

“Do Not Be Ashamed of the Gospel” (An Exposition of 2 Timothy 1:8)¹

Introduction

Here in v.8 of our text we see the point that Paul has been driving toward in the opening verses of the letter – he is exhorting Timothy (and us) *not* to be “**ashamed**” of the gospel of Christ, but rather to “**share in suffering**” with him for the sake of the gospel by the power of God.

That is the choice that is set before us by the Word of the Lord – either being ashamed of the gospel (which we as believers in Christ must *never* do), or suffering for the sake of the gospel. That is the choice that *Paul* was faced with in his ministry. That is the choice that *Timothy* then faced after him. And that is the choice that *we* as believers face today if we would faithfully bear witness to the gospel of Christ.

To be ashamed of the gospel is essentially *to seek to avoid its reproach* in the eyes of an unbelieving world that hates the Lord Jesus Christ and the message of the cross. Those who would be faithful to Christ and His Word will at times endure suffering for it. *Are you willing to suffer for the gospel?*

In some ways what Paul says here in v.8 is *the central theme of the entire letter*. You could say that much of what Paul says throughout much of the rest of this brief epistle is essentially just expanding upon and fleshing out this very truth – that we must not be ashamed of the gospel, but must instead share in suffering for its sake!

Do Not Be Ashamed of the Message of the Gospel

The first thing that Paul tells Timothy (and us as well) here in v.8 is that *we must not be ashamed of the message of the gospel*. There in v.8 he writes:

“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 . . .” (Italics added)

Paul has used similar language elsewhere in his epistles. The best known example is probably found in Romans 1:16, where he likewise says:

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” (Italics added)

There he tells us at the outset of his great magnum opus on the message of the gospel that he was *not ashamed* of it. And he tells us there the reason (or at least *one* of the reasons) *why* he was not ashamed of the gospel - “**for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes . . .**” The gospel (or good news) of Christ is both the *message of God* unto salvation and the *power of God* unto the salvation of sinners!

That can be said of *no other message on earth* – that it is *the very power of God* unto the salvation of sinners! So if we proclaim some other message, we may gain a following; we may find great success (as the world defines that term), but we will *not* see the power of God at work in saving sinners!

¹ All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version (ESV) unless otherwise noted.

But have you ever read that passage and wondered why in the world Paul would feel the need to say such a thing? *Why would any believer in Christ (much less an apostle!) ever feel tempted to being ashamed of the gospel?*

A brief survey of the many things that Paul suffered for the sake of the name of Jesus Christ gives us the simplest answer to that question, doesn't it? In 2 Corinthians chapter 11 Paul gives us a list of his qualifications for ministry, and it is basically *a litany of his sufferings for the gospel* – imprisonments, beatings, shipwreck, stoning, lashings, and a host of other things (v.29-33).

In fact, at his conversion in Acts chapter 9 the Lord Jesus told Ananias that, not only was Paul going to *bear witness* to His name, but that He was also going to *suffer* for its sake as well. In Acts 9:15–17 it says:

“But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.” So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.””

To be *ashamed of the gospel* is to allow something – often the fear of suffering or reproach - to cause us to be silent and fail to bear witness to the truth of God in the gospel of Christ.

In our day we see similar fear and silence about a great many lesser things. Political correctness (so-called) has often led those who hold conservative political views to keep their views to themselves. In our day it seems that holding the “wrong” political view or supporting the “wrong” political candidate can be bad for one's reputation, social standing, and even your career.

The various social media in use today provide us with numerous examples of people's accounts being suspended for expressing views that are in contradiction to the current progressive view. People are often censored or suspended for expressing simple facts of biology and ethics.

It seems many are confused as to how many genders there are, what a “woman” is or isn't, and many other things that have been rightly understood and upheld throughout human history. Try to point out that having biological males (i.e. *men*) competing in sports against biological females (i.e. *women*) is unfair, immoral, and contrary to nature, and you now risk being ostracized or having your social media account suspended.

Even in the church there is the temptation to be ashamed of the truth of God in these things. Thunder in the pulpit about the “sins” (real or imagined) that are popular targets in the unbelieving culture, such as patriarchy, white supremacy, Christian nationalism, or being in any way sympathetic to President Trump, and the world will seemingly pat you on the back.

But thunder against the sins that are the sacred cattle of our unbelieving culture, such as all forms of sexual immorality, homosexuality, abortion, government tyranny and the like, and watch how quickly the tables turn.

Is this not at least partially the reason why so many pastors preach messages that are only suited for *itching ears*, and for the prevalence of the entertainment model of worship that is so common today?

We must not be ashamed of the truth of God, no matter what the subject. And that is doubly true when it comes to *the gospel of Jesus Christ* - **“the testimony about [or of] our Lord”** (v.8). And that includes the preaching and teaching of *the biblical view of sin*. The message of the cross is meaningless without that. No wonder the world hates the message of the cross!

