

# Truth for Today

*The Bible teaching radio programme*

For reply: Email: [truthfortoday@aol.com](mailto:truthfortoday@aol.com)

**Broadcast Date:** 15 October 2006

**No.** T0440

**Speaker:** Mr. Glenn Baxter

## Passing on the Torch - Hold fast the form of sound words - 2 Timothy 1:13

Today we begin a series of four talks under the general heading of 'Passing on the torch'.

It was at the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin that the modern Olympic torch relay was first instituted. More than 3,000 runners carried the Olympic flame from Olympia to Berlin, each runner being responsible for carrying the torch for a particular distance and then passing it on to the next runner. What a tragedy for a runner if the torch went out while it was within his responsibility! Each runner would be keen to ensure that the flame kept burning and was safely passed on to the next runner.

The idea in this series of talks is that each believer in every generation of Christians has had passed down to him or her the precious truth of God. It is each Christian's responsibility then to hold on to that truth, to witness to that truth and to pass it on to the next generation.

We are going to base our talks on Paul's writings to Timothy. Paul was not Timothy's natural father but he did refer to Timothy as his spiritual son - see 1 Timothy 1:2 and 18 and 2 Timothy 1:2. Paul had a great Christian love for Timothy and valued his support. He held up Timothy as an example to other Christians, for example in 1 Corinthians 16 and in Philipians 2. Under God's guidance, Paul sent Timothy to Ephesus to deal with matters of concern in the church there. It seems that Timothy was inclined to be rather timid and may not have been too strong physically. Paul wanted him to understand the truth, to teach it and to stand firmly for it. In effect, Paul, the older Christian man, was passing on the torch of truth to the younger man, Timothy, and was encouraging him in turn to pass it on to others at Ephesus.

All of the talks in this series are based on verses in 2 Timothy. You may have noticed in your reading of the Bible that Paul's second letter to a church or to an individual usually demonstrates a decline in spiritual circumstances from the time of the first letter. 1 Timothy had given teaching on sound doctrine, on godliness and on how those comprising a church ought to conduct themselves and Timothy was instructed to pass on that teaching to the church at Ephesus. Of course the teaching was also set out as instruction for us today. In 2 Timothy, the emphasis is on how Timothy and every other individual believer should walk in a time when adherence to the truth of God had declined. 2 Timothy is particularly touching because it is generally accepted that it is the last letter written by Paul and so we have his final recorded words to his son in the faith, Timothy.

So, as we turn to today's verse, we consider it in the context of the challenge to each Christian to be willing to accept the torch of truth passed down to him or her, to hold it firmly in a time of general turning away from the truth of God as set out in His Word and to pass it on to others to hold in the future until the Lord returns for His church. Paul wrote to Timothy: "The things that thou hast heard of me ... the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" - 2 Timothy 2:2.

Today's verse is 2 Timothy 1:13. While our particular theme for today is the first seven words in the verse, "Hold fast the form of sound words", I would like to read and consider with you the whole of the verse, reading from the Authorised Version of the Bible, as I shall do throughout this talk: "Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus."

I would like to divide this verse into four phrases and to think separately of each.

First of all, let us think about the phrase in this verse "**the form of sound words.**" Another way of expressing this could be "the pattern of wholesome words." Now, there are some important messages in this phrase. When Paul referred to the form or pattern he meant that Timothy should have clearly in his mind an outline of the truth of Scripture, knowing that truth and not allowing himself to deviate from it. What is more, the phrase tells us that this outline of truth is based on actual words passed down to Timothy and to us. What and where are these words? Surely not just some vague reference to traditions passed down, the accuracy and reliability of which may be open to challenge. No, the words are right in front of us, the very words of Scripture which we can study knowing that the words are not just Paul's or Peter's or James' words but are words divinely inspired by the Holy Spirit - see 2 Timothy 3:16. These are the words from which I and you are instructed to form the outline of truth to hold.

