

How Not To Be Ashamed Of Sharing Your Faith

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January 17-18, 2004

2 Timothy: Passing On The Faith Series

2 Timothy 1:6-18

Last week I began a series from Paul's second letter to Timothy; it's a series that I'm titling "Passing On The Faith." And I said last week, the Christian faith is really like an incredible chain made up on thousands of links – a chain that reaches back 2000 years to Jesus and the apostles; a chain that involves millions of faithful people, some of whom were martyred, many of whom sacrificed, millions of whom prayed and preached, copied Bible manuscripts and labored in translation; a chain that has gone from one side of the world to the other. The reason why any of us are followers of Christ today is because generation after generation faithful Christians have forged another link in the chain. 2000 years of passing along the faith.

So, we see this chain of faith reaching back to Christ and reaching forward to you and me. And the only question that really remains is whether you and I will add another link to the chain, pass along the faith to our children, our spouses, our coworkers, our classmates, parents, and neighbors, or whether the chain will simply end with us – our generation, our private faith.

Now, one thing is clear from the New Testament and that is the building of links in the chain of faith from one person to another and one generation to another involves suffering. For example, we read Paul's words to Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:8:

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.

In verses 11-12 we read:

And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. That is why I am suffering as I am.

The call to suffer, to extend the Christian faith to others runs right through this little letter of 2 Timothy. Let me give you a few more examples. The call to suffer, really, is found everywhere. But in 2 Timothy 2:8-9 we read:

Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal.

And in 2 Timothy 3:10-12, Paul says this:

You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings—what kind of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

The apostle Paul's life was a life of suffering in order that another link in the chain of faith would be forged. Listen to the report of the apostle Paul's life from his second letter to the Corinthians, 2 Corinthians 11:24ff:

Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face the daily pressure of my concern for all the churches.

Imagine if on five different occasions you were stripped, your arms tied to a post, and you were beaten across your back and legs with a whip that often had bits of bone or metal attached to the leather so as to cause greater lacerations to your flesh. You receive no medical treatment, no pain medicine.

When Paul writes this second letter to Timothy, he is suffering. It is somewhat difficult to reconstruct these last years in the life of the apostle Paul. Early church historians tell us that Paul was released from his first imprisonment in Rome, which we read about in Acts in chapter 28. Paul then continued to do church planting work around the Mediterranean. Some suggest that he went as far as Spain in the West. Others suggest that he went east. But by the time 2 Timothy is written, Paul has been rearrested. He had a preliminary hearing before a Roman tribunal and he's being bound over for a full trial.

He had one friend, Onesiphorus, of Ephesus, who came to Rome and ministered to Paul while he was in prison in chains. Other Christians fled from him, afraid of being too closely associated with this jailed man.

And so, when 2 Timothy was written, Paul was in prison. He was in chains. He was deserted by most of his friends. And he was about to face a full Roman trial at which time he was condemned to death and ultimately beheaded under the Emperor Nero near the third milestone on the Ostian Way. While we were in Rome last year, my wife and I visited the supposed spot where the apostle Paul

was beheaded. That's what Paul was looking forward to when 2 Timothy was written.

You know, you cannot read Christian history without seeing this continual theme of suffering as being part and parcel of the requirement of passing along the Christian faith. One of the most impressive recent examples of suffering is that of the Vins Family in the Soviet Union. I read a biography of Georgi Vins, who was the secretary of the Baptist Church in Russia. It was published in 1976 under the title, "Three Generations of Suffering." He documents the persecution and suffering endured by his father, Peter, who after preaching the gospel during the 1930's in Siberia and in the Far East, died in a labor camp under Stalin in 1943.

And then his mother, Lydia, was arrested and tried for preaching the gospel. She was imprisoned. And then Georgi, the writer of this book, was imprisoned from 1966-1969 and then in 1974 he was rearrested. He spent five years in prison followed by years of exile. And while Georgi was in prison, his son, Peter, was thrown in prison.

