Confidence

Believers can have confidence in Christ in all circumstances.

In a seminary class on the Book of Hebrews, I led my students in discussing the topic of Christian suffering. It was a lively discussion, with several students describing examples of where they had seen American Christians face hostility and opposition for talking about their faith. They spoke of believers who had suffered loss of employment, ridicule at school, or ostracism in the public square. Then two international students spoke of persecution they not only had seen but also had experienced in their home countries. Both of them had personally experienced arrest and imprisonment for preaching the gospel. One of them stated that he was part of an ethnic minority in his country that had suffered an attempted genocide. When the two students finished their testimony, the room fell silent. We all came to a sober understanding of what suffering for the faith could entail.

In this session, we move into Paul’s second letter to Timothy. It is likely that the apostle wrote this letter from a prison in Rome where he faced the real prospect of being put to death. He called on Timothy to “share in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God” (2 Tim. 1:8). Paul reminded Timothy that he had suffered “to the point of being bound like a criminal” (2:9). He declared that suffering for the gospel was an honor, not a source of shame.

Increasingly in our time, standing up for Christian values and for the gospel can be costly. Some believers might be tempted to remain silent in the face of hardships, but our commitment to Christ demands that we stand firm in faith and trust God in all circumstances.

Understand the Context

2 Timothy 1:1-18

When Paul wrote 2 Timothy, Timothy was still in Ephesus. Paul, on the other hand, had been arrested again and likely was in prison in Rome (2 Tim. 1:16-17). How much time had lapsed between the writing of the two letters is not
clear. The urgency of Paul’s tone in 2 Timothy suggests that he expected to be executed soon (see 4:6).

The opening of the second letter is almost identical to the opening Paul used in 1 Timothy, with the exception of the added phrase “for the sake of the promise of life in Christ Jesus” (1:1). As Paul faced the likelihood of his death, he reflected on the eternal life promised “in Christ Jesus.” Paul moved quickly from the opening to his thanksgiving section, recalling Timothy’s faith and expressing a deep desire to see his gospel coworker again. He urged Timothy to pay attention to his God-given gifts that were essential for a successful time of ministry in Ephesus.

Paul further encouraged Timothy not to be ashamed of the gospel or of him. This topic apparently weighed heavily on Paul. He assured Timothy that he was not ashamed, and he mentioned with gratitude the effort that Onesiphorus had shown, finding Paul in Rome and refreshing him. Onesiphorus was not ashamed of Paul’s imprisonment, even though some companions from the province of Asia (possibly from Ephesus) had abandoned Paul (1:15-18).

Timothy was to follow Paul’s example and the pattern of his teaching. He needed to guard the sound gospel teaching he received from Paul. Timothy had plenty of negative examples for what not to do: those who taught false doctrine and who refused to stand firm in ministry. Onesiphorus was a positive example of one who ministered well both in Ephesus and in Rome.

**EXPLORE THE TEXT**

**HERITAGE** (2 Tim. 1:3-5)

**VERSE 3**

*I thank God, whom I serve with a clear conscience as my ancestors did, when I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day.*

Letters in Paul’s day often included a prayer-wish after the opening salutation, something similar to today’s “I pray that all is well with you.” Paul often adapted this form to express a prayer in Christian terms on behalf of the recipient. In this instance, he expressed a prayer of thanksgiving for Timothy. The entire prayer, covering verses 3-5, is comprised of one extended sentence in the Greek text. First, Paul commented on his own relationship with God, which paralleled his later comments in verse 5 about Timothy’s faith. Paul tied his service to God to the Old Testament faith of his ancestors. His worship of Jesus as God’s Messiah was in line with the prophets and patriarchs to whom God had spoken in the past. His service to God was with
a clear conscience. When Paul was addressing the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, he claimed, “Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience to this day” (Acts 23:1). Now near the end of his earthly life, Paul made the same claim again.

Paul built his thanksgiving prayer on the theme of remembrance. First, he talked about remembering Timothy in his prayers. The Greek word rendered constantly does not need to be understood as non-stop but rather as continuing on a regular basis. Paul prayed regularly, and when he prayed he did not forget to intercede for his young missionary coworker.

VERSE 4

Remembering your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy.

