

Unashamed and Unafraid

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Date: 12 July 2015

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[0 : 01] If you'd please turn in your Bibles to the second letter to Timothy, chapter 1. We'll read our Bible reading now, and that's page 995 in the Church Bibles.

So 2 Timothy, chapter 1. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the will of God, according to the promise of the life that is in Christ Jesus.

To Timothy, my beloved child, grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day.

As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother, Lois, and your mother, Eunice, and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well.

For this reason, I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God gave us a spirit not of fear, but of power and love and self-control.

[1 : 30] Therefore, do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me, his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works, but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Saviour, Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, which is why I suffer as I do.

But I'm not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I'm convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me.

Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.

You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes. May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains.

But when he arrived in Rome, he searched for me earnestly and found me. May the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that day, and you well know all the service he rendered at Ephesus.

[3 : 13] Amen. 50 million people can't be wrong.

50 million people can't be wrong. Those words accompany a poster of Elvis Presley, the king, it says. 50 million people can't be wrong.

Isn't that sometimes how we can feel as Christians? Maybe you're the only one in your class at university. Maybe you're the only one in your office or your company. And when the world says one thing in what seems to be one united voice, can't it seem like we're on the losing side?

50 million people can't be wrong. When you're the solo voice in your surgery, and you don't want to feel like the stupid one, you can feel like that.

50 million people can't be wrong. Maybe it'll be easier to be liked if I'm with the majority. That's a real temptation.

[4 : 26] Maybe the 50 million people flying the rainbow flags can't be wrong. Maybe the 50 million who think the supernatural is nonsense can't be wrong.

No walking on water, no virgin birth, no flood, no resurrection. All the media, all the scientists, maybe they can't all be wrong.

Question. Is it easy as a Christian to feel under pressure and feel like we're weak, stupid, unloving, and even losers?

Is it easy to be afraid of being in the minority? Of course it is. Of course it is. In many ways, that's the normal reaction.

It's normal. What do we do when we find ourselves doubting all the things we've held on to because the pressure from society is just getting so great?

[5 : 25] Isn't that a pressure faced by any normal Christian? Everyday Christians like you and me. Well, 2 Timothy is a book that will give us great encouragement.

It's a letter written to a normal pastor. Timothy is a recipient, and there's a sense in which it is for pastors. The main commands all throughout the letter are to do with ministry and preaching, so it has much to say to those who preach.

But that application stretches out to the church that seeks to proclaim the gospel, and it stretches out to the individual who wants to faithfully make Jesus known to the people they live amongst every day.

The central charge of the whole book is Paul telling Timothy to preach the words in 4, 1, and 2. And dotted throughout the whole book are references to guarding the gospel, following it, not being ashamed of it, teaching it, entrusting it.

And there are lots of references to opposing what is false, avoiding it, correcting it, having nothing to do with it, and people being deceived by it. This book puts into perspective what real-life gospel ministry is like, mainly for the pastor, Pastor Timothy, but also in some way for any of us who want to proclaim Jesus in conversations we have throughout the week.

[6 : 47] Ministry, which we're all as Christians to be involved in, is at the very least telling the truth and opposing what is false. However, it's not that simple.

Paul makes plain that for those who do this, for those whose pattern of life is to practice this, there's going to be suffering. That's what we see throughout this letter.

Paul himself is in chains for it, and he says that all who desire to live a godly life in Christ will suffer for it, 3.12. So he wants to encourage his young protege.

He wants Timothy to keep going, to finish the race, to keep fighting the good fight. Not because Timothy was weak and timid, but because the reality of a life lived sharing the gospel is a life that will face difficulty.

2 Timothy 1 brings that to light very clearly. So what do we do if the 50 million people who can't be wrong are on the other side to us?

[7 : 53] Thankfully for all of us, Paul doesn't take a cold, blunt approach. He wants Timothy to persevere. He wants him to keep going. He doesn't want him to be ashamed of the gospel, so he doesn't lump another pressure on top of him.

He doesn't say, chin up or man up. He leads him towards enduring with some wonderful theology. The majority of the commands in the letter relate to how we treat God's words.