In this book, *Three Generations of Suffering*, Georgi writes of a poem that his father, Peter, sent to him on his fourth birthday when he was four years old. He has always kept the poem with him. It is this wonderful sacred gift of an imprisoned father to his little boy. One of the verses in the poem that Peter wrote to his four-year-old son, Georgi, went this way:

Now you are forced involuntarily
To suffer for the name of the Lord.
But I pray that you may willingly
Choose the thorny path of Christ.

From one generation to another the chain of faith was forged by suffering.

In America right now, it is rare for Christians to suffer physically for their faith. But there is a kind of suffering that is required, if the Christian faith is going to be extended in our culture at this time. And the suffering that we are called upon to endure is the suffering of shame. It is required of us who are followers of Christ to willingly suffer shame in the eyes of the world in order that this Christian faith of ours be passed along and one more link in the chain be forged.

I've called today's talk from 2 Timothy 1:6-18, "How To Not Be Ashamed Of Sharing Your Faith." Let's pray.

2 Timothy 1:6-18

For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.

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 life—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. 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 know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.

What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

You know that everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes.

May the Lord show mercy to the household on Onesiphorous, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains. On the contrary, when he was in Rome, he searched hard for me until he found me. May the Lord grant that he will find mercy from the Lord on that day! You know very well in how many ways he helped me in Ephesus.

Three times the apostle Paul speaks about being ashamed in this text. In verse 8:

2 Timothy 1:8

So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord or ashamed of me his prisoner.

That second “ashamed” is not in the original. It more literally reads:

Do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner.

Then Paul comes back to this theme of being ashamed in verse 12:

That is why I am suffering as I am; yet I am not ashamed.

Finally, in verse 16:

May the Lord show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains.

This exhortation to not be ashamed of Christ and to never be ashamed of passing on your Christian faith is found everywhere in the New Testament. For example, the Lord Jesus himself warns us against being ashamed of him or his words in Mark 8:38:

Mark 8:38

If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.

There is a reason that the New Testament regularly tells us to not be ashamed, to be willing to bear disgrace for Christ, to not allow unpopularity and the unacceptability of the Christian message to keep you from sharing your faith. The reason that we have to be told over and over again to not be ashamed is simply because we are tempted to be ashamed. Let's be honest and say that we all value being well thought of. We all like to be liked. Almost none of us go out of our way to be unpopular. We enjoy, all of us, positive comments said about us. We like affirmation. All of us would rather be on the up escalator in public opinion than on the down escalator.

And so, when we realize that part of our Christian message may be offensive to a person or may be unpopular, we are tempted to water it down. We are tempted to avoid tough issues. We are tempted to be inoffensive, to fly below the radar screen, to not stick our heads up because we know we will be shot at. We are tempted to change the message, to hide it, to not pass along the message because we know that in a particular setting that we're in, or with a particular person, our faith will be unpopular.

Are any of you who consider yourselves followers of Christ ever tempted to not share your faith? Or to smooth off the sharp edges of the Christian faith, so that it will be more palatable, more acceptable, or go down easier with the person or group you are talking to?

Of course, all of us have, at one point or another, succumbed to the temptation to hide the light of the gospel because we were ashamed of Christ and ashamed of the message. Our culture exerts a great deal of pressure against the Christian faith. Our faith is completely antagonistic to the easy-going, tolerance and pluralism of 21st century America. Our faith challenges what I would call the "Oprah Theology," where all of us are spiritual people, whatever our particular beliefs, we are all on equally valid, spiritual journeys. It does not matter if you call God Krishna, Buddha, Allah, Jesus, a higher consciousness, personal enlightenment, or spiritual empowerment. We live at a time where every particular spiritual belief about God and life has to be accorded equal respect.