Second, Paul remembered Timothy’s tears when he prayed. Some Bible students suggest that perhaps Timothy had wept deeply when Paul separated from him to go to Macedonia while Timothy remained in Ephesus (see 1 Tim. 1:3). Another possibility is that Paul was referring to Timothy’s ongoing fears and frustration about the spiritual challenges faced in Ephesus. Whatever the case, Paul assured Timothy of their close relationship as gospel ministers. Further, Paul longed to be reunited with Timothy and no doubt prayed to that end. Seeing Timothy again would fill Paul with joy.

VERSE 5

I recall your sincere faith that first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and now, I am convinced, is in you also.

Third, Paul remembered Timothy’s history and heritage of sincere faith. The Greek word rendered sincere refers to being genuine, without pretense or hypocrisy. In 1 Timothy 1:5, Paul declared that the intent of gospel instruction was to produce in believers sincere faith along with love and a good conscience. He had seen Timothy consistently exhibit such faith.

Just as Paul grounded his own devotion to God in his ancestral heritage, he knew that Timothy’s faith was built on the foundation that first lived in Timothy’s grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice. Acts 16:1 reveals that Timothy was “the son of a believing Jewish woman” and a (presumably non-Christian) Greek father. Evidently, both Timothy’s Jewish grandmother and mother had been instrumental in grounding Timothy first in Jewish heritage and later in the Christian gospel. Paul later expressed confidence that Timothy had been taught the Scriptures from the time he was an infant
He prayed for Timothy to continue standing on the foundation of faith he had received.

EXPLORE FURTHER

What are some spiritual foundations you received from your parents and grandparents that remain with you to this day? What are you doing to pass along good spiritual foundations to the next generation?

GIFTED (2 Tim. 1:6-7)

VERSE 6

Therefore, I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is in you through the laying on of my hands.

The word therefore (“for this reason,” ESV; NIV) connects Paul’s admonition in this verse about Timothy’s giftedness to the faith foundation mentioned in the preceding verse. Paul urged Timothy to rekindle the gift of God in his ministry. The Greek word rendered rekindle (“stir up,” KJV; “fan into flame,” ESV) literally refers to stoking a smoldering fire so that it bursts into flame again. Paul did not mean that Timothy’s faith was about to die out. Rather, Paul was urging Timothy to let the ever-burning embers of his faith reignite his ministry gift. Paul’s counsel to Timothy here and previously in 1 Timothy 4:12-14 may indicate that Timothy was struggling with uncertainty and fear on account of his relatively young age.

What was the gift of God in Timothy that Paul mentioned? In 1 Timothy 4:14, Paul spoke of “the gift that ... was given to [Timothy] through prophecy, with the laying on of hands by the council of elders.” In 2 Timothy 1:6, Paul personalized the reminder, emphasizing that he (Paul) had participated in the act of recognizing Timothy’s authenticity as a believer and authority to proclaim and teach God’s Word. Timothy did not need to feel afraid or intimidated about his ministry task. Paul confidently supported him. Timothy simply needed to fan the flames of faith to rekindle his ministry gift.

VERSE 7

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but one of power, love, and sound judgment.

Paul further reminded Timothy that God does not equip His people for ministry by giving them a spirit of fear. English Bible translations differ
on whether Paul referred in this verse to the Holy Spirit (see NIV) or to the human emotion, or spirit, of fear (see CSB; KJV; ESV). Bible readers can recognize a translation’s conclusion on the matter in part by whether or not the word spirit is capitalized. In either case, however, Paul’s point is the same: God does not make His servants fearful in ministry. Rather, He gives them power, love, and sound judgment (“self-control,” ESV; “self-discipline,” NIV). Paul viewed this trio of qualities not as natural character traits but as gifts given by God to those who serve Him.

These three qualities given by the Holy Spirit are complementary. Power that is exercised without love and sound judgment can become tyranny. Without power, love can lack strength. Power and love without sound judgment can be misguided. Only power exercised with love and sound judgment can accomplish God’s purposes in His churches.

EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled “Spirit” on pages 1497–1499 in the Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded. How does the Holy Spirit empower believers to serve God without fear? How can believers rekindle their awareness of the power, love, and sound judgment God gives to equip them for service?

UNASHAMED (2 Tim. 1:8-12)

Paul declared his assurance despite being persecuted for his faith in Christ. His confidence was not based on his own abilities but in Christ’s power that was demonstrated in the resurrection.

VERSE 8

So don’t be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, or of me his prisoner. Instead, share in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God.

