



### ***When the Emphasis is Partial***

*<sup>1</sup>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: <sup>2</sup>preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. <sup>3</sup>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, <sup>4</sup>and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. <sup>5</sup>But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. — 2 Timothy 4:1-5*

There seems to be no end to the number of websites representing both individuals and whole ministries or movements proclaiming to either be a Christian “discernment ministry” or a “prophetic ministry” who quote just verses 3 and 4 alone from this passage. To be certain, this is **a** truth concerning the state of apostasy of our times, but it is not the **whole** truth as to what we are to do about it. It would appear that so many of these ministries and individuals use verses 3 and 4 as an excuse to forego carrying out the instructions in the surrounding verses for the right way to act in the face of this situation in order to substitute their own chosen actions to address the problem, quite often with anything **but** the biblically right response.

### ***It Always Begins with the Word***

*...preach the word; be ready in season and out of season... —  
2 Timothy 4:2*

Within the overall context of Paul’s teaching, this advocates preaching the **whole** of God’s Word, not just specializing in one aspect of it. One sure way to know we are dealing with something which, at the very least, is not biblically balanced, is when they devote the most space to a favorite topic or issue but spend little if any time at all actually preaching the Word. The true test of whether something is from God or Satan or the flesh is the degree to which it conforms to, or deviates from, God’s Word.

But the most common practice observed for ministries which over-fixate on a single segment of the whole such as discernment, prophecy, music, etc. is that at the very most, they only preach a *part* of God's Word, most often those exclusive portions which may pertain to their narrow interest. This means they really aren't completing the biblical mandate to make disciples, which requires contributing to every area of spiritual growth, not just a single aspect. It's the equivalent of feeding someone nothing but one kind of food over and over again; it inevitably leads to the consequences of an insufficiently balanced diet to ensure mature growth and health. Without the whole and complete context, a truth may not fully mean what they represent because of what is omitted.

There is far more to God's Word than just the issues of discernment and prophecy, but you would never know it from so many websites who never venture outside a single, narrow specialty. Ultimately this attempts to allow one spiritual gift to supersede and take the place of all the other gifts which are supposed to work together *"for the equipping of the saints...until we all attain to the unity of faith..."* (Eph. 4:11-12)

It is this kind of "specialization" of a narrow field within God's overall Word which has contributed significantly to serious doctrinal error within the Church. An over-emphasis on verses dealing with God's blessings has fostered the various false prosperity gospel teachings because they omit the rest of God's Word which places those blessings into the right context in parallel with trials, testing and perseverance. Always preaching from Scriptures focused on love without balancing them with their counterparts on truth has led to as much spiritual danger and error as those who over-realize truth at the expense of love. Or as Warren Wiersbe so elegantly put it, "Truth without love is brutality, and love without truth is hypocrisy". Why is it that so many discernment ministries see the whole world exclusively through the prism of discernment? Or prophetic ministries interpret everything so narrowly pertaining to prophecy alone? Such preach a very limited subset of God's overall Word, omitting what is otherwise necessary not just for an individual's entire faith, but the Church's as well.

Another way to translate *"be ready in season or out of season"* is "take a stand whether it is convenient or not". In other words, the priority is always on God's Word regardless of the situation or circumstances. A red flag where biblical credibility is concerned often unfurls when someone is prepared to argue just their pet issue and nothing but their pet

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issue. It reveals that just as they are not actually fully rooted in God's Word to begin with, neither are they prepared to carry it forward.

### ***It Requires a Right Approach***

*...reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. — 2 Timothy 4:2*

The absence of a priority on preaching God's Word may raise a warning something is spiritually deficient from the outset, but just because it is present does not automatically prove they are biblically qualified either. It is necessary to preach the Word in accordance with God's guidelines and boundaries. We do not have a license to do so any way we feel like and with disregard for other's feelings—"the ends justifies the means" is **not** a biblical principle. It is most important to take note how the following three actions are qualified: "*with great patience and instruction*". So many who quote only 2 Timothy 4:3-4 describing the apostasy omit this qualification and proceed to act with anything but "*great patience and instruction*". Many websites dedicated to discernment and prophecy in particular operate falsely under the assumption that possessing the truth exempts them from having to restrain themselves.

**"Reprove"**—"elegcho" (Greek). This word is also translated in other New Testament verses as "convict" or "expose", highlighting an action undertaken in order to prove someone is in the wrong spiritually and therefore convicts them to act in accordance with God's Word. Probably the best example and explanation of this is when Jesus said, "*If your brother sins, go and **show him** (elegcho) his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother*". (Mt. 18:15) In Scripture this term is often associated with exposing sin as when John the Baptist called out Herod for taking his brother's wife. (Lk. 3:19)

This is a particularly telling aspect of whether or not someone is preaching the whole of God's Word or simply a narrow part of it. If their focus is so fixated on a handful of issues so that they never get around to addressing the greater issue of sin, there is a problem here regardless of the goodness of their intentions. The truth is that the underlying cause for people being deceived or following false teaching is most often rooted in an issue of sin. This is why they so easily ignore the truth even when plainly provided because they are unwilling to let go of sin. Whether it is convenient or not, we must always be ready to expose sin as a priority of preaching the Word because even if

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someone acknowledges the truth, but allows sin to go unaddressed, the problem remains.