There was a perfect expression of our current American pluralism in the ceremony that followed 9/11. Do you remember in New York City when there

was a huge gathering at Yankee Stadium and the nation was led in prayer, and in a time of remembrance of those who had been killed by terrorists at the World Trade Center and at the Pentagon? Who was asked to moderate and lead that prayer meeting at Yankee Stadium? Was it Billy Graham, or some other nationally known Christian leader? No. Was it a famous Catholic priest, or a Jewish rabbi, or a Muslim Imam? No. It was Oprah. Oprah communicated to America that all spirituality of whatever type is all equally good.

Our message about Jesus is an open rejection of the easy-going pluralism of 21st century America. Christians show deep respect to other faiths. We work cooperatively to bring relief to suffering with other faith traditions. But our message that salvation is only found through Jesus is a slap in the face and is highly offensive to many in our culture. How dare you say, as I recently did in the newspaper publicly, that Jesus is the Messiah not only of Gentiles, but also of Jewish people like me?

We are tempted as followers of Christ to limit the offense, to say that basically we all worship the same God, even though your view of God is radically different than mine, even though you reject the need for the cross, or a sacrifice or a mediation between you and God for your sins, even though you do not believe that God has finally spoken to us through his Son, Jesus. No, basically, we all believe the same thing. Because we are ashamed, we are tempted to speak vaguely about God, or about being spiritual, or spirituality, and we carefully avoid the name Jesus.

Paul tells Timothy in his day, "Do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord. Don't ever be ashamed of the name Jesus." This is what has allowed the Christian faith to be passed along for 20 centuries. Now you and I must pass it along as it has been given to us.

We are tempted to be ashamed because 21st century America rejects any claim to absolute truth. You know, Jesus does not only claim to be the way; Jesus not only says that no one can come to the Father except through him, but Jesus also claims to be the truth. And that is an offense and a scandal to 21st century ears. How dare you claim to possess THE truth? Who do you think you are? You are intolerant of other viewpoints. You are arrogant. Everything about contemporary America, every message, every advertisement, every TV show, every training session for teachers in schools, for employees in major corporations, everything that we hear all the time from the world is that no one can make a claim to possess absolute truth. All truth is relative.

21st century America asks the same question that Pontius Pilate asked of Jesus before he crucified Christ. He looked at Jesus and he said to him, "What is truth?" 21st century America will look you squarely in the eye in the form of a friend, professor, boss, group of nice people around the lunch table in your office, parents, and they will say to you, "What do you mean by truth?"

Well, we are tempted to be ashamed by the truth claims of the gospel. We are tempted to water it down by sharing our testimony. "Let me share with you what Jesus has done for me. I don't claim in any way that you must accept this truth. This is just my private little deal." People will applaud your testimony so long as you keep it only as your story.

"I'm glad you were helped by believing in Jesus."

"I'm glad that you are happy."

"It's nice that you got off of drugs."

"It's nice that your marriage was healed, but don't start pushing that Jesus stuff on me."

There is only one absolute truth in 21st century America and that is there is no absolute truth.

We are tempted to be ashamed because Jesus is not only the way and the truth, but Jesus is the life. Everything about our messages affirms life. We read in verse 10:

2 Timothy 1:10

It has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to life through the gospel.

We believe in a God who gives life. When he creates, the waters teem with life. God gives the gift of life. But our culture is, to borrow a phrase from Pope John Paul II, a "culture of death."

This is Sanctity of Life Sunday. It is a time for Christians all around the world to remember the millions and millions of unborn children who have lost their lives through the sin of abortion. A few years ago the Pope said, "Life, one's own life and that of others, can not be disposed of simply at our wills. Life belongs to the Author of life. Love inspires the culture of life, while selfishness inspires the culture of death."

Choose life, therefore, says the Lord, that you and your descendents may live.

There is right now an enormous, a dramatic clash going on throughout the world between good and evil, between death and life, between the culture of life and the culture of death. Friends, do you realize that we live in a time when the culture of death is very powerful, when death and watching people die is one of the most popular forms of entertainment in America? In video games, movies, TV shows we are entertained by watching dozens; sometimes hundreds of

people get killed. We live in a world of suicide bombers who hate their enemies more than they love their own lives.

