

Passing the Torch Faithful to the Word 2 Timothy 4:1-5

Introduction

As he writes this letter, the Apostle Paul focuses upon helping his you protégé, Timothy, become the best Christian he can be. In the very first verse of chapter 4, he writes, "I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom." Paul reminds Timothy that even though we live in a pagan world, we live under the watchful eye of God, the Father, and Jesus Christ, who is the coming judge of the living and the dead.

There are several distinct judgments mentioned in Scripture. The judgment referred to in verse one is not the Great White Throne Judgment of Revelation 20 (11-15). That is the judgment of all unbelievers. Paul is referring to the Bema Seat Judgment, commonly called the Judgment Seat of Christ. at which believers will face judgment. (1 Cor 3:12-15, 2 Cor. 5:10) The judgment seat of Christ is where all believers receive their rewards for their Christian service.

For many, preaching is only a profession. But to Paul, preaching was a calling issued by God. The call to preach requires a response of obedience. It is not a matter of preference or natural giftedness. A pastor is a shepherd and teacher. The public ministry of the Word of God is a pastor's responsibility.

The Apostles established the priority of prayer and public preaching during the early days of the church. Luke records it in Acts, Chapter 6. A dispute arose among the Greek-speaking widows over the way Jewish believers distributed needed food and funds. The Apostles came up with a simple solution to the problem. Acts 6:2-4 says, "Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the Word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of *good* reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word." (Act 6:2-4 NKJV) This, by the way, is an excellent example of Holy Spirit problem-solving.

When Paul uses the phrase "I charge you," he conveys the idea of a solemn oath. He certainly wants Timothy to listen and heed these final instructions. It's almost as if Paul is in a courtroom calling Timothy to testify under oath that he is witness to Paul's words. Paul speaks these words before God and Jesus Christ, whom he says will judge the living and the dead. These are Paul's final words, and he summons every amount of force and weight he can give to them. As he sits in his cold, damp prison cell, he realizes this is his last opportunity to reach out and help Timothy to grow in faith and purpose.

The reason these words are so crucial for Timothy to hear is that Paul believed firmly in the Second Coming of the Lord, and he wanted to make sure Timothy did

too! Paul had been preaching for over 30 years, and he had never wavered on this point. It is a theme he began in his very first letter to the Thessalonians. In light of the Second Coming of Christ, Paul tells Timothy, Preach the Word.

I. Preach the Word

Look at verse 2, "Preach the Word! Be ready in season *and* out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching." (2Ti 4:2 NKJV)

Proclaiming the Word of God is preeminent in Paul's mind. And it's not just for preachers to do; every believer is called to proclaim the truth of God's Word. Preach the Word, has always been a constant emphasis of Paul's instruction. Even in this final letter, Paul refers 36 times to the true gospel. Paul's constant emphasis on the gospel makes this point clear to Timothy.

Listen to the excellent instruction Paul gives Timothy:

- Don't be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord. (1:8)
- Hold fast the pattern of sound words. (1:13)
- The things you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men. (2:2)
- Rightly divide the Word of truth. (2:15)
- A servant of the Lord must be able to teach (2:24)
- All Scripture is given by inspiration of God. (3:16)

Preach the Word! That is Paul's advice. Of course, Paul wanted Timothy to know the Word and like reading the Word and accept the teaching of the Word, but he also wanted him to proclaim the Word. The content of his message should be immersed in the scriptures. While there's nothing wrong with sharing funny stories, life experiences, notable quotes, and illustrations, the gospel is a message about Jesus. Paul says we should always be ready to share the good news that God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to forgive us of our sins and give us an eternal hope and purpose. But there are only two times when it is appropriate to share the message about Christ, in season and out of season. In other words, anytime you want! Always be ready to proclaim your faith!

Be ready, suggests a sense of preparedness and urgency. It pictures a soldier preparing to go to battle or a guard who is always on alert. The Apostle Peter wrote these words, "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always *be* ready to *give* a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed." (1Pe 3:15-16 NKJV)

"Convince" means to present a logical and systematic presentation of the gospel. Answer questions, be truthful, challenge the obstacles, and be reasonable. Be convincing!

To "rebuke" does not mean telling someone off! It means challenging and refuting a person's arguments or behaviors that allow the Holy Spirit to convict them of their sinfulness. A rebuke should always be for the betterment of the person. We rebuke because we love and care about people. It's having a loving heart to heart conversation and confrontation.

To "exhort" literally means to explain with encouragement. And Paul adds with longsuffering. An exhortation explains how to apply the Word of God to your life correctly.

Paul says, preach the Word to convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching! The gospel is not a theory; it is the truth about God's plan for humanity.

II. Some Will Reject the Word

Look at verses 3-4, "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, *because* they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn *their* ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables." (2Ti 4:3-4 NKJV)

We need to keep focused on the Word of God because our human instinct is to turn away from God. That's what sin causes us to do. Adam and Eve hid from God in the garden. And people have been doing that ever since. No one wants their sins exposed! We all would rather hear that what we want is right and good.

People will pay good money for someone to tell them how right they are! Paul says their ears are just itching for someone to tell them what they want to hear! There are people today who are obsessed with endless curiosity and an insatiable desire for the newest things and wildest experiences. People are pushing the envelope in every area of life.

If you are here today because you want to hear God's Word, I would say God is doing something unusual and quite wonderful in your heart and life. Left to ourselves, we would all rather do things our way. But when God changes your heart and gives you a desire for His Word, you know God's way will always be better for you. Unfortunately, the world looks for experts who agree with them and support their sinful ways.