Chapter 1 alone, if we look at verse 6, fan into flame the gift of God. That's about Timothy's gifts in ministry. Verse 8, do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord.

And again, verse 8, share in suffering for the gospel. Verse 13, follow the pattern of sound words. Verse 14, guard the good deposit. All these commands relate to how God's word is treated.

Paul's encouraging Timothy to stick to this truth, to make it known, to defend it, to follow it, and to suffer for it. The task of the preacher is to do this, but isn't in a small way the task of any Christian.

[9 : 03] So what is the theology that Paul grounds this resilient, gospel-proclaiming Christian life in? It's this. The Christian's eyes are the eyes of faith, not fear.

They know who they believe in. And Christian ministry, for all its appearances as the weak minority, will press on, protected until the end.

That's Paul's chin up. That's Paul's man up. It's warm and encouraging. So let's look a little bit more closely at it.

Real faith looks past fear, verses 1 to 7. Real faith looks past fear. With all that's expected of faithful gospel ministers and indeed faithful Christians, of course it's going to hold fear.

In this letter, they're approaching 10 references to some kind of suffering. Three of them alone are in this chapter. It is the reality that faces people who care about the gospel and want to share it.

[10 : 12] As a church, we ought to be settled on the issue of human sexuality. But didn't you feel weak and shut out of society all over again last week as Facebook was decked out with rainbow flags and even some Christians seemed to be joining in.

Does Paul say we ought to cower in the face of it? No. He says in verse 7 that God did not give us a spirit of fear or of cowardice, but of power, love and self-control.

Why does he say this? Because verse 5, he's reminded of the sincere faith of Timothy's mother and grandmother in which Paul is sure Timothy has to.

Verse 6, Timothy's to fan and to flame his gift which Paul's laid his hands on him for. Paul's saying he's certain of Timothy's real faith.

It's past the generations of his family. Paul's witnessed it himself and has laid hands on him to carry out his gift in ministry. We see in 1 Timothy 4 that his gift in ministry is to devote himself to the public reading of scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.

[11 : 25] He mustn't neglect his gift. Paul's reminding Timothy of his very real faith. It came through generations of his family and it's been witnessed and recommended by Paul.

Timothy is a real Christian. Paul's reminding him of that. But verse 4, Paul knows of Timothy's tears. These may well have been at the last meeting that they had where Timothy knew what was awaiting Paul, where Timothy was faced with a church that was questioning his leadership.

He was aware what faced Paul may also be waiting for him and the problems in Ephesus at his church were rearing their ugly heads again. Real tears that Paul knew about.

To say that Timothy was a weak man, easily toppled, is to misunderstand the strain and difficulty he was facing. If he was a bit cowardly, then why would he be Paul's most trusted messenger?

The list of churches Timothy visited on Paul's behalf, the messages he took, the letters he co-wrote, surely he wasn't weak and cowardly. In fact, the church that Paul had the rockiest relationship with, the one that was most belligerent towards Paul was Corinth.

[12 : 44] And yet we read in 1 Corinthians 4, 17 that it was Timothy who was the messenger to them. With the content of the Corinthian letters, would you send a coward to be the messenger?

Would you send someone who was weak, prone to fall? No. Timothy was not timid or weak or cowardly or overly fearful.

Timothy was a faithful Christian minister. Timothy was normal. And in the face of all that was troubling him, would any normal person not need reminded to fear not?

In the midst of opposition and suffering and difficulty, would any normal Christian not feel fear? Fear of being marginalized, fear of being seen by colleagues and friends as intolerant, unloving, bigoted, afraid of not being liked, afraid of being perceived as stupid?

Well, Paul says to Timothy, it's not fear that the Lord has for him. Rather, because Paul is sure that Timothy's a real Christian with a sincere faith, God has power, love, and self-control for him.

[13 : 59] God has given you power to put up with these struggles, power to keep going, to get to the promise of life in verse 1. That doesn't mean what is fearful will cease to disturb, but it means it shouldn't be what masters us.

