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## HANDING OFF THE BATON

2 Timothy 4:1-5

By

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December 9, 2018  
A Final Charge (4)

## Handing Off the Baton 2 Timothy 4:1-5

In practicing for a relay race, runners work hard to get the handoff of the baton right. If a runner drops the baton, the team is immediately disqualified from the race.

Today, I'm handing off the pastoral leadership baton to Dave Berry. If you were here on May 31, 1992, the Sunday that I began as your pastor, I thank you for hanging in with me over these years. You qualify for some sort of special reward in heaven! On that Sunday I preached from this text to explain my major task and yours. I repeated the same basic sermon on March 15, 1998 and again on January 21, 2007. If you've already heard it three times, your reward will be even greater!

But Paul's words here are of utmost importance. I often get emails from people in other cities telling me that they can't find a church that preaches God's Word. So I want you to understand (perhaps for the fourth time!) why I have emphasized expository Bible preaching and why Dave will carry that same baton in the years ahead.

J. I. Packer (*A Quest for Godliness* [Crossway], p. 282) wrote, "We shall never perform a more important task than preaching. If we are not willing to give time to sermon preparation, we are not fit to preach, and have no business in the ministry at all." He argues (p. 281) that "the well-being of the church today depends in large measure on a revival of preaching in the Puritan vein." He explains (p. 283), "... to the Puritan, faithful preaching was the basic ingredient in faithful pastoring." I agree. I believe that biblical preaching is the pastor's primary task.

Maybe you're thinking, "You're saying that because you're a preacher. Of course preaching is important to you!" But I'm not saying that preaching is important simply because I'm a preacher. I'm saying that preaching is important because God says that it is important in His inspired Word.

Our text is Paul's final charge to Timothy just before the apostle's execution. He senses that the time of his departure has come (2 Tim. 4:6). He's handing the baton to Timothy, his younger friend and understudy. Paul realized that Satan would relentlessly attack God's Word. Having just emphasized the trustworthy nature of that Word and its vital importance (2 Tim. 3:16-17), he now charges Timothy (and every pastor after him) to be faithful to preach the Word, no matter what the opposition or hardships. But preaching is a two-way street. So Paul's words are not only a solemn charge to pastors. They also are a solemn charge to all believers to listen to biblical preaching with a view to obedience.

Preaching and obediently hearing God's Word are of utmost importance in view of eternity.

If Paul had said, "I solemnly charge you, preach the Word," it would have been a strong exhortation. If he had said, "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, preach the Word," it would have been a *really* strong exhortation. If he had said, "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, preach the Word," we'd be off the charts on strong exhortations!

But when he says (2 Tim. 4:1-2a), "I solemnly 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, preach the Word," I don't know how he could have said it any more emphatically! It's as if he grabbed Timothy by his shirt, pulled him to within six inches of his face, and shouted like a drill instructor, "Preach the Word!" Paul gives five commands in verse 2 and four more in verse 5. In verses 1-2, Paul shows *why preaching* the word is of utmost importance. In verses 3-4, he shows *why obediently hearing* the word is of utmost importance. Then (v. 5), because there will be inevitable opposition to the word, he shows *why* a faithful pastor must *persevere in preaching* the Word.

1. Preaching the Word is of utmost importance because of Christ's coming judgment and kingdom.

Paul answers four questions: *Why* preach? *What* to preach? *When* to preach it? *How* to preach it?

A. *Why* preach? Preach the Word because Christ Jesus is coming to judge everyone and to establish His kingdom.

The word translated *solemnly charge* (1 Tim. 5:21; 2 Tim. 2:14) had a legal nuance, of taking an oath in a court of law. Paul is calling Timothy in front of God's judicial bench and charging him under oath with the serious task of proclaiming God's Word to those who also will someday stand in front of that bench for judgment by Christ Jesus, who will return to reign over all.

The verb *is* (before *to judge*) literally means, *is about to*. It implies the urgency of the task. The day is soon coming when Christ will return. He came the first time as the suffering Savior to redeem us from our sins. But the second time He will come as the Sovereign King, to defeat all rebellion and to judge the living and the dead. I think that includes just about everyone here! Although as believers in Christ, we will not face condemnation (Rom. 8:1), we all will stand before the judgment seat of Christ to be recompensed for what we have done with our lives (2 Cor. 5:10).

