

## How To Hold Fast the Word

Let us turn to our Bibles to 2 Timothy chapter 1. 2 Timothy chapter 1 verse 13. I read this collection of verses 8 through 13. 13 to 14, excuse me, I'm behind the curve ball here.

Verse 13 to 14 last week, I want to drill into verse 13 more topically here. Thus this sermon, 2 Timothy 1.13, how to hold fast the word of God, or the word of the Lord, or the truth of God. Let us listen attentively to the word of God.

Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love, which are in Christ Jesus. Let us pray. Spirit of truth and life, illuminate these texts again as we need, and apply the lessons to our heart, I pray, and to our hands, God Almighty, that if we need a little more encouragement, a better direction, or reminders of these things, God, that they would prove efficacious in our life, and helpful to that end, Lord.

And may we draw nigh unto you in all that we do this morning. By the blood of your Son we pray, Amen. As we heard last week, holding fast, that is keeping and retaining the word of truth, is not only the duty of pastors, as public persons, of course, but all believers to the extent that they are able on their own, depending on their callings in life.

We have to read the Bible ourselves. We talked some about this here in Sunday School class on the means of grace, and the Bible being the chief means of grace by the power of the Spirit. Now, this distinction between pastors as public persons and the rest of us is not unlike our citizenship in this world.

As Americans, we do not have the public authority or power. We're not public persons to enact laws, to arrest people, or to guide public policy. We simply do not.

You may vote to that extent, but you don't actually do these things. Yet that does not relieve us of our duties as citizens to teach our children what? The laws of the land. You don't just sit there and say, Well, I'm not a politician, I'm not a professional teacher, I ain't going to teach you anything.

That's not how it works. It's and both. And that's why this text is still applicable for us.

Yes, the apostle as a mentor, speaking to young Timothy as a public officer, but these duties overlap ours to a large extent. To a large extent. And so, similarly, in our nation as well.

Thus, in the church, we have responsibilities to learn the laws of God's Word, although we do not publicly teach or enforce them the way either church leaders would, like a session. And to that end, I thought it good to go over some particulars that would help us in this duty to hold fast the Word of God. It was examined in earlier generations to such an extent, this question was examined to such an extent, that they put the duties into the catechisms. So I'm going to cover some of the larger catechism here.

## Hold Fast When Reading the Word

The first one here, hold fast when reading the Word, we actually have a question, question 156 of the larger catechism, the Westminster Confession of Faith, those Puritans. 156 is a question about the Bible.

Is the Word of God to be read by all? You're like, well, how's that a question today, Pastor? Well, in one sense it's not. We're all like, of course we read the Bible. We all have access to the Bible.

Back then, it still wasn't accessible, although they had the printing press for about 100 years, I guess 120 years or so. It's still expensive. It's just not like what we have today.

I can literally print it at home on myself. It was a real question back then. And you're going to see part of how it's still relevant today, I hope.

Is the Word of God to be read by all? Although all are not to be permitted to read the Word publicly to the congregation. So there is a restriction that they were highlighting that is lost today. Maybe not in our circles, Reformed churches, we still follow it.

I mean, it's our confession, crying out loud. But you live in a world with lots of non-Presbyterians, and they don't understand this. They just kind of think any Tom, Dick, and Harry can come up to the pulpit and do whatever they feel like, short of preaching.

And even then they can preach. They call them lay preachers, which is kind of like you're really a preacher, but not, I don't know. It continues on here.

Yet all sorts of people, so this is true, public form of worship, I've highlighted that, it's different, right? And it's no different than any other public event, because the public people are involved, public officers. We do this with all kinds of things in life, businesses, clubs, politicians. Yet all sorts of persons are bound to read it apart by themselves.

You have an obligation, brothers and sisters, and with their families, to which end the Holy Scriptures are to be translated out of the original into vulgar languages because of this command of God. You have to use the means, causes, and occasions, and that's a translation that you would have access to the will of God. Public readings, the text they use here, that is, not everyone is permitted to read the Word of God publicly in the form of public worship, is out of Deuteronomy 31 and Nehemiah 8. You'll recognize Nehemiah 8, I think.

