

The Finish Line

History of the Marathon from the Greek Historian Herodotus..

- Philippedes ran 150 miles from Athens to Sparta to ask for help against the Persians.
- He then ran the 150 miles back.
- Fought a battle at Marathon against the Persians
- Ran another 25+ miles after the battle to let the town know they won.
 - Then he died from exhaustion.

Why would someone run themselves to death? He believed in the cause! The risk was worth the reward (saving his country).

Paul could see the finish line, and like Phlippedes, it would cost him his life.

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time for my departure is close. ⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ There is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me, but to all those who have loved his appearing.

2 Timothy 4:6-8

I did not know that Paul's Final Last Words would be my last series with you all when I began this several months back... While my upcoming transition has definitely given me pause & caused reflection I must confess there is a world of difference between my situation & Paul's.

"...and the time for my departure is close." V. 6b

The word *departure* (2 Tim. 4:6) is a beautiful word that has many meanings...

- The word also means "to take down a tent." This parallels 2 Corinthians 5:1–8, where Paul compared the death of believers to the taking down of a tent (tabernacle), in order to receive a permanent, glorified body ("house not made with hands"—a glorified body, not a "mansion" in heaven).

- *Departure* also has the meaning of “loosing a prisoner.” Paul was facing release, not execution!
 - He had embraced the reality of his situation not because he wanted to die but because he knew that he had lived well!
 - He had no regrets!

Nathan Hale (6 June 1755 – 22 September 1776) was an American soldier and spy for the Continental Army during the American Revolutionary War. He volunteered for an intelligence-gathering mission in New York City **but** was captured by the British and executed.

- “I only **regret that I have but one life** to lose for **my country.**”

Finish well.

So what? Why is it important that we finish well?

- OJ Simpson. One of the greatest running backs of all time. His bust is still up in Canton Ohio at the NFL Hall of Fame. Yet, when people look at it they see more than “incredible football player.”
 - We should all want to leave behind a legacy that honors God & our family name.

I guess we need to define what it means to “finish well.”

- Multi-millionaire when you die?
- Have 30 grandkids & 101 great-grandkids like John & Christine are going for?
- Name on a fortune 500 company board of directors?
- Football stadium named after you?
- Find the cure for cancer?

Those things are not necessarily bad. But I believe there is an even higher way to finish that doesn’t necessarily exclude the other things mentioned above...

- Spiritual Legacy

What will it benefit a man if he gains the whole world yet loses his life? Or what will a man give in exchange for his life? Matthew 16:26

One of the biggest blessings of my ministry here has been the support I have received from those who have been here the longest. Johnny Mehaffey, Frank Wartick, Mel Johnson, were all men who have/had been members here for 40+ years! Johnny's grandparents donated the land for this church building to be built!

- They could have easily have said "We want it our way." But they didn't...
 - They cared about the future of FSBC. The spiritual future of El Dorado!
 - Their sacrifice & generosity, their HEART, is to be honored.
 - What a perfect example of what it means to Finish Well.
 - No scandals. Just selflessness so the Gospel message would be proclaimed.
 - By the way every one of those men had amazing wives by their side that whole time.

Now What? What does it take to Finish Well?

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. V. 7

- Intentionality

- We need to establish in our hearts that we are going to serve the Lord & Finish Well.
- Determination
 - It's going to be tough! Are you willing to stay the course?
- Courage
 - Satan doesn't want you to succeed. He's going to throw everything he can at you to knock you off the way the Lord is wanting you to go.
 - You're going to encounter resistance.
 - Christ's path is not popular.

Conclusion:

“Is your life preparing you for death? Do you share Paul's confident expectation of meeting Christ? The good news is that the heavenly reward is not just for the giants of the faith, like Paul, but for all who are eagerly looking forward to Jesus' second coming.” (Life Application)

Finish Well.

He looked around (v. 6). Paul realized that his time was short. He was on trial in Rome and had been through the first hearing (2 Tim. 4:17). But Paul knew that the end was near. However, he did not tremble at the prospect of death! The two words “offered” and “departure” (2 Tim. 4:6) tell us of his faith and confidence. “Offered” means “poured out on the altar as a drink-offering.” He used the same picture in Philippians 2:7–8. In effect Paul was saying, “Caesar is not going to kill me. I am going to give my life as a sacrifice to Jesus Christ. I have been a living sacrifice, serving Him since the day I was saved. Now I will complete that sacrifice by laying down my life for Him.”

The word *departure* (2 Tim. 4:6) is a beautiful word that has many meanings. It means “to hoist anchor and set sail.” Paul looked on death as a release from the world, an opportunity to “set sail” into eternity. The word also means “to take down a tent.” This parallels 2 Corinthians 5:1–8, where Paul compared the death of believers to the taking down of a tent (tabernacle), in order to receive a permanent, glorified body (“house not made with hands”—a glorified body, not a “mansion” in heaven).

