

**Bethel Christian Fellowship
Fair Lawn, NJ**

**The Message Of 2 Timothy (4): “Enduring Suffering for The Gospel”
2 Timothy 1:8-12**

May 7, 2023

There’s no question that Paul was a great teacher and theologian. But he also had a pastoral heart, and he was a great encourager. He knew that encouragement is something *everyone can do*. He also knew that encouragement is something *everyone must have*. Throughout his many years of ministry, he had learned that burdens are eased, and spirits are lifted and relationships are healed by words of encouragement.

Just ask Timothy. Timothy had every reason to be encouraged about the ministry that Paul had entrusted to him. He knew Paul loved him, and prayed for him, and longed to see him. He knew that Paul was confident he had a sincere faith, and that this faith would see him through whatever troubles he was facing. Timothy also knew that he didn’t need any new work of grace in his life to accomplish his ministry. All he had to do was “stir up” what he already had. He knew as well that the Holy Spirit would enable him to serve Christ and to minister to others. For Paul had reminded him that God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, love, and self-control.

In the verses before us today, Paul continues to give much needed encouragement to Timothy. First, he urges Timothy to join him in suffering for the gospel, by the sustaining power of God (v. 8). The mere mention of the gospel then leads him to reflect on God’s power and salvation, since God had saved them and called them both to a holy calling (vv. 9-10). Then Paul reminds Timothy of his own commission to preach the gospel and affirms that he himself is not ashamed of his suffering, for he is convinced that God is able to guard what he had entrusted to Him (vv. 11-12). This last verse was especially intended to bring real encouragement to Timothy.

A. Paul’s Plea (1:8-10): *“So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy calling (ESV) – not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”*

The first thing to note is the smooth transition from the preceding section (vv. 6-7). In those verses, Paul has urged Timothy to rekindle the spiritual gift that is in him (v. 6) because God gave us a spirit not of fear, but of power and love and self-control. “So,” (NIV), or “Therefore” (ESV, NASB), Timothy has no need to be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed about visiting Paul in his Roman prison. “Not to be ashamed” of the gospel actually means “to be proud of it,” writes William Hendriksen. If so, then this is a call to pledge our allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ. (Imagine if Christians throughout America celebrated a “gospel pride” month.)

Second, when Paul urges Timothy to take his share of suffering for Christ, he reinforces his plea by adding, “*by the power of God . . .*” Obviously Paul knew that no one wants to suffer, and that no Christian can endure intense suffering *without* the power of God. But endure suffering is something Timothy must do, for the gospel message *always arouses antagonism* (nobody is neutral once they begin to see the true nature of the gospel message.)

Third, Paul never would have made this appeal if Timothy had not felt the pressure to remain silent in a hostile environment. There are those times when there *is* a strong temptation to be ashamed of speaking about Christ, or associating with those who are committed to the gospel of Christ. “We are all more sensitive to public opinion than we like to admit,” writes John Stott, “and tend to bow down too readily before its pressure, like reeds shaken by the wind” (Guard the Gospel). That’s why we *must* depend on the power of God to publicly testify about Christ.

Fourth, it is impossible for Paul to speak about the gospel (v. 8) without going on, in the same breath, to speak about the good news of God’s salvation (vv. 9-10). “Timothy,” Paul says, “we should never be ashamed to testify about the Lord Jesus Christ, by the power of God, for the power of God has saved us and called us both to this holy calling.” This leads to one of the clearest explanations of God’s plan of salvation found anywhere in the New Testament. It’s “*the A – B – C*” of salvation’s story:

(a) God has saved us and called us by His grace *alone*. It’s not because of *anything* we have done; rather, it’s because of His own purpose and grace (His gracious purpose); **(b)** God’s gracious plan to save us was put in place before we were born; even “before the beginning of time.” This is Paul’s doctrine of “unconditional election;” God’s eternal decree of redemption in Christ is based *solely* on His own purpose and good pleasure (as opposed to anything He foresaw in us); **(c)** His saving grace has now been manifested through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed the *power* of death (by His death and resurrection) and has brought life *and* immortality to light (through the preaching of the gospel). From beginning to end, we are saved entirely by God’s grace alone; He does it all.

Fifth and finally, these verses provide the link between suffering and the gospel. It’s the *undeserved nature* of the gospel which always offends. “The natural or unregenerate man hates to admit the gravity of his sin and guilt, his complete helplessness to save himself, the indispensable necessity of God’s grace and Christ’s sin-bearing death to save him, and therefore his inescapable indebtedness to the cross” (Stott). As my grandmother told me, shortly before she died, “If I’m not good enough to go to heaven, then I don’t want to go.” That’s what Paul meant by the “stumbling block” of the cross (1 Cor. 1:23).

B. Paul’s Personal Testimony (vv. 11-12): “*And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.*”

Q. Why should Paul need to remind Timothy of *his* commission to preach the gospel? This is something he has already mentioned to Timothy (1 Tim. 2:7) and which Timothy already knows. So why now? A. It’s because Paul is the great encourager, and he knows Timothy is in need of encouragement. In the words of Dr. Donald Guthrie, “If the great apostle, with his clear sense of

mission, has nevertheless been called on to suffer, Timothy must not be surprised if the same thing happens to him” (New Bible Commentary). Nor should we. We may not wind up in prison, but we may lose friends; or be shunned by family members; or passed over for promotions; or lose valued customers or be rejected by the world at large. None of this should surprise any of us.

Then, having urged Timothy not to be ashamed (v. 8), Paul affirms that he himself is not ashamed of his suffering (v. 12a), for he knows the Person in whom he has put his trust (“*I know whom I have believed*”). Paul is confident, therefore, that God is able to guard “*what I have entrusted to him*” (NIV, RSV, NASB); or “*what has been entrusted to me*” (KJV, ESV). So which is it?

In the Greek text, Paul literally says that He is able to guard “my deposit.” Paul could be referring to something which has been *deposited* into his account, or “entrusted to me” (ESV, KJV). If so, then Paul is saying that even though his life was about to end, he was confident that Christ would preserve the *gospel* (entrusted to him) and place it in other hands (like Timothy’s), so that the gospel ministry would not be hindered (upon his death), until “that day” (the day of Christ’s return). That surely would be comforting to know.

But “my deposit” could also mean something that Paul has entrusted to God (NIV, NASB, RSV), which would most likely refer to himself. If so, then Paul is saying that he has no fears about his present suffering, because he is confident that his life and ministry are entrusted to the hands of the Savior, until “that day.” That’s the day when Christ appears, *and* the vindication of all Christian suffering will occur. It would seem that in view of the preceding verses, and the real encouragement that Timothy needs at this time, this latter view would be the better one. On this final day, says Paul, it will be worth it all.

One does not have to be a spiritual giant or a super saint to testify about our Lord, as some might think. The same grace and power of God which saved us can also sustain and strengthen us for the task we have been called to do. Paul felt no shame in suffering for the gospel, nor should we. The more we come to know the *Person* in whom we have believed, the more we gain greater confidence to testify on His behalf. In the end, it *will* be worth it all.

I know not what of good or ill
May be reserved for me,
Of weary ways or golden days,
Before His face I see.
But I know whom I have believed,
And am persuaded that He is able
To keep that which I’ve committed
Unto Him against that day.
(Daniel W. Whittle, 1883)