And Paul tells us that these words are sound or wholesome words, literally healthful words. 1 Timothy 4:6 tells us that a good servant of Jesus Christ is “nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine.” We all know the importance of nourishing food in giving healthy physical bodies. The words of Scripture generate healthy Christian lives. Dear listener, never be frightened to quote actual words of Scripture. Obviously at times we have to try to explain what those words mean but don't let us water down the words even with the laudable objective of making them easier to understand. The truths behind some Bible words or phrases, for example, glory, grace, the only begotten Son, are just not capable of definition because the meaning is so deep. By all means let us try to explain them, but let the words and phrases themselves stand, to be increasingly, but never in this life fully, understood by believers as they meditate on them!

Secondly, the phrase “the form of sound words” is followed by “**which you have heard of me.**” In taking on and passing on the torch, what message do I take from this next phrase? I think that Paul is emphasising his authority as an apostle and is guarding against the danger in these times of spiritual decline that we take our teaching from any source other than the Word of God. Paul and every other apostle wrote with divinely-inspired authority and we must take their written words as being from God Himself. Please note that it is the words themselves which are inspired, not just the general thoughts.

There are no apostles of this sort now. Paul was in a unique position in that he was called by the Lord from heaven as recorded in Acts 9. It was a requirement of all of the apostles that they should have seen the Lord - see Acts 1:21 and 22 and 1 Corinthians 9:1. The Bible does not teach that there are successors to those apostles. Evidently even in the early days of the church there were those who falsely claimed that they were apostles - see Revelation 2:2. That book of Revelation closes with a most solemn warning to anyone who adds to or takes away from the words written in Scripture. Please note again that that warning in Revelation 22:18-19 refers to the actual written words of Scripture, the same idea as in today's verse in 2 Timothy. The Holy Spirit wants to guard the very detail in the inspired words left on record for us and, in passing on the torch, He wants us to know and guard the actual words of Scripture.

There is a verse in the short epistle of Jude which is of great relevance to our subject today. It is Jude 3, part of which reads: “it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” The force of those last few words is that we should fight to defend the body of truth which was once for all passed on to believers. This reinforces what we have just been saying. The truth which we have in Scripture was delivered by the apostles as a complete statement never to be added to. Jude goes on in verse 4 to say why he needed to make this exhortation. There were certain men who had crept in to the churches and were spreading teachings which were not in accord with the truth of God. These were ungodly men who had perverted God's grace into lawlessness and immorality and were denying the Lord Jesus Christ. Some Christians refer to this as a time of apostasy that is a falling away from a professed position once taken. Jude urged believers to contend or fight to maintain allegiance to the body of truth set out in Scripture.

Peter also warns of false teachers being present among believers. I urge you to read the whole of 2 Peter 2 but we only have time now to read 2 Peter 2:1-2: “But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.” Peter warns that these false teachers will be right there among professing Christians spreading their evil teaching but making it sound plausible and attractive so that, as Peter says, many follow their ways. Interestingly, Peter goes on in 3:2 to instruct believers to be mindful of the actual words of the prophets and commandments of the Lord delivered through the apostles. Once again, this is an emphasis on the detailed words of those divinely - appointed messengers which should alone form the basis of what Christians believe and adhere to.

And if we were to look at the Apostle John's writings we would see his voice added to this theme. In 1 John 4:1-6, John also warns that there are many false prophets and that what is said needs to be tested before being accepted. John gives a fundamental test by which we can determine whether what is being said derives from the Spirit of truth or the spirit of error. In 4:2 he declares that “Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God.” John was very concerned to emphasise that the teaching concerning the person of Christ is vital and must be held at all cost. This fits well with the Gospel of John in which John portrays Jesus as the Son of God and reveals many distinctive truths about the person of Christ. Let all of us who are Christians take heed of John's instruction and beware of anyone of any position who tries to put forward anything contrary to Scripture as to who Christ is and what He has done!

Finally in regard to this second phrase, I would like to draw your attention to one of the things which Paul had to say in his first letter to Timothy. In 1 Timothy 4:1, Paul writes that the Holy Spirit expressly warns that in these latter times some will depart from the faith through giving attention to seducing spirits and doctrines emanating from demons, compared with “the doctrine” mentioned in the last verse of that chapter. In verse 6 we see again the emphasis

placed by the Holy Spirit on the knowledge of the actual words of the faith. In that verse, Timothy is urged to remind his fellow-believers of these important things, in effect passing on to them the flame of the truth to hold and to guard.

