

Message #15

II Timothy 4:5-8

Years ago, Dr. Warren Wiersbe was asked what is the formula you need for getting God's blessings in ministry. His answer was very simple, yet very profound. He said the key formula for the blessings of God in ministry is to "preach, pray and plug away."

That formula is a good one and it certainly is consistent with some of the final thoughts Paul presented to Timothy. Timothy was in Ephesus and Paul was in Rome. Timothy was surrounded by impressive religion systems that were heretical and immoral. It was a big time religious world and Paul was concerned that Timothy maintained a proper focus and proper ministry.

In fact, the opening two words "but you" are very emphatic in Greek. In sharp contrast to that religious world that is not enduring sound doctrine and in sharp contrast to the ear tickling religious teachers, Paul wanted Timothy totally and completely focused on an award-winning ministry.

What Paul tells Timothy in these verses is this:

IN VIEW OF THE FACT THAT PAUL WAS ABOUT TO LEAVE THIS WORLD, HE GIVES TIMOTHY A SERIES OF COMMANDS SO THAT HE WOULD HAVE A MINISTRY THAT IS IN SHARP CONTRAST TO THE REST OF THE RELIGIOUS WORLD AND SO THAT HE WILL ENABLE HIM TO FINISH AN AWARD-WINNER.

Timothy was to preach God's Word very carefully and very accurately, regardless of what the rest of the religious world was doing. Now there we are in a section in which Paul is giving Timothy a series of final imperative commands or final imperative charges. So far we have examined five charges:

FINAL IMPERATIVE COMMAND #1 – Preach the Word. **4:2a**

FINAL IMPERATIVE COMMAND #2 – Stand on the Word. **4:2b**

FINAL IMPERATIVE COMMAND #3 – Reprove with the Word. **4:2c**

FINAL IMPERATIVE COMMAND #4 – Rebuke with the Word. **4:2d**

FINAL IMPERATIVE COMMAND #5 – Exhort with the Word. **4:2e**

Now we come to four more final imperative commands in **verse 5**:

FINAL IMPERATIVE COMMAND #6 – Be sober in all things. **4:5a**

Now I doubt seriously that this charge to "be sober" had anything to do with drinking alcohol. In fact, in Paul's first letter to Timothy, he told him to "use a little wine" (I Tim. 5:23).

The word “sober” is a particular Greek word that has to do with being calm and circumspect in one’s mind (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 303). As William Hendriksen said, this challenge has to do with being “calm, steady and sane” (*II Timothy*, p. 312). Philip Towner said this charge is really a charge for Timothy to “keep his head” in all situations. (*1-2 Timothy & Titus*, p. 205). To keep preaching the Word of God when most aren’t would require a clear, focused mind.

It was important that Timothy remain controlled and temperate and clear-headed in his mind in the midst of a religious world that was given legalism and antinomianism. It was critical that Timothy did not go the way of the sensational or sentimental or the emotional or irrational. Timothy needed to stay focused on truth with a sound, sober mind.

On the one hand there were rigid religious systems like Judaism that focused on laws and traditions, and on the other hand there were religious systems like the worship of Diana that focused on no laws and no morals. In between these two were a hodgepodge of religious notions and Timothy needed to stay solid in such a world. In the midst of this world, Timothy needed to maintain a controlled mind.

There are some ministers who fall for any new fad that comes along. Any new-fangled idea that happens to excite emotions intoxicates many ministers.

God wants His people mentally and morally alert. He wants us with alert minds, controlled minds.

FINAL IMPERATIVE COMMAND #7 – Endure hardships. 4:5b

No minister in his right mind goes out specifically looking for hardships. No minister who has any wits about him intentionally wants to suffer. But sometimes hardships and suffering come your way and when they do, a true minister will endure them.

Most people have a normal desire to escape hardships, not endure hardships. Most people strive for the life of ease, not a life of endurance. This is tough for a minister, because you have to put up with stuff that most people do not. There are some hard things you are called to do when you are in ministry. There are many things in ministry that could cause a minister to leave; but Paul tells Timothy, you endure.

