

A Call to Finish Well (2 Timothy 4:1-8)

“Beginning well is a momentary thing; finishing well is a lifelong thing.”

~ Ravi Zacharias

I. The Final Charge (4:1-8)

A. Overview

The urgency and seriousness of this letter is reiterated in this final chapter. In his closing remarks to Timothy, Paul invokes the name of the Lord, utilizes eschatological language, and employs a series of commands. The apostle Paul will then reinforce this charge by appealing to his own life as a model for ministry and to the fact that his life is drawing to a close.

B. The Content of the Charge (4:1-5)

v. 1 - The “solemn charge” signifies the serious nature of this task Timothy is receiving (cf. 1 Tim 5:21; 2 Tim 2:14). The level of urgency is further heightened by Paul’s appeal to end-time events: (1) Jesus’ role as the future judge (cf. 1 Thess 4:13-16), (2) Jesus’ future coming, and (3) the arrival of the Kingdom.

“Salvation has already begun; so, too, the events that await future consummation are capable of shaping Timothy’s character and motivating him to faithful fulfillment of this charge” (Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 600).

v. 2 - In light of future events, Paul delivers five imperatives:

- “Preach the Word” - Timothy must proclaim the gospel message (cf. 1 Tim 1:15).
- “Be ready” - This term denotes a “preparedness” or “persistence”.
- “Reprove” - This task is essentially that of revealing sin.
- “Rebuke” - This term entails disciplinary action—an action generally reserved for believers who have sinned and are in need of correction.
- “Exhort” - This term seeks believers to grow in their spiritual maturity and is generally positive in tone (cf. 1 Tim 4:13). Paul qualifies this role by the attitude and manner in which the exhortation should take place.

vv. 3-4 - The effect of the future creates a sense that this time has already arrived (e.g., “for the End is upon us”). Observe the five ways in which Paul characterizes individuals of this “time”:

- “will not tolerate sound teaching” - Individuals will become bored, even annoyed, with traditional teaching. This rejection will be directed as much toward those who teach the message as it is toward the teaching itself (cf. Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 802).
- “will follow their own desires” - The self-centeredness highlighted of the future age in chapter 3 can be clearly seen in this verse. Their desires are diametrically opposed to God’s will.
- “gather teachers” - The term literally means “to accumulate or pile up”.

- “insatiable curiosity to hear new things” - A lack of discretion and a rejection of traditional thought results in apostasy.
- “turn away from truth . . . turn aside to myths” - They are attracted to deceit and foolishness (cf. 1 Tim 1:4; 4:7; Titus 1:14).

v. 5 - Unlike this future generation, Timothy is to be self-controlled, is to persevere in suffering, is to preach the good news, and is to complete the task of serving Christ.

C. Encouragement to Fulfill the Charge (4:6-8)

v. 6 - Both parts of this sentence allude to Paul’s death. The reference to “already” denotes that this action is already underway or is in process (cf. 2:18; 1 Tim 5:15).

“being poured out” - The term was used to refer to the libation that was poured out to accompany and complete a sacrifice (cf. LXX Exod 29:40; Lev 23:13; Num 4:7; 29:6). This sacrificial imagery could imply that his death was not meaningless but rather “a necessary event in the furtherance of the work of the gospel” (Towner, *The Letters*, 611).

“depart” - Rather than a reference to his release from prison, this term is used figuratively for Paul’s impending death (cf. *1 Clement* 44.5).

v. 7 - Paul utilizes three athletic metaphors to describe his life and service:

- “finished well” or “completed in the good contest” - This phrase could refer to a race, a boxing match, or a wrestling match.
- “finished the race” - Paul competed the course of human life (cf. Acts 13:25).
- “kept the faith” or “kept the rules of the race” - Unwavering in orthodoxy, Paul fully discharged his obligation with respect to the gospel.

v. 8 - The “crown of righteousness” recalls the emblem of victory for outstanding performance in athletics during the time of Paul (cf. 1 Cor 9:26). While some scholars argue that this is the prize for living a righteous life, it would seem best to see this as a gift of God’s righteousness fully experienced. Thus, “one receives the final crown of righteousness precisely because one has already received righteousness in Christ” (Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy*, 290).

Paul returns to Christ as the eschatological judge (4:1) and His future coming (i.e., “that day,” cf. 1:12, 18).

In turn, the apostle “explicitly invites ‘all’ believers to anticipate with confidence the same triumph that his experience, certainly, and hope have prepared” (Towner, *The Letters*, 617).

II. Intersect

- A. Faithfulness in our service to the Lord must be consistent even when circumstances might be difficult and our message might be rejected.

2 Timothy 1:8-14 -

- B. An effective ministry will be met with hardship.

1 Peter 4:16 -

- C. As followers of Christ, we need to keep our eyes on the finish line and on the prize that awaits us.

1 Peter 5:6-11 -

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God,
so that he may exalt you in due time.
Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.
Discipline yourselves, keep alert.
Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around,
looking for someone to devour.
Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the
world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering.
And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace,
who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen,
and establish you.
To him be the power forever and ever.
Amen.

“Afflictions add to the saints' glory. The more the diamond is cut, the more it sparkles; the heavier the saints' cross is, the heavier will be their crown.”

~ Thomas Watson