And so we are tempted to be ashamed of this gospel message of ours which affirms life, all human life – the lives of unborn babies in the womb, the lives of the homeless, the lives of AIDS sufferers in Sub-Saharan Africa, the lives of the mentally disabled, the lives of the physically disabled. Like politicians we're sometimes tempted to say, "Well, I personally oppose abortion, but far be it for me to stand up for life when it is being mowed down by the culture of death."

We are tempted to be ashamed because our message is a message of purity and of the reserving of sex exclusively for marriage in a culture of sensuality. Jesus' words challenge people regarding their lust. Jesus' words challenge people regarding sex outside of marriage. Pornography pores over the Internet, invited and uninvited. Paris Hilton, as a result of a sex video, now has her 15 minutes of fame in America. Time Magazine recently reported that there is going to be a new reality show – "Can You Be A Porn Star?" When I was out in California recently I saw middle school girls wearing little shirts emblazoned with the words, "Porn Star." Moms and dads were sending their little middle school daughters off to school with the words "Porn Star" on their shirts.

America is now debating whether to reserve marriage simply for one man and one woman. In England, the police investigated a Church of England Bishop because this Bishop said in a newspaper, "Some people who are primarily homosexual can re-orientate themselves. I would encourage them to consider that as an option." He went on to say, "I would not set myself up as a medical specialist on the subject, that's in the area of psychiatry. We want to help them, but I don't offer it as a panacea. I'm about giving honor to marriage."

His statements were roundly condemned around Great Britain as hate speech. The police chief in the Bishop's area said the Bishop had crossed the line. Here's a direct quote, "I think in a civilized society what he said was totally unacceptable." Anyone who claims a gay man or woman can be healed, or can be set free, is going to be accused today of hate speech, or homophobia.

And so we Christians are tempted to be ashamed of our message that calls for the physical expression of sexuality only within the boundaries of heterosexual marriage. There's so much pressure to say otherwise in our culture of sensuality.

And, of course, our message confronts a culture of egotism and pride. The Gospel not only confronts people over their lust, their love of death, their hatred of truth, but most of all, the Gospel confronts our pride. You can't preserve your pride and become a Christian.

Oh, you can get a little religion. You can have church and religion be a nice add-on to your otherwise successful life. You can have a great career, a great house, and a great sense of achievement and success and never be brought to your knees, never be made to feel personally helpless by religion. Religion can never confront you with your neediness, your inadequacies, your insufficiencies, your personal brokenness and failures.

But the message of Jesus Christ, the message of the gospel, the message of the cross tells you that your only hope of salvation is to admit to God that you are helpless, hopeless and insufficient and the only answer for you is to be saved by Jesus. You must give up trust in your own abilities and rely entirely on the life, death and resurrection of Christ to gain you right standing with God. That is an offense. It is an offense to our culture of self-esteem and positive thinking. The culture says you can do it so long as you believe in yourself. And so we are tempted to be ashamed of this message. It is a poke in the eye of human pride. It calls people to an honest acknowledgement of weakness and need.

Millions of people throughout history have suffered to pass along this Christian faith intact. In our day the question squarely presented to you and me is whether we are going to be willing to take up our places and suffer shame so that another link is forged in this chain of Christian faith.

Again, let's be honest. We biblical Christians, those of us who are committed to be followers of Christ, and to transmit the words of Christ, we are in the minority in our country. Why should you not capitulate to the cultural pressure around you? Why not make the lines fuzzier. Why not keep your head down so you don't get shot at by a professor in class, or a gay activist, or a colleague at work, or a fellow student? In some cases, the people who will be shooting at you will be members of your own family – your parents, your in-laws, occasionally your own spouses. Some of you know from personal experience the feeling of being shot at because your viewpoint and faithfulness to Christ and his gospel is offensive.