The actual word “endure hardships” is a compound verb that literally means to endure bad things and distressful things that afflict you and torment you and your emotions.

Ministry is a tough business on your emotions. You have to endure things you would never have to endure in most jobs. You have to confront things you don’t want to confront. You have to take all kinds of things you don’t want to take. It would be easy to call it quits; but Paul says you endure it.

I have been in ministry now for nearly 35 years and before that I worked in different secular jobs, and I can tell you ministry demands that you endure all kinds of things you never have to endure in another job. It is a privilege to serve God and to serve God's people in a church, but frankly, it is a hard job and it is a lonely job.

There are problems in all kinds of areas and you are expected to try and solve them. If the numbers aren't good, you are to blame. If the offerings are down, you are to blame. If someone is sick, you try to help but if you don't help enough, you are to blame. If someone is struggling, you try to strengthen them. If someone is depressed, you try to encourage them. If someone is in sin, you try to win them. You have the joy of marrying people and the sorrow of burying people. You try to do your best to minister to everyone, but for some it is never good enough. People criticize the way you look and the way you teach and the way you minister. People you thought you could count on let you down and frankly, you are a human and you let yourself down.

Ministry is one tough job. If you don't succeed in every area completely, you will be blamed. Your personality flaws will be the topic and target of attack. People analyze you, they analyze your preaching. You face things you never face in a normal secular job.

In ministry there are hardships to endure; there are crosses to be borne. Paul says to Timothy, endure it. Take it. Put up with it. Keep ministering and keep preaching.

FINAL IMPERATIVE COMMAND #8 – Do the work of an evangelist. **4:5c**

When you are in ministry you can get sidetracked by so many things that you forget about witnessing for Jesus Christ. Now a Pastor/Teacher is not an evangelist, but he is to do the work of an evangelist, which means he must continually be about proclaiming the truth concerning the grace of God that is found in Jesus Christ.

It is critical that a minister understand the doctrine of grace salvation and do the work of an evangelist in proclaiming that doctrine. Every now and then I pause and ask myself, when is the last time I shared Jesus Christ with someone?

The greatest hockey player ever is said to have been Wayne Gretzky. He played 20 seasons in the NHL and still holds 60 NHL records. There is a very famous quote that was made by Wayne Gretzky that is powerful. He said, "you will miss 100% of the shots you don't take." There is so much wisdom in that statement. We will not win everyone; but if we do not do the work of an evangelist, we will win no one.

FINAL IMPERATIVE COMMAND #9 – Fulfill your ministry. **4:5d**

Now challenge to "fulfill" your ministry is one to "fill up to the full" the sacred service ministry with which God has entrusted you. The ministry is a very sacred trust from God.

The minister must let nothing stop him from heralding the Word of God and from discharging his ministry to the full level.

Now in **verses 6-8**, Paul gives Timothy three reasons for all of these commands. He gives him three reasons why he needed to obey all of these commands:

Reason #1 - Because Paul was about to die. **4:6**

William Hendricksen said this is one of the most “sublime and moving passages” one will ever read (*Ibid.*, p. 313).

The reason why Timothy needed to obey these commands is because the one man who modeled all of these things was about to leave; he was about to die.

Now this is a very intriguing text because we get to see how Paul views and how Paul faces his own death. There was no sense in him trying to ignore the subject of death because he was about to die. Now death is called “the last enemy.”

There are two ways that Paul viewed his own death:

(Death View #1) - Paul viewed death as an offering. **4:6a**

Paul could have said Timothy, you need to be faithful because I am about to suffer a horrible death that I do not deserve. But that is not what he does. He says to Timothy my death is an offering to God. In fact, it is comparable to a “drink offering.”

In Numbers 15:1-10, when a lamb was sacrificed, the drink offering, which consisted of pouring wine on the sacrifice, made the sacrifice a soothing aroma to God.

Paul viewed his own death as a drink offering that was being poured out for God. When a faithful believer dies, it is very special and precious in the sight of God. Paul had lived his life as a living sacrifice and now he would end his life as a dying sacrifice.

