19-20)?” If you’re essentially the same person, if you’re still struggling with the same sins and you haven’t brought anyone into the Kingdom and shown them how to walk with Jesus, but you love Bible doctrine, then Satan’s got you captive, not to itching ears but Bible doctrine. The Pharisees were like this; they too loved to study God’s Word, but they were far away from God, which is why His Word became a weapon in their hands with which they beat up the people (Matthew 23:13-15).

**4:5**, Timothy, on the other hand, must be alert, he must be wide awake about all these things. As he’s correcting the various problems and people in Ephesus, he must stick with God’s sound Truth. He cannot allow the itching ear syndrome to infect him. He’s got a serious job to do: he must endure afflictions, of which there will be plenty of as he strongly corrects, rebukes, and encourages those who will respond and those who won’t. He must do the work of an evangelist, i.e., he must bring the Goodnews of Christ to bear on the various people and problems in Ephesus. He must give them the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus and show them how to live it the way Paul showed him (1:1, 13; 2:2; 3:10, 14-15). In other words, he must fulfill the ministry that God gave him (1:6).