Let's admit, right now, that we all want to be liked. We all enjoy affirmation. We all prefer to be thought of as cool. We all love positive comments about us.

How do you keep going in our culture, despite the shame? How do you keep faithfully passing on the faith? We have been given the Holy Spirit, which enables us to stand up to cultural pressure. 2 Timothy 1:6-7:

2 Timothy 1:6-7

For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love, and of self-discipline. So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me as prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel by the power of God.

When Paul says that God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, the New International Version, unfortunately, in my opinion, uses a lower case “s” for the word “spirit.” I think Paul is not referring to simply an attitude, but to the Holy Spirit. Verse 7 is linked to verse 6. Verse 7 begins with the word “For...”

For God didn't give us a spirit of timidity.

In verse 6 we are told about what Spirit Paul is referring to. We read in verse 6,

2 Timothy 1:6

For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.

I think the gift of God that Paul is referring to is the gift of the Holy Spirit. Paul was simply saying the Holy Spirit doesn't produce in you cowardice, or fear. When you see yourself simply being a coward, laying low, watering the message down, smoothing off the rough edges, trying to be as inoffensive as possible, not saying anything, not speaking up, hiding your Bible, changing the subject – when you see yourself being a coward about your Christian convictions, being a coward about what you really think about the great issues of our day, being a coward with your classmates, being a coward with your coworkers, being a coward with your family, being a coward with your cool friends, that is the opposite of what the Holy Spirit is trying to produce in you. The Holy Spirit is trying to produce in you confidence and power to bear witness.

You know, the Holy Spirit, when he takes up residence in a person's life, he desires to change that person from being a coward, to being bold as a lion. It doesn't matter what your temperament is, whether you are naturally timid, or naturally aggressive. The Holy Spirit wants you to be confident and bold. See the difference the Holy Spirit makes in the lives of people in the New Testament. The apostle Peter on the night Jesus was tried, was ashamed of Christ and ashamed of associating with Christ. He denied knowing the Lord three times to a little servant girl. But after the Day of Pentecost, after the time he was filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter became bold as a lion.

You know, the Holy Spirit changes you. This is not something we psych ourselves into, this boldness. It is not like a fighter or football player who pound themselves on the chest before they score, screaming at one another and grabbing each other's face mask saying, “Come on, we can do it. Let's go out there and win.” “Come on, Champ, you can do it. You can fight. You can stand up for the truth.” Boldness is not something you talk yourself into. Boldness is something that the Spirit of God gives you as a gift.

And we have to fan that gift into flames. We have something to do with whether or not the Spirit produces power in us and love. You can't simply sit back as if

we were passive puppets and say, “Well, God knows where I am. He knows I’m sitting here in Starbucks having a Frappuccino.” “He knows I’m sitting in front of my large screen TV watching CSI, if he wants to fill me with a Spirit of power, love, and self-control, I’m not opposed.” Paul tells Timothy to fan into flames the gift of God, to make sure that the Holy Spirit burns bright in your life.

Friend, do you ever pray, “Father, today in my classroom set me on fire. In my family, set me on fire. In my office, with my Jewish friend and my gay friend, with my utterly secular friend, with my parents, with my sister or brother, light a fire within me. Father, I know the Holy Spirit dwells in me, but I feel so dull. My spirituality feels like dimly burning embers.”

How much do you pray, “Father, I welcome the presence of your Spirit. Banish from me cowardice.”

You don’t psych yourself into boldness. But you can go before God and cry out for a fresh filling of the Holy Spirit. “Grant me the Spirit who produces in me power. Send me the Spirit that produces in me a love for other people so that I want to share my faith. Grant me the Holy Spirit who produces in me self-control so that I’m wise and thoughtful about what I share and when I share it.”