Departure also has the meaning of “loosing a prisoner.” Paul was facing release, not execution! “The unyoking of an ox” is another meaning of this word. Paul had been in hard service for many years. Now his Master would unyoke him and promote him to higher service.

Paul looked back (v. 7). He summed up his life and ministry. Two of the images here are athletic: like a determined wrestler or boxer, he had fought a good fight; and, like a runner, he had finished his lifelong race victoriously. He had kept the rules and deserved a prize (see Acts 20:24; Phil. 3:13–14). The third image is that of a steward who had faithfully guarded his boss’ deposit: “I have kept the faith” (2 Tim. 4:7). Paul used this image often in his pastoral letters.

It is heartening to be able to look back and have no regrets. Paul was not always popular, nor was he usually comfortable; but he remained faithful. That is what really counted.

Paul looked ahead (v. 8). A Greek or Roman athlete who was a winner was rewarded by the crowds and usually got a laurel wreath or a garland of oak leaves. The word for “crown” is *stephanos*—the victor’s crown; we get our name Stephen from this word. (The kingly crown is *diadema*, from which we get “diadem.”) However, Paul would not be given a fading crown of leaves; his would be a crown of righteousness that would never fade.

Jesus Christ is the “righteous Judge” who always judges correctly. Paul’s judges in Rome were not righteous. If they were, they would have released him. How many times Paul had been tried in one court after another, yet now he faced his last Judge—his Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. When you are ready to face the Lord, you need not fear the judgment of men.

The crown of righteousness is God’s reward for a faithful and righteous life; and our incentive for faithfulness and holiness is the promise of the Lord’s appearing. Because Paul loved His appearing and looked for it, he lived righteously and served faithfully. This is why Paul used the return of Jesus Christ as a basis for his admonitions in this chapter (see 2 Tim. 4:1).

We are not called to be apostles; yet we can win the same crown that Paul won. If we love Christ's appearing, live in obedience to His will, and do the work He has called us to do, we will be crowned.¹

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. (4:6)

Like "but you" at the beginning of the previous verse, **For I** is emphatic. There was a special urgency for Timothy to perform his ministry with steadfastness, because Paul's ministry was about to end.

Being poured out as a drink offering is a figure taken from the Old Testament sacrificial system. As commanded in the book of Numbers, the people of Israel, as well as Gentiles who lived among them, were first to give a burnt offering of one of the prescribed animals, then a grain offering, and finally a drink offering (15:1–10). While writing Timothy, Paul **already** was **being poured out as a drink offering**, his final offering to the Lord who had sacrificed Himself for the apostle and for all people in all ages. And just as he had offered himself to the Lord as "a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God" (Rom. 12:1) while he was alive, he now offered himself to the Lord in his death. He was "ministering as a priest the gospel of God, that [his] offering of the Gentiles might become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit" (15:16).

Paul's speaking of his death **as a drink offering** also may have referred to the type of execution he expected to suffer. Because Roman citizens could not be crucified, he knew that he likely would be beheaded, literally pouring out his own blood for the Lord. Some five years earlier he had written believers in Philippi, "But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all" (Phil. 2:17).

Battle scars are the mark of the faithful soldier, and Paul had them in abundance. He had been "beaten times without number,... received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes,... [and been] beaten with rods." At least once he had been stoned, three times he was shipwrecked. He had spent "a night and a day... in the deep," and had "been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure" (2 Cor. 11:23–27). But the supreme mark of the faithful soldier is to give his life in battle; and that mark the apostle was now willingly prepared to receive.

He always had been ready to make the ultimate sacrifice, but now the possibility was about to become reality: **the time of my departure has come**. As in verse 3, *kairos* does not here refer to chronological but epochal **time**. Paul was speaking of the final *period* of his life and ministry, not the final hours or days. He obviously expected to live a few more months before his **departure**, because he asked Timothy to "bring the cloak which I left at Troas with Carpus, and the books, especially the parchments" (v. 13), and to "make every effort to come before

¹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [*The Bible exposition commentary*](#) (Vol. 2, pp. 255–256). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

winter” (v. 21). He had the comforting hope of once more seeing Timothy face-to-face before he died.

When the apostle was first brought to trial in Rome, none of his fellow believers stood by him (v. 16). This great man of God was the spiritual progenitor, directly or indirectly, of perhaps most of the redeemed souls in the Gentile world. But during his time of greatest personal need, he sat friendless in a dark, filthy prison, facing Nero’s certain sentence of death. He was not bitter but, like his Lord, prayed for his persecutors that the injustice might “not be counted against them” (v. 16). “The Lord stood with me, and strengthened me,” he affirmed, “in order that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was delivered out of the lion’s mouth. The Lord will deliver me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom” (vv. 17–18).

