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Conducted by  
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"2 Timothy 4:2 says, 'Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke; exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine.' What is meant by preaching out of season?"

In a world wherein true Christian doctrine is a rarity and many Christians suffer from chronic apathy, this instruction by Paul to Timothy comes as an urgent imperative to everyone who professes the Christian faith. It is so demanding and intense as to be almost frightening, and the questioner does us a real service by inviting us to take another look at this scripture so that we might re-appraise our own involvement in this instruction which is undoubtedly a progressive one. We have been asked to comment on one particular phrase but I am persuaded that it would be beneficial for us to say something about the context in which the phrase occurs.

#### Preach the word

There seems to be little doubt that this instruction was given primarily to Timothy as an individual. It is an active imperative. It calls Timothy to that sphere of action which in his second letter Paul explains like this, "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. Be not therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God" (2 TIM. 1:7, 8). The testimony of the Lord of which Paul speaks is explained by Peter, "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason for the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (1 PET. 3:15). If we were to paraphrase Paul he would seem to be saying "Yes, Timothy; you have been saved by Christ Jesus, our Lord. Don't be ashamed to testify to his saving power and grace. Speak out boldly your hope. Tell people the reason for your faith. Preach the word that was taught to you; it is imperative that you do so."

By extension, the same active imperative comes to every Christian. Preach the word. But how can we preach that which we do not know? I am appalled at the number of Christians who do not avail themselves of periods of Bible study. How can we be ready always to give an answer to people concerning our hope when we so blatantly neglect the source of our hope, the word of God. Not only should we be sharing our hope in the gospel with others, but we should be assisting in every way we can those who preach and teach the word. Listen to Paul again, "Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things" (GAL. 6:6). Do the elders need your support? Does the preacher need your support? Well, go out and support them to the hilt. The Church is in desperate need of Christians who are committed to Christ and His word.

#### Be instant

W. E. Vine states that this phrase means, 'to stand by, be present, be at hand, come on or upon'. It signifies a state of readiness. It could even have the idea of such a state of preparedness that one could go over to the assault. It brings to mind the words of Paul to the Ephesian Christians, "Stand therefore, having your loins girt

about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (EPH. 6:14-17). The same apostle teaches us, "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds" (2 COR. 10:4).

Let's have no illusions. The strong holds of Satan are binding countless millions to Christ-less graves. How many of us are prepared to stand ready in the trenches of God, prepared and armoured to assault the citadel of sin? We should not delude ourselves by grandiose thoughts of our strength. In the days of the so-called pristine purity of the Church, when Paul was experiencing the punitive measures brought against him by the power of the Roman authority, he was constrained to write, "At my first answer no man stood with me, but all forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear." (2 TIM. 4:16, 17).

What a tragedy if Christ has to say to us, "You did not stand by me. I shed my blood to bring you the word of God. Why were you not ready?" Be instant!

#### In season, out of season

I well remember my grandmother saying, "You must never eat pork unless there is an 'R' in the month." (This, of course, excluded the months of May, June, July and August). The pork, in her estimation, was then 'out of season,' and one could presumably expect dire gastronomical effects if one ate it. This is a crude example but you will get the idea. We live our lives according to the premise that there is a time or a season for doing some things, and that such things must not be attempted if the time or season is not right.

According to the teaching of Paul, the above is not the case relative to the preaching of the gospel. We know and understand that some seasons are 'convenient', others are 'difficult'. When Paul commented to the Corinthians on the absence of Apollos, he said, "As touching our brother Apollos, I greatly desired him to come unto you with the brethren: but his will was not to come at this time: but he will come when he shall have convenient time." (1 COR. 16:12). Apollos, evidently, would choose the convenient time. In contrast, Paul reminds us about the difficult times, "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come." (2 TIM. 3:1). In the very next verse to the one we are considering, Paul indicates a time which some would consider to be an 'out of season' time, "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine . . . they shall turn away their ears from the truth." (2 TIM. 4:3, 4). What are we to do at such times? Stop preaching the word? Paul doesn't think so, because he says to Timothy, "make full proof of thy ministry." (v5). This undoubtedly would include ministering the word.

What then is Paul saying? I believe him to be saying, "Assault Satan with the word whether or not the season be easy, convenient, difficult, or even perilous." In Paul's mind there is never the conception of a time when the word should not be preached, and his message resounds down the corridors of time until it strikes *our* ears like the sound of a trumpet with a certain sound, "Preach the word be instant in season, out of season." I pray to God that every Christian, with God's help, will find it possible to do just that.

(All questions please to Alf Marsden, 377 Billinge Road, Highfield, Wigan, Lancs.).