If armed men burst into the room right now and started shooting, you wouldn't criticize people for being afraid, would you? That's normal. Fear there would be normal.

Paul doesn't criticize Christians who fear the cost of holding on to the gospel. That's normal too. But he does urge Timothy to look past the fear and shame to the power of the gospel itself.

For those who minister the gospel, whether they be preachers or painters, ministers or midwives, there is a fear that accompanies faithful gospel ministry because it will bring difficulty.

That's normal. But fret not. Be encouraged, says Paul. God has given us power to overcome this. It's his gospel.

[15 : 10] He'll protect and keep it and its messengers. And here is the key theology Paul points Timothy to in verses 8 to 12. He says, you can suffer today whilst you savour that day.

You can suffer today whilst you savour that day. Paul urges Timothy to persevere and suffer now whilst keeping an eye on the gospel's future.

The promise of life, verse 1, is drawn out in verse 10. It's the immortality of the gospel. The fullness of life that the gospel brings.

the life that's everlasting. And all ministry now is grounded in that great hope. It is both the hope the minister spreads and the hope that the minister is sustained by.

But also look at verse 12. God is able to guard the gospel until the last day. He's able to keep the life-giving, life-sustaining gospel being believed until the last day.

[16 : 18] Do you feel weak? Do you feel left behind by the 50 million people? Paul says, what will be true to the end is the gospel.

What will stay a reality, what will still be believed at the last day is the gospel, not what's popular today. Look at what lasts and look at what fades away.

Paul says, because of the power which God has given, don't be ashamed of the testimony of the Lord, verse 8, nor of Paul, his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God. And notice that phrase, by the power of God. That simply means God's Spirit is helping believers to do this. We have his power, his help. That's what he's given us in verse 7 and it's repeated in these verses.

We don't struggle along in this on our own, but we have God's Spirit alongside us, helping us. The central commands of this chapter are don't be ashamed of the gospel or of Paul, his prisoner, but likewise share in suffering.

[17 : 32] What Paul is really saying here is that being ashamed of him and his imprisonment is the same as being ashamed of the gospel. In a world where appearances are still so important, the man writing from a prison cell has little credibility.

Even people who have known him and benefited from his ministry have fled from him. Paul's in prison, disgraced, low.

A lot of people might even think that Christianity would be all the better if we just scrubbed Paul out. After all, Jesus was gentler, more accepting. Paul's just that boring killjoy, isn't he? But the reality is that Paul's gospel is based solely on the Lord Jesus.

Chapter 2 says, Remember Jesus Christ as preached in my gospel. Paul's gospel is the only real gospel. It's Jesus' gospel.

And the most blatant sign of it is that Paul's suffering for it. For Paul's shameful imprisonment reads Jesus' shameful crucifixion.

[18 : 39] Timothy must not abandon Paul. His chains do nothing like discredit the gospel. It's the opposite. Suffering verifies it, as we'll see next week in chapter 2.

Share in this suffering by God's power. Jesus has proven the gospel already by saving us and calling us to the holy calling of ministry.

Timothy. That's what Paul says to Timothy. The gospel going forth is God's purpose from all eternity. The gospel power has come to Paul and to Timothy to Christians because Jesus has appeared, verse 10, and brought this promised life.

He brought the promise of a future that lasts forever. a glorious realization of the gospel that endures for all of time. Verse 11.

That's why Paul suffers for this glorious gospel. He preaches, he teaches, he leads for the sake of the gospel which is overcoming death and bringing life.

[19 : 50] The gospel that's saving people from a despairing world. The gospel that guarantees all manner of privileges to its followers. this gospel that is secure until the last day.

Verse 12. This whole section is bookended with suffering. Verse 8, Sharon's suffering. Verse 12. This is why I suffer. If we are to be a church that cherishes the gospel, if we are to be a people who hold to the gospel unashamedly, we will face suffering.

Our leaders will face suffering. That's what Paul's telling Timothy. And our members ministering in everyday life will face suffering. If we are prepared to stand with faithful gospel ministers and to be faithful gospel witnesses, unashamed, we must be prepared to stand up and stand with each other when we face the shame and disgrace that Paul was subjected to.

