SERIES: Entrusted with the Gospel
SERMON: The Fellowship of the Unashamed
SCRIPTURE: 2 Timothy 1:8-18
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Last Lord’s Day Pastor Josh shared with us very poignantly about how he could relate to Timothy, the young protégée of the Apostle Paul to whom he addresses this powerful personal letter we know as 2 Timothy. Josh saw in Timothy’s background some of the same family of origins issues which he himself experienced, namely the absence of a godly father in the home. While Paul praises Timothy’s mother and grandmother for the powerful spiritual influence they had in his life, no mention is made of his father or his grandfather. Whether they were deceased or separated from the family or merely unbelievers, we do not know, but it seems that the absence of male spiritual models from the home created some unique challenges for Timothy, and for Josh—challenges which both, thankfully, overcame by the grace of God.

I did not have that problem. I grew up in a godly home with a very involved father, four of whose five children actually followed him into the ministry—not because we felt pressured but because my dad made serving God vocationally very attractive. Nevertheless, I also relate to Timothy, but for an entirely different reason from Josh—one of personality. Let me explain.

Several years ago our whole staff went through some psychological testing offered by a highly qualified church consultant. I can’t even remember why we did it, but I think it had to do with helping us mesh together as a team. The testing expert didn’t know any of us, but the results he came up with were uncannily accurate. One of the scales on which we were rated was an extrovert/introvert scale. Guess which of our staff emerged as the number one extrovert, defined as one who is energized by being around people? Well, it was Dan Curnutt, the quintessential people-person.

Guess who was the most introverted, i.e. the one who is by nature shy, drained by crowds, and energized by books? Yours truly. On a scale of 1-10 for extroversion, I think I was a minus 4. Now I suspect some of you are surprised by that. As a Lead Pastor for 38 years in two fairly large churches I have spent most of my adult life in the public eye, and frankly I worked hard to be friendly and available. But at heart I am a very private person. I hate crowds and I’m scared to death to speak extemporaneously in public. My ideal vacation is not Disney World but a trip to southern Utah, where some of God’s greatest natural handiwork is on display and where people are scarce. I’ve gone there eight times in the last ten years.

I wouldn’t be shocked if someone, having heard this, were to ask, “Why in the world would a pathological introvert go into a career as a public speaker and leader of a large organization?” Well, without trying to sound too spiritual, I believe God called me into pastoral ministry. I’m not the first introvert, and I won’t be the last He calls into leadership, and whenever God calls,
He equips. We may not be entirely comfortable where He puts us, but we can be confident He will provide the strength and resources to be obedient and effective.

It is here that I relate to Timothy, for he, too, was timid and introverted, unsure of himself in public, given to insecurity. Now to be honest this was in part due to his age. He was young and inexperienced when he became the pastor of the church Paul planted in Ephesus, which reminds me of what I was when I first became pastor here—five years younger than Josh is today. In 1 Timothy 4:12 Paul says to Timothy, “Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.” In the next chapter Paul will urge Timothy to flee youthful passions.

But Timothy was not only young; he was also by nature timid, mentioned in Josh’s passage last Sunday—2 Timothy 1:7. This is also hinted at in 1 Corinthians 16:10, where Paul tells the church, “When Timothy comes, see that you put him at ease among you, for he is doing the work of the Lord, as I am. So let no one despise him.” I gather from this that Timothy was so insecure and fearful that he actually attracted a certain amount of criticism for it.

In addition, several times in his letters to Timothy Paul urges him not to neglect his spiritual giftedness (last week in 2 Timothy 1:6 and also in 1 Timothy 4:14), which I assume was not because he lacked desire to serve, but because he lacked boldness and courage.

However, the most important hint we get about Timothy’s introverted personality may be found in our text for today. It is the term “not ashamed,” found three times in the last half of chapter one and again in chapter 2. It conveys the notion of timidity, fear, even cowardice that so often plagues those of us who are high on the introvert scale, but which can also affect anyone in given circumstances.

