



Do Not Be Ashamed

SERIES: *A Life That Counts: Studies in 2 Timothy*

The story is told about a hen and a pig who approached a church one morning and read the sermon title that was posted outside, "What can we do to help the poor?" Immediately the hen turned to the pig and suggested they help by offering bacon and eggs. The pig thought that sounded good, but he told the hen there was one thing wrong with feeding bacon and eggs to the poor. He said, "For you it only requires a contribution, but for me it requires total commitment!"

As we continue this morning in our study of 2 Timothy, we're faced with an important question: Is our Christian faith the kind that requires merely a contribution or a total commitment? In many ways this was the question Paul was putting before young Timothy. Paul himself had already answered that question. In chapter 4 Paul writes, "**I am already being poured out as a drink offering (to God), and the time of my departure has come**" (4:6). That's total commitment. But now he was asking Timothy to make the same kind of commitment. And it required a choice, as it does for us; a choice between suffering or shame.

I. Choose suffering rather than shame

"Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God,..." (v. 8).

Paul begins this passage with a command. The command is to choose suffering over shame. He says "Do not be ashamed...but join with me in suffering..." When I say we choose suffering, don't get me wrong. We don't choose suffering because we like it. Oswald Chambers writes, "No healthy saint ever chooses suffering; he chooses God's will, as Paul did, whether it means suffering or not." Timothy was in a situation where he could avoid a lot of hardship if he were ashamed and backed out of his commitment. It's like those of us who are 49er fans have to choose to stay loyal to our team or to drop them out of shame because they're 1-3. By the way, shame was a powerful force in the ancient near east, and still is. People did things or didn't do things to avoid shame. To publicly identify with someone or something that others disapprove of is very difficult, especially in that culture. There are three things that MIGHT cause us

shame when it comes to being a Christian.

First, he says don't be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord. This means the testimony that we make about our Lord. The word "testify" means "to witness." We're all called to be a witness for our Lord. In doing that we don't have to try to be weird. But inevitably that sometimes will make us look weird or ignorant or narrow. In another letter Paul called himself a "**fool for the sake of Christ**" (1 Cor. 4:10). It's a temptation to be ashamed of that.

Second, he says don't be ashamed of me his prisoner. It's possible to be proud of Christ but embarrassed of His servants. Paul was in prison. He was about to be executed as a criminal. It would be easy to be embarrassed by that. If you look down at v.15 you can see that all of Paul's former fans from Asia had forsaken him. They were embarrassed of him. In v.16 he says only Onesiphorus was not ashamed of his chains. What if one of the elders in our church lost his job because he refused to do something he believed was unethical? What if lies were told about him and as a result he was "blackballed" from being hired in that industry? What if he went through years of unemployment and he looked like a loser? Would it be possible to be a little embarrassed to hang out with that guy; to identify with him as one of your leaders? That's what Paul is talking about.

Third, he says don't be ashamed of the gospel ("join with me in suffering for the gospel"). Why might we be ashamed of the gospel today? The attitude today is whatever you want to believe is fine. If it works for you, that's cool. But as soon as we say this is not just for me, this is for you; as soon as we say Christ is not just A way but THE way, then we're viewed as narrow and bigoted. That can be embarrassing.

These are the three main things which we, like Timothy, are tempted to be ashamed of. And that's a real temptation for all of us. If Timothy hadn't felt it, Paul wouldn't have needed to say this. If Paul hadn't have felt it, he wouldn't have needed to say in Romans, "**I am not ashamed of the gospel...**" And if this weren't a temptation common to all of us, Jesus himself wouldn't have said, "**For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son**

of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of his Father with his holy angels” (Mk. 8:38). One writer says, “We’re all more sensitive to public opinion than we like to admit, and tend to bow down too readily before its pressure, like reeds shaken by the wind.”

I’ve had to learn that the hard way. There have been times when I’ve been unashamed of the gospel. I can recall as a college football player asking my coach if he would call a team meeting so I could tell the whole team how Christ had changed my life and how he could change theirs as well. The amazing thing is he let me do it! I wasn’t ashamed. But I can also remember years later when I was at a pool party. An old high school friend asked me in front of everyone why I was so different than I was in high school. I wasn’t ready for that. I was ashamed to tell him the truth.

Because this is a real issue for all of us, Paul goes on in this passage and develops these three ideas. He discusses these three things, which we’re tempted to be ashamed of. He does so in inverse order. He starts with our loyalty to the gospel in vv. 9-10.

II. Do not be ashamed of the gospel

In vv. 9-10 he describes in detail this gospel which we’re tempted to be ashamed of.

“...who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel,...”

