

The Suffering of the Unashamed. 2 Timothy 2:1-7

Called to be unashamed – when so many are

You know All in Asia have deserted me 1:15

2 Tim. 1: ¹⁵ You know that all those in the province of Asia have deserted me,

You know

Timothy, himself in the province of Asia, knows first hand Paul's unpopularity, that he, his gospel, his way of doing ministry, is an embarrassment to many who identify as believers

Maybe even a cause of fear as he attracts the suspicion and condemnation of the State

That he is reckoned controversial, disapproved, rejected

You know

And perhaps you know the unpopularity of the gospel with your peers, the embarrassment of some who call themselves Christians with a message of repentance and faith

The suspicion of some that the Christian faith is not good for people

The hostility of others

You know

But Timothy as we heard in chapter 1 is called to be different

2 Timothy 1: ⁸ So don't be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, or of me his prisoner. Instead, share in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God.

Called to be Unashamed of the Christian message about Jesus

And to have a ministry that is unashamed of Paul and the gospel Paul has received from Jesus and in turn entrusted to Timothy - A ministry of holding fast v. 13

2 Tim. 1: ¹³ Hold on to the pattern of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁴ Guard the good deposit through the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

But What will an unashamed ministry of the gospel look like for Timothy in the midst of suspicion of and hostility towards the gospel?

What will that involve for Timothy?

And what does it look like for us to be unashamed of the gospel in the face of defection from gospel truth by some calling themselves Christians and in the midst of a wider suspicion of the goodness of the Christian gospel?

Paul tells us in our reading that to be unashamed of the gospel will mean three things

A reliance on grace

A focus on the gospel's trustworthy transmission

And sharing in suffering

2 Tim. 1: ¹⁵ You know that all those in the province of Asia have deserted me,

But

*2 You, therefore, my son, **be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.***

The source of an unashamed ministry – reliance on grace v. 1 [2 Corinthians 12:9-10]

To live unashamed of the gospel

To have a ministry faithful to the gospel

Needs strength

Strength to resist persuasive error and those who teach it

Strength to persevere when so many are abandoning the truth, to not be carried along with their defection

Strength to endure suspicion and misrepresentation

Strength to keep on confessing Christ if, like Paul, your ministry is subject to the punishment of the state

But also strength to resist temptation, to keep going

Strength to be the good soldier, the successful athlete, the hardworking farmer Paul will later call Timothy and us to be

Strength, moral and spiritual, will be needed

But where can that strength be found?

In our Upbringing – family tradition, pride

Our Training –

Some hidden well of strength deep within?

None of those

Instead Paul points Timothy to

Grace, the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

The Lord Jesus is the source of the grace we need

And this is not a special kind of grace

It is the grace every believer receives, Generic grace, the grace given us in Christ Jesus before time began

1: ⁹ He 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.

Timothy's strength, our strength, is to be found in grace, in God's free, sovereign, generous kindness and favour towards us which we have come to know and receive through trusting the Lord Jesus

Romans 5: Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ² We have also obtained access through him by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we boast in the hope of the glory of God.

Paul says, in Romans 5, that justified by faith in Jesus the atoning sacrifice for our sin we have peace with God and through faith 'have obtained access into this grace in which we stand'

This grace we have in Christ is not on again, off again

We stand in grace, we live in grace

In Christ we are always the recipients of grace

And this grace every believer receives in Christ is the source of the strength we need to live and minister unashamed of the gospel

But for whom is the strength grace supplies?

The weak

And we most know its strength when we are most aware of our weaknesses

Remember when Paul was finding himself hampered by the affliction he called his thorn in the flesh.

"Concerning this", he writes in 2 Corinthians 12:8-10, "I pleaded with the Lord three times that it would leave me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weaknesses." Therefore, I will most gladly boast all the more about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may reside in me. So I take pleasure in weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and in difficulties, for when I am weak then I am strong."

My grace is sufficient for you – for my power is made perfect in weakness

To know that all the strength we need is found in grace

That the more we feel our need the more help is there

Is such a comfort

In committing ourselves to be unashamed of the gospel We don't have to pretend we are stronger than we are

We don't have to minimise the challenge

Don't have to put our hope in ourselves

We turn out to grace, not in to our own resources

And that grace, the source of strength, is not far away, not difficult to obtain

Grace is freely given, it is generous and inexhaustible – never runs out, not rationed

We don't have to think we can only come to God for help when we've been good

Done our bit as best we can

For Grace is gracious – it is kind and forgiving,

We bring our need, not our deserving

And grace is not some mechanical, impersonal reservoir that we turn on and off as required, where it all depends on us,

Grace is God's active kindness that goes before us, not just after our requests

And His grace is not just strength for a task, but love for a person

We receive in grace Care and kindness, the restoring and strengthening of our hearts in knowledge of God's love.

