

## Not Ashamed and Holding Fast

II Timothy 1:12-18

By [Dr. J. Ligon Duncan III](#)

Amen. It's inspiring to think that Christians have been using those words for 900 years to express their praise to the Lord Jesus Christ, and that the words that we had the privilege to hear read and which we sung back to God have been used by believers for 3,000 years to express their praise to God.

If you have your Bibles, I invite you to turn with me to II Timothy, chapter one, as we continue our way through this last of Paul's letters. Paul is in prison. He is awaiting what will eventually be his death by execution for his fidelity to God, to Christ and to the gospel. And he is writing his beloved son in the Lord, Timothy—and this past Lord's Day you had the privilege of working with Derek through that glorious passage in chapter one, verses 8 to 11.

Let me just remind you what Paul is doing there, not only in verses 8 to 11, but all the way to verse 12, which is the first verse of the passage that we'll consider today. Paul is telling you why he is able to endure hardship and trials and suffering for the Lord, and to endure them without shame, without embarrassment; without any sense that the Lord has let him down, without any sense that the Lord has not got His eye upon him; without any sense that something's wrong with his ministry. How is he able to do that? He's telling you in verses 8 to 12, and of course it culminates with this glorious expression of his confidence in Jesus Christ, and that's exactly where we're going to start today.

Let me outline the passage for you. Verses 12 to 18 [have] five parts to it. Now, we're going to have six points in the message, if we get to them! But that is because I want to look at the fifth point of Paul's argument twice, from a slightly different direction.

First, look at chapter 1, verse 12. Here Paul is speaking to us about our confidence in Christ as a source that enables us to endure suffering and hardship in the Christian life.

Secondly, if you'll look at verse 13, Paul speaks of the importance of fidelity to truth. Here he is reminding us of the importance of Christians holding fast to the truth of God's word, to the faithful preaching of the apostles.

Thirdly, if you look at verse 14, he speaks of our responsibility to be active in the care (or the protection, or the guarding) of the gospel message.

Fourth, if you look at verse 15, he actually prepares us to experience disappointment in the Christian life from the Christian church. Now, that's an extraordinary thing, but we'll see how he does that as we study the passage today.

And then fifthly, if you'll look at verses 16-18, he pronounces a divine benediction on a believer who has encouraged him. And in so doing, he reminds us of the Lord's promise of blessing on all those who encourage His disciples, His followers, His servants.

Now let's flip that around and look at it from the other side. Why is Paul telling Timothy about the example of this one man who was a standout in encouraging him when everybody else abandoned him? Because he wants Timothy to imitate him; because he wants the Ephesian church to imitate that Christian; because he wants First Presbyterian Church of Jackson to imitate that Christian. And so, that's my sixth point: we ought to aim to imitate this biblical encourager.

Now, with that having been said, let's look to God's word in II Timothy, chapter one, beginning at verse 12. Before we read God's word and hear it proclaimed, let's look to God in prayer and ask for His blessing.

*Our Lord and our God, we bless Your name, for Your word, it is truth; it is a lamp to our feet and a light to our way. You intend to build us up and equip us for every good work. Your word is inspired: every word of it is God-breathed. Every word of it is without error. Every word of it is the final rule of our faith and life. So we pray by Your Spirit that You would open our eyes to behold wonderful truth from Your word, and live that truth in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Hear God's word:

For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day. Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. Guard through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you.

You are aware of the fact that all who are Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes. The Lord grant mercy to the house of Onesiphorus for he often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chains; but when he was in Rome, he eagerly searched for me, and found me—the Lord grant to him to find mercy from the Lord on that day—and you know very well what services he rendered at Ephesus.

Amen. And thus ends this reading of God's holy, inspired, and inerrant word. May He write its eternal truth upon our hearts.

What is Paul doing in this passage with these six exhortations that we're going to look at? What is Paul doing? Well, I'll tell you what he's doing: he's giving you and me marching orders for how to live and minister in a fallen world and in an imperfect church.

The Apostle Paul had to suffer hardship and trials, and endure many persecutions from the unbelieving world. His eyes were wide open to how the world can oppose and persecute and undermine Christians in the living of the Christian life, and so he is concerned to encourage Timothy to be ready to endure in this fallen world.