This means that you need to take life seriously. One day you will stand before the Lord Jesus to give an account of your life. The Word of God tells us how to live in a manner pleasing to the Lord (2 Cor. 5:9). Preaching is important because judgment is ahead.

Christ will appear and set up His kingdom to reign over all. The word *appear* was used of the Emperor's visit to a province or town. Just before his visit, things were put in order. The garbage was cleaned up, the streets were swept, and the buildings were scrubbed clean for his appearing. During his presidency, Jimmy Carter would sometimes spend the night at the home of some average citizen. If you knew that the President would be spending the night at your house, I'm sure that you'd do some housecleaning! Well, Christ, the King, who is far greater than the President, is coming! Preach so that people will clean up their lives and be ready for His return.

B. *What* to preach? Preach the Word!

Some scholars argue that *the word* means the gospel. I don't object to that, as long as by "the gospel" you include the whole counsel of God as contained in all of Scripture. In the original text, there is no chapter break between 2 Timothy 3:16-17 and 4:1-5. All

Scripture is profitable for teaching (3:16) or instruction (4:2, a related word). A preacher must explain and apply the doctrines of the Bible so that when he's done, you can look at the biblical text in its context and say, "I understand what it is saying and how it applies to my life."

"Preach" means "to herald." The herald was the king's messenger who relayed the king's message to the people. He wasn't free to make up his own stuff. He wasn't a politician or diplomat or a spin doctor. His job was to proclaim faithfully the king's message so that the people understood it. Even so, the preacher's message should come out of the text and be governed by the text.

There is a sad lack of that kind of biblical preaching in American churches. I once listened to some tapes titled, "The best of ..." a well-known preacher. He took his theme loosely from a biblical text, but then he'd jump off from there and tell a lot of uplifting stories. But when he was done, he had not explained or applied the words of the text in its context. You could have removed all the Bible verses and the result could have appeared in *Reader's Digest*, not much altered by the absence of the Scriptures.

But Scripture gives us "the wisdom that leads to salvation" and equips us for every good work (2 Tim. 3:15-17). It reveals to us "everything pertaining to life and godliness" (2 Pet. 1:3). If a pastor doesn't explain and apply Scripture, his preaching may be entertaining and inspiring; but it will lack life-changing power.

Although I disagree with much of Karl Barth's theology, I admire him for an incident that happened during the 1930's (told by Michael Ladra, *Ministry Journal*, July, 1985). He was preaching on John 3:16. Even though many in his German congregation professed to be Christians, they were sympathetic to Hitler's persecution of the Jews. Barth made the point that Jesus was a Jew, that He had died for all the world, and that the Jews were part of that world. Thus anyone who loves Christ would not participate in the widespread ill treatment of the Jews. Many in his congregation walked out in disgust before he finished the sermon. One wrote a scathing letter denouncing him. Barth's reply was a single sentence: "It was in the text."

That kind of preaching takes courage! But the man who proclaims the Word of God must not pull his punches. He must be patient and gentle, but he must proclaim and apply the text of Scripture as the King's message.

So, *why preach?* Preach because of Christ's coming judgment and kingdom. *What to preach?* Preach God's Word. Third,

C. *When to preach it?* Be ready to preach the Word at every opportunity.

"Be ready in season and out of season." The idea here is that a preacher is not to play at preaching. Rather, it must be a life-consuming passion. He is never off duty. All his life and his walk with God go into the preaching of the Word, because biblical preaching is God's truth imparted through a man who walks with God. "Be ready" implies a sense of urgency. Picture a paramedic unit on call, ready to save someone's life. Souls are perishing without Christ. Christians are straying from the fold. Proclaim God's Word whenever and wherever you can!

The 18<sup>th</sup> century evangelical preacher John Berridge was called in by the Anglican bishop and reproved for preaching at all hours of the day and on every day of the week. "My lord," he replied, "I preach only at two times." The bishop pressed him, "And which are they, Mr. Berridge?" He quickly responded, "In season and out of season, my lord" (A. Skevington Wood, *The Inextinguishable Blaze* [Eerdmans], p. 212).