But there is another major reason why we followers of Christ never need to be ashamed in the face of lots of cultural pressure to the contrary. We Christians have trusted a message that will give us ultimate victory over everything that dehumanizes, enslaves, falsifies, and wounds. The gospel message offers victory. Look at this with me, beginning in verse 8:

So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me as 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 life 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.

Consider the scope of this message. The apostle Paul uses the biggest possible word he can to describe the gospel message. He says the gospel message is all about “salvation.”

Join with me in suffering for the gospel by the power of God who has saved us and called us to a holy life...

Verse 10, look at the title he gives to Jesus:

...but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus...

The reason that the apostle Paul uses the word “saved” and “Savior” is that he wants the most inclusive word possible for the scope of the blessing that comes to someone through the gospel message. To be saved is bigger than to be justified, that is, to be declared “right” in the sight of God. To be saved is bigger than the word “sanctified,” to be made right in the sight of God. To be saved means that God has given you all the answers for what overwhelms you.

What is beating you down? Whether it is your own sin or someone else’s sin, whether it is anxiety or the anxiety of the culture we live in – your fears about the future, fears about death, fears about the judgment of God, your sense of meaninglessness, your sense of purposelessness, your sense of emptiness, your bitterness because of some abuse you suffered or some offense that still wounds you. Whatever is overwhelming you, the gospel is God’s ability to save you from it.

Paul says I want to use the biggest word possible to remind you of the victory that has been won for us through Jesus our Messiah. You do not have to be overwhelmed and beaten down by this culture of sensuality. You don’t have to be swept away by this culture of death, or the culture of relativism, or the culture of easy-going tolerance. Christ has come to save. Being saved includes all the blessings of God that make us whole, healthy, and well. The Old Testament Hebrew word that the New Testament translates as “saved” was the word “shalom.” It referred to every blessing with which you could be blessed. It means to be made well, to be made perfect, a victory over everything that afflicts men and women.

The gospel is power. The gospel is victory.

I want to tell you, by way of my own personal testimony that I have now been a follower of Messiah Jesus for 30 years. I was converted to Christ and the gospel message when I was 18 years old. I come from a Jewish background. When I was a teenager, by conviction, I became an atheist.

I’ve personally seen the power of the gospel save marriages that were shattered by abuse and neglect. I’ve seen the gospel, this humbling of pride, save marriages that were shattered by adultery. I’ve watched couples get reconciled because Jesus Christ changes people. I’ve seen the gospel message create forgiveness in men and women’s hearts. I’ve seen it bring about humility. I’ve watched dead marriages be resurrected by the gospel message.

I’ve seen people get off of heroin by the victory and power of the gospel. I’ve watched alcoholics break the power of alcohol by the victory and power of the

gospel. I've watched people overcome homosexuality and sexual addictions to pornography because of the power and victory of the gospel.

The gospel is not just truth; the gospel is victory and its power. It produces an effect.

And this huge word "saved," "salvation" finds itself and origin in God. Paul says:

Join with me in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life 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.

The message that gives us victory is the gospel of God. It is not the pep talk of God. It is not the you-can-do-it speech of God. It is not the encouragement of God. It is not just the inspirational Word of God. If it were just a pep talk, then we would have a reason to be ashamed when we looked into the eyes of a person who had cancer who can't do it. We'd have reason to be ashamed as we looked into the eyes of a person addicted to drugs, or when we looked into the eyes of a mom, who lost her child to leukemia, or a spouse who lost their mate to a heart attack, who needed more than a pep-talk.

If our message were simply the pep talk of God, then we would have reason to be ashamed because there are many situations in which a person simply can't do it. They can't rally. No amount of positive thinking can fix their situation. The message is not more information from God. It is not the hidden insight of God, the kind of thing you can get from therapy. "Yes, I see now why I have problems. I now understand." The Gospel is the victory of God; it is the power of God.

See, this salvation, whose source and origin is God is not based on us at all. God purposed, according to this verse, to show us grace before we were born, before the beginning of time, before we did anything, before we knew anything, before we thought positively, before we had any insight. Friend, when you trust in Christ to save you, when you say, "Messiah, be my Savior (what it says in verse 10)," then your salvation from beginning to end depends on the power of God.