For us, it won't be prison. Not yet, anyway. But it might be being cast out, being unpopular, being disliked, being made to feel stupid.

But it's not all bleak because the gospel that we'll be standing for is wonderful. We're saved by it, called to live out lives that reflect Jesus, and none of this because we deserve it or can earn it, but because of his purpose and grace through Jesus planned from before eternity.

[21 : 26] If you're a Christian here today, that's always been the plan. Rescue you decided before you even existed. And that's become a reality through Jesus appearing.

Remind each other that our Savior has abolished death and has given us life, real, true life that's immortal. Why fear suffering?

Why fear death? It's been abolished. Life awaits. And verse 12, Paul is not ashamed of this gospel. He's urging Timothy not to be and he's saying he's not. He's not ashamed of Jesus being crucified and he's not ashamed that he now suffers.

Paul will suffer because he knows whom he believes. Another thing to remind ourselves of, look at it in verse 12. Paul says, I know whom I have believed.

[22 : 26] What confidence comes from this? Not confidence in Paul's own faith, but confidence because the person he believes in is Jesus.

Paul knows his Savior. He knows that Jesus is able to keep and guard for all eternity the wonderful gospel that saved him and been entrusted to him.

all the richness of the gospel will not fade away with our suffering and our being marginalized. It won't cease to be true.

It's guarded until the last day. Paul knows whom he believes. That's why he can be unashamed and that's why he can suffer.

That's where Paul's confidence rested and that's where ours can too. That's how we keep going. In the face of suffering, chin up is about as useful as a slap in the face.

[23 : 28] Paul's chin up is much warmer, much, much more encouraging. Remember who you believe in and remember how faithfully he's able to preserve you from harm.

You can trust him. Paul's answer is warm. When you feel weak and ashamed and shut out because people belittle the supernatural, because they say, yeah, right, like someone can rise from the dead, remember who it is you believe in.

Remember it's because of him that we can suffer today because we believe in him and we can savor the last day because we believe in him and we know that he is able to guard it.

verse 12. There have been a few times I've attempted a park run. It's a five-kilometer jog around a park.

I'm not overly fit and I don't like running. It's never a joyful experience. I often give up. Every week, when we finish, we head for a cup of tea and a nice piece of cake or something.

[24 : 35] If I run by myself and try to go quickly, I always stop when it gets painful. The times I've finished, someone has been running alongside me, encouraging me, telling me to keep going, stopping when I stop, slowing when I slow, and I can finish.

Someone helping me get there. And then at the end, the real reason I've been to park run is the coffee and the cake and I can look forward to that.

someone alongside me helping me and having in mind why I'm really doing it. Paul says, we can suffer now because God is helping us too and in the end, the gospel will win.

He's saying our suffering is preserving the church. God will keep the gospel being believed. Keep walking, Timothy. Keep running if you can, but don't be ashamed of my gospel, says Paul.

Look what it's really about. Look what it promises. Look to see that Jesus secures its existence long after we're gone. Look to the end, the last day, when the gospel will stand and all the world believes now will have passed away.

[25 : 54] Finally, Paul says, take care to keep the faith. Take care to keep the faith.

Verses 13 to 18. In a sense here, he's not really saying anything new. Follow the pattern of the sound words which Paul has taught. It's his gospel. And then by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us and helps us, guard the good deposit.

Take care to follow what Paul has taught it seems like a repeat of what he's already been saying, really. However, if we look more closely, the pattern of the sound words, the pattern of the sound words is that the one who speaks them suffers.

Jesus did. Paul did. And now Timothy is to do the same. And this is an especially real test as Paul gives us two examples of people not doing this.

Verse 15. Everyone in Asia turned from Paul, even Phagellus and Hermogenes who must have been known as faithful ministers previously. They've deserted Paul which means they've deserted his gospel.

[27 : 09] It's real. It can happen. People who've appeared faithful can give up. They've become ashamed of his chains and ashamed of the God whom Paul seemingly brought down to be a God of suffering and prison.