Has come translates an intensive perfect of *ephistēmi*, indicating that **the time** of Paul’s **departure** had arrived but had a continuing effect. The clouds of death had come and still hovered over him.

But for Paul, they were not dark clouds, because death held no peril for him. Like Peter, he viewed death simply as “the laying aside of [his] earthly dwelling” (2 Peter 1:14). It was a move from his demanding and painful life on earth to the infinitely glorious life of peace and rest to come, when he would forever be with the Lord.

Departure is from *anulusis*, which has a variety of meanings. William Barclay explains four of those meanings, each of which gives a vivid picture of the way in which the apostle viewed his last days.

(a) It is the word for unyoking an animal from the shafts of the cart or the plough. Death to Paul was rest from toil. He would be glad to lay the burden down.... (b) It is the word for loosening bonds or fetters. Death for Paul was a liberation and a release. He was to exchange the confines of a Roman prison for the glorious liberty of the courts of heaven. (c) It is the word for loosening the ropes of a tent. For Paul it was time to strike camp again. Many a journey he had made across the roads of Asia Minor and of Europe. Now he was setting out on his last and his greatest journey: he was taking the road that led to God. (d) It is the word for loosening the mooring ropes of a ship. Many a time Paul had sailed the Mediterranean, and had felt the ship leave the harbour for the deep waters. Now he is to launch out into the greatest deep of all; he is setting sail to cross the waters of death to arrive in the haven of eternity. (*The Letters to Timothy, Titus and Philemon* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1957], 209)

For a Christian, death is exchanging the burden of earthly life for the eternal joy of heaven (cf. Phil. 1:21).

Paul did not die like Napoleon, Gandhi, Talleyrand, or any other person—no matter how successful and acclaimed—who does not know Christ. The apostle faced his **departure** with no feeling of futility or hopelessness or despair but with the divine assurance that his real life was only about to begin. Just as he had faced earthly living without fear, he faced earthly dying without fear. Because he abode so faithfully in the will of his sovereign God, he could echo the words of Jesus, who said, “No one has taken [my life] away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative” (John 10:18). As the Lord Jesus had commanded, Paul took up his own cross and never laid it down, in the certain knowledge that “this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this perishable will have put on the

imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality,” he would exult with Isaiah that “Death is swallowed up in victory,” and cry out with Hosea, “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” (1 Cor. 15:53–55; cf. Isa. 25:8; Hos. 13:14).

THE PAST: THE COURSE, IN WHICH HE WAS FAITHFUL

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; (4:7)

Paul next reflects on his life and service since salvation. It was a life in which he breathed every breath and lived every moment in service of his Lord, a life in which no sacrifice was too great and no commitment too demanding.

Perhaps Theodore Roosevelt had that verse in mind when he wrote,

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbled or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly; who errs, and comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; who does actually try to do the deed; who knows the great enthusiasm, the great devotion, and spends himself in a worthy cause; who, at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly.

Far better is it to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checked by failure, than to rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy nor suffer much because they live in a gray twilight that knows neither victory nor defeat. (From speech on the strenuous life, Hamilton Club, Chicago, April 10, 1899)

Paul lived his life doing great things in the power of God. As reflected in the English, **have fought, have finished, and have kept** (Like “has come” at the end of v. 6) translate intensive perfect verbs, indicating completed action that has continuing results. Paul had no regret, no sense of unfulfillment or incompleteness. After the Lord took control, he truly had lived life to the fullest. Everything God had called and enabled him to do, he did. He left no unfinished symphony. There can be no greater satisfaction—and certainly no more glorious way to end the Christian life—than to know, as he did, that you have fully accomplished all that the Lord has called you to do. That is precisely what he was asking Timothy to do: “fulfill your ministry” (v. 5).

We cannot help wondering how we too can live our lives in that way. How was Paul able to make such a claim? What was the motive of his astounding spiritual faithfulness and achievement? He himself gives the answer in the three short clauses of verse 7.

Five principles are expressed or implied in this verse that were foundational to Paul’s life and service. **First, he recognized that he was in a spiritual struggle.** **Have fought** is from the verb *agōnizomai* and **fight** is from the related noun *agōn*. As one would guess, they are the source of our English “agonizing” and “agony.” In New Testament times, both words were commonly used in reference to athletic contests, in particular public games such as the famous Greek olympics, which had originated several centuries earlier. The words also were used of other types of struggles that involve great effort and energy, whether physical or spiritual.