**“Rebuke”**—*“epitimaō”* (Greek). Although also often translated as “to warn” and “to charge”, the interesting thing about the action “to rebuke” is that it is often focused more on the person and their issuing the charge or warning than it is whether or not the recipient accepts and responds rightly to it. For instance, when people were bringing children to Jesus for His blessing, the disciples “rebuked” them, but Jesus intervened and corrected the error of that rebuke. (Lk. 18:15-17) The penitent thief on the cross “rebuked” the other, but obviously that message was not accepted by the second thief. (Lk. 23:39-43) The Greek word is actually derived from the root word *“epitimia”*, meaning “punishment”, alluding to the consequences for not heeding such a warning. (Hence the fate for the thief who would not listen.) In the New Testament when a rebuke is an authoritative command, it is most often associated with interaction with demons rather than humans. (Mt. 17:18; Mk. 1:25; 9:25; Lk. 4:25, 41; 9:42) It is, however, ultimately expressing the truth of the inevitable consequences of continuing to ignore God’s Word and ways.

This is a powerful follow-up to Paul’s first instructing us to “reprove”—that is, expose and convict of sin, and now to “rebuke”—warn of the inevitable consequences for ignoring sin. It is revealing how the definition of being ready to preach the Word regardless of the circumstances is repeatedly brought back to the fundamental issue of addressing sin. This is actually the greater underlying problem for those whom discernment and prophecy ministries cannot reach, because the ultimate cure for spiritual blindness where the truth is concerned is addressing the root disease of sin.

**“Exhort”**—*“parakaleō”* (Greek). *“Para”* expresses the meaning “in the immediate vicinity of” and *“kaleō”* is “to call someone” in order that they may come or go somewhere. Together they depict appealing to someone by way of personal consolation and encouragement. This word is often translated as “comfort” in the New Testament as in, *“Therefore comfort (parakaleō) one another with these words”*. (1 Th. 4:18) It is not unusual to see it used in conjunction with one’s heart as in, *“Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father...comfort (parakaleō) and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word”*. (2 Th. 2:16-17) Whereas “reprove” and “rebuke” have more to do with addressing the sin of the spiritually unfaithful, the complimentary

activity of preaching the Word is encouraging and comforting those walking in obedience to God's Word and ways.

Even though many single-issue ministries seldom address the problem of sin in terms of the biblical definition of what it means to "reprove" or "rebuke" the unfaithful, it is even rarer to observe them providing consolation and encouragement to the faithful. In other words, a hallmark of those who correctly preach the Word is that they focus on behavior, either correcting creeping issues of sin in the backslidden, or affirming the steadfastness of the faithful. True proponents of the Word do not simply provide the truth and say, "Well, it's up to them as to what they'll do with it", but are actually actively involved all the way to the personal level of following up to see whether or not it is adopted. To properly "*reprove, rebuke, exhort*" requires personal involvement followed up with personal accountability.

### ***It's Always About the Fundamentals***

*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. — 2 Timothy 4:3-4*

An affirmation that this is about preaching the whole of God's Word, and not just a narrow subset, is that the issue of what some will refuse to "*endure*" is specifically defined as "*sound doctrine*". The underlying Greek word for "*doctrine*" is actually the same word translated "*instruction*" in verse 2 ("*didache*"), reinforcing that this applies to the fundamental doctrines of God's Word, not just a single aspect of it. "*Didache*" is what the early Church committed themselves to, as when it states in Acts 2:42, "*They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching ("didache")*".

Notice again how this is an issue intrinsically connected to personal behavior as the primary motivation for turning a willful deaf ear to "*sound doctrine*" is "*in accordance with their own desires*". The Apostle John affirms in the most politically incorrect terms how fundamentally important this is:

*Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching ("*didache*") of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching ("*didache*"), he has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching ("*didache*"), do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; — 2 John 9-10*

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This permanent link between God's Word and our behavior is actually the defining difference as Christians, proving that we are new, born again creations who no longer live according to our former thinking and ways.

*But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching ("didache") to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. — Romans 6:17-18*

In my experience, Christians who become desensitized to issues connected to God's prophetic Word and/or involved in a teaching or movement highly publicized as an issue of discernment (it's interesting how often one leads to the other), if we can get personal enough with them, are shown to always be embracing fundamental doctrinal error, or at the very least replacing it with something else.

In the arena of God's prophetic Word, a classic example is currently proliferating within the Church where literal Israel is concerned. Ignoring Paul's extensive teaching to the contrary in Romans 9-11, many embrace one form or another of "Replacementism", the notion that God is through with Israel, they had their chance and blew it, and now God works only and exclusively through the Church. Proponents even go so far as to teach that every time we see the word "Israel" in Scripture we should substitute the word "Church" as those Scriptures no longer apply to literal Israel. Notice how the rejection of a fundamental doctrine leads to the misinterpretation and misapplication of other areas of Scripture.