But that's not all. Paul knew that there are disappointments awaiting us in life and ministry even in the Christian church. Christians can let us down. And so he is not only concerned that Timothy (and you and me) would understand that this fallen world has challenges to our faithfulness, to our continuing to have confidence in God, but even our experience in the life of the church has its own challenges. And so he's giving us marching orders for how to serve God in a fallen world and an imperfect church. And here are six things that he says to Timothy and to you and me.

### **I. Your confidence is found only in Jesus Christ.**

And the first thing is this: your confidence must be in Jesus Christ. Don't you love this verse? For many of you this is a life-verse. It's one of your very favorite verses, and perhaps you memorized it many years ago in Sunday School or in Vacation Bible School.

“For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard that which I have entrusted to Him until that day.”

Paul is saying, ‘My only confidence is in Jesus Christ.’

You know, if Paul's confidence in life and ministry had been based on his circumstances, his confidence would have been up and down like a roller coaster. One day — conversions; one day, many Christians being discipled and matured in the faith; the next day being heckled by pagans, rejected in his teaching; one day being received into the houses of Christians in a strange land; the next day, being beaten by the natives of a city for his proclamation of the gospel. If his confidence had been based upon his circumstance, it would have been a very dodgy thing indeed! And the Apostle Paul is saying, ‘That's not

where my confidence is. My confidence is in Jesus Christ, and so it never wavers.'

Take your hymnals out and look at hymn No. 705. Again, this is a hymn that you have known for many years and sung countless times—but have you ever paid attention to the words? Look at the five stanzas of 705: *I Know Whom I Have Believed*. Notice that this hymn writer, Daniel Whittle, over a hundred years ago has given us words in which he tells you seven things that he doesn't know. You remember the song from the Fifties or Sixties, *Don't Know Much About (Geography, History, etc)*? Well, this is a Christian version of that song! I don't know much about this, I don't know much about that, but this I do know...and he tells you seven things that he doesn't know much about.

Look at the first stanza: *"I know not why God's wondrous grace to me He hath made known..."* I don't know why God has set His love upon me. There's nothing in me to deserve that. I don't know why He, in His mercy, has saved me. It's a mystery to me, he's saying. I don't know why that is.

And he continues in the first stanza: *"...nor why, unworthy, Christ in love redeemed me for His own."* In other words, I don't know why, though I am unworthy, the priceless, worthy gift of Jesus Christ was given in order to buy me back, in order to redeem me, in order to restore me to God's family. I don't know that!

Look at the next stanza: *"I know not how this saving faith to me He did impart..."* In other words, I don't know how it was that God brought me to faith in Christ. I don't know how He did that. I know the Holy Spirit did that, but I don't know how the Holy Spirit did that.

And then he goes on: *"...nor how believing in His word wrought peace within my heart."* In other words, I don't know how it is that believing what God says in His gospel and His word gives you assurance and peace. I don't know how that works. It does. I've experienced it. He's given me peace in my heart because I believe in His word, but I don't understand how that works.

Notice what he goes on to say: *"I know not how the Spirit moves, convincing men of sin; revealing Jesus through the word, creating faith in Him."* In other words, how the Holy Spirit works in our hearts—it's a mystery to me. I don't know how He does that.

But he doesn't stop there. Look, sixthly: he says, *"I know not what of good or ill may be reserved for me, of weary ways or golden days before His face I see."* In other words, I don't know what's coming. Tomorrow may have blessings galore. Tomorrow may have sorrows galore. I don't know the future. It's a mystery to me.

And then, finally he says: *"I know not when my Lord may come, at night or*

*noonday fair; nor if I'll walk the vale with Him or meet Him in the air.*" In other words, I don't know when the Second Coming of Christ is. I don't know when that's going to be. and I don't know whether I'm going to be alive or whether I'll have already gone home to be with Him before He comes to bring all His people home to glory. I don't know whether I'll walk with Him through the vale...in other words, I don't know whether my Lord will walk with me through the valley of the shadow of death until in my soul I'm with Him in heaven; or, I don't know whether I'll be alive and the Lord will come, and the shout of the trumpet will be there, and I'll be caught up in the air with His people to reign forever.