Paul had used the same basic phrase in his first letter to Timothy, admonishing him to “fight the good fight of faith” (6:12). He reminded Corinthian believers that “everyone who competes

[*agōnizomai*] in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable” (1 Cor. 9:25). The same verb (Italicized in the following references) was used by Jesus in calling men to “*strive* to enter by the narrow door” (Luke 13:24). In his letter to the church at Colossae, Paul testified that “for this purpose also I labor, *striving* according to His power, which mightily works within me” (1:29) and praised Epaphras, “one of your number, a bond-slave of Jesus Christ, [who] sends you his greetings, always *laboring earnestly* for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God” (4:12). We are to “labor and *strive*,” he says, “because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers” (1 Tim. 4:10).

The faithful and productive Christian life is nothing less than a fierce and relentless struggle “against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12). Commenting on that verse, William Hendricksen writes,

It had been a fight against Satan; against the principalities and powers, the world rulers of this darkness in the heaven lies; against Jewish and pagan vice and violence; against Judaism among the Galatians; against fanaticism among the Thessalonians; against contention, fornication, and litigation among the Corinthians; against incipient Gnosticism among the Ephesians and Colossians; against fightings without and fears within; and last but not least, against the law of sin and death operating within his own heart. (*New Testament Commentary: Expositions of the Pastoral Epistles* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1965], 315)

The faithful Christian constantly battles his own flesh, his own sin, his own ignorance and laziness. He even has to battle temptation to do things that are perfectly good in themselves in place of other things that are immeasurably more important. Every day there are new fronts on which the struggle continues.

Second, Paul recognized that the cause he pursued was noble. He had a tremendously elevated sense of dedication to the divine cause in which he was engaged. He was fighting **the good fight**. *Kalos* (**good**) refers to that which is intrinsically good, good in itself, without any qualification. It also was used of that which is inherently and genuinely beautiful and of things that fully conform to their basic nature and purpose. Elsewhere in the New Testament it is used of many such things. In Matthew it is used of good fruit (3:10), of a good tree (12:33), of good ground (13:8), and of good fish (13:48). Paul uses it of God’s law (Rom. 7:16) and of all His creatures (1 Tim. 4:4).

The apostle was extremely perplexed that so many believers were seeking “after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:21). To the complete contrary, he considered his own impressive religious credentials to be rubbish (Phil. 3:4–7) and, in fact, counted “all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ” (v. 8). Nothing mattered but the cause of Christ.

It was a great satisfaction for the apostle to be able to say that Timothy “is doing the Lord’s work, as I also am” (1 Cor. 16:10). Despite his limitations, this younger colaborer was following in the apostle’s footsteps, selflessly serving, expending himself in the cause of Christ, faithfully proclaiming the divine “word of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:19).

Christians are not saved simply or even primarily for their own sakes. We are first of all saved for the glory of God and to fulfill His holy calling to be His witnesses to an unsaved world (Matt. 28:19–20; 2 Tim. 1:9; Heb. 3:1). That noblest of all callings to the noblest of all causes should inspire every believer to “seek first His kingdom and His righteousness” (Matt. 6:33). It should motivate us to yield every gift and talent, every hour and opportunity, every resource and all of our energy to lifelong service in the will and power of our Lord.

Third, Paul recognized the need to avoid wandering, to have the self-discipline to stay on his divinely appointed **course** until it was finished. From spiritual birth until the time God calls us into His divine presence, that is our divine mission.

Ted Williams, the famed baseball player, reportedly had such powers of concentration that, when he was standing at bat, he could not be distracted even by firecrackers thrown at his feet. He allowed nothing to interfere with his unusual concentration at that moment. That is the degree of self-discipline for which every child of God should yearn in serving Him. The writer of Proverbs wisely admonishes: “Let your eyes look directly ahead, and let your gaze be fixed straight in front of you. Watch the path of your feet, and all your ways will be established. Do not turn to the right nor to the left; turn your foot from evil” (Prov. 4:25–27).

Course is from *dromos*, which literally refers to the running of a race and metaphorically was used of fulfilling a lifetime career, occupation, or military service. During his first sermon in the synagogue at Antioch of Pisidia, Paul spoke of John the Baptist, saying, “And while John was completing his course [*dromos*], he kept saying, ‘What do you suppose that I am? I am not He. But behold, one is coming after me the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie’ ” (Acts 13:25). Using the same word to describe his own calling, the apostle some years later assured the elders from Ephesus, “I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, in order that I may finish my course [*dromos*], and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24).

The writer of Hebrews warns of the two major hindrances that relentlessly threaten to deflect believers from their Godgiven **course**. “Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us,” he says, “let us also lay aside every *encumbrance*, and the *sin* which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us” (Heb. 12:1, emphasis added).