In living and ministering unashamed of the gospel believers look to the grace of Christ for strength

Look in our known, confessed, felt – weakness, for the grace that is sufficient,

That will display God's power in our lives

Where do you look for the strength to persevere in being unashamed of the gospel?

On whom are you relying?

How we begin in the Christian life – saved by grace, is how we continue, strengthened by grace

If you know that when you fail, been tripped up in sin, you will get up again for you know grace is forgiving

And even if it is tough to see progress you will be optimistic about the end – for that grace is inexhaustible

be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

And

² *What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.*

The Focus of an unashamed ministry – passing on the gospel v. 2

In this grace there is strength to persevere in a focused way on what is important, passing on the gospel you have been entrusted with to others who themselves can share it with others in turn. In this way the gospel that makes life and immortality known continues and goes to more and more people

What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses,

What you heard from me. Paul is again reminding us that the gospel is a given, the message entrusted by the Lord Jesus to his apostles.

It is not a body of philosophy to be added to by those who follow

It is not a sentiment that must be clothed afresh in every generation and culture

It is not a morality constantly adapting to new situations

It is the message about Jesus.

The summary of that message is that He died for our sins, was buried, and rose again,

Paul what Timothy has heard from Paul is more than that summary. It includes all that Paul has taught in person or by letter – taught about righteousness by faith, about Jesus’ pre-existence [Phil. 1], about His reign, about the life of the age to come, about what it means to follow Jesus in a pagan world. It includes the gospels and all that Jesus has taught

The gospel is a message with a given content, what we have received from the apostles, what Jude calls the faith delivered once and for all to the saints

And it is a final and sufficient word for you can’t know more of God than you can in knowing Jesus and it brings what we need, life and immortality through repentance and faith in Jesus. You cannot be more saved than you are in believing the gospel’

And Paul reminds Timothy this apostolic witness is a public message, given before or through many witnesses.

A public message for all

It is not secret, esoteric – just for the inner circle – like the teaching of the false teachers

Not myths and secret codes

It is light and it loves the light

Always a public message whose content in every age can be tested and confirmed by looking at the record of what has been taught in public by the apostles.

This gospel is to be preserved and passed on. As it is for all, it must go to all, in all places and in all times and the means God has chosen to bring the message to all people is by one generation of believers passing the gospel on to the next generation of faithful believers

What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses,

commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

This is both Timothy’s urgent task in Asia, and the focus of unashamed gospel ministry through the ages.

Timothy’s task is urgent. Paul is calling him to Rome [4:9, 13, 21] as quickly as possible. So provision must be made in Asia for the continuation of the teaching of the apostolic gospel before he leaves. In Timothy’s case, considering the instruction Paul has already given about elders in the Ephesian church in 1 Timothy, and the need for this gospel to be taught publicly and with authority in the churches of Asia, Timothy is looking for faithful men.

[Right translation, but restricting this to men would not be the right application]

But the word translated 'men' also in many contexts includes women, and the principle for the transmission of the gospel here applies to both women and men – the gospel is to be entrusted to faithful people.

Faithful, unashamed gospel ministry, is always looking for its continuation and propagation, its spread, by entrusting the apostolic gospel for safekeeping to people with two characteristics
faithfulness, and an ability to teach.

Faithful has the sense of both believing and trustworthy.

These are people who are committed to the gospel's truth, know for themselves its power to save,

They live the gospel

And, able to teach, they are committed to passing it on accurately, without addition or subtraction

Teaching is not less than the transmission of the content of the gospel. It must involve that, but it involves more than that.

There is always a teaching to do, and so it involves application

[It is teaching modelled on that of Paul [2 Tim 1:11 – a teacher], teaching Timothy has in turn modelled [1 Tim. 4:13, 2 Tim. 4:2] that showed how the Old Testament Scriptures were fulfilled in Jesus, that sought to bring out what following Jesus meant in new contexts.]