But, he says, this I do know. I don't know any of those things...and in the refrain, five times over you sing it:

*"I know Whom I have believed, and [I am convinced]...am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I've committed to Him against this day."*

And that is exactly what Paul is saying here: 'I don't know a lot of that other. I don't know what the future holds. I don't know what the response to my ministry is going to be. I don't know what struggles or trials or hardships I'm going to face. I don't know what sufferings I'm going to have to endure...' (although we already have a pretty good catalogue of his sufferings recorded for us in Scripture). But he does say this: 'This I do know: I know Jesus, and I know that He is able to keep His promise to me. I know He is able to deliver on the commitment that He has made to me. I don't know these other things, but these things I know: I know Jesus, and I know He's able to deliver on His promises.'

And Paul is saying to Timothy and he's saying to the Ephesians, and he's saying to you and me: 'You need to make sure that your confidence is in Jesus Christ.'

I love what J. A. Alexander's wife said about J. A. Alexander, the great Princeton theologian of the nineteenth century. There was a translation in his time that inserted the little preposition *in* between... "I know *in* Whom I have believed"... and he had marked that out in his manuscript. And she said, "My husband was not willing that so much as a preposition would separate his soul from his Savior." And that's how you and I need to be, my friends. Our confidence needs to be in Jesus. If it's not, it's going to wax and wane. It's going to go up and down, and we're going to be tossed about by every wind.

Now, that's the first thing that Paul tells us: that our confidence is found in Jesus Christ. And that's so necessary for life in a fallen world, because we don't know what tomorrow will bring; but this we do know: we know Christ, and we know He's able. He's able to make us to stand on the last day. The only way that you can really make it through the trials of this life without becoming bitter, without becoming cynical, without becoming jaded, is to make sure that your confidence is in Jesus Christ; because if it's anywhere else, your trust is going to be so crushed that you will become bitter and cynical, and you'll become jaded, and

you'll become hard. But if your confidence is in Christ, it will be never be disappointed. And that's what Paul is saying. 'Timothy,' he's saying, 'First Presbyterian Church — Jackson, put your confidence in Jesus Christ, and let go everything else.' That's the first thing.

## **II. Hold fast to biblical/apostolic doctrine/teaching/language, and do so in word and life.**

The second thing, you'll see in verse 13. Here he calls us to fidelity to truth. 'Hold fast to biblical, apostolic doctrine and teaching and language...' and then he adds, '...and do it in word and in life.' Listen to what he says: "Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus." Paul is calling on Timothy and he's calling on us to hold fast to sound, biblical teaching, and even to the words that the apostles have given us in that teaching, because that teaching has been given to us by inspiration. It's the very word of God that we're looking at this morning, and it's the very word of God that we're studying today, and every word is inspired and every word is profitable. And we're to hold to that word: we're to hold to sound, biblical doctrine and teaching and preaching.

And my friends, that's so hard to do. We live in a relativistic age, an age that doesn't believe in truth. There are many of your friends who really esteem you, but who think you are *nuts* to believe that the Bible is the word of God. They really do love you, they just can't figure out how an intelligent person like you could possibly believe that this is the word of God.

So, you know what? Paul was writing to Timothy and to the Ephesians in a relativistic world. They didn't believe in absolute truth in the Mediterranean world in the time of Jesus Christ. That was one thing that was so offensive about Paul's teaching: he came along and he said, 'By the way, all that stuff that you believe... it's all wrong. The only truth is in Jesus Christ, the only name under heaven by which a man can be saved.'

And so Paul is saying, 'Timothy, hold on to the truth.' But don't you love the way he puts it? "Retain the standard of sound words in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus." In other words, he's saying, 'I don't want you to simply accept the theorems and the formulations of biblical truth as if they are theoretically true. I want you to live those truths out in your lives. I want those truths to work out in your faith and love.'