I have done many funerals and I have never used this description of death; it is very unusual. It is out of the O.T. in pouring out wine on the altar as a savor and offering to God. This is how Paul saw his own death. He is not afraid to die.

(Death View #2) - Paul viewed death as a departure. **4:6b**

The word “departure” is most interesting. It is a Greek word that means to loose the anchor of a ship or the guy lines of a tent so one can relocate (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 31). Paul viewed life as that which held him and bound him here for a while and he viewed death as the moment he was free.

Death is a depressing prospect for most people, but not for Paul. Paul did not view death as his demise; but as his departure. Paul saw death as a relocation. He was going to depart this world and go to be with the Lord. He viewed his own death as being loosed from one location so he could go to another location. He did not view death as the end; but as a new journey or trip. Paul would leave this world and move from earth to a new location of heaven and he would go home to be with Jesus Christ.

Jesus promised to prepare a place for His people and would take them there. Paul's moment was nearing and he was anticipating departing from this world and going to a new place. I Corinthians 2:9—it has not entered into the heart of man all that God has prepared for those who love Him.

Reason #2 - Because Paul had finished a winner. **4:7**

Paul is reflecting on 35 years of ministry. Another reason why Timothy needed to obey these commands is because this is the kind of life Paul lived and he had lived and ministered in a good, prize-winning way. Now there are three main ways Paul viewed his own life and ministry:

(Way #1) - Paul had fought a good fight. **4:7a**

Most people don't understand this about Grace Age Christianity—it is a war and we are soldiers. God wants us good soldiers. The noun "fight" contains an article, so we are not talking about just any fight; but the struggle of the Christian life fight. This is the Greek word from which we get our word "agony."

The Christian life is a struggle; it is a fight; it is a war. We are at war with our flesh; we are at war with the world and we are in war with the Devil. It is a fight. Paul had fought a good fight.

(Way #2) - Paul had finished the course. **4:7b**

The words "finish the course" are words that mean to "complete a specific course or race" (*Ibid.*, p. 123). The noun "course" is articular, which again refers to the specific course God had laid out for Paul. He had finished the course laid out for him, which ended with him being in a Roman dungeon about to die.

Paul could look back over his life and see the long grueling experience and he had finished his course.

In Acts 9:15-16 Jesus told Ananias the course He had laid out for Paul. Notice Acts 20:24—Paul had to finish the course, which meant to go through hard things.

We all have a course to run. God is providentially in control of the course and we must stay faithful and obedient so we may say, as he did that he finished the course.

(Way #3) - Paul had guarded the faith. 4:7c

The word “guard” means to carefully watch over, carefully guard and preserve something. Specifically Paul guarded “the faith.” The particular emphasis of the word “guard” is watchful care (*Ibid.*, p. 445).

God had entrusted him with the grace/faith system and Paul carefully guarded it and preserved it. He not only guarded it, he preached it and passed it on to others. He fought and he ran and he guarded the faith.

Paul had been loyal to Jesus Christ. Some aren't faithful and loyal to Jesus Christ.

Reason #3 - Because Paul would win the crown. 4:8

Paul wanted Timothy to obey these commands because he was about to die; because he had finished a winner and because he would win the crown. Truth is to most people Paul did not look like a winner. Almost all of the churches that he had founded had some problems. He was locked up in jail and most people had abandoned him. He was about to be executed and he says Timothy, I am a winner. I am going to get the crown. I have won it and so can you.

Paul would win the victor's crown and so could Timothy if he remained faithful.

Paul did not fear death nor dread it. He believed that he would get before the Lord and the Lord would give him a crown as an award for faithful service.

This “crown of righteousness” more than likely is a special reward given to faithful believers who maintained a commitment to Biblical righteousness on earth.

A key factor to a believer who will get this crown is that he is living life in a way that loves the appearance of Jesus Christ at the Rapture.

The truth is not all Christians would love it if the Lord returned today because some are involved in some shameful things. But faithful believers want the Lord to return and look forward to it.

The Christian life is not easy. The Christian ministry is demanding. It is tough and it is lonely.

But as Dr. Warren Wiersbe said, great ministries preach, pray and plug away.