The basic error of Replacementism has therefore given rise to even deeper error by providing the basis for "Kingdom Now Theology", which has parallel forms in what is often called "Dominionism" or "Triumphalism". These views express the biblically unsupportable assertion that Jesus will not return until the Church has evangelized and won the whole world to Him spiritually. Error is compounded upon error until finally there is a fundamental reinvention of Christ's Second Coming which contradicts the plain teaching of Scripture. And at the root of this is a rejection of sound doctrine in favor of what tickles the fancy of one's own desires.

A universal feature of most discernment ministries is to warn of the Church Growth Movement, in particular as personified by Rick Warren's *Purpose Driven* false teachings. It's a testament to what happens when someone successfully gets people to stop

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seeking **God's** purpose for their life and substitute their **own** purpose, the very definition of “*they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance with their own desires*”.

As one progresses through the *Purpose Driven* series of materials, they are discouraged from directly addressing sin, specifically told that pursuing prophecy makes them “unfit for the kingdom”, and ultimately taught to embrace all religions since they all worship the same God and there are “many paths to God”. Error compounds error, deception breeds deception, and at the root of it all is the rejection of sound doctrine in favor of one's own desires. We can see this in the false teachings of the Emergent Church, the Signs and Wonders Movement, and in every false teacher and false teaching of our day.

The Apostle John would describe it as no longer abiding in the teaching of Christ; Paul would call it a return to being a slave to sin. But the only cure for bad doctrine is sound doctrine, the only remedy for unfaithfulness is faithfulness. It is not enough to merely communicate the substantive truth of God's Word, but must be personalized and presented as “*reprove, rebuke, exhort*”.

### ***Sober Up***

*But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. — 2 Timothy 4:5*

It is amazing how many times in Scripture the term “sober” is associated specifically with how Christians should act in the Last Days.

*But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief; for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and **sober**. For those who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night. But since we are of the day, let us be **sober**, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation. — 1 Thessalonians 5:4-8*

*Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep **sober** in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. — 1 Peter 1:13*

*The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and **sober** spirit for the purpose of prayer. — 1 Peter 4:7*

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*Be of **sober** spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. — 1 Peter 5:8*

A common biblical metaphor for those who are deceived or embracing false doctrine is to describe them as “drunk”, a clear distinction as to what it means to be biblically “sober”. This may be a big part of what makes it so difficult for biblically-grounded and committed Christians in a sea of apostasy; few things can feel as futile as being the only sober person among a party of drunks pursuing their own desires. But this does help to explain Paul following on with, “*endure hardship*”. It is difficult enough under ordinary circumstances to “*reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction*”, much less when “*they will turn away*” and “*turn aside*”.

What is particularly interesting is the Holy Spirit’s inspiration for Paul to qualify this with, “*do the work of an evangelist*”. The message of an evangelist is to repent of sin and live a crucified life going forward. This is an especially powerful reinforcement that simply conveying the truth is not enough, that God’s Word needs to be preached so as to address the fundamental issue of **why** they will no longer endure sound doctrine: sin.

We need to recognize that this is providing a higher calling than just telling people the truth and letting them decide, or providing information they may or may not act upon, but recognizing that the core problem needing to be addressed is sin, the root cause for someone acting “*in accordance to their own desires*”. Over and over again I see well-intentioned attempts to “explain” why “this” or “that” is wrong and contrary to God’s Word, whether it be the subject matter of discernment or prophecy, but with only marginal results. I have come to believe this is like trying to give a drunk a cup of coffee to temporarily regain their senses without addressing their daily pursuit of another bottle. “*Do the work of an evangelist*”; bring it all back to the issue of sin, the cross and crucifying the old life. Otherwise, we will never actually achieve the end goal stated here, “*Fulfill your ministry*”.

### ***“Fulfill Your Ministry”***

I think the early motivations of individuals, organizations and their websites are most often characterized as good intentions, but that is not enough to see it through to the point that it can be affirmed as authoritative by the quality of its spiritual fruit. Especially within the context of what is being taught here, John the Baptist expressed it best, “*Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance*”. (Mt. 3:8)

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The ultimate goal of any ministry is to ensure the future by reconciling everything in the past and present to the work of the cross. The work of a true discernment ministry is not to expand the library of discernment issues; the work of a ministry focused on God's prophetic Word should not be to merely run from one prophecy to the next; the work of a music ministry has definitely gone askew when its focus becomes obtaining/creating more music. We are supposed to be doing "*the work of an evangelist*", soberly fixated on addressing the issues of sin which lie at the heart of the matter, ready to preach the whole Word of God regardless of the circumstances, prepared to drill down to the personal level in order to "*reprove, rebuke, exhort*". And although we are certainly living in times when to do so will mean we will have to "*endure hardship*", we never cease to endeavor to do so "*with great patience and instruction*".

Regardless of how we prefer to characterize or define our ministry, we are never simply information providers, or sideline observers who do not actually get into the game, but personal messengers who seek to have the message personally applied by all so that behavior is restored to the character of the new creation and ceases to fall back upon the old. Specialization is a way of neutralizing a ministry so that it falls short of fulfilling its biblically-intended goal. Let's sober up and get it right.

In Him,

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