So, we have seen from these examples that Paul, Jude, Peter and John combine in the same theme that there is one, and only one, source of truth, that is the Holy Spirit through the divinely appointed prophets and apostles. We are warned to expect that that set of sound words will be under attack from satanic sources through individuals who may be within the church masquerading as true believers.

For our third phrase, let's consider very briefly the last few words of 2 Timothy 1:13 which tell us that we are to hold the sound words heard from the apostle **"in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus."** I suggest that these words tell us that we should hold this form or outline of sound words with a right spiritual attitude. Our belief is not in a theoretical or academic set of words or ideas. Our belief is in a living Person, Christ Jesus, and the truth connected with Him. We hold that belief first of all in a living faith in God and His Word and we then show and share our belief in love to those around us. This would stop us being legalistic about the truth. Yes, of course we stand firmly for the truth of Scripture and don't move on the fundamentals, but we display and discuss the truth in love, trying to carry on the pattern established by our Lord as recorded in John 1:17 where, in comparison with the legalism of the Old Testament times, it says that "grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."

I have deliberately left to fourth and final place the opening two words of our verse in 2 Timothy 1:13 where we are instructed to **"Hold fast"** this form of sound words received from the apostle. In the light of all that we have thought about today, here is a challenge to me and to you to hold on to that outline of sound words which each of us should have in our minds. That outline of sound words will not be magically imprinted on our minds and hearts. That will only come about by regular and careful reading of the Bible, day by day, and by obedience to it.

There is a thrilling record in Judges 7 of a battle where only 300 of God's earthly people, the Israelites, were up against a vastly bigger army of one of their enemies, the Midianites. The Israelites were led by Gideon who, like Timothy, had started off as a timid man. You can read of Gideon's battle plan from Judges 7:16-18 and let me now read Judges 7:20: "And the three companies blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers, and held the lamps in their left hands, and the trumpets in their right hands to blow withal: and they cried, The sword of the LORD, and of Gideon."

The verse tells us that in one hand they held a torch to throw light on the darkness around them. In the other hand, they held a trumpet to sound forth the noise of God's people. Part of their cry was "The sword of the LORD."

What a picture that is for God's people today! In Ephesians 6:17 it says that "the sword of the Spirit is the word of God." In Psalm 119:105 it is recorded that "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." Trumpets are often used in Scripture to convey the idea of God's message being sounded forth, for example in Numbers 10:1-10 and Revelation 1:10-11. As Gideon's army held on to these things, so we today are urged to hold on to what God has to say in His Word and to make His message clear to those around. In Gideon's day it brought a resounding victory. Today, as at any time in the church's history, it remains the only way for ultimate victory, however large and formidable the opposition may be.

At the end of 2 Timothy, Paul warned that a time would come when many would not tolerate sound and helpful instruction, wanting instead teaching which is appealing to their natural instincts and is easy to listen to even if some of it is based on fables and not on God's Word. This warning is in 4:3-4. I firmly believe that that time has come and, as mentioned earlier, it is for every individual believer to seek to teach and adhere to the truth as set out in the Word of God even if some others, even in our churches, are not particularly interested in it.

What a temptation it is at times to change what the Bible actually says, perhaps to try to make the message sound more appealing or to try and make it fit better with changing social, political or moral views or standards. But that is not God's way, as we have seen from the verses which we have thought about today. To make such changes is to give in to the false teachers about whom we are warned.

I actually did not suggest the theme of this series of talks but I have a great feeling for it. At the small church which I attend, we have a few Christians in their teens and twenties. It is a great joy to see them grow in their knowledge and appreciation of the Word of God "which liveth and abideth for ever" - 1 Peter 1:23. It is a responsibility but a privilege to pass on the torch to them and to pray that they might run faithfully with it, knowing and holding firmly to the pattern of sound words set out in the divinely inspired Bible.

---

#### Please Note:

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1. Large Print copies of this document are also available upon request.