So let’s turn our attention to the Word of God as found in 2 Timothy 1:8-18 in the pew Bible. There is a parenthetical thought in verses 9-11—more than a passing thought, actually a purposeful and very important theological treatise—but in order to grasp the argument of the passage better, I want us to skip those verses in our reading, but I will definitely come back to them in the course of the sermon.

2 Timothy 1:8, 12b-18 (ESV)

8Therefore 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, … 12bI am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me. 13Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. 14By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.

15You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes. 16May 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.

In this brief passage the Apostle urges his young friend Timothy, either directly or indirectly, not to be ashamed of testifying about the Lord, of suffering for the Gospel, or of God’s faithful servants. Evidently the temptation to be ashamed must have been very real for Timothy, and by extension for many of us. But if we’re going to be able to grasp the heart of what Paul is talking about I think we need to examine this term “ashamed.” What does it mean? Why is it a threat to our spiritual health and ministry?

One of our esteemed professors at Trinity Seminary, Dr. Richard Averbeck, has done some ground-breaking work on the subject of shame, based on the creation story. He is uniquely qualified because he has a Ph.D. in Hebrew and Semitics and is a licensed therapist. As you recall, following the creation of Adam and Eve, the crown jewel of God’s creative work, we read, “The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame” (Gen. 2:25). They enjoyed absolute openness and uninhibited intimacy both with God and with each other.

But immediately after their sin they felt the urge to hide from God and to cover up from each other. They went from fellowship to hiding, from confidence to fear. Before the Fall when God walked in the garden it was the most natural thing in the world for Adam and Eve to run to Him; after the Fall the most natural thing was to run away from Him. If we feel shame we always want to cover up and hope no one sees us in our shame. However, there are different degrees of shame. Embarrassment is a slight form of it, but extremely painful for some people. Pathological fear is a more serious form, and much more powerful.

We all struggle with shame to varying degrees, but we do not have to be controlled by it—that’s one clear teaching of this passage. God would not tell us not to be ashamed if it weren’t possible for us to avoid it. Dr. Averbeck suggests we really have two options in life. We can either allow the insecurity we feel and experience to cause us to run away from God and from people, or we can allow it to drive us back to God and by His power build relationships with people.

Now it is my contention that shame is generally a more challenging issue for the timid, the introverted. Everyone experiences it, but those with Timothy’s personality type are more likely to hide, to feel vulnerable, to hold back. Now with that as background I want us to examine the first thing Paul urges Timothy not to be ashamed of.

Don’t be ashamed to testify about Jesus. (8)

The Gospel of a crucified Savior, according to 1 Corinthians 1:23, struck Jews as blasphemous and pagans as downright foolishness, so it is understandable that a faint-hearted person like Timothy might shrink from incurring the inevitable scorn that bold preaching of Christ might
bring upon him. But Paul wants Timothy to be a fearless evangelist, and I think he wants all of us to be that, but for a young pastor it was especially important, timid or not.

I must tell you that I am not proud of my record as an evangelist. People have come to faith in Christ through my ministry. After all, God has promised that His word will not return void, and I have preached His Word. But I am a coward when it comes to testifying, at least compared to people like Audrey Schultz, Joe Stout, Gary Bugg, Tyler Hiebert, Curt Romig. I need this exhortation of Paul to Timothy—Don’t be ashamed to testify about Jesus—anywhere, anytime. My introverted personality is no more an excuse for me than it was for Timothy.

Then Paul tells Timothy . . .

Don’t be ashamed to suffer for the Gospel. (8, 11-12a)

Start again at verse 8: “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.” There were apparently some in the church who were ashamed of Paul because he was suffering. Perhaps they were of the view that if Paul were serving God faithfully he would be healthy and wealthy rather than suffering in prison with imminent execution hanging over his head. Paul rejects that reasoning completely and even invites Timothy to join him in suffering for the Gospel.

