



Leadership Principles

Passing the Baton of Leadership –part 2

This series by Paul Bramsen and Nate Bramsen was originally given at Emmaus Bible College's 2011 Iron Sharpens Iron Conference. Their message is condensed into three articles, the second of which follows.

Nate: Passing the baton can be painful. Or at least uncomfortable. This brings us to a second potential fear.

The Fear of Change. Why are we often afraid of change? Perhaps the answer is found in your answer to this question: Where is your passion? Think about it. Is your driving passion truly for God's Word

and the gospel of Christ going to all nations? Or are you more passionate about upholding your traditions? Certainly there is a place for tradition. But what is our passion? What are we pursuing? For what are we striving? Is our focus to take the gospel to all nations or is it to preserve our current way of life?

Young people, I'm not speaking only to the older generation here. I'm talking to you, too. We all have batons to pass. So don't get comfortable. No one should get comfortable. This is the Word of God for all of us.

Why do we fear change? I want to suggest a few possibilities. One is **lack of communication**. Each generation feels they are not being heard. The older ones feel they aren't being respected and the younger ones feel that their suggestions get thrown out because they are new and uncomfortable.

Another reason we fear change is linked to our **lack of accessibility**. Are you accessible to those in your assembly? I'm not asking if you're physically there on Sunday, but: Are you accessible? Are you getting into their lives so they know you love them and care for them? Are you encouraging them on a practical level? As they think about those who care about them, do you come into their minds? Are you one they'll go to with their concerns and ideas? Will you have the opportunity to develop that relationship and mold them into leaders who will carry and pass the baton? Do you know what's going on in their lives? Do you know what drives the young people in your assembly? Do you know what drives your kids?

How about you young people? Do you know what gets the interest of the older generation? Are we accessible?

Perhaps the greatest contributor to the fear of change is **lack of sacrifice**. Without sacrifice, the baton won't be passed. Are you sacrificing on behalf of those who are to receive the baton? You can't pass the baton and live life at the status quo. We must embrace the fact that our lives will change if we embody the message that Christ told us to act upon. In 2 Corinthians 12:15 the Apostle Paul says, "I will gladly spend and be spent for the sake of your souls." Everyone in this room is spending. The fact that you're even

here means you're spending some of your time. We're all spending on behalf of eternity, aren't we? But Paul goes beyond

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just spending. He says, "I will gladly spend AND BE SPENT on behalf of your souls". Christ left His comfort zone to come into our world and show us His love. In return, are we willing to spend and be spent out of love for Him?

Paul: 3) Who Is To Receive the Baton?

In a relay race, it's the next runner. And in the race of life? The next generation. We heard about Barnabas investing in Paul, and then we see Paul investing in others. Timothy's backstory is told in Acts 16. It simply says that Paul came to Derby and Lystra and a disciple was there named Timothy. He had a believing mother and a pagan father. But he was well-spoken of by the brothers and sisters in the local churches. Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him. Paul had a vision to invest into this young man. We read in 2 Timothy 1 about Grandma Lois, who, as a mom, had invested in her daughter Eunice. Both Mama Eunice and Grandma Lois invested in Timothy. Then Paul enters the picture, and invests in Timothy, too. Now here we are today, some 50 generations later, still enjoying the benefits of Paul's investment in that faithful young man.

In the Muslim country of Senegal, it's been a joy to watch new believers who have received the baton now passing that baton to others. They know how to proactively look for those in whom they can sacrificially in-

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Biblical Foundations

Fitting Doctrine

by Chuck Gianotti

Studies in Titus —Part 5 (2:1 NASB)

Paul now writes directly to his young understudy, Titus: “But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1). Even the individual mentored by the venerable apostle, who had stood with him against the Judaizers “from James” in Jerusalem (Gal 2:3, 12), namely Titus himself, must be challenged to hold fast!

Two Implications

First, if Titus needed to be admonished about sound doctrine, how much more do we need that today? Second, guarding against false teachings means first of all guarding oneself from neglecting sound doctrine. Paul held himself to a high standard in this regard (see Galatians 1:8, 1 Corinthians 9:27). This requires humility to recognize that none of us is exempt from this ministry hazard. Is this not the teaching in 1 Corinthians 10:11? Paul does not speak casually when writing to the Ephesian elders, “Be on guard for yourselves . . .” before he wrote, “and all the flock of God . . .” (Acts 20:29-30).