Notice what it is that God has accomplished through the Gospel. Three things: He saved us, he called us with a holy calling, and he abolished death and brought life and immortality to light. The gospel is about salvation. That’s why it’s good news. That’s why the angel said to Mary, “I bring you good news of great joy, a Savior has been born today who is Christ the Lord.” We’ve been saved from the penalty of sin, which is eternal death. We’ve been forgiven. But the gospel is about more than just forgiveness. The God who saved us also “called us with a holy calling.” God is holy and when God calls a person he calls him to live a holy life, and he begins to mold him for that purpose. But that’s not all. The gospel is also about “life and immortality.” To make that a reality for us God had to “abolish death.” He didn’t eliminate death, he put it out of commission; he rendered it powerless and ineffective over us. Spiritually, we’re no longer

dead but alive. Physically, though we may die, we’re immediately ushered into immortality.

That’s what God accomplished through the gospel. You have to wonder why would we ever be ashamed of something like that? The reason might be found in Paul’s describing the WAY God accomplished all of this. Notice what he says. This wasn’t accomplished by our own works, “but according to his own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, but now revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus.”

We couldn’t earn this salvation. That’s offensive to some people. We don’t have what it takes. We’re sinners to the core. Our most righteous deeds are filthy rags to God. Instead of earning it he granted it to us as a gift from all eternity. Before we could do any good works, he granted us grace. This is the biblical doctrine of election. It’s hard for us to get our minds around this, but we don’t have to. John Stott writes, “The doctrine of election is never introduced in Scripture either to arouse or to baffle our carnal curiosity, but always for a practical purpose. On the one hand, it engenders deep humility and gratitude, for it excludes all boasting. On the other, it brings both peace and assurance, for nothing can quiet our fears for our own stability like the knowledge that our safety depends ultimately not on ourselves but on God’s own purpose and grace.” Do you see what he’s saying? Divine election is not a bomb to be dropped or a banner to be waved, but it’s ballast for the soul in the midst of difficult and doubting days. It’s a source of security. If I didn’t earn it in the first place, if it was from the beginning of time a free gift of God’s grace, then I can do nothing to lose it! Since no amount of good works got me in, no amount of bad works can get me kicked out. It’s all of grace.

Notice also the sheer exclusivity of this gospel. He says this grace was granted to us “in Christ Jesus.” It was his and only his appearing which brought life and immortality to light. In other words, there is no other way to be saved. There is no other name which can do all these things. That’s offensive to people today. That’s not cool to say today, but it’s the truth. And it’s the truth people need to hear. Far from something to be embarrassed of, it’s something to glory in!

III. Do not be ashamed of His servant

Next Paul moves from talking about the gospel to himself - Paul. Remember he told Timothy not to be ashamed of him. There are times we’re tempted to be ashamed of not just the gospel but servants of the gospel. Paul deals with that in vv. 11-12 by holding himself up as a model for Timothy to follow.

“...for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher. 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.”

God appointed Paul as a preacher, an apostle and a teacher. A preacher is one who proclaims the gospel, an apostle was one who actually formulated the gospel, and a teacher is one who instructs people systematically in the doctrines of the gospel. We don't have apostles any more in the sense that Paul was, but we have preachers and teachers. Paul brings this up because he wants Timothy to know that it was because of his appointment that he suffers imprisonment. He's saying, "Timothy, this is nothing to be embarrassed about. I'm here because I've been faithful to him who appointed me." Notice up in v. 8 he calls himself "his prisoner." Whose prisoner? Nero's? That's what it looks like to some. But Paul means that he's Christ's prisoner. He's in prison because of Christ. And if Christ wants him out of prison he'll get out.

And then Paul makes this great statement of personal trust in v. 12. **"For I know whom I have believed..."** He doesn't say "I know WHAT I have believed," though that would have been true. He doesn't say, "I know WHEN I believed," though that would have been true also. He doesn't say, "I know HOW MUCH I have believed," though he did have great faith. He says, "I know WHOM I have believed. His confidence is in a person; a faithful God. He has entrusted something to God, and he trusts that God is able to guard that deposit until the day arrives when all accounts will be settled. What has he entrusted to God? His life. His work. He knows God will keep that deposit (investment) safe until the day he sees Christ face to face.

This is the secret of living a life that is free from shame; unembarrassed of the gospel. That's what we all want, right? We don't want to cower before the world. We don't want to be undercover Christians, afraid of being found out. The key is to know whom you have believed. Not just to know about him, but to know him; to know his faithfulness; to know you can entrust your life to him; to know a day will come when he will make good on that investment.

In his newspaper column, *Market Report*, Bill Barnhart once explained the difference between investors and traders in the stock market. A trader in stock makes decisions minute by minute in the hope of shaving off profits in fractions of a dollar. Traders are wheelers and dealers. They purchase for short term profits. They don't necessarily have any confidence in the companies they buy stock in. On the other hand, an investor buys or sells a stock based on research about the company. Investors are in it for the long haul. They're "chained to the mast." They commit their money to a stock, believing that over a period of years and even decades that stock will pay strong dividends and steadily grow in value. They aren't flustered by the ups and downs of the market because they believe in the quality of

the company.