Because the writer distinguishes encumbrances from sin, they obviously are not the same thing. An encumbrance is not evil in itself. Normally, it may be harmless or even worthwhile. The danger and harm come when such things hinder our service to Christ. They weigh us down as we are running, they distract our attention when we should be concentrating, they move our focus from the Lord’s work to something else, and they sap energy that should be dedicated entirely to Him. Anything unnecessary that we allow in our lives becomes a spiritual encumbrance. Paul called such things “wood, hay, straw” (1 Cor. 3:12). They are not bad but have very limited value.

The second hindrance mentioned in Hebrews 12:1 is more obvious and much worse. Sin does not merely deflect us from the Lord’s work but often robs us of headway already gained. If the sin is unusually serious, the Lord Himself may pull us from the race, because our testimony and effectiveness have been undermined (cf. 1 Cor. 11:30; 1 John 5:16). The great apostle was very much aware of that potential threat to his own ministry. He had no fear of such things as “bonds and afflictions,” as long as he could “finish [his] course, and the ministry which [he]

received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:23–24). But he had great concern that he might somehow do something or fail to do something for which the Lord would find him unworthy of his calling. “Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim,” he said. “I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified” (1 Cor. 9:26–27).

The writer of Hebrews goes on to point us to the only protection against encumbrances and sin, namely, fixing “our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (12:2).

Even after Jesus questioned Peter’s love and warned of his coming afflictions for the sake of the gospel, the disciple still did not have his eyes fixed on the Master. Instead he became curious about John, saying, “Lord,... what about this man?” and received another rebuke: “Jesus said to him, ‘If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me!’ ” (John 21:22). In other words, if the Lord allowed John to live until the Second Coming, that was none of Peter’s concern. Peter’s concern should have been about his own faithfulness.

Rudyard Kipling’s famous poem “If” is not Christian, but it captures the essence of the mature life, the life that keeps everything in its right perspective and priority.

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don’t deal in lies,
Or being hated don’t give way to hating,
And yet don’t look too good, nor talk too wise;

If you can dream—and not make dreams your master;
If you can think—and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you’ve spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build ’em up with worn-out tools;...

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with Kings—nor lose the common touch;
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you;
If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds’ worth of distance run—
Yours is the Earth and everything that’s in it,
and—which is more—you’ll be a Man, my son!

A fourth foundational principle of Paul's life was recognizing the need to treasure time. We have only the time allotted by God, and none of us knows when it will run out. Every Christian life runs by His divine timetable and against His divine clock. We do not know how long He will hold open the door of a given opportunity or of our entire time of service. "Be careful how you walk," Paul therefore counsels, "not as unwise men, but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil" (Eph. 5:16). God gives us many things without limit—His love, His grace, and many others. But His gift of time is strictly measured.

In 490 B.C., the Athenians won a crucial and decisive battle over the forces of King Darius I of Persia on a plain near the small Greek coastal village of Marathon. One of the Greek soldiers ran nonstop from the battlefield to Athens to carry the news of victory. But he ran with such unreserved effort that he fell dead at the feet of those to whom he delivered the message. The marathon races that are so popular today are named for that battlefield. They also are a tribute to that soldier, the length of the run being based on the approximate distance (Just over 26 miles) he ran in his last maximum effort for his country. He had completed his course, and there is no nobler way for a man to die.

A fifth foundational principle of Paul's life and ministry was recognizing his sacred trust regarding the Word of God, the controlling element of everything he said and did. We should all want to be able to say with the apostle's truthfulness and sincerity, **I have kept the faith.**

Have kept is from *tērēō*, which carries the various ideas of watching over, heeding, or preserving. Jesus used the verb three times in His high priestly prayer. He lovingly asked His Father to "*keep* them [His people] in Thy name, the name which Thou hast given Me, that they may be one, even as We are," remembering that "while I was with them, I was *keeping* them in Thy name which Thou hast given Me; and I guarded them, and not one of them perished." A few verses later, He asked that the Father would "*keep* them from the evil one" (John 17:11–12, 15, emphasis added; cf. 1 John 5:18). Jude speaks of believers as those "who are the called, beloved in God the Father, and *kept* for Jesus Christ" (Jude 1:1, emphasis added).

On our part, keeping **the faith** involves "being diligent to *preserve* the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3; emphasis added) and *keeping* ourselves "free from sin" (1 Tim. 5:22). Using a different verb but giving the same admonition, Paul charged Timothy to guard the Word of God, which had been entrusted to him (1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 1:14). Regardless of the obstacles or cost, we are to preserve and proclaim the immeasurable treasure of the Word.