Now, the difficulty arises from the fact that we are often confronted with situations and teachings that may not line up exactly with the situations addressed in the apostolic writings. Paul had taught Titus much, but the young man needed to fill in as needed when new situations arose that Paul had not addressed. But, and this is absolutely essential, Titus’ teaching must fit with “sound doctrine.” If it did not, then that teaching must be rejected. The same is true today.

For example, the Bible doesn’t explain precisely how the following two biblical teachings can both be true: the sovereignty of God and the culpability of humans (that is, the teaching that humans are held responsible for their choices). Nor does it contain teaching about how an employee should respond to an unfair employer. We need to reason from what the Scripture *does* say, and how that should apply to the situations and questions of today. And that is often where the difficulties arise. In some cases, the ramifications are huge and spill over into many areas of the Christian life—and correspondingly the debates are more significant because gravity of error increases exponentially. Wise is the man who can discern between the truly

weighty and what is not.

The word “sound” can mean “healthy” (Luke 5:31) or “safe” (Luke 15:27). Paul used this word eight times in the pastoral epistles (1&2 Timothy and Titus) in reference to doctrine, words, teaching and faith. Spiritually healthy communication of the truth is essential for the leader of God’s people; it must be faithful to the apostolic teaching.

My goal here is not to settle these issues mentioned above but to examine how Titus, and we today, should approach them. We do not have the luxury today to directly ask Paul for clarifications. We must begin with accurately understanding what he and the other Scripture writers penned. By definition, apostolic teaching is what defines sound doctrine. The early church was devoted to the apostles’ teaching (Acts 2:42). They were the official authoritative witnesses (Acts 1:6, 2 Tim 3:15-16). But, they also taught some things Jesus never mentioned in His days “in the flesh” (see for example in 1 Cor 7:12). But what they taught *never went contrary* to Christ. Their teaching was safe and healthy because it fit with the teachings of Christ. Likewise, our teaching can be judged safe and healthy when it fits with what has already been established in Scripture.

Avoiding the “Blinker” Mentality

So in practical terms, we must study diligently in order to know more than just the surface of what the Word says. We must come to really *know* the Word. C.S. Lewis used the illustration: imagine asking a person to determine whether the signal lights on an automobile work. The individual responds, “Yes, no, yes, no . . .” Of course, he is technically correct: the lights are indeed alternating between being on and off. But, he is not putting the truth of those two bits of information together to gain a real understanding. The blinkers of course were working.

With doctrine we need to move beyond the “blinker on/off” level of interpretation that invariably lands in the pendulum swing, that of emphasizing one truth at the neglect of another. And this is where false doctrine often arises. If we are not adequately prepared, we may find ourselves inadvertently promoting false doctrine by swinging the so-called pendulum to the opposite extreme by over-emphasizing another truth in attempts to guard against the original

false teaching. Both pendulum swings cause harm when neither fits with sound doctrine of the Scripture. The ability to see the big picture (“Yes, the blinker is working properly”), to make legitimate inferences in a balanced way, is an indication of someone who really knows the Word of God.

This is where so many doctrinal differences take place—disagreement on how to properly interpret and put together the meaning of individual Scriptures into a larger whole. To get beyond the “blinker on/off” to see what God is really saying. This is where we so often disagree, yet we can easily start throwing out proof-text verses either to support the “on” or to support the “off.” And this often leads to a legalistic, wooden and selective approach to Scripture—in other words, it can lead to false doctrine, carelessly.

Know the Word

The best thing we can do in the face of this dilemma, in my opinion, is to commit ourselves, in humble reliance on the Holy Spirit, to a comprehensive, immersive, fully engaged study of the Word. We fully submit to its authority. The Word must thoroughly saturate us, seeping into every nook and corner of our lives. We need to allow our souls to marinate in it, to soak it in. Our minds need to be renewed by it and transformed. Then, and only then, do we begin to think and reason biblically beyond the blinker mentality.