Deuteronomy 31 is the commands of God given to Moses. And so Moses wrote this law and delivered it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and to all the elders of Israel. And Moses commanded them, saying, At the end of every seven years, at the appointed time, in the year of release, at the Feast of Tabernacles, when all the people come to appear before the Lord your God, in the place which He chose, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing.

Who should read the law once every seven years? The priests. Not just any person, Jew, in the congregation, but the public officer, because he's a public person with public

responsibilities, and one of those responsibilities is to read the Bible so that people would have access to the Word of God, because they didn't have, again, books like we do. Now, the classic text here is Nehemiah 8. You probably recognize this one, Nehemiah 8, 2 and following.

This is after the captivity, the Babylonian captivity of 70 years, and a remnant is brought back to Israel, and they're rebuilding the walls. Nehemiah is part of this. So Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of men and women, and all who could hear with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month.

And then he read from it in the open square that was in front of the water gate from morning until noonday or midday. So several hours he spent going through the Pentateuch, reading it to the people of God, because, again, most of them did not have access to the Bible that way. And even if they did, because some of them probably did, certainly the priests did, it's good to have this public exercise in going through God's will before the people.

What's wrong with reading the Bible? Nothing, everything's for it. But in public assemblies, public gatherings, you're going to have a public officer read it typically. And it makes sense from everyday life.

We no longer have priests, of course, but they are what? In the category of a public officer, a public person or figure, like the elders. In fact, elders are listed in the prior chapter of Moses that he gave the law to the priest and the elders. The elders have always been there in secular society and in religious society, the church.

And these elders and these leaders we've always had would maintain order in large groups. And part of the order is not just anybody gets to speak and yell out and whatever else. He leads and guides and directs so there's edification and things are done in good, proper order.

1 Corinthians 14, right? That classic passage. Private readings are part of this, however, not just public. It's important to know the will of God.

We're called to know it and therefore we ought to read the word of God. The common practice in every other part of life is at a new job, becoming a new citizen, new community, new HOA, new car, you read the manual, kind of learn how to use the thing. Even if you don't read it, you hear about it.

Someone explains these things to you. And that's what we do with the word of God. We must have it.

We must read it. We must learn about it. We must memorize it even.

The background, of course, of the Roman Catholic Church at that time discouraged anybody having access to the word of God. We're kind of on the flip side. Everyone has access to the word of God.

It's very, very easy to have access to God's word. Revelation 1.3 is one of the texts they use here. Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the word of this prophecy and keep those things which are written for the time is near.

And how can you be blessed unless you read, unless you pay attention and get access to the word of God? John 5.39 for reading outside and our responsibility and we're called to read the word of God. You search the scriptures, Jesus says, for in them you think you have eternal life and these are they which testify of me. They're correct.

That's where they find eternal life. And they testify of Jesus. He's not condemning them.

He's saying this is true. This is right. You should be reading the Bible.

It's not just the call of the pastor. Your call is to read the Bible. Deuteronomy 6-9 is one of those passages about families reading the Bible and families helping one another.

That the families can't just sit there and say, well the pastor and the church can do it all for me. I'll send my kids off to Sunday school class and that'll fix everything for me. You have a duty as a parent to teach your kids not only the things of this world to be a good citizen but the things of the world to come.

And so Deuteronomy 6-6 and following. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down and when you rise up.

Wherever you are in your life as a family, as a parent, as an older sibling even. It's not just parents only. The older sibling can help the younger kids learn the Bible.

We are called to teach and explain it. It's not just a call for the Old Testament Jews. This is clearly a moral command and moral command therefore is for everyone.

It's not ceremonial. What's ceremonial about it? Only the priests get to read it? You gotta sacrifice something when you read the Bible? No. You're called as parents, as a leader in fact, because the fifth commandment is about leadership in general, to help as situation comes upon them.

As you walk, as you're about to go to sleep, whatever works in your life, you are called to apply and to teach and to read the Word of God. And we have all these copies. We ought to use them right.

Set some time on your calendar. Put a Bible in every part of your room, a part of your house, that you can see it to remind you to read and to pray before God and to learn His ways. And with these many, many Bibles that we have, it's easy to take it for granted of course, because with such abundance.