People attend church today for a variety of reasons. Many of those reasons are selfish. People want the church to make them happy and meet their needs. People today feel very entitled. They don't want you to talk about sin or hell. Instead, they want to hear how to be successful and happy. They think doctrine is boring, and theology doesn't matter. They want short sermons that make them feel better about themselves, and they think the church ought to be fun. No wonder so many churches are in no hurry to reopen.

In 2003, the Episcopal Church elected its first gay bishop. In response, an op.ed. entitled, "The Gospel of Inclusion," the Wall Street Journal stated that the Episcopal

Church had just tossed aside 2,000 years of bedrock Christian teaching about marriage, the family and sexuality. It has rejected beliefs fundamental, not only to Christianity but to Judaism and Islam. Episcopalians' inability to defend core doctrine suggest that mainline American churches are losing their theological mooring, and increasingly falling prey to the prevailing winds of secular culture. In doing so, the church appears to be embracing a new gospel, its message? Jesus came to make us feel good about ourselves." The article goes on to say, "the new gospel's disciples do not generally jettison Scripture outright. Instead, they radically reinterpret it. [Katherine Kersten. Wall Street Journal. www.opinionjournal.com/taste/?id=110003859]

That was 17 years ago. Would you say that the church and our society have dramatically improved in the last 20 years?

According to the Barna Research Group, 10% of those who claim to be born again also claim to believe in Reincarnation. [George Barna. The Barna Update. "Americans Describe Their Views About Life After Death." - www.barna.org] Seriously! How many of you know that's not really possible? You are one or the other, but you cannot be both. It's impossible to believe in the Resurrection and, at the same time, believe in Reincarnation.

What about the myth of evolution. Some Christian accept evolution without even considering the theological implications of what evolution teaches. Amoeba's and Apes don't jibe with Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden. If the human race descended from apes, then there never was or could have been a fall in the Garden of Eden. By denying the Fall of Mankind, evolution teaches there is no need for a Redeemer, and therefore Christianity is irrelevant. Since evolution is the prevailing, and probably, the only doctrine of origin taught in public schools today, is there any wonder why young people see no need to believe in God or the Church?

It seems once people quit believing the Word of God, they reach out to embrace extreme fanatical views. It isn't that those who reject God's truth believe in nothing; sadly, they will believe in anything.

To think that the universe came about by chance is to believe a fable.
It's a fable to believe that you must earn your way into God's graces.
It's a fable to believe that God only loves you when you are good.
It's a fable to believe that you're such a bad person that God can't save you.
It's a fable to believe that you are better than others.

The only way to turn away from fables is to turn to the Word of God. Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away." (Mat 24: 35 NKJV)

III. Always Respect the Word

In verse 5, Paul writes, "But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

(2Ti 4:5 NKJV)

Paul contrasts those who follow fables and those who follow Christ. Even when others turn aside to fables, Timothy is to remain dedicated to doing what God wanted him to do. In fact, the behavior of the world should make Timothy more dedicated, not more discouraged.

John Calvin said, "The more determined men become to despise the teachings of Christ, the more zealous should godly ministers be to assert it and the more strenuous their efforts to preserve it entirely."

Paul says, "Be watchful in all things." You won't remain faithful if you don't give careful attention to being watchful. Watchful over your spiritual life. Watchful over your children. Watchful over your marriage. Watchful in all things! A watchful person keeps their eyes open and can spot potential trouble ahead of time.

Endure afflictions! No one escapes trials and difficulties. James says it is "the trial of your faith that works patience." Some believers get mad at God when trials come their way. Job said, "Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?" (Job 2:10) Christians must endure afflictions, just like everyone else. The difference is we have confidence and faith in God to see us through troubled times. After the storm, the sun still shines! And there are plenty of wonderful blessings for us to enjoy after we've endured a time of affliction.

Paul also tells Timothy to do the work of an evangelist. Some believers have the gift of evangelism. They can talk to anyone and everyone about the gospel. It seems so natural for them, and they never know a stranger. But Paul says the rest of us have to work at it, including Timothy. Just because you don't have the gift of gab, doesn't mean you're exempt from sharing your faith and publically testifying that you are a follower of Jesus. Every believer must faithfully work at proclaiming our faith in Jesus Christ. So, put it out there! – that you are bonafide, 100% Christian.

And then prove it by being faithful to your ministry. Paul gave a similar command to Archippus in his letter to the Colossians. (4:17) Paul knew what it was to be faithful and fulfill his own ministry. (Acts 12:25). There may be many reasons why a person's ministry goes unfulfilled:

- Fear.
- Unbelief.
- The cares of the world.
- The fear of man.
- Criticism and discouragement.
- Besetting sins
- A host of other factors

Paul's final warning to Timothy is, "If you want a fulfilling ministry and vibrant Christian life, then be faithful to the Word!"

Conclusion

Paul did not focus on the visible success of Timothy's ministry but on the excellence of his service. He focused on his commitment rather than on Timothy's opportunities. He concentrated on his Christian character rather than his prominence or achievements. He challenges Timothy to faithfulness and godliness rather than a great image or popularity. He was concerned about the pastoral care and spiritual gifts Timothy demonstrated before his church in Ephesus rather than the size or wealth or influence of the Ephesian Church.

When we fill our hearts with the Word of God, the Holy Spirit equips us to make a difference in our world. God has revealed his plan for humanity in His Word. When we discover God's plan, we also find God's purpose for our life. David wrote in Psalm 119, "Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light for my path." (105)

It is the Word of God that encourages us and teaches us wisdom. As we learn God's ways, the Holy Spirit helps us to discern right from wrong and reveals to us the lies of the enemy. If you need help to understand the Word of God, ask the Holy Spirit to reveal it to you. Never be ashamed of your faith in Christ, and always respect and proclaim the truth and teachings of Scripture.