

Keep the Faith

Sermon for July 31, 2022

2 Timothy 4:1-7

Pastor Chris Sicks

Today we will be looking at question 31 from the New City Catechism. The answer to question 31 will be familiar to you. I will read the question, and together we will read the Apostle's Creed in our own languages. You will find the creed in your language in the Worship Guide. Look for this symbol in the Worship Guide.

Question 31: What do we believe by true faith?

We believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth;

and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,

born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended into hell.

The third day he rose again from the dead.

He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

The New City Catechism has been very helpful to us this year at One Voice Fellowship. It provides 52 simple questions and

answers about the most-important things Christians believe.

The Apostle's Creed is a shorter, and much older, summary of the Christian faith. We don't know if the apostles themselves wrote it. Maybe it was written a century or two after the apostles died. We call it the Apostle's Creed because it captures clearly the things that Jesus taught the apostles, and what the apostles taught the early believers.

For almost 2,000 years, Christians in every part of the world have publicly spoken those same words that we read a minute ago. That is because Christianity is not something we create or invent. Our faith is something we receive from God and from the believers who lived before us. We are truly the Body of Christ because we are united with Jesus by faith, and we are connected to one another.

I was just with my family for the past week in Michigan. There were 40 people together. Aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, united in one family. It felt good to see many people I haven't seen in a long time. I feel connected to each one of them, even when we are not together, because we are a family.

The Apostle's Creed is important because it reminds us that we are part of a global family with millions of brothers and sisters. As you know, there are many religions around the world, and even different opinions about Christian doctrine. That's another reason we need the Apostle's Creed.

The apostle Paul is writing to Timothy, a young pastor of the Christian church in Ephesus. Paul wants Pastor Timothy to teach the Ephesian church how to recognize truth from lies. Paul wants this young church to grow up strong in their understanding of what it means to know and follow Jesus.

I am going to read the verses in English and then pray. If you are using a tablet or you speak one of the four languages on the screen, you can read the text in the beautiful language that God blessed you with.

2 Timothy 4:1-7

1 I 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:

2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.

3 For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions,

4 and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

5 As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

6 For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come.

7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

Together we read Isaiah 40:8:

The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.

Let's pray together.

Father in heaven, we come to you because you are the source of life and truth. Jesus, we worship because you are full of mercy and love. Holy Spirit, please open our hearts and minds to be transformed by the word of God. Amen.

Let's look at verse 1 again:

"I 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"

Paul begins this sentence with a charge to Timothy. A charge is like an order or command that an officer gives to a soldier. Paul is not saying these things based only on his own authority. In Jewish law, two witnesses were required in the courtroom. Paul is reminding Timothy that God the Father and Jesus the Son are observing Timothy's ministry. Jesus is the judge of "the living and the dead." Paul knows that one day Jesus will evaluate everything Paul and Timothy did on earth with the gifts and opportunities God gave to them. Jesus will also evaluate my life, and yours.

Do you know that God is watching what you do? In America, we are very committed to our freedoms, to our independence. I know that freedom is a great blessing and relief to you who come from oppressive countries that severely limited your freedom. Oppression is evil, and freedom is good. But absolute freedom is not good. That is what our sinful hearts really want. That is where our problems begin. We do not want accountability. We want to decide for ourselves what is true. But that is not how truth works. Truth is something we can receive or we can reject. But truth is something that comes to us, not from us. That's why good teaching from God's word is so important for our spiritual health. We see this in the instructions Paul gives to Timothy in verse 2.

"2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching."

Paul gives some specific instructions to Timothy about how to be a pastor. And these verses also speak to all Christians about how to be messengers of the truth. We need to be ready to share the gospel at all times, and to be good at it. Sometimes the opportunity to share the gospel will come at a time that we don't like. Or with a person we don't like. But if God gives us the chance to tell someone about Jesus, we should be ready "in season and out of season." That's why our church retreat on

September 5 will include time to learn and practice evangelism. We want to be confident when we share the gospel with other people.

Paul also tells Timothy about three other responsibilities of a pastor. Reprove is not a common English word. It means to correct or to direct. A shepherd guides sheep to the safe path, to the good grass. A pastor is supposed to direct people to the path of truth.

Rebuke is the second responsibility. If someone doesn't listen to the truth, then a rebuke might be necessary. It is a word of love that is used to get the attention of someone who is wandering off the safe path.

Exhort is the third task. This means to encourage. When you exhort someone, you are reminding them of what is good and right. You encourage them to follow God's heart, not their own heart. Paul is exhorting Timothy in verses 1 and 2. Paul is telling Timothy that he needs to be ready to respond to different people and different situations. Sometimes a person knows what they should do, and they need encouragement. Other times people need to be reprovved. They need a gentle word to correct and guide them.

But sometimes you have already corrected someone, and they continue doing the same thing. That's when they need a rebuke, delivered with patience and love. Here's an example. If Naomi asks me to unpack my suitcase after our vacation, she is reminding me that my suitcase is making a mess on our bedroom floor. She exhorts me to do what I know is right.

What if my suitcase is still on the floor after a week? I promised to put it away, but I didn't do it. Then Naomi has a right to rebuke me. She can say, "My beloved husband! You know how sad I am when our room is a mess. You promised you would unpack your suitcase. Why are you being insensitive to my request?" That's a funny example, maybe.

Here in chapter 4, Paul is talking about something more serious than a suitcase. Paul knows people in Ephesus are living sinfully and teaching others to do the same. They need to be corrected, and sometimes rebuked. Let's look together at verses 3 and 4.

"3 For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions,
4 and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths."

