



*Ron Woodward*

When you read this, I will be in my sixth and final year in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, with my wife Nancy before she joins me in retirement (Oregon) next June. The years in Asia have given us a marvelous base for travel. Last year over Christmas and New Year's Day, for example, we spent 17 delightful days exploring the north island of New Zealand. Earlier trips have taken us to Australia and Tasmania, Vietnam, Thailand, Myanmar, Greece and Nepal, plus "stopover vacations" in Switzerland, Norway, Sweden, Finland, and St. Petersburg, Russia, on the way back to Oregon for Nancy's summer vacations.

I continue to do some writing, editing, and proofreading for Barclay Press—a ministry that I greatly enjoy. The devotionals this week are taken from Paul's second letter to Timothy, a brief epistle that's always been one of my favorite New Testament letters. (The picture above was taken at a viewpoint along U.S. Highway 101 overlooking the beach at Manzanita, Oregon.)

*BIBLE READING: 2 Timothy 1:1; Romans 1:1-4*

Question: *If someone asked you to describe the way your identity in Christ relates to the way you spend your time and energy, how would you respond?* (I will be posting a similar thought-prompting question at the beginning of each devotional this week.)

In both brief passages of Scripture, Paul describes his own identity in Christ. He says he was called to be an apostle—a *sent one*—by Christ himself. Paul’s whole identity, his whole mission in life, was defined by the fact that he knew he was “an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God” (2 Timothy 1:1). In other words, he was comfortable in allowing God to define who he was and what he was called to do.

When I was seventeen years old and in my first year of junior college, I sensed a clear call from God to devote my life to pastoral ministry in the Friends Church. Up until then I had planned to become a chemical engineer. As a result of that call—which I sensed had come from God—I spent 43 years in some phase of pastoral ministry.

Most of you who read this are not engaged in what we used to call “full-time Christian service.” Therefore, your answer to my initial question will not come quite as quickly as it would have for the apostle Paul. However, if you’re a Christian, you’ve been given spiritual gifts for ministry. (1 Corinthians 12:7-11, Ephesians 4:12). As a result, in God’s eyes you have a unique role in the world in regard to “the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 1:1). How does that affect your plans for this week?

*SONG: May the Mind of Christ, My Savior*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord Jesus, remind me today about some role I can have this week in advancing your kingdom.*

—Ron Woodward

*BIBLE READING: 2 Timothy 1:4-8*

Question: *Can you remember a time in the past when you had a much clearer vision of how you felt your life should count for Christ?*

In *The Silver Chair* (book six in *The Chronicles of Narnia*), C.S. Lewis describes the admonition that Aslan the Lion gave to Jill in regard to her task: “Here on the mountain, the air is clear and your mind is clear; as you drop down into Narnia, the air will thicken. Take great care that it does not confuse your mind.” I wonder if Timothy’s mind might have become just a bit confused, if his vision might have dimmed. It’s clear that he had a solid faith in Christ. At some previous time Paul had solemnly placed his hands on Timothy’s head or shoulders and spoke a commissioning prayer, consecrating him for service as an apostle or at least as a “second lieutenant” under Paul in apostolic ministry.

People speculate about Timothy’s personality. Some scholars suggest he was introverted and tended to be timid about aggressively presenting the gospel, leading to Paul’s admonition in verses 7-8. Nobody knows for certain, but Paul felt the need to remind Timothy of his original calling.

In our history revival meetings became a primary means of urging believers to “fan into flame” the gift once given and the passion for Christ once experienced. Such meetings provided the opportunity to rededicate one’s life to a purpose that had seemed much clearer at one time. So, how does that same “recommitment” tend to happen today? Take inventory of your own life now. Has the original vision dimmed at all?

*SONG: A Charge to Keep I Have*

*PRA YER SUGGESTION: Heavenly Father, clear the cobwebs out of my heart and mind today. Grant me a new vision and sense of calling.*

—Ron Woodward

*BIBLE READING: 2 Timothy 1:8-12, 16-17*

Question: *Can you think of a time when you felt at least a twinge of embarrassment about being a Christian or being identified with people who called themselves Christians?*

Three times in this chapter Paul makes reference to a feeling of shame in regard to the gospel.

- He strongly urges Timothy not to be ashamed about giving bold testimony in regard to the gospel or even Paul himself.
- He makes it clear that he is certainly not ashamed of Christ or his message (v. 12).
- He mentions how Onesiphorus was never ashamed about making all kinds of inquiries in a pagan city as he searched for Paul who was imprisoned in a Roman dungeon.

In Paul's day Christians were despised and ridiculed by many of the more sophisticated members of Roman society. The situation is not very different today. As a result, it's easy to feel shame if we hold strong convictions that society views as foolish superstitions or a socially harmful form of bigotry. But if we do feel ashamed of Christ or his followers, it will have a paralyzing effect on us. We'll be reluctant to admit we're Christians, will fail to defend the gospel's truth with any sense of boldness, and may even withdraw from fellowship with other believers.

The antidote to feeling ashamed of Christ is to focus more intently on him; to realize all he has done for us (vv. 9, 12); and to affirm more strongly than ever that *he indeed is the way, the truth, and the life*.

*SONG: I Know Whom I Have Believed*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, I confess to being embarrassed when so-called Christians do dumb or terrible things in your name. Please don't let that diminish my readiness to make it clear that I'm a committed Christ-follower.*

—Ron Woodward

*BIBLE READING: 2 Timothy 1:13-14*

Question: *Have you ever considered the gospel of Christ as a precious treasure that needs to be guarded and protected? If so, how do you go about guarding the treasure?*

If you needed to carry around a large amount of cash, how would you protect it? Years ago while working in Kenya with Nairobi Yearly Meeting, I had to pay in advance for a Kenyan wildlife safari on behalf of an important visitor coming from the United States. I placed a lot of Kenyan shillings in the side pocket of my pants (a seemingly safe place) and took a public bus downtown. As usual, the bus was standing room only. After reaching my destination, I realized that the money was gone: I had failed to guard the treasure!