But we should turn that abundance into our advantage, as I said. Get lots of copies then. Real cheap.

They're real cheap. Put one in the car. You always have one with you in the car.

Why not? You have access to it when something comes up or if you just need time to pray and read when you're on your way to an important meeting because you're kind of nervous. Put it somewhere in the house, as I said, somewhere visible, so that it pokes you in the eye if need be. Read it with a commentary.

Matthew Henry is a classic one we always recommend or Calvin's commentaries and the like. Some Puritan somewhere probably. Read entire books or chapters dealing with relevant matters.

Don't think you have to read from Genesis to Revelation. Pick the Psalms if you find that more edifying throughout the week, for example, and go through all the Psalms. Pick your favorite Psalms and keep reading it until you have it memorized.

Something like that. There's no specific way. The Bible doesn't sit there and micromanage exactly what you should read, but find something relevant for you.

Book a Proverbs. Maybe mix it up. Proverbs has lots of little handy, relevant sayings and reminders, especially for kids and young adults.

Or you want to be more structured and simply sit there and say, let's use the one-year Bible plan or the two-year Bible plan. You can find them online. You can download and print them.

You probably even have it on your phone app. Just stick with it and follow through with it. If it's only five or 10 minutes of reading, that's fine.

Just keep working on it. How do you eat an elephant? You've heard this before. One bite at a time.

Because it's a big elephant. I mean, it's 66 books. How to read the Word of God.

The Catechism talks about how to read the Word of God. Isn't that interesting? Well past, you just open the Bible, you learn some English, and you read. I think you know it's more than that, right? How is the Word of God to be read? Question 157 of the larger Catechism.

Question 157. The Holy Scriptures are to be read with a high and reverent esteem of them. Not just flippantly.

With a high and reverent esteem of them. With a firm persuasion that they are the very Word of God and that He only can enable us to understand them. It's a special book.

With desire to know, believe, and obey the will of God revealed in them. With diligence and attention to the matter and scope of them. With meditation, application, self-denial, and prayer.

That's a mouthful. That's a lot of particulars. And I think as we go through this, and another question as well, about hearing the Word of God preached, you're going to recognize, I hope, that a lot of it's common sense.

You should take the Word of God seriously. It's His Word. It's infallible.

It's holy. And He's there giving it to us. And we ought to read it, therefore, with careful attention, with diligence, and not just sloppily.

Even with meditation, application, and prayer. Always prayer. Prayer is part of our life.

Why not with the Bible? Of course, with the Bible. So, it may seem tedious at first, but it flows partly from history, and partly from people dodging their responsibilities. One of the things you find out raising kids is, you give a commandment, and all of a sudden the kid realizes, I can find an exception to your very words.

The very words that you use. But you know your words were supposed to convey something broader than the narrow definition of each word, right? You know this as adults. You can only say so many words.

You're trying to cover a lot of situations, and the kid's like, I don't think you mentioned this. And so you end up having to be more specific to get the point across. That happens in the church, in spades.

That's why the confessions keep getting longer and longer. Someone comes along and says, yeah, well, Jesus is God, but what about this? Okay, we're gonna explain this as you're making an error. And we have a similar thing here with how to read the Word of God, how to read the Bible, or how to stop people from dodging their responsibilities is probably one way of looking at it.

Question 157. So, read with a high and reverent esteem of them. That is, not in a flippant manner.

It's more important than getting a letter from the president. Pick your favorite president. Your favorite politician.

Your grandparents. Your loved ones. This is a loved one.

Sometimes we talk about it being the love letter of our Lord. You can describe it that way if you understand it in the best sense of that. And as such, we ought to take it seriously and read it carefully.

With a firm persuasion, these are the words of God. 2 Peter 119 and following. 2 Peter 119 and following.

And so, we have the prophetic word confirmed. We in the New Testament have it confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place until the day

dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation.

For prophecy never came by the will of man, but of holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. It's not just any kind of private letter, a letter from a king or yourself or whatever, or these people who, these amazing Jews or whatever you might think of them if you're not a believer. But they were moved by the Holy Spirit to write these things.