Verses 8-12 in the Greek text comprise one long sentence in which Paul encouraged Timothy not to lose confidence but rather to bravely suffer, if necessary, for the sake of the gospel. English Bible translations tend to break the long Greek sentence into several sentences for ease of understanding. Thus, verse 8 begins the thought with two imperatives, the first a negative command (don’t be ashamed) and the second a positive charge (share in suffering). The Greek word rendered ashamed refers to a painful loss of status.
Shame was the opposite of honor and thus was to be avoided at all cost. Paul commanded Timothy never to consider either the gospel (the testimony about our Lord) or Paul (me his prisoner) as badges of shame. The Greek term rendered testimony can refer either to the act of sharing a message or to the content of the message. In this case, Paul was referring to the true gospel message of Christ’s death and resurrection that many Gentiles considered foolish and many Jews deemed a scandalous lie (see 1 Cor. 1:23).

Likewise, Timothy must not be discouraged by Paul’s imprisonment for the gospel. Even if the apostle’s current imprisonment ended with his death, the gospel message itself would never be stopped (see 2 Tim. 2:9). Paul urged Timothy to see true honor in both the gospel message and Paul’s situation.

In light of the first imperative, Paul then challenged Timothy to share in suffering for the gospel. While it is true that some suffering comes as a result of sinful behavior—and for this type of suffering believers are rightly to be ashamed—to suffer as a result of living and proclaiming the gospel message is a badge of honor, not shame. Christians who suffer on account of their faith in effect share in the sufferings that Christ endured. The apostle Peter gave the same encouragement when he wrote to believers, “Dear friends, don’t be surprised when the fiery ordeal comes among you to test you as if something unusual were happening to you. Instead, rejoice as you share in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may also rejoice with great joy when his glory is revealed” (1 Pet. 4:12-13).

Paul did not make light of Christian suffering or urge Timothy to invite suffering. The apostle well knew the horrors of being persecuted for the faith (see 2 Cor. 11:24-27). Thus, he implored the young minister to rely on the power of God whenever Timothy faced the prospects of hostile opposition to the gospel truth. Timothy could depend on God’s empowerment to keep him loyal to Christ, to Paul, and to the gospel ministry.

VERSE 9

He has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.

To underscore the sufficiency of God’s power to sustain him, Paul reminded Timothy that both salvation in Christ and the believer’s holy calling of living and proclaiming the gospel were matters of God’s grace, not works. The Greek term translated holy calling could refer either to the holy nature of God’s call or to the holy lifestyle of service that believers are expected to embrace and develop. Paul likely was reminding Timothy that neither salvation nor ministry could be accomplished in the power of the flesh.
The Christian’s salvation and calling are accomplished according to God’s own purpose and grace. Paul made similar statements in other letters (see Eph. 2:8-10; Titus 3:5). Human effort cannot produce what God has done for the believer purely out of divine grace. Timothy could thus join with Paul in suffering for the gospel by trusting that God’s grace was active in his life, empowering Timothy to fulfill the plan God had for him.

Paul emphasized two points related to Jesus’ role in achieving God’s purpose. First, God’s grace was given to believers in Christ Jesus. That is, Jesus was (and is) the One through whom God chose to impart His grace to sinners. Second, Paul emphasized that the gospel was not a last-minute plan enacted only when an earlier plan failed to succeed. Salvation by grace through faith in Christ Jesus was God’s plan before time began. God’s grace was grounded in His eternal purpose, a point that Paul made clear also in the opening verses of his Letter to the Ephesians (see Eph. 1:3-14). Before the first humans were created and before He gave the law at Mount Sinai, God already knew that He would provide the way of salvation from sin through faith in Jesus Christ and not by sinners’ futile efforts to save themselves.

VERS 10

This has now been made evident through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who has abolished death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

Paul declared that what God planned “before time began” has now been made evident through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus. Paul often used the Greek word rendered appearing to refer to Jesus’ second coming at the end of time (see 1 Tim. 6:14). In this verse, however, the term points to Jesus’ first coming as a Child born to the virgin Mary. God the Son’s incarnation demonstrated that divine grace for sinful humanity was no longer just a promise to be anticipated but was a plan being enacted.