Do Not Be Ashamed of the Messengers of the Gospel

The second thing that we see in our text this morning is that not only are we not to be ashamed of the *message* of the gospel, but *we must also not be ashamed of the messengers of the gospel!* In v.8 again Paul tells Timothy:

“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” (Italics added)

We as believers must support the persecuted church and its ministers in any way that we can. As we have seen in the last year or so, it is no longer unheard of for evangelical pastors in the West to be arrested and imprisoned for the simple act of maintaining public worship and keeping their churches open in some places during the pandemic.

In some places liquor stores and places of ill repute that we should be ashamed to mention were deemed “essential,” while churches were ordered to be closed and limited to streaming their services online. And all of this as if *the gathered church* of the Lord Jesus Christ were not essential, and as if the fellowship of the saints and the administration of the sacraments (which *cannot* rightly be done virtually) were somehow not essential parts of Christian worship.

What did Paul mean when he told Timothy not to be ashamed of him? He clearly means that Timothy must not be afraid to be associated with him. He must be willing to stand by Paul and not abandon him. He must be willing to still come to see him in Rome in his prison cell as he awaited his execution.

Back in v.4 he told Timothy that he *longed to see him*, that he **“may be filled with joy.”** And then in v.15-18 of this same chapter Paul says:

“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.”

Paul reminds him of *what he already knew* – that others who formerly served faithfully alongside Paul in the work of the gospel had now deserted him in his hour of need! He says, **“all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes”** (v.15).

Why did they turn away from Paul when he needed them most? Because it may have now been dangerous to be associated with Paul. After all, he was on death row as if he were a violent criminal offender, just for preaching the gospel.

Onesiphorus, however, was **“not ashamed”** of Paul's chains, and sought him out earnestly and found him. He was *a true fox-hole guy!* No wonder Paul praised him and prayed God's blessings upon him!

Now we may not have reached that point in our society quite yet, and I pray that God in His mercy restrains the wickedness in our land so that it may not degenerate into such a wicked condition, but we must still make it our aim as believers in Christ to support those seemingly few brave pastors and teachers who *boldly* preach and teach the whole counsel of God.

They are the ones who take all of the heat of the battle, as they are the proverbial the tip of the spear. Such men are often unpopular, especially among those pastors and theologians who may be of a more progressive bent.

And *pray for a holy boldness in your pastors*, as many of us are of a more timid personality, perhaps even like young Timothy may have been. Pray that we might learn to *stand firm* and *stand up* for the truth of God.

Settle for nothing less than the preaching and teaching of “**the whole counsel of God**” (Acts 20:27). And do not ask that the so-called “rough edges” of the Scriptures be smoothed over to avoid the ruffling of feathers.

If we fail to support those who stand up boldly for the truth of God, we can be sure that we will see fewer and fewer men being willing to stand up boldly for His truth.

Notice how Paul describes himself there in v.8 - “**his prisoner.**” Whose prisoner? The Lord Jesus Christ! Paul was in a Roman prison cell, awaiting execution for faithfully preaching the gospel of Christ, but was he ultimately a prisoner of Nero or of Rome? No! *He was a prisoner for Christ!*

He says much the same thing in his epistle to the church in Ephesus. In Ephesians 3:1 he says, “**For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles . . .**” He entrusted himself, even his very life, to the safe keeping of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He trusted that the Lord Jesus knew what He was doing, and that as long as he was doing the will of God, he entrusted the results - both *the conversion of his hearers* as well as *the consequences from those who rejected his message of salvation in Christ* – to the sovereign good pleasure of Christ!

That is what we too must do if we would be faithful to Christ as His servants. Whatever we go through, we go through for Him and by His sovereign good will. If we suffer for His name's sake, He is able to take care of us.

Share in Suffering for the Message of the Gospel

That brings us to the *last* point (or at least the beginning of it in v.8), that we too must be willing to *share in suffering for the message of the gospel*. No doubt Paul will spend much of the rest of this very letter explaining what this means and what it looks like to do so, but here he makes the point clearly.

He tells Timothy to “**share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God.**” What Paul is saying here is probably better rendered simply as “**suffer with [me].**” That is clearly what he is getting at here. And was Paul some super Christian? Or did he expect super human ability in Timothy in order to do this? No. He tells him (and us) to do this “**by the power of God.**” On our own we can do *nothing* (John 15:5). But by the power of God we can endure all things for the truth of God.

It is *not* just pastors and missionaries who are called to suffer for the name of Christ. In Philippians 1:27–30 Paul elsewhere writes:

“Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. *For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.*”

It is not just pastors who are called to contend for the faith. The whole church, every believer together alongside each other, is to **'stand firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by our opponents'** (v.27-28).

Why? Because it has been **“granted”** (v.29) to us by God Himself that we should do so! It has been granted to us for the sake of Christ, not only that we should **“believe”** unto our salvation, but also that we should **“suffer for his sake.”**

By the grace of God may all of us who believe learn to live out the words that we all sang earlier in the service this morning. That classic old hymn by Isaac Watts puts it this way:

“I'm not ashamed to own my Lord,
or to defend his cause,
maintain the honor of his Word,
the glory of his cross.”

May God work in us by His Holy Spirit that we might not be ashamed to own our Lord as our own, so that we are not ashamed to defend His cause, so that we too maintain the honor of His Word and the glory of His cross. - Amen