Holy men of God spoke as they were moved. These are God's words through man's words, as it were. They are man's words.

If you do an exhaustive study, you can take my word for it. Paul writes differently than Peter, than John. John is especially a little easier.

When you do first-year Greek, you can go through the book of John, for example, the Gospel of John. Paul, however, is like, wow, the sentence never ends. It just goes on and on.

So, God maintained their personality and their lingo and the way they spoke. But what they did and spoke was God's words, holy words, words that we ought to take seriously when we read it. This is one reason why I remember, I think, I must have been a man under care or a licentiate, must have been a licentiate.

And Huntington, yeah, pastor in the Presbytery here, Ed, yeah, he passed away. But he told me one time, you need to tell people before you read the Bible, I'm about to read the word of God. So you're giving him a heads up to what? Pay attention to these words.

They're not my words, they're God's words. And I've done that ever since. He was a pastor with experience.

I'm like, okay, yes, sir. Reliance upon his illumination. Very explicit here, right? We need the Spirit of God to open our eyes to the Bible.

You can read the Bible. Unbelievers have read the Bible and get lots of truth out of it in the sense of, yeah, okay, I believe Jesus existed. Yeah, Paul was here.

This is Paul's theology of justification. But they don't believe an ounce of it. To them, it's just historical curiosity.

But we need that illumination, of course, of the heart so that we believe it even more. A desire to know, believe, and obey God. Of course, this is all of a package here.

To know, believe, and obey God. It's all of a piece. We need this if we want to grow as believers by reading the word of God.

And then to be careful and diligent. Deuteronomy 17.10, we read there, in Deuteronomy 17.10, you shall do according to the sentence which they pronounce upon you in that place which the Lord chooses. And you shall be careful to do according to all that they order you.

That is, order you according to the word of God. We ought to be careful in these matters. We are careful with the laws of the land, especially taxes, because we don't want to get burned.

We ought to be careful for the word of God. I guess you could say you can get burned as well if you mishandle the word of God. Because God will uphold his honor in his name.

Acts 17.11 is another classic passage about being careful and diligent. And these things were, the Bereans had a readiness of mind, eagerness, a willingness to take seriously the Bible as preached by Paul. And they were more noble-minded, therefore.

Paul commends them for being those who went back to the Bible and didn't just sit there and say, well, that's what the pastor said, that's good enough for me. Pared what the pastor said to the word of God. And then, this is interesting, at least to me perhaps, to pay attention to the context and scope or the subject and context or however we wish to describe it.

In other words, you can't just go to the Bible and just start reading it and having no understanding that it has a historical background. Now, some of the words, like a shekel, mean something. We don't have shekels today.

So you have to get a Bible dictionary, is what they're called, and it will give you what a shekel is, what kind of farming techniques they had, perhaps, and all these special words and what a heifer is and everything else. You can look it up if you don't know. So you understand what you're reading.

Don't just cherry pick the Bible. It all fits together of a piece that has a context. And we see this by the example of Philip and the eunuch.

When we read in Acts 8.30, so the eunuch answered Philip and said, I ask of you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or some other man? He read the words, but he still had questions about the words. Because he wants to understand what's really going on, not just put his own interpretation upon it. Good, ask questions.

If you don't know, ask questions. Ask me, ask a ruling elder, ask your commentary. Matthew Henry would probably cover these typical questions like that.

And of course, lastly here, meditate, apply, and always with prayer and self-denial. I think, again, this should go without saying in our circles that we take these things seriously, that we read the word of God in Psalm 119, verse 97. 119, verse 97.

Oh, how I love your law. It is what? My meditation all the day. Meditation is not some fancy new age thing or some weird mystical experience.

It's just simply ruminating, meditating, thinking in your mind and going over and mulling it over and thinking about it. What did I read? Have questions about it. And then when you have a better understanding, then you can go on to application.

Because usually meditation and application kind of go together. If you understand the text pretty clearly, like we read Psalm 119 here, we all understand this. I love your law.