Do you believe that? Do you believe that when you are filled with doubts, when you are overwhelmed, when the cultural pressures are really great, when you have blown it, you've been ashamed, you can't solve right now what life is throwing at you, do you say, "Well, I am not rescued, and I do not receive every blessing from God because of my goodness, because of my wits. I receive blessing from God because of his grace."

The ultimate reason why we are not ashamed is because of the content of the gospel. The gospel is about Christ. Verse 10:

It has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

The gospel is about Christ. It is about Christ appearing at a certain moment in history. God stepped into this broken, suffering, death-filled world, and he destroyed death. Now, people still physically die. What does it mean that Christ Jesus destroyed death?

There are several ways this passage can be interpreted. One way is that physical death no longer has to be a terror to a Christian. So many people are terrified of dying. They are doing everything possible to stave off the day of death. They are running around the world getting various treatments, trying to become young. But the Bible says that for the Christian, death is merely falling asleep. In fact, for the Christian, the apostle Paul says that,

For me to live is Christ, to die is gain.

For the Christian, death is positive gain. Death is the gateway for being with Christ.

In what sense has death been destroyed? The terror of death has been destroyed. We know that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, not even death.

And for the Christian, spiritual death has been destroyed. Another way that death is spoken of in the Bible is not just physical death, but spiritual death. Spiritual death means separation from God. Because of the Fall, we are born dead in our sins and trespasses. We are born, all of us, separated from God. But through the death of Jesus Christ, our spiritual death, our separation from God can be ended. As we trust in Christ, we are reconciled to God eternally. We are no longer estranged, separated, and dead to God. We Christians come alive to God and are reconciled to God eternally.

And death is destroyed because you and I, who have trusted in Christ, will not face the second death. The book of Revelation speaks about a second death. Here's eternal judgment and eternal separation from God.

Physical death doesn't have to terrorize you. Spiritual death is overcome. And the second death does not await you because Christ Jesus came into the world to destroy death and to bring the way to life, the way to immortality, and the way to resurrection and the light through the gospel.

That's why at a Christian funeral it is entirely inappropriate for us to sing some dirge, these grim requiems that are composed for people's deaths. Christian

death is sad for those who are left behind, but for those who have gone, the songs should be ones of celebration. They should be songs of going home. We are saved. Our mortality has been swallowed up by immortality. No more tears. No more pain. No more aches. No more struggles when the Lord calls us home. We cannot prematurely hasten that process. But when the Lord calls us home, that's our victory day!

We have no reason to be ashamed because we have an answer to the worst thing that can happen to someone in this world, death. We Christians have an answer for terrorist bombings, cancer in children, genocides. Messiah Jesus came into the world to destroy death. And he brings life and immortality to light through the gospel.

And we don't have to be ashamed of the people of God. Do you know the press always focuses upon the faults and worse elements of the Christian church? One would think, if you listen to NPR, or read the newspapers, that the only thing that is going on in the several hundred million worldwide Catholic Church is the molestation of children by priests. One never hears about Roman Catholic Bishops or Anglican Bishops who have led African nations from dictatorships to democracies.

You never read in the press that it was Christians who were at the forefront of the modern Civil Rights Movement. It was Christians that were at the forefront of the modern anti-slavery movement. It was Christians that started the modern movement of offering education for everyone. Christians started virtually all of the first hundred universities and colleges in America. Christians started the first hospitals.

In the popular press, the church is shown in its most intellectually shallow, most crass, most scandalous form – the Tammy Faye Baker's, the Leroy Jenkins. One never hears from the press that a thoroughgoing Christian recently served as the president of the American Philosophical Association, a man by the name of Alvin Plantinga. Or that some of the leading professors in America in Political Science, Law, Economics, and Biochemistry are Christians.