D. *How to preach it?* Preach the Word with application to life.

2 Tim. 4:2b: "Reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction." Biblical preaching should show people where their lives are not in line with God's truth and help them to make the necessary corrections to obey that truth consistently. Martin Luther put it (in David Larsen, *The Company of the Preachers* [Kregel], p. 157), "Always preach in such a way that if the people listening do not come to hate their sin, they will instead hate you."

To do this, a preacher must make an *appeal to the reason* of the hearers: "Reprove." This is a legal term that means to present your case in such a manner as to convince your opponent of his wrong. A preacher must present his case in a logically convincing manner

from the Word, so that his hearers are persuaded that what Scripture says is right even if their behavior is wrong. The Holy Spirit's task is to reprove (convict) the world concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8). He does this largely through Spirit-filled biblical preaching.

Second, a preacher must make an *appeal to the conscience* of the hearers: "Rebuke." This moral aspect of preaching says, "You are sinning against God; you need to repent!" We tend not to like that sort of thing, but it is desperately needed in our day of watered-down, feel good Christianity. William Barclay rightly said (*The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* [Westminster Press], rev. ed. p. 207): "Any teacher ... whose teaching tends to make men think less of sin is a menace to Christianity and to mankind."

Third, a preacher must make an *appeal to the will and emotions* of the hearers: "Exhort." The word means strongly encouraging someone to right behavior. Some people need rebuke and some need encouragement. If you encourage those who need rebuking, you're helping them to go on sinning. But if you rebuke those who need encouragement, you'll discourage them. Someone has said, the preacher's job is to comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable. Only the Holy Spirit can take His Word and apply it individually to a congregation made up of all sorts of needs.

The preacher becomes the channel for the Spirit's working when he appeals with "*great patience and instruction*." People require time to change. They don't always get it the first time around. So the preacher of the Word must say it over and over again from different biblical texts. Patience does not mean tolerating open sin, but rather, bearing with people's weaknesses. But the preacher doesn't just leave the people in their weakness; he gives them practical *instruction* so that they can grow in Christ.

Thus Paul is saying that preaching the Word is of utmost importance in light of the coming judgment and kingdom of Jesus Christ. But even great preaching that falls on closed ears and hardened hearts is not effective. Thus,

2. Obediently hearing the Word is of utmost importance in view of the sinful propensity to turn away from the truth.

2 Timothy 4:3-4: "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate [lit., 'heap up'] for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths." They will find teachers who tell them what they *want* to hear, not what they *need* to hear.

I heard Stuart Briscoe say that he asked a Sunday school class what they did with the commands in the Bible. A little old lady raised her hand and said, "I underline them in blue." That's nice, but not exactly the point! The commands of the Bible should be obeyed because God gave them to us for our good.

In the Pastoral Epistles Paul frequently mentions "sound doctrine" (1 Tim. 1:10; 2 Tim. 4:3; Titus 1:9; 2:1; "sound words" in 1 Tim. 6:3; 2 Tim. 1:13). "Sound" means healthy (we derive our word "hygienic" from it). Sound doctrine results in healthy Christian living. Note that Paul sets sound doctrine in contrast to what people like and thus it must be *endured*! Like healthy food, healthy doctrine isn't always something we like, because it confronts our selfish desires, but in the long run it yields healthy Christianity. Why didn't God make broccoli unhealthy and ice cream healthy?

Paul warns that people [in the church is the implication] will turn aside from the truth to myths—the religious ideas of men as opposed to God's revelation in Scripture. The propensity of sinful human hearts is to turn away from God's truth and to embrace what feels good at the moment. So preachers face the powerful temptation, especially if they want to be liked, to give people the ice cream of popular worldly myths instead of the broccoli of God's truth. But don't judge a man's preaching by whether you like it or not. Rather, answer the question, "Does his preaching line up with what God's Word says?" Does it come from the text?

I try to serve the broccoli of the Word along with the ice cream (thankfully, the Word contains both!). That's one reason for preaching verse by verse through the Bible. It gives the right proportions of spiritual broccoli and ice cream. I try gently but firmly to confront sin with God's truth as well as tell you God's prescription for spiritual health. But my job is only half the task. You have the responsibility as hearers of the Word not to reject the broccoli and want only the ice cream or to go find a place that only serves



ice cream. You will not be spiritually healthy if you do. You need to hear the Word with a heart eager to obey it.