The first requirement for keeping that treasure is to recognize that it *is* a treasure. A beautiful and touching story is told of a young French girl who had been born blind. After she learned to read by touch, a friend gave her a Braille copy of Mark's gospel. She read it so much that her fingers became calloused and insensitive. In an effort to regain her feeling, she cut the skin from the ends of her fingers. Tragically, however, her callouses were replaced by permanent and even more insensitive scars. She sobbingly gave the book a good-bye kiss, saying, "Farewell, farewell, sweet word of my heavenly Father." In doing so, she discovered that her lips were even more sensitive than her fingers had been, and she spent the rest of her life reading her great treasure with her lips. Would that every Christian had such an appetite for the Word of God!

In 1904, William Borden, a member of the Borden dairy family, finished high school in Chicago and was given a world cruise as a graduation present. Particularly while traveling through the Near East and Far East, he became heavily burdened for the lost. After returning

home, he spent seven years at Princeton University, the first four in undergraduate work and the last three in seminary. While in school, he penned these words in the back of his Bible: “No reserves.” Although his family pleaded with him to take control of the business, which was foundering, he insisted that God’s call to the mission field had priority. After disposing of his wealth, he added “No retreat” after “No reserves.” On his way to China to witness to Muslims there, he contracted cerebral meningitis in Egypt and died within a month. After his death, someone looking through his Bible discovered these final words: “No regrets.” He knew that the Lord does not require success, only faithfulness.

We should be constantly aware that our lives are a spiritual struggle, because that is what God’s Word repeatedly teaches. We know we are engaged in the most noble of causes, because that is how the Word defines it. We are to labor with self-discipline, because that is what the Word requires. We know our time is precious and limited and we know our calling is a sacred trust, because that is what the Word declares to be true.

THE FUTURE: THE CROWN, WITH WHICH HE WILL BE REWARDED

in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing. (4:8)

Loipos, translated **in the future**, refers generally to what remains, that which is left to come. What yet remained for Paul, after the past and present were finished, would be by far the most glorious part of his life in Christ.

Paul had the certain, Spirit-inspired assurance that **in the future there [was] laid up for [him] the crown of righteousness**. After he had fought the good fight, finished the course, and kept the faith, he would be given the victor’s reward.

Laid up carries the idea of being safely stored and carefully guarded. A certain part of their heavenly treasure is stored up in advance by believers themselves. “Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven,” Jesus commands, “where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal” (Matt. 6:20). In his first letter to Timothy, Paul counsels him to instruct the people in his congregation “to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed” (1 Tim. 6:18–19).

Although he had not met Jesus during His earthly ministry, Paul doubtless had heard of his Lord’s promise “Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great” (Matt. 5:11–12). Christ also said that His Father will re-ward those who give, pray, and fast in secret—that is, sincerely rather than for the notice and praise of men (Matt. 6:4, 6, 18). Christ will, in fact, join His Father in dispensing those rewards, “for the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and will then recompense every man according to his deeds” (Matt. 16:27). Jesus’ promise was not a new revelation but was a quotation from Psalm 62:12—“And loving kindness is Thine, O Lord, for Thou dost recompense a man according to his work.” The writer of Hebrews tells us that “he who comes to God [not

only] must believe that He is, [but also must believe] that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him” (Heb. 11:6).

No writer of Scripture more forcefully proclaimed the truth that salvation is entirely by God’s grace working through our faith than did the apostle Paul. Yet no other writer of Scripture more joyously anticipated the reward he one day would receive from the hand of the Lord who had saved and sustained him by grace. He continually pressed “on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:14).

This reward will be based more on our motives than our accomplishments. The writer of Proverbs asks rhetorically, “Does He not consider it who weighs the hearts? And does He not know it who keeps your soul? And will He not render to man according to his work?” (Prov. 24:12). Selfishly motivated good deeds may be of great help to other people and may be used by God for His glory, but they will merit no reward for the doer.

On the other hand, good work that is sincerely intended but not completed through no fault of the doer will merit a sincere doer’s reward, because it is the heart that God weighs. William Borden accomplished virtually none of the ministry he had envisioned, having been cut off by death even before he reached his field of service. But his final declaration of “No regrets” was well founded in the assurance that he had genuinely sought and faithfully obeyed the Lord’s will.

Paul had no regrets. He did not claim perfection. “I am conscious of nothing against myself,” he said, “yet I am not by this acquitted” (1 Cor. 4:4). Nevertheless, he had absolute confidence that God had **laid up for [him] the crown of righteousness**.

Crown is from *stephanos*, which has the literal meaning of surrounding and was used of plaited wreaths or garlands that were placed on the heads of dignitaries, military victors, and winners of athletic contests as a mark of great honor. It was a *stephanos* of thorns that Pilate’s soldiers placed on Jesus’ head as they mockingly hailed Him as “King of the Jews!” (Matt. 29).

