

Instructions In Perseverance

2 Timothy 1:7-12

Introduction

This letter was written by Paul to Timothy in the closing months of Paul's life. Paul finds himself in a Roman prison. He is virtually alone ("*...only Luke is with me*" 2 Timothy 4:11). In the fourth chapter Paul has made his first defense before the Roman Court and "*no one stood with, but all forsook me*" (4:16). Opportunities to witness were restricted and Paul anticipates that he will soon be executed (4:16). In what has been called by many Paul's last will and testament; Paul lays out charges, commands, instructions of what constitutes the essential conduct of a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The letter is a constant call to persevere in present testings and to expect and endure future testings as well. Paul has run the race. The finishing line is coming soon. The theme of this book is holding on to faith in times of conflict, suffering and doctrinal declension. Some of the churches in Asia had defected from the gospel of grace and lapsed sadly to either a license or legalism (see 1:15). How will Christians face the challenges when the culture calls us to abandon personal purity or doctrinal integrity? The word apostasy has fallen out of favor in Christian conversation. It is a word that describes people who abandon Biblical Christianity because of hardship or suffering or conflict or doctrinal confusion. And yet Jesus Christ really is Lord and the Gospel of Grace is true. How will Timothy endure and survive the inevitable onslaught of abuse brought by the world, the flesh and the devil? What were some of the problems Timothy faced? It would seem he had to deal with constant opposition from the false leaders; opposition to the message of the gospel, his youth (see 1 Timothy 4:12); and his relationship with Paul.

Paul said "stir up the gift of God" or keep the fire ignited (v.6). What was that spiritual gift? It may be the gospel or it may be the spiritual gifts given by God's Holy Spirit for effective ministry. That fire ignited must be stirred, the flame must be guarded and kept, zeal fuels the gifted minister and the Christian must exercise the gift in this world. How do we endure hardship? How do we deal with doctrinal divisions, persecutions, gospel abuses and apostasy? We must stir up (slow burning embers) (*anazopyreo*) *ana—up and again—zoe—life—pyre—fire* "keep blazing" or keep the flame of the fire burning. What is your spiritual gift? Stir it up.

We must not fear (v.7). God has not given us a spirit of fear but of power and love and a sound mind (v.7). We must not be ashamed of the gospel (v.8). We must be willing to share in the sufferings of gospel (vv.8-10) and then follow Paul's lead or example (vv.11-12).

Do Not Fear (v.7)

2 Timothy 1:7 (NKJV) *For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and a sound mind.*

Let's see if we can connect the dots. Paul tells Timothy stir up the gift of God, that is use the very special gift given by God and verified and acknowledged by Paul (*by the putting on of my*

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hands v.6). Don't be afraid to use your gift. There are lots of reasons we might be reluctant to use our gifts or exercise our gifts. Evangelism and teaching are the tools God uses to save the sinner and mature the saints.

In honesty we all admit moments of fear. There are three Greek nouns that translate to the word fear in the New Testament. This word is *deilia*-(*only here*). The most frequent word in the NT are *phobos* (47 times) and *Eulobeia* (twice in Hebrews 5:7; 12:28). Trench points out the differences; *deilia*—is always used in the bad or negative sense; *phobos*—is a middle term that can either mean healthy or unhealthy depending on context; and the *eulobeia* is used in the good sense “godly fear” (see Hebrews citations). The word Paul uses here is a kind of word that means timidity—fearfulness—or cowardice. This kind of fear does not come from God. It's not healthy. Cowardice is not a fruit of the Spirit. There are repeated instructions in the Bible; do not fear the face of man, do not fear trials, ridicule, persecutions. But sometimes that is exactly what we fear. We fear embarrassment, mockery, criticism, opposition or abuse.

We must be careful not to confuse aggressiveness with power and love and a sound mind. The antidote to cowardice is not aggression but bravery. The source of bravery is not will power but the power that comes by God's Holy Spirit. We let God equip us. The Holy Spirit's power is manifest when the power is needed. I am going to suggest to you the power is given the moment you decide against cowardice and decide that courage is the course. The powerful Holy Spirit imparts power, and love. This is not ordinary love. This is *agape*. This is the love that loves people when they are enemies. It is a kind of love that is not controlled by emotion but rather the mind and will. This is love in resolution. This is the love that is demonstrated in the presence of ridicule and abuse. This is the love that is exercised in the presence of abuse and ill treatment. The love that exercises care to sinners and enemies is God's love. Fallen human beings can exercise courage and acts of self-less sacrifice. God's love is available to God's people. This is why Jesus said, “A new commandment I give to you; that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men know that you are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:34-35). “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness. . .” (Galatians 5:22-23).

What does Paul mean in his use “sound mind” (*sophronismou*)? It seems to mean the ability to control one's emotions, feelings and thoughts—in times of trial, difficulty, dare I say “threat”? This is the ability to exercise self-control in the presence of threatening circumstances or people. This is the disciplined response of a person who has learned how to think and act in crisis.

Paul is asking Timothy to act like a genuine believer; in boldness, in power, in love, exercising self-control. The ability comes from the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of that believer.

This is important. I think there is a human will to power and to love and to reason. But the power and love and self-control that Paul speaks of is the supernatural enabling by God's Holy Spirit.

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Bible scholars debate whether Paul's reference to the *spirit* is the Holy Spirit or some inner attitude; reinforced or strengthened by the presence of the Holy Spirit. Either way—it is the Holy Spirit who strengthens the human spirit (whether Timothy was timid by nature or not).

How in the world are we going to face trial, endure hardship, and suffering? How will we persevere? We will stir up the gift of God (v.6). We will abandon cowardice (v.7). One translation of our text reads; *God's Spirit doesn't make cowards of us. The Spirit gives us power, love, and self-control (CEV)*. “Have I not commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: For the Lord thy God is with thee withers over thou goest” (Johua 1:9).