And this teaching can go on in many contexts – like Paul's ministry – in the synagogue, in a rented hall, from house to house, even in prison, in person or by writing

Timothy must find people who are fit to receive the gospel deposit entrusted to him v. 14 and able to pass it on

People who will, like him and Paul before him, be stewards of the gospel and who know that the one thing required of a steward is faithfulness

You might be thinking that this only applies to official ministry, and those specially gifted

But we should all want to be known as faithful – every one of us should be believing and trustworthy, keen to be accurate in our transmission of the gospel, in relaying the message of Jesus

And all of us can find ourselves in contexts where we teach

Whether it is to our own Children around the dining room table

Sunday School, or Conversation

Everyone of us should be seeking to be a faithful receiver and a faithful transmitter of the gospel

For the gospel saves – this is the way people hear of life and immortality

And it is by teaching that disciples of Jesus are made

But there is a cost in unashamed ministry, in being faithful in passing on the message entrusted to the apostles

2 Timothy 3:³ Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. ⁴ No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in the concerns of civilian life; he seeks to please the commanding officer.

The Cost of an unashamed ministry - suffering vv. 3-6 [1:8]

As he had in 2 Tim. 1:8 where he called Timothy to be unashamed Paul again calls Timothy to share in suffering for the sake of the gospel

[2 Timothy 1:⁸ So don't be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, or of me his prisoner. Instead, share in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God.]

There is no way to avoid it. If you are to be unashamed of the gospel there will be suffering.

And Paul introduces a picture of the kind of suffering that Timothy might face

Share in suffering as a good, a praiseworthy, soldier of Christ Jesus

He is going to focus the cost of unashamed ministry of the gospel in three further images that help us to understand what is called for in vv. 4-6

But let's think first about what's involved in being a soldier.

[All the inhabitants of the Roman empire had exposure to the Roman army, even in peaceful provinces. Soldiers accompanied governors, tax officials, escorted prisoners

The life of a soldier was known to them]

The life of a soldier in the Roman legions had many hardships

you joined up for 25 years, and the Emperor Augustus had forbidden legionaries to marry.

They were often moved, unable to settle anywhere

There was frequent Training

You lived under orders and Harsh discipline

Sometimes the living conditions were poor, out in the open or in isolated forts

There was the presence of danger

The possibility of wounding or death in conflict

And in between those times, boredom

Military life was tough in and of itself

Hardship went with the job

Hardship, Suffering goes with an unashamed commitment to the ministry of the apostles' witness to Jesus

And Paul uses three pictures to focus the suffering, the cost, involved that Timothy and we will have to think over to know how they will apply to our individual lives

Three pictures of the suffering to be embraced

⁴ *No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in the concerns of civilian life; he seeks to please the commanding officer.*

The single minded soldier

The first carries on the image of the soldier to emphasise that the unashamed gospel minister must be singleminded, seeking to please the Lord Jesus in everything. He is the one who enlisted the believer – that is what the phrase translated ‘commanding officer’ means. Jesus is the one who has called the believer into His service.

The good soldier is singleminded.

On the one hand that means he or she ‘doesn’t get entangled in the concerns of civilian life’

Entangled is getting caught up in something so that your movements are slowed or prevented entirely because you are held fast.

It was used of a sheep caught in thorns

Or you could think of troops caught in barbed wire

What can entangle Christ’s soldier is ‘the concerns of civilian life’, the affairs of everyday life.

There has been a lot of discussion about whether Paul was thinking about something specific when he spoke of the affairs of everyday life, like marriage or work.

Now marriage does compete for our attention, divide our interests.

Paul writes in *1 Cor. 7:*³² *I want you to be without concerns. The unmarried man is concerned about the things of the Lord—how he may please the Lord.*³³ *But the married man is concerned about the things of the world—how he may please his wife—*³⁴ *and his interests are divided. The unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the things of the Lord, so that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But the married woman is concerned about the things of the world—how she may please her husband.*

But we know Paul expected elders to be married [1 Tim. 3:2, Titus 1:6], encouraged younger widows to be married [1 Tim. 5:14], and observed without criticism that some of the apostles were accompanied in their work by believing wives [1 Cor. 9:5]

So the entangling affairs of everyday life is not marriage in itself. He is not commanding celibacy.

And while work does take time and attention we also know that Paul commanded the Thessalonians to work [2 Thess. 3] and worked with his hands 1 Cor. 9:6 to support himself in ministry, so Paul is unlikely to be talking about work in itself.

The emphasis is not so much on a specific activity of everyday life, but on the attitude to that activity.

Everyday life becomes an entanglement when it distracts us from pleasing our Lord, when we allow it to compete with our loyalty to Him, with taking direction from him.

So, for example, Christians can play sport – and some even do to share the gospel – but when sport starts to call the shots in our life, determines our choices, leads us away from Christian service, that is an entanglement

Or politics – some Christians serve there, but when the pursuit of power takes priority over the pursuit of godliness, when it determines our choices – that is an entanglement

This can be true of success in business or academic pursuits, retirement plans or home renovation. We can allow all those to become entanglements.