Stephanos perhaps most commonly was used of the wreath placed on the heads of winning athletes, much as medals are placed around the necks of Olympic champions today. It was the only prize (cf. 2 Tim. 2:5) ancient athletes received but was cherished as a great treasure. Yet, they run “to receive a perishable wreath [*stephanos*],” Paul said, “but we an imperishable” (1 Cor. 9:25).

Of righteousness translates the single Greek noun *dikaïosunē*, which is here a genitive. Linguistically, it could be either a genitive of source, meaning that **righteousness** is the source of the crown, or a genitive of apposition, in which case **righteousness** describes the nature of the crown. As noted above, a believer’s heavenly reward is based to some extent on his faithfulness, making possible a genitive of source. But in this context it seems more appropriate to take **righteousness** as an appositive, describing the crown. It is the crown of eternal righteousness—the very righteousness of the Redeemer granted in full perfection to the glorified believer.

Certain rewards that believers will receive or not receive will be individual, based on their own faithfulness. Summarizing the truths of the parable of the talents, Jesus said, “To everyone who has shall more be given, and he shall have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away” (Matt. 25:29). Paul teaches that “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10). In his previous

letter to believers at Corinth, he had explained that “each man’s work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work. If any man’s work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire” (1 Cor. 3:13–15).

But Paul is here speaking of the **crown of righteousness** with which every believer will be crowned. James speaks of it as a “crown of life” (James 1:12), and Peter as “the unfading crown of glory” (1 Peter 5:4). In the parable of the landowner who hired men at different times throughout the day and paid them all the same wage (Matt. 20:1–16), Jesus explains that every believer will share equally in eternal life and eternal righteousness.

He also assures us that “blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied” (Matt. 5:6). Our satisfaction will come from the very thing for which we seek, **righteousness** itself being the reward of those who seek it. It is “the hope of righteousness” for which believers eagerly wait “through the Spirit, by faith” (Gal. 5:5), as we look “for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13). “The kingdom of God is... righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17, emphasis added). **Righteousness** is that which, by the Lord’s gracious provision, will one day be our harvest (2 Cor. 9:10) and our clothing (Rev. 19:8). It could not be otherwise, because “we know that, when [Christ] appears, we shall be like Him” (1 John 3:2).

When we believed in Christ as Savior and Lord, He imputed His righteousness to us (Rom. 4:6, 11); and as we live out our lives in Christ, His Holy Spirit works practical righteousness in us and through us (Rom. 6:13, 19; 8:4; Eph. 5:9; 1 Peter 2:24). Yet because of sin, which clings to us like an old dirty garment, we must battle against unrighteousness. It is only at the completion of that battle that His righteousness will be perfected in us, when we receive the very **crown of righteousness** from the Lord’s own hands. It is the victor’s wreath, Paul says, **which the Lord Himself, the righteous Judge, will award... on that day.**

Paul has referred to **that day** two other times in this letter. He said, “For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day” (1:12). A few verses later he prayed that his beloved Onesiphorus would “find mercy from the Lord on that day” (v. 18).

He is speaking, of course, of the **day** of Christ’s return in particular, the **day** of resurrection and rapture, when “the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:16–17). In that glorious **day**, “we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, ‘Death is swallowed up in victory’ ” (1 Cor. 15:51–54).

The apostle admonished the church in Philippi, “Do all things without grumbling or disputing; that you may prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights

in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that *in the day of Christ* I may have cause to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain” (Phil. 2:14–16, emphasis added).

The glorious prospect of receiving God’s crown of righteousness not only belongs to Paul **but also belongs to all who have loved His appearing**. Again the apostle uses a perfect tense (**have loved**), indicating the accomplishment of something in the past that has continuing effects.

“Love is from God,” John says, “and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God” (1 John 4:7). Conversely, he goes on to explain, “The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love” (v. 8). Love of God is so absolutely essential that “if anyone does not love the Lord,” Paul says, “let him be accursed” (1 Cor. 16:22).

In other words, a person who does not love God has no claim on God, either for salvation or for reward. And every true believer *will* love God and the things of God, because love is the supreme and necessary mark of salvation. When people become Christians, they come to love God. The regenerated believer is given a new heart, a new will, and a new spiritual attitude, all of which will be expressed in love, because “the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Rom. 5:5). There are no exceptions.

Likewise, all believers will love **His [Christ’s] appearing**, because they look forward to coming into His divine presence, where they will live and serve throughout eternity. Because our true “citizenship is in heaven,... we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Phil.3:20).