You know, it is possible to be a Presbyterian, to be Reformed, to be a Calvinist, and to very effectively argue for the sovereignty of God in salvation...that it takes God's divine grace to change a sinner; and it is possible to be very irritated with your Arminian friends that they don't understand what the Bible teaches on that; and it is possible to believe that and to believe it correctly, and yet, for God's

grace to you not to have worked forth in a merciful heart yourself towards others. And those who truly understand God's sovereign grace to them are people who are gracious to other people, and merciful to other people, because they know the mercy that has been shown to them undeservedly.

And so the Apostle Paul is concerned not simply that we know in the abstract the truth of God's word, but that the truth of God is worked out in our experience and in our life, in our faith and our love. The truth will go bad on you, unless you turn it into prayer and turn it into practice; unless it is changing the way you think and relate to God, the way you think of yourself and the way that you show the love of God to your brothers and sisters in Christ and to all mankind. God's mercy changes us, and so a real knowledge of the truth of God always has a corresponding impact on our experience and on our living. And so the Apostle Paul tells us to hold fast...to fidelity to that truth. And that's, again, a hard thing to do in our day, because we don't believe in truth.

One of my dear friends at his inaugural address to a major theological seminary preached this message: "Don't just do something, stand there!" His point was this: that unless we stand on the truth of God's word, it doesn't matter what we do—it'll be wrong. And so the beginning of doing something for God is to stand on His truth, to embrace that truth with your head, with your heart, with your life. And that's what Paul is exhorting us to do here.

### **III. Guard the gospel message, by the Holy Spirit.**

But thirdly, if you look at verse 14, he calls you and me to an active care or protection of that truth. He calls Timothy to guard the gospel message through the Holy Spirit. Listen to his words: "Guard through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you." Now, many good commentators think that what is being spoken of there is not the gospel message itself, but Timothy's ministry. That's a treasure, that's a gift that God has given to him, and Timothy's own giftings and abilities for that ministry. And that's a perfectly acceptable interpretation, but I suspect that what is being talked about in this treasure is in fact the gospel message, because of what Paul has just said. We are to retain the truth. We're to hold fast to the truth. And then he turns around and he says, "Guard through the Holy Spirit the treasure...." The truth is the treasure: the gospel truth, the gospel message—that's the treasure. And what Paul is saying to Timothy is this: 'You will have to be reliant upon the Holy Spirit if you are going to continue to be faithful to the truth, if you're going to continue to guard the truth.'

How many of us would ever think, 'Oh, yes, I could defect from the truth. I could slip into false belief. I could embrace false teaching.' I've never met anybody who thought that they could— and that's precisely when you're in danger. And Paul is saying to Timothy, 'It will be your dependence upon the Holy Spirit that will

enable you to take care of the truth in your own life.'

One of my dearest friends growing up, grew up in a faithful Baptist church where the Bible was preached, where salvation in Christ was proclaimed; and from a very early age, he wanted to go into the ministry. And he went through school, and he went through seminary, and he embraced unbelief. And he is out on the mission field spreading unbelief. And if you had told him at the age of 14 that he would defect from the truth, he would have denied it to your face! None of us think we're going to defect from the truth, and Paul says, 'Timothy, take care of that truth; guard that treasure by the Holy Spirit.'

If truth is to be guarded, it will be done so in our reliance on the Spirit of God Himself. We can neither keep our minds sound in the faith as to the doctrine of the faith, nor our souls steady in the exercises of faith and love, without the help of the Holy Spirit. And so we must be consciously dependent upon Him in prayer, as we embrace the truth.

But there's more.

#### **IV. Faithfulness to the Lord does not guarantee human loyalty to us.**

Look at verse 15. Here Paul is preparing us for disappointment in the church. It's a sad, sad sentence, isn't it? — "You are aware of the fact that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes." You see, Paul is saying, 'Timothy, being faithful to the Lord doesn't guarantee human loyalty to us. Being faithful to the Lord doesn't mean that God's people won't disappoint you or let you down.'

Paul had shared the gospel with Asia before any of the other apostles. While they were back in Jerusalem evangelizing Jews, he was out evangelizing Jews and Gentiles all over the Roman Empire. He had risked his life, he had shed his blood to bring the gospel to Jewish and Gentile Christians in Asia Minor; and in his hour of trial, when he was thrown in prison, he tells us just about all of them turned their back on him.