Paul was an investor in the kingdom of God, not a trader. He believed in the long term quality of the One he had invested in. He knew his deposit (investment) was good. He wouldn't be deterred by a few ups and down in the market. How about you? Are you an investor or a trader? Are you just trying to improve your lot in this world, so that when pain or hardship comes you sell out? Or will you stay invested no matter what happens, knowing that eternal dividends await you?

That's not a model to be embarrassed by, that's a model to follow.

IV. Do not be ashamed of the testimony about Christ

Finally, he calls Timothy not to be ashamed of the testimony of Christ. Look at vv.13-14.

"Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you."

There are two commands here. He's to retain and he is to guard. He's to retain the standard of sound words. He's not to stray from the pattern which Paul set. He's also to guard the treasure, or the good deposit. This is the same word we saw up in v. 12. We make a deposit with God, but here it says God makes a deposit with us. It's a "good deposit." It's a treasure. It mustn't be lost. It needs to be protected from thieves. Paul is talking about the truth of the gospel. He's talking about protecting that truth from being lost and distorted.

This is pretty difficult, especially if you're timid by nature like Timothy was. The stakes are high! But there is some encouragement here. Notice a thread that has been woven through this entire passage. The thread started with the first word of the passage: *"Therefore."* What is the "Therefore" there for? You have to go up to v. 7, **"For God has not given us a Spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline."** The reason we're not to be ashamed is because we have his Spirit in us and his Spirit doesn't produce timidity, he produces power and love and a sound mind. The thread continues in v. 8, he says **"join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God."** Did you notice that? You can't do that according to your own power. You can only do that with his power at work in your life. Finally, the thread stops here at v. 14. How is Timothy to guard the treasure? How can he stop the flow of compromise? Paul says, **"...through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us."** You can't do it on your own. You don't have what it takes. But you have God within you, strengthening you, giving you wisdom and courage.

How we need the Spirit's strength, because in our postmodern culture there are a lot of ways we're tempted to allow for a little distortion. The truth of the gospel says Christ is not a way but the way. Our culture doesn't like that. Our culture is fine with Jesus, until we quote him: "**I am the way, the truth and the life; no man comes to the Father but through me**" (Jn. 14:6). That's awfully narrow, isn't it? So we're tempted to broaden our message.

The truth of the gospel says that we're sinners; no good thing dwells in us; we haven't a chance in hell to be good enough to deserve heaven. Even our best efforts, our noblest causes are tinged with sin and self. Our culture doesn't like that. We would rather affirm the "universal goodness of mankind." So we're tempted to update our message.

The truth of the gospel says the consequence of rejecting Jesus is an eternity separated from God and his people. Jesus warned us, "**Don't fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell**" (Mt. 10:28). Our culture says, "That's pretty rough, isn't it? What kind of God would do that?" So we're tempted to soften our message.

The truth of the gospel says that you can't claim to be a Christian and ignore the demands of holiness. The pursuit of holiness is not optional for the believer. Jesus said, "**Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven**" (Mt. 7:21). But the world says whatever feels good, do it. So we're tempted to lower our standards.

James Denney writes, "If God has really done something in Christ on which the salvation of the world depends, and if he has made it known, then it is the Christian duty to be intolerant of everything which ignores, denies, or explains it away."

Now, lest we think we should go around and hammer people with the truth don't miss what he say at the end of v. 13, "**...in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.**" So it's not just WHAT you believe, it's also HOW you communicate it. How we need a balance between truth and love. How we need to be humble and gentle and winsome in our witness. How many people are turned off not by the message but by the messengers, who are proud and judgmental and insensitive in the way they communicate truth.

CONCLUSION

Henry Thoreau once went to jail for refusing to pay his poll tax to a state which supported slavery. Thoreau's good friend, Ralph Waldo Emerson, went to visit him in jail. He peered through the bars and asked, "Henry, what are you doing in there?" Thoreau looked at his friend and answered, "No, Ralph, the question is, what are you doing out there?"

Some of us have to ask ourselves the same question. What are we doing out there? We're blessed in the country with so much freedom. We can believe what we want; we can worship who we want. Because it seems there is so rarely a price to pay for following Christ, it's hard to know sometimes if ours is a faith of convenience, which asks for little more than a contribution, or if it's a faith of commitment.

But if we truly take a stand for the gospel, and if we truly stand for his truth in a pluralistic society, a society which more and more accepts only pluralists and is only content with Jesus if we place him among the pantheon of all the other gods, then someday we might find ourselves where Paul was. And it's not just pluralism, it's relativism. There is no absolute truth. There is no fixed moral standard. But if we come along and say, "That's wrong!" Go up on the streets of San Francisco and say that, and you will find yourself a target, because relativists are nice as long as you agree with them. And if we don't, some day we might find ourselves in there rather than out here. You say it's not possible? I say it's happening today all over the world.

So be ready to choose suffering over shame. I say the day will come here in the U.S.A. when it will be very clear whether we've signed up just to make a contribution, or whether we've made a total commitment.

© 2003 Central Peninsula Church, Foster City, CA