Paul was not speaking from pride. As much as any saint who has ever lived, he knew that every good thing he had and did came by the grace of God. “For this purpose also I labor,” he explained to the church at Colossae, “striving according to His power, which mightily works within me” (Col. 1:29). **He was not taking credit for himself but was acknowledging that by the grace and power of God, working through the human faithfulness that the Lord requires, his life was coming to a victorious end.** On the basis of the Lord’s own promise, he expected one day soon to hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matt. 25:21).

Friends and Foes

12

Make every effort to come to me soon; for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service. But

Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. When you come bring the cloak which I left at Troas with Carpus, and the books, especially the parchments. Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Be on guard against him yourself, for he vigorously opposed our teaching. At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me, in order that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was delivered out of the lion's mouth. The Lord will deliver me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus. Erastus remained at Corinth, but Trophimus I left sick at Miletus. Make every effort to come before winter. Eubulus greets you, also Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brethern.

The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you. (4:9–22)

A business, government, or large organization cannot function properly or survive without networking. Suppliers, customers, employees, stockholders, and many others are necessarily involved. There is no better illustration of this principle than the human body with its wonderfully varied and intricately related parts. Paul used that figure in his first letter to the immature and disunified church at Corinth to teach them what unity and harmony in the body of Christ must be like (1 Cor. 12:14–27).

It is therefore no surprise that the last part of Paul's last letter focuses on other people, the many friends and a few foes, who influenced his ministry in one way or another. The great apostle knew they were involved in everything he did, and in these closing verses he recognizes and remembers this network of people. Even he could not effectively minister alone. He was fully aware of his distinctive calling and authority as an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ (See, e.g., Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:1; 1 Tim. 1:1; 2 Tim. 1:1). But he did not presume to work for the Lord independent of other believers or try to meet every need and accomplish every task himself. He had teams of fellow workers, fellow servants, fellow preachers and teachers in whom he placed great trust for mutual ministry. Most of them were faithful collaborators, "valiant men [and women] whose hearts God had touched" (1 Sam. 10:26).

Some of the people were old friends and some were new, some were consistent in their service and some were not, some were always ready to volunteer and some were never to be found, some were willing to make any sacrifice for the Lord, and others were not willing. Quite a few were unbelievers, some of them being within the church and others being outside. But all were a part of Paul's life, and all played a role in his ministry.

As he faced the executioner's ax, many of these people were on his mind. In passing on the mantle of ministry to Timothy, he brought the young pastor up to date on the spiritual condition, activities, and whereabouts of certain men and women. Some of them, including Timothy, he hoped would visit him before he died. Others he simply greeted or extended greetings from. Some are named, and others are nameless. Some of them he was sending out or had already sent out to strategic places to build up faltering congregations. Others he mentioned because of the special harm they had brought to him and to the cause of Christ.

Paul did not write this section as an afterthought; it was not incidental but vital to the Spirit-inspired message. The Lord wanted the rest of His church to know about these people in Paul's life and to learn from their faithfulness or their failure.

TIMOTHY, THE FAITHFUL SON

Make every effort to come to me soon; (4:9)

At the beginning of his first letter to Timothy, the apostle addresses him as "my true child in the faith" (1:2) and in this second letter as "my beloved son" (1:2). He had no other earthly friend who was so dear to him.

Nor did he have a coworker who was more dependable. He tells the church at Corinth, "I exhort you therefore, be imitators of me. For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church" (1 Cor. 4:16–17). In the same spirit of confidence, the apostle told the church at Philippi, "I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition. For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare" (Phil. 2:19–20). Timothy not only followed Paul's doctrine but also his example.

The love was mutual. At the beginning of the second letter, the apostle says to Timothy, "I thank God, whom I serve with a clear conscience the way my forefathers did, as I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day, longing to see you, even as I recall your tears, so that I may be filled with joy" (2 Tim. 1:3–4).

Although the faithful and beloved Luke was with Paul in Rome at the time, the apostle longed to see Timothy with the longing of a father, especially because he knew the possibility of seeing him again in this life would soon be gone. It was therefore imperative that Timothy **make every effort to come to Paul soon.**

Many great Christian leaders have had a spiritual mentor, someone who has taken special care in teaching them the Word and in setting a high example. For Timothy, of course, that person was Paul. Like him, such mentors doubtless have no greater satisfaction than seeing someone under their guidance turn into an effective servant of Christ.

The writer of Hebrews told his readers to "take notice that our brother Timothy has been released" (Heb. 13:23). This young minister was following in Paul's footsteps, even to the point of being put in prison for boldly proclaiming and refusing to compromise the gospel.²

² MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1995). [*2 Timothy*](#) (pp. 188–204). Chicago: Moody Press.