Properly Reason from the Word

We need to learn how to reason, to “infer” from Scripture. For example, the Word tells us, as we alluded to earlier, that slaves are to “be obedient to those who are your masters” (Eph 6:5). Unless I am an actual slave, this verse does not speak directly to me. However, we can infer a number of things to “as it were” read between the lines. We ask: “Are there principles here that can be applied today?” The answer is yes, but we must be fully aware of what we are doing—namely making an inference. The concept of being submissive to those in authority over us *is* present in that passage. We may then reason that if it is true in the worst possible case of human relationships that Christianity has something to say to the slave, namely that it is possible to live in a Christ-like way (“as to the Lord”) while living in slavery, then it is entirely possible to live in a Christ-like way in any kind of author-

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Wives' Corner

The Skill of Empathy

by Mary Gianotti

A new year sometimes feels like a new start. I want to eat less chocolate (maybe), lose weight, read more, talk less—the list goes on. Listen to Peter's exhortation to a fresh start: "Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth [a great place for an elder's wife to be, by the way], so that you have a sincere love for each other, love one another deeply from the heart" (1 Peter 1:22 NIV) Truth be known, I don't do that well; but I want to go deeper in my love for God's people.

After years of knowing people, we can tend to categorize them: complaining, high maintenance, sickly, dysfunctional, shallow kinds of people. Our hearts are hardened, we are tired and our love for God's people is anything but deep.

Recently I watched a short animated video that started by asking the question, "What is the best way to ease someone's pains and suffering?" The speaker then demonstrated how empathy is the thing that helps us reach out to hurting people. In 2014 we will have those in our fellowship who will be suffering in a variety of ways. Will we joyfully extend Christ's love to them in a helpful way or will we avoid these difficult situations?

Empathy is understanding and sharing the feelings of another. Expressing empathy fuels connection. When there is a connection then true love can be shown and received. Hebrew 4:15 tells us that Jesus our high priest is able to empathize with our weaknesses. Such things are not pretty but Jesus came in human flesh so He could understand, feel and reach us. I believe this is "loving deeply from the heart" that is required in being like Jesus, living out His life.

So often we have a tendency to make judgments on how others should think about their problems. How can we get past that? Asking questions and listening helps us understand the perspective of the hurting person. When actors want to enter the mind of the character they are assigned, one technique is for them to search their own life experiences and find something that connects with the character's story. They can then enter the person's world with convincing emotions. We are not pretending but the principle is the same. We all have sins and weaknesses—this helps us understand the hurting person. This self-awareness can lead to empathy. Feeling

with people is essential. It is sacred, it can be heart wrenching.

I sit with my friend going through chemo for the third time. Her body is not the same. Her husband and a grandchild have died. Add to this she has moved to a new state and retired—all this in four years. I sometimes feel sick; how can I take her perspective? I must. I want to recognize emotions that may or may not be on the surface, the deep pain. I need to show Christ's love, not judgments and solutions that make me feel good. I need to communicate empathy clearly. That's what Jesus did.

"For this reason He had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that He might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because He Himself suffered when He was tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted" (Heb 2:17,18).

Peter knew how to love deeply and to put these things into practice. Read 1 Peter 4:1-11 and resolve this year with the Lord's help to go deeper in your love for God's people.

Empathy is very difficult. Empathy is a choice. Empathy is Jesus.



Fitting Doctrine (continued from page 2)

itive relationship. This is an inference. The Bible never specifically addresses an employer-employee relationship. But, we can use the teaching to the slave and apply it to an employee. This is consistent with and fits well with established, sound teaching.

The error comes when we read "into" scripture what is not there, where our inferences are forced and not "fitting" with sound doctrine, or cause us to deny or water down other biblical teachings. True, we may hold to things that agree with the church, denomination or movements that we belong to. We may even claim to be un-influenced by others, like the man who arrogantly says, "I never sit under the teaching of any man, only the Word of God." But all of us are capable and prone to false teachings.