Now I confess I’m not much into suffering. I don’t go looking for it; in fact, I try to avoid it. To be honest I’ve never really been exposed to much persecution. Oh, I’ve been criticized, I’ve received nasty emails, I’ve been misjudged, but if I’m brutally honest most of it has been because of my own mistakes and stupidity, not because of the Gospel. Most of the conflict I have endured has been over personality issues and my own leadership failures, not because I was preaching the Gospel too boldly.

So once again I need this exhortation as much as Timothy. In fact, we may all need it because later in this book Paul promises Timothy that “everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” (3:12) It’s inevitable for serious Christians. We Americans have probably enjoyed the greatest freedom from religious persecution than any nation in history has enjoyed, but I don’t know how much longer it’s going to last. Our country is becoming more and more unfriendly, at times even downright antagonistic, to the Gospel. Recently a major university established a policy that Christian organizations on campus could no longer discriminate on the basis of belief or behavior in setting qualifications for leadership. In other words, if an Intervarsity chapter was choosing a leader, an atheist or anarchist or gay activist had as much right to run for the office as a committed Christian.

On another front I believe that within ten years the Lesbian, Gay, Transgender steamroller will not stop until they get laws passed that prohibit churches and pastors from discriminating on the basis of sexual orientation, even when it comes to weddings. In fact, there is a proposed ordinance before the Hutchinson, KS city council that requires churches that rent their facilities
for weddings not to discriminate against gay weddings no matter what their theology is on the matter.

And friends, make no mistake about it—marriage is a Gospel issue. It is a divine picture of Christ’s relationship with His Church. “Husbands, love your wives (not your partner, not your significant other, your wife), just as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her to make her holy” (Eph. 5:25-26) I suspect the evangelical church before long may have to abandon civil marriage altogether in favor of marriage licenses issued by the church—just to protect the integrity of marriage as the Bible defines it.

By the way, where do we get the courage to endure if and when we are called to suffer for the Gospel? I don’t think we have it in ourselves. Thankfully, verse 8 clearly tells us—the courage comes by the power of God. He will help us.

A parenthetical treatise on the Gospel (9-11)

Now before we go on to Paul’s third exhortation, I want us to take a look at this parenthetical treatise on salvation in verses 9-11. By calling it a parenthesis I do not mean that it is unimportant. It may be the most important thing in this passage.

The Gospel, as you may well know, means “Good News,” the good news God has fulfilled His promise to send a Savior to rescue broken people, restore creation’s glory, and rule over all with compassion and justice. The short form would be “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Tim. 1:15). John 3:16 is a little fuller description: “God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

Paul has just urged Timothy to join him in suffering for the Gospel, and that triggers in his mind this awesome statement on the plan of salvation. Let’s read it starting in verse 9.

2 Timothy 1:9-12a (ESV)

9 [God] saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, 10 and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, 11 for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, 12 which is why I suffer as I do.”

The purpose of this parenthesis is to inform Timothy, and us, that if we are called upon to suffer for the Gospel we can rely on God’s power to bring us through it triumphantly. And it will be worth it all because of the awesome salvation God has planned. First he speaks of . . .

1. The nature of our salvation: What it is. “He saved us and called us to a holy calling.” When you ask the average person what it means to be saved, you’re likely to hear that it means
you’re going to heaven when you die. Or if they have a little more biblical understanding they might respond that it means you’re forgiven of your sins. But verse 9 makes it clear that salvation is more than a heavenly destiny, more than forgiveness of sin: we are called to holy living. This is a constant theme of Paul’s. In many of his letters he says we are “called to be saints,” which means we are called to live as the holy, unique people of God.

2. The source of our salvation: Where it comes from. “He called us not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began.” John Stott writes, “If we would trace the river of salvation to its source, we must look . . . beyond time to a past eternity.” Clearly our salvation cannot depend upon anything we have done, because God’s grace was given before we did anything, in fact, before we were even born. Our security rests not on ourselves but on God’s own purpose and grace. That’s good news for a timid introvert; in fact, it’s good news for anyone.