What does that mean, God? It means I love Paul, excuse me, David loved God's law, and I should follow David as a godly example. I should love God's law. Do I love God's law? What does that look like in my life to love God's law? There you are thinking and meditating upon it and applying in the same breath.

So although they have this kind of list, a lot of it's organic and happens almost simultaneously in our life, doesn't it? We want to know, we want to believe, we want to apply it. We want to meditate, we want to have self-denial. You have to have self-denial.

If you come to the Bible without self-denial, you're going to put your own self in the text and use it to your advantage.

## **Hold Fast When Hearing the Word**

That leads us here to the second point. Hold fast when hearing the word.

Question 160 of the Logar Catechism, hearing the word of God. What is required of those that hear the word preached? So we had reading and now hearing. It is required of those that hear the word preached that they attend upon it with diligence, preparation, and prayer.

Sound familiar? Examine what they hear by the scriptures. Receive the truth with faith, love, meekness, and readiness of mind as the word of God. And lastly, meditate and confer of it.

Hide it in their hearts and bring forth the fruit of it in their lives. So I'm not going to follow the order here, but I think you're going to recognize a lot of this is very much the same as reading it. Because it's the same thing.

It's God's word, but now spoken, and now preached and expounded upon, in fact, by the preacher and the pastor. We are called to hear, the first thing I want to highlight, is listen to the sermon. What is required of those who hear the word preached? Not the word read, but the word preached.

Preaching means the pastor is going to use what? His own words. And expound and explain the Bible. And we are therefore called to receive with faith and love and meekness what we hear as the word of God.

In other words, to the extent that the sermon is faithful to the Bible, you are hearing the word of God. The text for this is 1 Thessalonians 2.13. 1 Thessalonians 2.13. For this reason, we also thank God, Paul writes, without ceasing. Because when you receive the word of God, which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth the word of God, which also effectively works in you, who believe.

They were preaching to them. Paul, and I think it's Titus here, in 1 Thessalonians, came to them, and they didn't just open the Bible and just read the Bible. Is that the example you find in Acts? Ask yourself, going through the history of Acts, where did they just sit there and read the Bible? They didn't, they were preaching all the time, weren't they? Bunch of little sermons that we read there, and they're not all listed out there.

They just preached and taught and taught and preached. That's what's going on here. You heard it from us, and you received it not as the word of men, but as the word of God.

You can have the words of God in the sense of you speaking the truth, although you're not quoting a Bible verse. That's what's going on in the preaching of the word. And we're called to receive it to the extent that it's faithful to God's word.

Therefore, we are called, in listening to the word of God preached, to be diligent and not lazy. Blessed is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors, says wisdom personified as a woman in Psalm, or excuse me, Proverbs 8. Right, the whole chapter there. And, when you hear the preaching, and you receive it as the word of God, and you're diligent, listening, not being lazy and distracted to the best of your ability, you compare it with the Bible, Acts 17.11. These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they receive the word with all readiness, and search the scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so, what they heard preached to them by Paul and Timothy and Titus and Peter and others, is it found in the word of God? So you have a duty, again, to listen intelligently, to be what we say today, an active listener, to avoid your mind wandering about.

We do this, of course, with important people talking to us, like our boss, who could fire us at any moment. Yes, sir. Yes, listen.

Very attentive. We ought to do that with the preacher and preaching of the word. Meekness.

So this would parallel, it seems to me, the idea of self-denial that we had about reading the word of God. Again, these questions were put together by committee, so this is what you get sometimes. Therefore, lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word which is able to save your souls.

James 1.21. Receive it with meekness, that is, with a humility towards the word of God, that I need the Bible in my life, and to learn and to apply it. That leads us to meditate and confer upon it, and hide it in our hearts. Just like reading the Bible, so hearing the Bible preached, we ought to meditate and confer upon it.

We have my sermons, or other pastors' sermons as well, across the nations, recorded. You can listen to it later, and meditate upon what you hear. Bear fruit.

This is important. Psalm 119, verse 11. Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against you.

It's not just memorize the Bible because it makes me feel super holy. It's memorize the Bible, the truth of the Bible, even if I don't have the exact wording, so that I don't sin against God. That's why.