Paul says:

Do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me, his prisoner.

We Christians have much to be proud of as we look at the people of God. Sadly, most Christians don't know enough about the accomplishments of our brothers and sisters. We should feel really good about our family. Yes, there's been a lot that's been wrong. There have been shocking instances of betrayal of Christ. We Christians frankly acknowledge the power of sin even in Christians lives. This Monday, when we celebrate Dr. Martin Luther King's birthday, we celebrate

the fact that the Civil Rights Movement in America arose virtually entirely from the church in the South. You are part of an extraordinary heritage. Many of the people who have contributed most to the betterment of the human condition have been Christians.

Let me close by sharing with you one such person that you may not be familiar with. I don't know how many of you have ever heard of Anthony Ashley Cooper, who became, upon his father's death, the seventh Earl of Shaftsbury. Anthony Cooper was born in 1801. He had a very unhappy childhood. His parents were abusive. His only comfort was his housekeeper, who told him Bible stories and taught him to pray. She appears to have led him to faith in Christ.

When Anthony Cooper was away in boarding school at age 16, he saw a group of drunken men drop a poor man's coffin in the street. They laughed and cursed and kicked that poor dead man's body. Cooper was so disturbed by the incident that he resolved then and there to spend his life on behalf of the poor, the weak, and the disenfranchised.

Cooper entered Parliament in 1826 at the age of 25. He spent the next 60 years working on behalf of the poor. He was responsible for such an extraordinary amount of social legislation in England that you can't overstate the Earl of Shaftsbury's influence.

In 1842 the Coal Mine Act was passed prohibiting underground work in mines by women and girls. In 1845 the Lunacy Act was passed offering protection and treatment for the insane. He passed the 10-Hour Factory Act regulating hours for women and children. In 1851 Cooper sponsored the Common Lodging Housing Act to end unsanitary, overcrowded conditions in housing and to provide standards for people's houses. The legislation that he passed resulted in the care of boy chimney sweeps, flower girls, orphans, prostitutes, prisoners, handicapped people, crippled children. He just worked and worked and said, "I must persevere."

Why did he do this? Because he was a Christian! When he died, he had been known for decades as the Poor Man's Earl. Tens of thousands of people from all walks of life followed the horse drawn carriage that carried his body from his home to Westminster Abbey. Representatives of the homes he started for the poor, the schools, asylums, the societies carried banners through the streets with Matthew 25 emblazoned on it.

I was hungry and you gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you took me in. Naked and you clothed me. I was sick and you visited me. I was in prison and you came to me.

The *Times of London* acknowledged him as the one man who changed the whole social condition of England.

Do not be ashamed of the Lord. Do not be ashamed of the gospel. Do not be ashamed of the people of God.

Brothers and sisters, the particular way that we American Christians are called to suffer, to extend our faith in our time and in our generation, is by suffering shame. Bear shame proudly. Bear shame with a sense that you are walking in the footsteps of martyrs and apostles before you. Don't hide. Don't water down this message. Boldly, proudly pass this faith of ours along. Let's pray.

How Not To Be Ashamed Of Sharing Your Faith

Rich Nathan

January 17-18, 2004

2 Timothy: Passing On The Faith Series

2 Timothy 1:6-18

- I. A World That Makes Us Suffer (2 Tim. 1:8, 12)**

- II. A Culture That Makes Us Ashamed (2 Timothy 8, 12, 16)**
 - A. A Culture Of Pluralism
 - B. A Culture Of Relativism
 - C. A Culture Of Death
 - D. A Culture of Sensuality
 - E. A Culture Of Egotism

- III. A Spirit That Makes Us Powerful (2 Timothy 1:6-8)**

- IV. A Message That Makes Us Victorious (2 Timothy 1:8-10)**
 - A. The Scope Of The Message
 - B. The Origin Of The Message
 - C. The Content Of The Message

- V. A People That Make Us Proud (2 Timothy 1:8, 11-18)**