And you can understand why. For them to go associate with Paul would have been to risk their own lives; to identify themselves as a Christian, a follower of an illegal religion, a superstition—it would have endangered their lives, their families, their livelihood. It would have invited persecution. And so in his hour of need, this man who had evangelized Asia is abandoned by the very Christians whom he had been the human instrument of God the Holy Spirit to lead them to Christ.

Now, my friends, that could have made Paul bitter and cynical. It could have made him to question God and Christ, and the gospel and the church. And you know what's beautiful? It doesn't. And the very reason he records it here is to say, 'Timothy, don't think that serving God's people will mean that they will not let



you down and will not support you.'

And my friends, that is such an important lesson for all of us to learn today. And one of the things I hate most about letting you down is not only my sinful pride—it's so hard to repent, it's so hard to face up to my own failures...it's so embarrassing to have to admit that to you—but it's also because I genuinely love you, that I don't want to let you down. I don't want to fail in my ministry to you. But you know what? I do! I fail in my ministry all the time! I disappoint some of you. Now, most of you are too kind to tell me, but I hear it. And it kills me to disappoint you.

And you know what? You disappoint one another, too. Now, there are times of need in our lives when you think, 'You know, the elders really let me down on this. My friends in Sunday School class, they really let me down on this.' And I've known many a Christian to grow up professing Christ, living in the church, and they come to a crisis point in life and the church lets them down, and you know what? They leave the church, because they've been so bruised, so wounded, so let down, so disappointed by Christians.

Isn't it glorious that Paul says to Timothy, 'Timothy, don't be surprised by that: expect it!'

And I want to say, my friends, we have so little suffering and hardship to endure here in the American church, in the Western church. We have so many blessings, so much affluence, so much ease, so much peace, so much freedom, that we rarely get to enter into the sufferings and hardships of our friends in Africa and in Asia, where by the thousands day by day they are laying down their lives because they believe in Jesus Christ. And so I want to tell you this: since our trials are so meager in comparison to theirs, when you're wounded by one of your fellow believers, or even by one of your ministers in the church, take that as your opportunity to endure hardship and disappointment for the Savior. Because when the Apostle Paul had the experience of being abandoned by those very converts that he had led to the Lord in Asia, you know what? All he was experiencing is what Jesus experienced from His own beloved disciples...because Matthew tells us it was not only Judas that betrayed Christ, and it was not only Peter who denied Christ, but that all the disciples fled from Him in His hour of need.

And when you're disappointed by the church, praise God and remember that you serve not in a perfect church, but an imperfect church; and it's going to be imperfect until He comes again and makes us perfect! There's never been a perfect church in the world in 2000 years, and when you experience the disappointment of living with sinners—redeemed sinners, to be sure, but sinners—just remember, you have an opportunity to experience what your Savior experienced from you, and endure it, and don't become cynical and bitter and disappointed.

And don't turn your back on the people of God. Isn't it beautiful that Paul gives his life for these people, and they let him down, and he keeps on giving his life for these people? Isn't that beautiful? Isn't that how you want to relate to one another?

Now, that's not an excuse, I want to say very quickly, for the ministers of this church not to do our job. Far from it. It would be a wicked sin for me to use that as an excuse not to serve you as we ought. But when you do experience disappointment from us or from one another, rejoice that you have the privilege of enduring exactly what Paul experienced from God's people, and exactly what Jesus experienced.

#### **V. The Lord shows mercy on those who encourage His servants.**

But there's a fifth thing. Look at verses 16 to 18. Here Paul pronounces a divine blessing on this man, Onesiphorus, who has ministered to him. Out of all those Christians in Asia who had abandoned Paul, not Onesiphorus! No, when he comes to Rome—maybe he came to Rome on business—what does he do? Does he try and stay as far away as possible from the Apostle Paul so that he doesn't get in trouble for being a Christian? No! He searches all over the city until he finds Paul in prison, and he goes to him and he ministers to him. And Paul records his name: “He often refreshed me, and he was not ashamed of my chains....He eagerly searched for me, and he found me.”