It has a purpose, it has an end. I can be faithful to my Lord and Savior, at least as faithful as I can this side of eternity, because I'm certainly a sinner. And so, reading the Bible and hearing the Bible requires all these things, and I think they're very much the same thing.

We are called by God's word, the holiness of the word itself, demands that we take it seriously, that we read it carefully, and that when we hear it preached, we ought to attend unto it, and see its application in our lives. And same with private listening. Not listed here in the question, but in my division between public and private means of grace, it makes sense to put it here.

Back then, they didn't have books recorded on audio. You could read a book, perhaps, if you had access and money, but a lot of people were poor. But the same principle applies to the extent the sermon is faithful, that you hear on sermon audio, or perhaps YouTube, to the extent that it should be heeded and accepted, of course.

In preparation, you should take a little bit of focus, of course, when you hear the word of God preached to you on your audio recording, on your computer, on your phone, and the like. I listened to the sermons of Thomas Manton, a couple of sermons, when I was on my way to Presbytery, in the car. I don't usually like doing that, because I want to stop and take notes, and I can't do that while I'm driving.

## **Hold Fast When Living the Word**

Thirdly, and lastly, hold fast when living the word of God. The whole fast of truth here, of course, was specifically for Timothy, in terms of not giving up the doctrine, believing it, and teaching it faithfully to the body of Christ. But Paul is not excluding, of course, that part of holding fast is living it.

It's important to bring forth the fruit of it in their lives, as Question 160 says, because our salvation is deep and wide. It's not just illumination of the mind, but that the illumination of the mind would move forth into our hands and into our feet, to do the Lord's work. As the parable of the seed reminds us in Luke 8.15, but the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience.

This is sanctification. The whole Sunday School series this year is to that end, that we would be faithful in following our Lord, whatever calling and vocation we have in life, whatever duty and responsibility that we have, that we would not be hard ground, or ground that will only bring forth thistles, but that which would bring forth fruit by the power of the Holy Spirit. And God has given us tools to those ends, the means and instruments to help us to become more fruitful in our Christian life and all that we do.

But in all these things, of course, the fruit that we are called to have as believers, the fruits of obedience, of love, of care, the fruit of the Spirit, the fruit of the Ten Commandments, must never be the basis upon us trying to get to heaven, but ever be evidence and fruit of our being already saved, and always through faith and faith alone. And so we have this theme then in Hebrews 4.2. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them, that is, we in the New Testament as well as they in the Old Testament had the gospel preached, but the word preached did not profit them, them in the desert, not being what? Mixed with faith in them that heard it. You can hear the word of God preached to you day in and day out by a pastor, pay for a pastor, he could be your private pastor at your house, but if it's not mixed with faith, it means nothing.

You can have all the Bibles in the world and read them and have them memorized, but it's not mixed with faith, it is nothing. Faith is always required in the reading and the hearing and holding fast the truth of God. Faith in Jesus, reliance upon him and his revealed will and not our own imaginations, trusting in him and the word that he has given us as the instrument to learn more about him and his will for our lives and the gospel above all.

This is what we are called to do, brothers and sisters, is faith should never be lost sight of. Yes, we're called to be active in our sanctification, to bear forth fruits and obedience in a life of honoring him and building up the kingdom of God, but always with humility recognizing what we do, what we can do, what we have done is because the spirit of God within us humbling us and giving us the gift of faith. We always do it trusting in Jesus.

And therefore, brothers and sisters, hold fast the word you have received. Whether read or preached, let us attend unto it with diligence and above all faith that we may stand firm in the truth by the spirit's power within us. Let us pray.

Indeed, Lord, we are grateful for the Bible, the means of grace par excellence that is here, Lord, which all other means of grace, our prayers, our preaching, our church attendance, our fellowship, our obedience, our praises is based upon and anchored in the truth of your word. Help us to hold fast the pattern of sound words, Lord, that we have heard from the pulpit over the years of our lives and that we have read and we have access to. We're grateful, Lord, we pray, and thankful above all that we continue to have such access.

Grant us more, therefore, of your spirit and growth and grace and perseverance. Amen.