

The Church's Agenda

2 Timothy 3:14-4:5 (EHV)

¹⁴ As for you, continue in the things you have learned and about which you have become convinced. You know from whom you learned them ¹⁵ and that from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be complete, well equipped for every good work. ¹ I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and Christ Jesus, who is going to 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 not. Correct, rebuke, and encourage, with all patience and teaching. ³ For there will come a time when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, because they have itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in line with their own desires. ⁴ They will also turn their ears away from the truth and will turn aside to myths. ⁵ As for you, keep a clear head in every situation. Bear hardship. Do the work of an evangelist. Fulfill your ministry.

Does everyone have an agenda? I guess, if we mean that people have reasons for what they do, then, yes, I would hope that everyone has an agenda. Even people who seemingly do things at random for random's sake still have an agenda for doing things at random. But do we more mean that when we say that everyone has an agenda is that the underlying thoughts behind their actions are hidden because they're self-serving, sinister even? Is having an agenda a bad thing?

Does the Church have an underlying, sinister agenda? The more cynical would say, "Of course it does! The Church just wants my money or wants to look important by having butts in seats. The Church wants something out of me for its own self-serving purpose."

The claims that the Church has an agenda are not to be dismissed out of hand. That's one of the reasons that Paul wrote this letter to Timothy as Timothy oversaw some of the churches that Paul planted. He knew that people in the religious community would have an agenda that would affect Timothy and his ministry and the ministry of these congregations. "For there will come a time when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, because they have itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in line with their own desires. They will also turn their ears away from the truth and will turn aside to myths." (verses 3-4)

Preachers have an agenda, and so do the people listening to them. But what is that agenda? For some, it would be to preach what people want to hear. They mold their messages to fit what people want so that they attain their version of success by getting butts in seats, gaining popularity or offerings to provide a lavish living for them. They offer secrets to a happier life, a more fulfilling life, a holier life through to-do lists in order to fulfill their agenda.

On the listener side, the agenda is going out and finding the preachers and churches who say what you want to hear. If you want a church that tells you how to have your best life now, you can find that. If you want a church that wears robes and plays the organ, you can find that. If you want a church that has a rock band up front with someone preaching who has ripped jeans and tattoos on their arms, you can find that. If you want a church that has your same political beliefs as you, either all Republican or all Democrat, you can find that. If you want a pro-life church or a pro-choice church, you can find that. If you want a church that is affirming, progressive, woke, LGBTQ+ inclusive community, you can find that. If you want the opposite, you can find those as well. We live in a consumer culture that allows us to shop around and find the specific agenda you want to hear.

This culture makes it tempting to change our agenda to preach what people want to hear so that we can attach ourselves to success and easy living. We want to surround ourselves with those hold the same ideals as we do, who think like us. We go so far as to create echo chambers, places where people will not contradict us or think differently than us but who will simply agree with us and tell us that we are right. The preacher is tempted to tailor his message to provide that echo chamber and achieve his success. Give people what they want, and they'll love you for it, right?

Now comes the hard question: am I here because this is the message my itching ears want to hear? Have I sought an echo chamber of people who think like me, talk like me, agree with me? For me as the preacher: am I tailoring a message that will make people like me, that will create job security, that will make me popular and beloved?

The temptation was no different for Timothy. So Paul commends to him the Church's not-so-secret agenda: "As for you, continue in the things you have learned and about which you have become convinced. You know from whom you learned them." (verse 14) Now, before we go farther, it's important to let the verses flow. Paul is not advocating, "Just believe whatever your parents or your

pastors believe.” Paul says to continue in what these people taught not because of who they are but because of what they taught: “that from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” (verse 15)

Timothy’s grandmother and mother, Lois and Eunice, as well as Paul himself, had taught Timothy about what God had done for him. They shared with Timothy from the Scriptures, from the Bible, that Jesus, the Son of God, came to live perfectly for him under the law, to pay the price for his sins, for all the times when he followed his own agenda and sought to scratch his itching ears instead of listening to God and his Word. They taught Timothy that Jesus rose from the dead, conquering death for him and them, and has clothed them all with his perfection. They taught Timothy that he was complete in Christ and in what Christ had done for them all.

This is what you and I have been taught. God gave you a message, not the one your itching ears wanted to hear, but what you absolutely needed to hear. He showed you your sins, that the seeking of your own agenda separated you from God. But God came down and lived perfectly for you. He took the punishment of your sins on himself. He has cleansed you, saved you. He has given you worth and value by what he has done for you. He has made you complete. You have been made wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Continue, then, in what God has revealed through his Word. Why? “All Scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, and for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, well equipped for every good work.” (verses 16-17) The Word of God is more than sufficient for all we need. Through it, God makes us complete because of his work for us. It also rebukes us, exposes and convicts us of our own agendas that are self-serving and sinister. His Word corrects us, restores us, after we are exposed and convicted of our sins – especially as we will sin again and again - and brings us back to this right relationship completed for us by Christ. God’s Word trains us, now that we have been rebuked and corrected, to continue to live the way God wants us to live, to continue to fight the urge to seek out our own self-serving agendas and instead produce the fruits of repentance, the fruits of faith worked in us by God the Holy Spirit. It leads us to seek what God wants and make that what we want. God’s agenda for us is clearly laid out, not hidden.

This is what the Church is to preach. We preach it because we know that Christ will return and we don’t know when. We don’t know how much time we have to share with people the Holy Scriptures which are able to make people wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. There is an urgency to continuing in and sharing God’s message. And so Paul tells Timothy, “Preach the word. Be ready whether it is convenient or not. Correct, rebuke, and encourage, with all patience and teaching.” (verse 2)

When it comes to correcting and rebuking, I don’t know of a time when it felt particularly convenient to do so. Nobody wants to hear that what they are doing is wrong and sinful. But this is what God has called us to do so that more people can be saved. They need to see their sin for what it is: hostile alienation from God. We point it out to then apply the good news that we all so desperately need, that Jesus is the one who took away this hostility and reconciled us to God, by his life, his works, his payment, and so we are complete by what he has already done for us.

Even with such urgency knowing our time is limited, we are to correct, rebuke, and encourage with the Word of God with all patience and teaching. We are called not to carelessly throw the Word of God around. Because we want people to be saved by what God has done for them, we want to be considerate to them and what they’re going through. We strive to meet them where they are at. We listen to their concerns and then apply what God has done for them. And we might have to do this many, many times. We continue to tell people what God has done for them so that they too are made wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus, that they would know God as Timothy knew God from the Holy Scriptures.

This will not be easy. It was last week that we saw rejection as a mark of proclaiming God’s Word as the people in the synagogue of Nazareth tried to throw Jesus off a cliff for saying that he was their prophesied Savior. People will not often thank us for pointing out their sins and showing them a Savior who takes away their sins and makes them complete. So, we take to heart the same instruction as Paul gave Timothy: “As for you, keep a clear head in every situation. Bear hardship. Do the work of an evangelist. Fulfill your ministry.” (verse 5)

Does the Church have an agenda? Does Light of the Valley? You bet we do, but it’s not hidden or self-serving or sinister. We want to preach God’s Word to people - not our ideas, our thoughts, our pet agendas. We aren’t here to create an echo chamber and preach to the choir, so to speak. We are here to point out sin so that then we can also point people to our Savior. He has taken away your sin. He has made us complete already. This is the message and agenda God lays out in the Holy Scriptures which alone make us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. That’s what we preach and why we preach it. That’s our agenda. Amen.