And you know what the Apostle says? “The Lord grant to him to find mercy from the Lord on that day” —meaning the Judgment Day. In other words, ‘Lord God, when the great Judgment Day comes and the books are open, and the pronouncement is given, when that man stands up before You, You bless him, because he encouraged me when everybody had left me!’

And I want to tell you, what Paul is saying there is not so surprising. I mean, you could be saying, ‘Paul, who are you to tell God what He ought to do for someone just for encouraging you, on the last day?’ Well, I’ll tell you who Paul was: he was an apostle, but he also knew his Bible. And the Lord Jesus Christ once said, ‘If you even give a cup of water to My followers, to My disciples, to My servants, I tell you I will not forget it on the last day!’ You see, Paul is just saying, ‘Lord God, fulfill what Jesus said He would do: that everyone who encourages the servants of the Lord will not do it without reward before Your throne on the last day.’

Isn't it precious that Jesus won't overlook the smallest kindness you extend to the people of God, and to the servants of God?

Now I want to quickly say, this is not a sermon in which I am secretly trying to get you to encourage *me* more. Even though Paul is talking about encouraging

ministers of the word, let me say I am encouraged by you more than I deserve. Let me say that very quickly! But you know what, brothers and sisters? It would greatly encourage me if you would go out of your way to encourage the other ministers and elders and deacons of this church, and the women who serve in the Women In the Church, and one another. Wouldn't it be a glorious thing for people in Jackson to say, 'You know, those Presbyterians over there at First Pres, they're a strange lot...but you know, they're encouraging! And when people are going through hard times, and suffering and hardships, they don't sit in judgment on them. They come alongside them and they encourage them. They're there, giving cups of cold water to one another.' What a blessing that would be, for that to be our testimony!

## **VI. Follow the example of the encouragers.**

And you see, that's the sixth thing that I want to get to, because Paul here shares this example precisely because he wants to urge us to be biblical encouragers. See, the apostle, this great apostle, needs and appreciates such support and encouragement given to him in dire straits, and so he gives this example to Timothy. And he says, 'Timothy, you be an encourager like this, and make sure your elders are encouragers like this, and make sure your congregation is filled with encouragement like this.' My friends, this is not something that happens because you're a nice person. This is something that happens because of God's grace and because of your desire to follow the Bible.

And you have to know one another before you can encourage one another. You have to know what one another is going through. You have to know the trials and the losses and crosses of life before you can really be this kind of encourager. Let me encourage you to aim to know one another, and to always be learning more, knowing more in our flock, and giving ourselves to encouraging one another. Be able to say, 'Dear sister, I know that in that relationship, you sharing the gospel with your sister caused her to hate you. And I want to tell you that it is a rebuke to me that you would be so brave as to share the gospel with your sister despite the fact that you knew it was going to create family problems.' Christian, do you realize how encouraging it would be to a Christian to hear those words from another believer in this church? 'Oh, brother, I know that in that business deal you were done wrong. You were clearly done wrong, and I just want to say that watching the way that you responded to that as a Christian, it was a humbling thing to me.' Or, 'I just want to say to you, I admire the way that you're faithful to prayer, to pray for the ministry of the church.' Or, 'Brother, I know that you sacrifice in order to give to missions, and I want to tell you that it makes me want to give to missions, to see the way that you are faithful in your own life to sacrifice to give to missions.'

Oh, my friends, we ought to be a fellowship of encouragement—not because we're positive thinkers or committed to political correctness, but because we're

committed to biblical principles. That's what Paul is saying. You want to get through this life? You want to endure without becoming bitter and cynical? Disappointed, because you live in a fallen world and you serve in an imperfect church? Have your confidence in Christ, Christ alone. Hold fast to biblical teaching, and live it in your life. Guard that truth in dependence upon the Holy Spirit. Expect the church to let you down. And be an encouragement to other people. Paul needed it. We certainly do.

Let's pray

*Our Lord and our God, bless Your word. Use it in our hearts and lives. Change us by it. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

*God's grace be with you. Amen.*

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