And yes, it can even be true of our marriages where pleasing our spouse has priority.

But like a good soldier are to live to please Him, to devote ourselves to the gospel He has entrusted to us.

And that may well mean saying no to a whole range of opportunities. You don't want to get yourself in a situation where for the sake of the business of everyday life you can't teach the gospel, can't speak of it openly, can't take it to others.

A small example – when I was much younger I loved bushwalking and had a group of colleagues who would try and be walking or climbing every weekend.

But you can't be away every weekend camping in the bush and be teaching Sunday School, or leading youth group, or encouraging your brothers and sisters in church.

So bushwalking had to go

What threatens to entangle you?

Are you single minded in seeking to please the Lord who by His gracious call has enlisted you into his service?

A way to answer that is to think about what determines how you spend your time. Do you do things because you know they please Jesus, or do you do what pleases you and Jesus doesn't seem to forbid? Have you even asked the question about whether your work, or your boyfriend or girlfriend, or your career goal, pleases Jesus?

Being a good soldier of Jesus means embracing the suffering of the single minded who will set aside all else, in Paul's case even life itself, to please Jesus.

But Paul now introduces a new image to illustrate the cost of being unashamed in gospel ministry – that of the athlete.

[2 Timothy 2:⁵ Also, if anyone competes as an athlete, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. ⁶ The hardworking farmer ought to be the first to get a share of the crops.]

The disciplined athlete

The society Paul lived in was keen on athletic competition. They had the Olympic games, the Isthmian games, and two pan-Hellenic games that all the Greek world could compete in. Athletics was part of an education, and local communities had their own versions of the more well-known games.

So everyone knew that there were rules that governed participation in athletic competition, just as today. An ancient commentator wrote of the Olympic games that

“... It is custom for athletes, their fathers and their brothers as well their trainers to swear an oath upon slices of boar’s flesh that in nothing will they sin against the Olympic Games. The athletes take this further oath also, that for ten successive months they have strictly followed the regulations for training. (Pausanias 5.24.9ff

If competitors were found breaking the rules – whether in preparation or in competition - they could be fined, excluded from the games or flogged, just as modern competitors guilty of doping can be excluded or stripped of their awards.

So when Paul said ⁵ *Also, if anyone competes as an athlete, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.*

They all agreed.

And the point? In the competition Christ calls us to, the unashamed ministry of the gospel, you can’t compete on your own terms, by your own rules, but only by Jesus’ rules. The cost of being unashamed of the gospel is a commitment to a disciplined life, of living as a genuine Christian according to Christ’s word in all things, of being dedicated and determined to do what He says.

There are no short cuts to the prize.

And to the military and athletic images Paul adds a third, that of the farmer

The diligent farmer

⁶ *The hardworking farmer ought to be the first to get a share of the crops.*

The cost of being unashamed of the gospel, the suffering of guarding the good deposit, is being diligent, committed to hard work and knowing the weariness of strenuous toil

There were no airconditioned tractor cabs for ancient farmers. It was all done by hand – from sowing to reaping, from planting to picking. And it had to be continued in all weathers, in all seasons. Farmwork is continuous and as one commentator has said it is ‘totally devoid of excitement, remote from all the glamour of peril and applause.’

And farmwork is work with what you might call delayed gratification. There are months between sowing and harvesting. You don’t see return straightaway, and if you are an orchardist, you may not see return for your efforts for several years.

But you keep going – watering, fertilizing, pruning, and planting some more.

The Lord Jesus worked hard, at some times so pressed by the crowds that he had no time to eat, having to get up early to have any time to Himself [Mark 3:20, 1:35-38].

The apostle Paul modelled the hard work he called for. You can get a sense of his toils in 2 Corinthians 6 and 11, and He could say of his labours in relation to the other apostles in 1 Corinthians 15:10 “I worked harder than any of them, yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.”

Whatever it might look like for us, whatever responsibility we are entrusted with by our Lord for sharing and teaching the gospel, we should work hard at it for the gospel is the word of life.