Will we be ashamed of the miracles in the Bible because the world scoffs? As countless friends, family, neighbors, colleagues, even some Christians cozy up to the world's agenda for equality as they post their support on Facebook as it surrounds us in the media, as they slip effortlessly into the world's mind, will we be ashamed of faithful gospel ministers who oppose it to chance of bigotry, to chance of being outdated?

Will we be ashamed of Paul and his chains? Will we be ashamed of Jesus and his cross? The scorn that those who put their heads above the parapet face is not usually far off for those who

support them.

Paul's prison cell in the ancient world was not far off for those who kept with Paul in his gospel. The cross of the Lord Jesus was not far off for those who followed him.

Fagellus and Hermogenes are forever remembered as those who deserted a faithful gospel minister and his gospel. They're Paul's first example to heed.

[28 : 41] Take care to keep the faith. But in the midst of the realism and in keeping with the warm encouragement of this letter, Paul has a positive example for us.

Look at Onesephorus, beautiful Onesephorus, who refreshed me in prison, who was not ashamed of my chains. an example of someone who's kept to the testimony of the Lord, one who believes and trusts in it, one who gets the ministry of it, one who follows the pattern, one who stands beside his brother in arms who's being shot to pieces.

Unashamed, unafraid, beautiful, precious, Onesephorus. He came looking for Paul, verse 17.

He looked until he found him and he cared for and encouraged him. Even Paul needed encouragement because the normal Christian faces real fear.

And Paul prays in thanks for Onesephorus. He prays that on that day, again, that day in the future, looking ahead, may the Lord grant mercy to him, verse 18, may he make it to that day, still believing the gospel as he's so demonstrated.

[30 : 01] That's what Paul prays. After all, that's the whole focus of the letter so far. Verse 1, the promise of life. And again, the future of that in verse 10, life and immortality of the gospel.

And verse 12, that it's guarded until the last day. Those who are faithful to the gospel and its messengers are to be granted mercy at the last day.

Judgment day will prove that being with Paul, that following his gospel has been right and worth it. The last day will vindicate Paul and those who've sacrificed and suffered to partner with him in gospel work.

Do not be a deserter. Yes, sometimes the pressure is more than we feel we can bear. Paul understood that. But heed his charge to Timothy.

If you make the gospel known, do so unashamedly. Be prepared to suffer and see the example of Onesephorus, those who stand with the suffering.

[31 : 10] God guards his church and his gospel until judgment day with many Timothys, normal gospel people who want to make the gospel known. And God guards his gospel and church with many Onesephoruses who stand beside the faithful faithfully and encourage them as they get shot at.

Paul says, Do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord nor of me, his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God.

As we suffer for the gospel, it proves its reality. As we unashamedly keep to the gospel in the face of opposition, we show whom we have believed and we show that our faith looks to the future, the promise of life, the wonderful gospel that was constructed before the ages began and is secure until the future.

As we suffer for the gospel, we show that our treasure is the richness of the gospel that will one day be fully enjoyed by sight.

Let us say with Paul, I am not ashamed of the gospel for I know whom I have believed. I am not ashamed of the gospel for I know whom I have believed.

[32 : 43] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we acknowledge how wonderful your gospel is. We thank you for it.

We pray that you would help us to keep on believing it week by week and year by year. give us confidence in whom we believe that we might not just believe but faithfully share the gospel in our everyday lives, that we might stand as a church that longs to be faithful in sharing the gospel and that we might stand with our pastors who faithfully proclaim and defend it.

For those of us in the midst of being shut out for our faith in the gospel, help us know the tangible power you've given us to keep going. Grant to us all a love for the gospel that means we'll cherish how it ends, that means we rejoice to know it's secure, guarded until the last day, that whether 50 million or 500 million people say we are fools, that we would rejoice in whom we believe because we know at the last day it is the gospel that brings life, that it's the gospel that will stand.

We thank you for it. Help us love it more and more, we pray. In Jesus' name, Amen.