In verse 1 and 2 Paul told Timothy that he is responsible for what he says and teaches. In verses 3 and 4, Paul says that the audience is also responsible. Timothy will teach the truth, but some people won't want to listen to his sound teaching. In English "sound teaching" means "true teaching" or "good teaching." Why do you think people sometimes will not endure true

teaching? Because then they are responsible.

If I tell my teenager, "Your room is a mess" he might say "no it's not!" Why? Because if he agrees that his room is a mess, he now has responsibility. Do you see how that works? If the teenager can deny the truth, he doesn't have to accept the duty of cleaning his room.

Adults do the same thing. For 250 years in this country, it was legal to own slaves. Millions of African people were enslaved here. However, we all know inside that it is wrong to own another human being. Because God's moral law is written on our hearts. But the slaveowners were making a lot of money. They did not want to believe that slavery was wrong, just as my teenager doesn't want to admit his room is a mess. Because then you become responsible.

In the United States, South Africa, and other countries, slaveowners found pastors and teachers to "suit their own passions" as verse 3 says. You can see on this slide how people have two choices. They can walk on the path of truth and listen to faithful teachers. But their "itching ears" want to hear someone say: *"Slavery is not a sin, it's okay to own other people."* May I share one more example from our current time?

Marriage is a covenant relationship that God created for a man and a woman. God said in Genesis 2:24, *"Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."* Marriage between a man and a woman is God's design. It is also common sense when you look at our bodies and how they work to make children. That's why marriage between a man and woman is what all human beings have done throughout history.

But today there are men who want to marry men, and women who want to marry women. We have sympathy and compassion for the struggle they experience. We are all broken. We all wrestle with things that are deep and difficult. We must have compassion for someone who feels attraction to people of the same gender. But God's Word can help us all when we follow the path of truth, instead of myths and our own passions. God's word tells us that our hearts will never find the happiness and peace on the wrong path. A same-sex relationship can't bring you the happiness God wants for you, because it contradicts God's design for happy human relationships.

I understand why people do not want to hear the truth if it contradicts what they believe. Because when you accept the truth you might have to change your behavior. That is why there have been many false teachers of the Bible. In the past they taught lies about slavery. Today they teach lies about marriage and gender. False teachers tell their audiences what they want to hear, not what God says.

Today the internet and YouTube are full of bad teaching. The most popular preachers on the internet are the ones who appeal to "itching ears." False teachers like Joel Osteen and Benny Hinn say that God wants you to be happy, healthy, and rich. They

don't talk about sin and repentance. They don't talk about suffering, or being "poured out like a drink offering" as God's servants.

Paul is saying in these verses that teachers and listeners are both responsible for false teaching. People have a responsibility to reject false teachers. We all must ask ourselves this question:

"Am I putting the Word of God under me, changing what it says to match my ideas and desires?"

Or am I putting my life and my choices under the Word of God?"

Do my ideas and desires come from me, or from God?"

The Bible should make us uncomfortable sometimes. You should read your Bible and find it is challenging you, pushing you to change and grow. If the Bible is not transforming how you think and live, then you are not reading it with an open mind and heart. That reminds me of what we read in God's Word in Romans 12:1-2.

"1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind;

that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

Let's look at verse 5 now and read some more of Paul's instructions to Timothy and to us.

5 "As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry."

An evangelist is a "messenger of the good news." They have the privilege of telling people that God the Father loves them so much that he sent his Son Jesus to die for their sins. But verse 5 is not only for missionaries who go out into the world. We all have a ministry to fulfill. All of us who do our ministry faithfully will "endure suffering" as evangelists. Why? If we are messengers of good news, why would we experience opposition during our ministry? Because the hearts of human beings don't like the idea that Jesus died for our sins. If the eternal Son of God had to die to forgive me, that means my sin problem is very serious.

The gospel is good news about salvation and eternal life. But to understand and believe this good news, we first must understand and believe the bad news. The bad news is that we are all sinners. Paul wrote about it in Romans 3:10-12.

"10 as it is written: 'None is righteous, no, not one;

11 no one understands; no one seeks for God.

12 All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.'"

People do not want to hear this bad news. But you cannot be saved if you don't think you need a Savior. After we understand

the bad news, we are ready to hear the good news in passages such as Romans 10:9-10.

"9 If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.
10 For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved."


The good news of the gospel means that dead people come to life when they trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins. Broken hearts are healed when the Father adopts us as His children. We are given new hope and a new purpose when we receive the Holy Spirit. We are all sheep, who like to wander and get lost. The Word of God is a compass to guide us through a world of confusion and conflict. To help us see the path clearly, we use tools like the Apostle's Creed and the New City Catechism. They are not scripture, but they are helpful summaries of the truth we find in scripture. These tools help us stay on the right path as we journey through this world.

Paul wrote this letter near the end of his life. He is beginning to look back of the history of his ministry. That's why he says this in verse 7:

"7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."

We want to keep the faith as individuals and a church. That's why we need to keep God's Word close to our heart and mind. You will have questions if you keep digging into the Bible. That's good. Let me and the other leaders at One Voice Fellowship help you wrestle with your questions and God's truth. Together, we will finish the race well, and keep the faith. To do that we definitely need to pray, so let's do that now.

Jesus, you are the Living Word. Help us to submit our lives to you, who will judge the living and the dead. We want to be a good followers, who listen to the truth so it will change our hearts and minds. And we want to be faithful messengers, who tell others about the good news of salvation through the blood of Jesus. Thank you for pouring out your blood as an offering to God so we could be saved. Please unite us by the Holy Spirit, for the glory of the Father. We pray this in the name of the Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

 One Voice Fellowship