Practical Questions

So how can we guard ourselves so that we "speak the things that are fitting for sound doctrine," that our inferences and reasoning are valid? Here are some things to consider:

- a. Am I studying Scripture to see what it really says, or do I approach Scripture to find proof texts to win a debate with someone?
- b. Am I really searching the Scripture as the Bereans did, or am I just mimicking things I heard long ago?
- c. Am I humble enough to admit when I am wrong when shown from Scripture? Pride is a terrible thing, it's the central cause, I believe, of false teaching.
- d. Am I trying to be unique? Do I crave to hear accolades such as, "You were good, I never knew that before."?
- e. Is my goal in teaching and preaching to convince myself and others of my significance, or to genuinely help others understand the Word of God?
- f. Am I nitpicking the "dill and mint," deluding myself and others into thinking this is deep teaching, when the weightier things are overlooked?
- g. Am I elevating a particular interpretation of one or two verses and making them stand out against all other Scripture that addresses a given issue?
- h. Am I and my fellow elders teaching the whole counsel of God, or are we repeatedly teaching the same issues over and over, fighting the same battles as we did 30 years ago?
- i. Are there taboo subjects which we avoid because they are too controversial or we feel ill-equipped to handle them?
- j. Is there someone I trust to hold me accountable, who will feel free to challenge my teaching in love?

Maybe you have some other or better questions to ask yourself. But, as elders we need to constantly challenge ourselves to make sure that we teach only "things which are fitting for sound doctrine."



Passing the Baton of Leadership (cont. from page 1)

vest. They know what it is to spend and be spent. In the dictator-controlled land of Cuba, we hear of church leaders who invest 4 hours every other Saturday to train the next generation so that they will be prepared to receive the baton. Yet here in affluent America, all too often, we see well-grounded believers in our local assemblies who are not receiving the baton. Some of them are even putting out their hand, but no baton is being placed in it. Why do we find it so difficult to trust the Lord enough to entrust the next generation with the baton of leadership?

Note: Let's think about another reason we don't pass this baton on to those who should receive it.

Fear of commitment. What does that mean? Let's talk about our Sunday School programs. Sometimes we pull the children out of the main meeting to go to a Sunday School class. Unfortunately they are often being taught by people who are learning along with them. And many of our Sunday School curriculums are haphazard, without much thought to the content.

In this regard, we can learn from those of other faiths. Let's feel like our toes are getting stepped on a little bit. Let's get uncomfortable. One reason the baton is not passed is because we are not preparing our young people; we're not preparing the next generation with the foundation of Scripture. Now I believe the assemblies have some of the best Bible teaching anywhere. But often with our young people we're not using a me-

thodical approach to giving them a proper foundation.

I work with children of all backgrounds and have some Mormon friends. When Mormon children reach 10th grade, for the next three years, 5 days a week at 7 AM before school, they go to church where they receive systematic teaching. One year they cover the Old Testament, another year they cover the New Testament, and the third year they cover the book of Mormon. Now, I'll tell you that the Mormon young people that I interact with – they know their stuff. And usually they are pretty passionate about it.


Muslim children go to Koranic schools when they are around 3 or 4 years old. Some of the kids memorize the entire Koran, which is nearly the length of the New Testament. Wow! How many of our young people can quote 3 chapters of Scripture, let alone an entire book?

The point is that there is a systematic approach to teaching young people that exists in many other faiths. Yet sometimes we just throw the Word out there like they're going to figure it out *somehow*. Let's not expect them to get it from us *somehow*. Let's prepare this next generation. Let's be intentional. Let's get together and talk about this. Let's strategize. Let's pour into our young people.

Our youth are not coming to the assembly for entertainment. They can get that on the outside. What they *are* coming for is something to live for and something to die for. Let's not compro-

mise the message of Jesus Christ that says, "If any man desires to come after me he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me."

In the foreword of "True Discipleship," Bill MacDonald describes a people who are fed up with living the status quo; a people who want to take the words of Christ literally. That is what young people are looking for today and it is time that we, the church, stop compromising that message in the assembly, in the home, and in our ministries. Why do we want to keep them in the assembly? To maintain the status quo? No. We should be all about the responsibility of passing the baton of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the nations of the world. This is our responsibility. What is our three-year plan? What is our ten-year plan? How are we preparing others to receive this baton?

Our responsibility involves a personal, private and public commitment. Passing the baton requires a personal commitment—to be in the life of that person, to pray for them, to study the Word of God together. It's also a private commitment—to know what's going on in their life, to interact with them, to be involved with them on a friend level. It's also a public commitment—to put them in situations of ministry like Barnabas did with Paul. We'll talk about the potential dangers in all this, but for now, let us confess that whatever the dangers, we must invest in the next generation in a personal, private, and public way. 

THE SMALL PRINT

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