As in Paul's time, the danger today is not so much that the gospel might be lost entirely, but rather that the message could be corrupted and drained of its power. In 2 Timothy 1:14, Paul urges Timothy to guard "the good deposit" (or "the good treasure" in the NRSV). In doing so, he probably had three things in mind: (1) that Timothy would make sure that he had a clear understanding and solid grasp of the gospel itself, (2) that his understanding would enable him to discern immediately when the gospel was being distorted, and (3) that he would be faithful in his teaching, passing on the truth of Christ in an unadulterated form (2 Timothy 2:2, 2:15). These points enable believers to discern when someone, perhaps unwittingly, begins to pass off falsehood in the name of God. So, in order to play our part in guarding the gospel, a serious and ongoing study of the Scriptures is necessary.

*SONG: And Can it Be?*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, thank you for the good news of grace! Continue to lead me to increasing clarity in understanding it.*

—Ron Woodward

*BIBLE READING: 2 Timothy 2:1-7*

Question: *What can you imagine someone saying at your memorial service about your Christian influence?*

It has often been said that Christianity is only one generation away from extinction. Paul certainly realized this and was not only determined to “pass the torch” to the next generation (Timothy), but was concerned that Timothy would take steps to ensure that the torch was passed to two more generations (the “reliable men” and the people that they would teach).

This important verse—2 Timothy 2:2—provides a guiding principle for all of us who are in some phase of Christian leadership. We who are or have been leaders in the church must shoulder this responsibility to “pass the torch.” Dedicated Sunday school teachers and Bible study leaders also sense this calling. Christian parents do as well. After having my own preaching ministry for over 40 years, I am delighted now to have the chance to hear my oldest son occasionally preach (even though he’s never been to seminary and has a career as a schoolteacher). But in a wider sense, all of us who are parents have a keen sense that our Christian influence is hugely important for our kids as they are growing up.

We as Friends have always affirmed the principle of the *universal ministry*; every believer is “in the ministry” on the basis of the spiritual gifts we been given. So, it might be helpful today to take a few moments and consider how you’re doing in “passing the torch”—a core message of the gospel.

*SONG: Pass It On*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, help me to be sensitive today to how my influence might be effective in pointing someone to you.*

—Ron Woodward

*BIBLE READING: 2 Timothy 2:8; Hebrews 12:1-2*

Question: *Have you ever realized that you've lived a whole 24 hours without one thought of God or your savior, Jesus Christ?* (If you're reading *Fruit of the Vine* as a daily habit, you may be able to answer the question confidently in the negative.)

Why do you suppose Paul exhorted Timothy to “remember Jesus Christ” (2 Timothy 2:8)? Two thoughts come to mind. First, I think of Colossians 3:2: “Set your minds on things above.” Practice the presence of God. Keep Jesus Christ in mind throughout the day in whatever you're doing. Send him flash prayers. Thank him for little things. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer has suggested in *Life Together*, visualize Jesus Christ between you and everyone you encounter throughout the day!

Secondly, I think of Hebrews 12:1-2. Paul reminds Timothy that Jesus is “descended from David.” In other words, it's a reminder that Jesus was fully human while on earth. He was tempted in all points like we are, and yet he was without sin. So, as you “run the race,” look to Jesus who, in spite of the unimaginable suffering that it cost him to purchase our salvation, “endured the cross, scorning its shame.”

Perhaps Timothy needed to prepare himself for all of the opposition and persecution that the Roman Empire was prepared to raise against him. Perhaps he needed to think more about what Christ suffered for him. To the Thessalonians Paul wrote, “May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance” (2 Thessalonians 3:5). That's a good word for us as well!

*SONG: Beneath the Cross of Jesus*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Dear Heavenly Father, help me today to find ways to focus and refocus on Christ and all he's done for me.*

—Ron Woodward

*BIBLE READING: 2 Timothy 2:11-13*

Question: *Since you first became a Christian, have you ever been troubled by the fear that you might lose your salvation?*

Bible scholars suggest that verses 11-13 were probably from an early hymn sung by the first century church. In any event, Paul felt that these four brief statements were worth quoting. The first two stanzas comfort anyone who has surrendered fully to Christ and has been willing to follow him through times of suffering. The third stanza is a stern warning to those who start out as Christ-followers but give up completely and turn their backs on him when hard times occur.

The fourth stanza, while a great encouragement to me, is subject to different interpretations. One Reformed (Calvinistic) writer feels that the third and fourth stanzas say essentially the same thing—they are both warnings. This writer says that “if we are faithless,” Christ remains faithful, not to us but to his covenant which calls for judgment and eternal punishment for those who are *faithless* (or without faith).

My understanding—and that of many biblical scholars—is that the Lord is telling us if we are *unfaithful* (a better translation, in my opinion) to Christ in any number of ways, he remains consistently faithful to us. In other words, the verse is a witness to the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Hence, if we know that we’ve been born again and have the assurance of eternal life (1 John 5:11-13) and maintain our keen desire to serve him, we will never need to fear losing our salvation when we “blow it” spiritually. I earnestly believe that God desires his adopted children *know* that they have eternal life!

*SONG: Jesus, I Am Resting, Resting*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, I thank you for giving me a deep assurance of eternal life and giving it to me through your Word and your Spirit..*

—Ron Woodward