Francis Roberts wrote; “The coward seeks release from pressure. The courageous pray for strength.”

George Swinnock wrote; “He that would not die when he must, and he that would die when he must not, are both of them cowards alike.”

Now Paul adds to his list; don't be ashamed of the Gospel—and don't be ashamed of people who aren't ashamed of the Gospel (v.8a).

Do Not Be Ashamed (v.8a)

2 Timothy 1:8a (NKJV) *Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner;*

Perseverance requires a resolute commitment to what God has said about reality. When Paul writes “therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord” it is God's testimony about Christ. It is Christ's testimony about God. It is both the testimony of God and Christ concerning the human condition and the remedy for sin. We identify with Christ and the gospel.

The Lord Jesus told His disciples; “*If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also*” (John 15:18-20). Later in this letter Paul will remind Timothy “*Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution*” (3:12).

What is Paul saying to Timothy? Please do not be ashamed either of the gospel or of me. Why in the world is Paul in jail? Paul is not in jail because he stole from the church or ran off with his secretary. Was Paul a true threat to society? Only if the gospel is a threat. Paul was misunderstood and opposed by the religious leaders, false teachers and the Roman authorities.

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The pressure was on. Do not preach the gospel. Do not live for Christ. And yet Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

For the Bible believing Christian there is no escape from the testimony of the Lord. We live for God and Christ because Jesus saved us from our sin. Jesus called us into a holy calling. Jesus saved us by grace—that is freely.

The gifts and callings of Christ were given to Timothy. And to you. The Lord gave Timothy a provision of power, love and self-control by His Holy Spirit. And to you. Timothy had every resource to stand against his opponents and their incessant criticism of his mentor and Father in the faith.

Prepare To Share In The Sufferings Of The Gospel (vv.8b-10)

*but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God,
9who 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 given to us in Christ Jesus before time began,
10but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished
death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel,*

How do we endure suffering and persevere in our faith? We stir up the gift of God (v.6); we abandon cowardice (v.7); we refuse to be ashamed of the gospel or of the servants of the gospel (v.8). Now Paul invites Timothy to take a big risk. “. . .*but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God. . .*” Really?

What does that mean? What exactly is Paul asking me to sign up for? Timothy was living in a time of growing hostility and animosity towards Christ and Christians. The message of Jesus was a real threat to the pagan practices of the ancient world. Believers were being arrested and imprisoned. Some saw Paul’s arrest and impending execution as a *judgment by God against the primitive Jesus movement*. Some thought that maybe Paul deserved to be in prison; that Christianity was a lie, a superstition, a story that was fabricated in order to upset people, tear families apart and keep decent people from having fun.

It is in the context of that determined opposition and persistent doubt that Paul urges Timothy to remain true to his calling, strong, courageous, bold, certain, as to Christ, and the gospel. Yes Paul was in a Roman prison but he was *God’s prisoner*. *No wonder Paul invites Timothy to share in his sufferings*. Paul invites Timothy to anticipate and expect suffering. The writer of Hebrews (13:23) says “Know that our brother Timothy has been set free, with whom I shall see you if he comes shortly.” Was the letter of Hebrews written before or after Paul’s second imprisonment? Either way—Timothy had either spent time or would spend time in prison. **Paul promises power to endure. A reliable power—a present power.** Paul had written to the Corinthians “I am content with weakness, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:10 NRSV).

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The believer is not limited to his or her own will power or strength. We are promised God's power in our suffering. Paul mentions his suffering according to the power of God (v.8b) and then briefly summarizes some of the most important points of the gospel in the life of the believer (vv.9-10).

He saved us (9a). This is both heart and soul of the Gospel. **There is no gospel apart from the death and sacrifice of Jesus. There is no gospel unless human beings are recalcitrant sinners by nature and choice.** Jesus is made sin so that we might be saved! Salvation serves as a both a reminder and motivation in the very presence of suffering.

He called us (9b). With a holy calling (9c).

If this were all it would be sufficient to renounce cowardice and embarrassment. God saved us. God called us. God had both a plan and a purpose. This plan and purpose was not rooted in our goodness or greatness. God did not save you because you are good. You are not good. God is good. You are not great. God is great. **His purpose in salvation was to redeem a people for Himself, in order to glorify Him. The Lord Jesus saves people from sin and then each believer is called to live a holy life.** Holy living has been all but lost in this present generation. **Are you ashamed of the gospel?** Do you live in constant fear that people at school or at work might discover you are a Christ follower? Do you live in constant fear that you might say something that will offend your unbelieving family or friends? Do you hope to blend in to the cultural scenery and hope nobody notices you are there? Do you look for opportunities to share Christ? Do you live a life that is honoring and pleasing to Christ? Are you using your life and resources to carry out Christ's desires or your own?

And yet. . .salvation and calling rely only and exclusively on Christ Jesus the Lord. Our works neither save us or empower us to please God. Our works are the simple manifestation of the presence of Jesus in our hearts. **Our salvation and holiness—or Christian living—can only occur through God's planned purpose and his amazing, sufficient grace.** *"We create neither the opportunity nor the possibility for our salvation. God graciously allows us to simply respond to His plan"* (see *Life Application Bible Commentary* p. 161).

Learn From Paul's Example (vv.11-12)

*11*to which I was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles.

*12*For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.

Conclusion

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What kind of personality did Timothy possess? Do you think that he was outgoing or introverted? Do you think he was by nature private? Whatever personality profile he possessed Timothy was reminded that God gives us boldness through His Holy Spirit.