3. The ground of our salvation: On what it rests. Verse 10 says, “which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus.” Though God gave us His grace in Christ before time began, He manifested it in time—through the appearing of Christ. The reference to His appearing includes His incarnation, miraculous birth, sinless life, atoning death on the Cross, resurrection, and ascension to the Father. The focus, of course, here and everywhere in the New Testament is on the Cross-work that Jesus did. That is the heart of the Gospel.

4. The result of our salvation: What it produces. In verse 10 Paul mentions two things Jesus accomplished: “He abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” To abolish death does not mean to eliminate it, as obviously death is still around. We as a church have been reminded of that recently as we have lost several long-time faithful members, and a number of you have lost extended family. The Greek word “to abolish” means to defeat or overthrow, to make ineffective, to render powerless. Death is not the grim reaper to us. It is simply a falling asleep in Jesus; in fact, it is so innocuous that Paul speaks of it as “gain” for the believer, an actual promotion.

But not only has God rendered death powerless; in its place He has brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel. Life probably refers to the real living that is possible for those who know Christ. Sadly, there are many who seem to think they have to sacrifice living now in order to go to heaven in the future. That’s the furthest thing from Paul’s mind, or Jesus’. He claimed in John 10:10, “I have come that you might have life and have it to the full!” Life to the full is not found in romance novels, friends, or in the movies, or in sports, or in financial success; it’s found in knowing Jesus. Immortality refers to the eternal destiny of the believer.

Know whom, not just what, you believe. (12)

Now in verse 12 Paul returns to his main thought of the importance of not being ashamed. This time, instead of exhorting Timothy not to be ashamed, Paul speaks for himself: “I am not
ashamed.” Yes, I am suffering as a minister of the Gospel, “But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me.” I think the key thought here can be expressed this way: Know whom, not just what you believe.

I find it very interesting that Paul does not say, “I know what I have believed.” That would make sense. In fact, it’s what we would expect, because it is very important to know what we believe, and why. I just finished teaching an LBI class on Evangelical Convictions. About 50 people took this three-month class to learn more about Christian theology. I would never downplay the importance of knowing what and why we believe. But it is infinitely more important to know whom you believe, because Christianity is not primarily a philosophy, not even principally a theology. It is a relationship with almighty God through Jesus Christ.

Knowing God personally through Christ gave Paul a very important conviction: that God is able to guard what had been entrusted to Paul until the day of judgment. When I learned this verse from the KJV I thought it meant that God was able to guard what Paul had entrusted to God, namely his personal trust and commitment. In other words, it seemed like a verse promising eternal security. Even the NIV reads that way. But the ESV translates it correctly, I think. What God is able to guard is what God entrusted to Paul, namely the Gospel. I will return to this thought in a moment.

The fourth exhortation to Timothy can be summed up this way:

**Keep the faith. (13)**

We use that expression rather loosely today. It can refer to everything from maintaining political orthodoxy to continuing to root for the Royals. But Paul has in mind the Gospel, which he refers to using two expressions: It is both a pattern of sound words and a good deposit.

1. **Follow the pattern of sound words.** Sound words are healthy words, words that lead to wholeness. Paul is referring to the apostolic doctrine he and the other apostles taught. The term “pattern” means “standard” or “model.” Timothy is to maintain Paul’s teaching as his guide and not depart from it. Many modern theologians feel no compulsion to follow Paul or any other biblical writer. They view the ancients as primitive and themselves as enlightened. But we sang a wonderful song earlier in the service, a song that exalts Ancient Words.

   *Holy words, long preserved,*
   *For our work in this world,*
   *They resound with God’s own heart,*
   *Oh let the ancient words impart.*

   *Words of life, words of hope,*
   *Give us strength, help us cope.*
In this world wherever we roam,
Ancient words will guide us home.