But what if people don't listen? Then what should a preacher do? Paul tells Timothy in verse 5:

3. Perseverance in preaching the Word is required in view of inevitable opposition.

2 Tim. 4:5: "But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry." When people won't listen, the preacher must keep preaching the Word anyway. It is a pointed reminder that a man of God must go against the flow, even at times against the "Christian" flow. Paul gives four commands that show Timothy how to conduct his ministry even when people aren't responsive:

First, "*Be sober*" (literally, "Don't be drunk"). When people get intoxicated with the latest winds of false doctrine, you're the designated driver. Keep your head about you and continue preaching the truth.

Second, "*Endure hardship*." If you preach the truth of God's Word, you will catch flak. Harry Ironside (*Timothy, Titus, & Philemon* [Loizeaux Brothers], p. 236) said that he sometimes received letters from people (invariably people he didn't know personally) who would say, "I resent your personal attack on me last Sunday. I don't like your preaching; and I don't think you had any right to expose me in the way you did. I don't know who has been talking to you about me." And invariably they closed by saying, "It's not true." Then he quoted someone who said, "If you throw a stone into a pack of dogs and one of them yelps, you know who got hit."

Third, "*Do the work of an evangelist*." Don't get sidetracked by critics in the church, but keep preaching the gospel and going after lost people. The enemy wants us to get sidetracked from preaching the gospel, because the gospel is how God saves sinners. And the gospel also strengthens the saints. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said (*Preaching and Preachers* [Zondervan], p. 150), "There is something essentially wrong with a man who calls himself a Christian and who can listen to a truly evangelistic sermon without coming under conviction again, without feeling something of his own unworthiness, and rejoicing when he hears the Gospel remedy being presented."

Finally, *“Fulfill your ministry.”* Paul is saying, *“Don’t bail out of the ministry and go into an easier line of work just because you run into opposition. Fulfill your calling as a preacher of God’s truth! Follow me in fighting the good fight so that you will finish the course”* (2 Tim. 4:7).

Years ago in California, I was going through a time of unusual attacks against my ministry. On a day off, Marla and I were driving somewhere and got stopped by road construction. As we sat there waiting for the flagman, I watched a guy driving a bulldozer and thought, *“That looks like a nice line of work! He just pushes dirt around all day and at quitting time, he leaves his bulldozer and goes home.”* It was tempting, but Paul is saying, *“Don’t bail out!”* John Calvin (*Calvin’s Commentaries* [Baker], p. 255) makes the point that rather than giving up because of opposition, the more intense the opposition, the more vigorously we must fight, to ward off Satan’s attacks on the church. So don’t quit because of opposition. Preaching the Word is a fight! Defend the gospel against all attacks.

### Conclusion

So, Dave, I’m handing you the baton. Your main job is to preach the Word of God faithfully, no matter what kind of opposition you may encounter. Church (I’m including myself), our main job is to hear God’s Word with hearts eager to obey. Phillips Brooks described preaching as *“truth poured through personality”* (Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching* [Baker], 1<sup>st</sup> ed. p. 24). That means, thankfully, Dave is not me, so don’t judge him because he is different than I am. God made him that way and God will give us His message through Dave if we listen with receptive hearts.

Paul goes on to say (2 Tim. 4:6), *“the time of my departure has come.”* That’s true of us all! Very soon we’ll all stand before the Lord Jesus Christ, the Judge of the living and the dead. In view of that solemn day, it’s essential that our pastor makes it his priority to preach God’s Word. It’s also essential that we listen to the preaching of God’s Word with a view to obedience. Then on that great day when we all stand before Christ, we will hear, *“Well done, good and faithful servant!”*

## Application Questions

1. What are some reasons that biblical preaching is not being emphasized today?
2. Agree/disagree: Sound preaching of the Word is the most important factor in choosing a church? Why/why not?
3. Even Jesus warned His audience about listening well (Luke 8:18). How can a person improve his listening ability?
4. Why does Paul say that sound doctrine must be “endured”? What are some implications of this?

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