A small example – John Chapman was a famous evangelist in Sydney. He told us that when he had just started teaching he wanted to find ways of having fruitful conversations with his colleagues that would allow him to talk about Jesus. He decided he would prepare himself by getting to the common room early, scan the paper, look for two or three interesting stories that he thought could lead to conversations about the gospel. And that is what he did – consistently. He had the desire to share the gospel, and he equipped himself to share the gospel by working at it. [Know and Tell the Gospel]

We have to know how to rest, we mustn't burden ourselves with the crushing thought that it all depends on us, but we should work hard in the ministry of the gospel and be willing to pay the cost of weariness – and it is wearying to stick at teaching in private and in public, day after day, year after year, like the hardworking farmer

But Remember In the parable of the talents the man the Master is displeased with is the man who went and buried his talent, who had been entrusted with a great treasure and did nothing with it. The master describes him as a 'wicked, lazy, servant' [Matthew 25:26].

We don't want to be that servant but instead be those who gain the rewards Paul speaks of here.

Did you see them?

The reward of the focused, single minded soldier is pleasing the one who enlisted him.

The reward of the disciplined, dedicated athlete is the winner's crown

The reward of the hard working farmer is to have a certain share, the first share, in the fruit of his labours.

These may just be features of the images Paul uses but they bring to mind what is said elsewhere in Scripture of the diligent servant and the victorious athlete.

In the parable of the talents our Lord welcomes those who use well what has been entrusted to them with the words

Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Master. Won't that be worth hearing.

And at the end of a life that has run the race and kept the faith Paul can say

2 timothy 4:⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.⁸ There is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me, but to all those who have loved his appearing.

That victors crown, which is being declared righteous in the judgement at the last day, of enjoying peace with God forever, is for all who persevere devoted to Jesus

There is a cost in being unashamed of the gospel

It is a call to suffering

The suffering of the good soldier

Who says no to being wholly absorbed in ordinary life so that he can single mindedly serve His Lord

The suffering of the athlete who lives a disciplined life of determined devotion to the rules of competition

The suffering of the hardworking farmer, the weariness of the one who perseveres in all weathers and seasons in cultivating the gospel seed, in nurturing believers growth

But what responding to that call for suffering will look like in Timothy's life

What responding to that call for singlemindedness, discipline and diligence, will look like in your life

Will take thought.

2 Timothy 2:7 Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

Engaging with application v. 7

Sometimes, often I think, to know the application of some part of God's word to your life – you have to think about it

Here especially you need to Reflect on what God's word is saying, and reflect on your life

To ask, for example, where am I being entangled?

Where am I not living up to what Jesus calls for from His followers?

Where am I slacking off in pursuing and using opportunities to share and teach the gospel?

Perhaps, even asking the foundational questions - am I convinced and grateful that the gospel Paul preaches has in the grace of our Lord brought life and immortality to me,

Am I Convinced I know the living God in the gospel of His Son and I can entrust my life to Him?

God calls us to think about what we hear

That is good for us – it is the way we mature, have a discipleship of our own, where we do what we do not because someone else has told us we should do it

But because we are convicted from His word that the Lord Jesus wants us to do it

It is by acting on that conviction that you grow in your trust in Him as you find Him faithful

And it will encourage the perseverance in suffering that builds character and hope

You need that conviction, because you won't suffer for someone else's good idea about how you should live your life, but you will for the Lord who has given you life and will raise you from the dead.

But thinking over what God says to us in His word takes time

So will you make time tonight to ask your self if you are the good soldier, the disciplined athlete, the hardworking farmer?

Giving yourself time to reflect on what you hear taught from God's word, what you read in His word, is a good habit, a daily habit, to get into

You should because Paul is confident that God will bless that thinking

*2 Timothy 2:7 Consider what I say, **for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.***

That is a promise

Everything is not a promise that the Lord will make you a brain surgeon

Everything is all the things Paul has been talking about here, what Timothy needs to know to live as a good soldier of Jesus

Paul is confident of the work of God's Spirit in Timothy's life

That through the Spirit Timothy will be led to understand and apply the truth of what Paul has just written

And we have the same Spirit, and the same patient Lord who wants us to grow in our service of Him

In fruitful service of the gospel

So – unashamed of the gospel of the Lord Jesus who has destroyed death, the gospel He has sent into the world through His apostles to give life and immortality to all who repent and believe

The gospel that has brought you and I life and immortality

Commit yourself to be like Timothy

Not someone who abandons the gospel and its preachers at the first sign of trouble and opposition, when it looks like it will cost you something to follow Jesus

But someone who is strong in grace

Focused on being trustworthy in your own handling of the gospel and faithful in passing it on

And who is willing to pay the cost, to suffer for the gospel

The cost of being single minded in living to please Jesus

Of living a disciplined and determined life as a follower of Jesus until the end of our race

Of working hard in Jesus' service in sharing and teaching the gospel as you have opportunity

Is that the live you are living now?

Think over what Paul has written, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything, in all that you need to live as His faithful follower.