Ancient words, ever true
Changing me and changing you,
We have come with open hearts,
Oh let the ancient words impart.

Paul also addresses the issue of how Timothy is to do this: “in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.” I’m reminded here of the counsel Paul gives at the end of chapter 2: “The Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness.” It’s possible to be so focused on truth that one becomes abrasive and obnoxious. Truth and love must go together like hand in glove.

2. Guard the good deposit with the Holy Spirit’s help. The Gospel is a treasure God has deposited with the church. It was first given to the prophets and apostles. Now Paul entrusts it to Timothy, and next week we will see that Timothy is to pass it on to others (2:2). But it can’t be passed on if it is not protected. Timothy must guard the Gospel because there are many who would steal it—by watering it down, by substituting something more palatable, by adding to it, by subtracting from it.

Please note this job is too big for Timothy himself—he can only do it by the help of the Holy Spirit. This takes us back to the thought in verse 12 that God is able to guard the Gospel until that Day, yet He invites us to join Him in that endeavor. He doesn’t need us, but He is willing to use us. Listen to John Stott’s analysis:

God will never allow the light of the gospel to be finally extinguished. True, he has committed it to us, frail and fallible creatures. He has placed his treasure in brittle, earthenware vessels. And we must play our part in guarding and defending the truth. Nevertheless, in entrusting the deposit to our hands, he has not taken his own hands off.

Be prepared for adversity and grateful for encouragement. (15-18)

Paul has one more issue to address. He wants Timothy to be prepared for adversity but also be thankful for any encouragement he receives, so Paul rehearses his own experience with three rather obscure people—Phygelus, Hermogenes, and Onesiphorus.

Phygelus and Hermogenes are notable for abandoning Paul in time of need. I don’t know why they are picked out for special mention when the text says all in Asia joined them in turning away from Paul. They must have been ringleaders. It’s almost unimaginable how Paul’s fortunes changed. He had personally founded the church at Ephesus, as well as churches in many urban centers in Asia Minor. In Acts 19:10 we read that “all the residents of Asia heard the word of
the Lord, both Jews and Greeks,” and many believed. Tragically this great awakening was followed by a great defection during Nero’s persecution.

But there was one encouraging exception—a man named Onesiphorus. He was not ashamed of Paul’s chains. He actually searched for Paul until he found him. Why was that necessary? It wasn’t unusual for the emperor’s prisoners to be stripped of their identity and isolated from friends and family. Onesiphorus searched and searched, probably at some risk to himself, until he found Paul and ministered to him—undoubtedly providing food and others essentials.

Paul offers two prayers regarding Onesiphorus, and these prayers may contain a hint that he has passed away. The first prayer is for his household, i.e. his family, rather than for him. The second is that Onesiphorus may find mercy from the Lord on the Day of Judgment. Could it be that he actually lost his life trying to encourage the Apostle? At any rate, Timothy could take heart that while many have defected, some will be faithful to the end.

My sermon today can be expressed in a sentence: Don’t use your background or your personality as an excuse for being ashamed of the Gospel; instead guard it with the Holy Spirit’s help. How important of an issue is this? Jesus said, “For whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels” (Mk. 8:38).

I was struck by the testimony of a young preacher in Zimbabwe. He said, “I’m part of the fellowship of the unashamed. I have the Holy Spirit’s power. The die has been cast. I have stepped over the line. The decision has been made; I’m a disciple of His! I won’t look back, let up, slow down, back away or be still. . . . I won’t give up, shut up, let up, until I have stayed up, stored up, prayed up, paid up, and preached up the cause of Christ. I am a disciple of Jesus.”

Friends, whether you are from a godly home or a broken one, whether you’re an introvert or an extrovert, whether you are pastoring a church or a layperson in the pew, you, too, can join the Fellowship of the Unashamed. May God help us to do so.

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iv. Stott, 47.
v. Stott, 45.