The title Savior was used in the New Testament to refer to both the Son and the Father. Paul applied the title to God the Father three times in 1 Timothy (1:1; 2:3; 4:10). In the Letter to Titus, Paul used the title three times to refer to the Father (1:3; 2:10; 3:4) and three times in reference to the Son (1:4; 2:13; 3:6). God, as both the Father and the Son (as well as the Holy Spirit) were uniquely and actively involved in providing the way of salvation.

Paul then described two aspects of Jesus Christ’s saving ministry. First, Christ abolished death (“destroyed death,” NIV). The Greek word translated abolished can mean “stripped of effectiveness or power” or “no longer in existence.” Paul used this term in 1 Corinthians 15:26 to describe the coming fate of death itself. In His death and resurrection, Jesus delivered the mortal
blow that stripped death of its power over the believer in the present life and condemned death to ultimate destruction in the life to come (see Rev. 21:4).

Second, Jesus brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. The Greek word translated immortality means “not subject to decay; imperishable.” The gospel message provides the astounding promise that Christ’s resurrection guarantees the believer’s resurrection. In the life to come, all believers will inherit resurrection bodies that are impervious to death, disease, and decay (see 1 Cor. 15:53-55). Through the gospel, Jesus shined a light on the incorruptible life in store for Christians.

VERSE 11

For this gospel I was appointed a herald, apostle, and teacher,

This gospel was the reason Paul had the roles God had given him. Even though he was currently in prison, Paul still embraced a threefold commission from God—as herald, apostle, and teacher. He had used the same three words in 1 Timothy to describe his ministry (see 1 Tim. 2:7).

In Paul’s day, a herald announced important news in public places. The news might be the report of a victory in battle or a birth in the royal family. The people of Ephesus would also have been familiar with heralds who were hired to proclaim messages on behalf of the numerous pagan temples. Paul’s appointment as a herald of the gospel was a life calling, not a temporary job. Moreover, the good news Paul was appointed by God to announce far exceeded any other message in both impact and importance. It was the good news that God had acted on sinners’ behalf to give His grace through His Son.

The title apostle emphasized the authoritative aspect of Paul’s commission. He was “an apostle of Christ Jesus by God’s will, for the sake of the promise of life in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 1:1). God had commissioned Paul to this ministry. Finally, Paul was a teacher. The role of instruction was important for Paul, especially in contrast to the false teachers he confronted in 1 Timothy.

VERSE 12

and that is why I suffer these things. But I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to guard what has been entrusted to me until that day.

Paul connected his suffering to his calling: that is why I suffer these things. When Paul encountered the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, part of God’s message to him at that time concerned the extent to which Paul would suffer for Christ’s name (see Acts 9:16). In 2 Corinthians 11:24-29, Paul listed a litany of experiences in which he suffered in the course of proclaiming the gospel and caring for fledgling churches. However, in none
of those experiences did Paul feel a sense of shame. His declaration I am not ashamed could refer either to not being ashamed of the gospel message or of his current imprisonment for the gospel’s sake. Both of those understandings were certainly true. That is, Paul understood that the gospel was “the power of God for salvation” (Rom. 1:16) and thus was not ashamed of the gospel message. Yet also, Paul viewed his imprisonment and resulting suffering as a badge of honor. He was in prison for being obedient to Christ. There was no shame in faithfully carrying out his calling, only honor.

Paul’s confidence was grounded in his relationship to Christ, the One in whom he had believed. The single Greek word rendered by the phrase what has been entrusted (literally, “the deposit entrusted”) occurs once in 1 Timothy (1 Tim. 6:20) and twice in 2 Timothy (2 Tim. 1:12,14). The term often referred to property that was put in trust with someone. In 2 Timothy 1:12, it is not clear whether Paul was referring to something God had entrusted to him (see CSB; ESV) or something he had entrusted to God (see KJV; NIV). If the first understanding is correct, Paul was stating that God could be counted on to preserve and empower the gospel message regardless of whether Paul lived or died. If the second understanding is correct, Paul was expressing confidence that the remainder of his physical life and the future of his ministry as a gospel herald were and always had been in God’s trustworthy hands.

The phrase until that day refers to the time of Christ’s return and the judgment. In the midst of suffering that might have dismayed Timothy, Paul reminded him that God could be trusted to preserve that which matters most for the faithful servant of Christ.

**EXPLORE FURTHER**

Read the article titled “Suffering” on pages 1510–1511 in the Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded. Give particular attention to the section on “Suffering of Believers.” Why do you think God allows His people to suffer in His name? How does the resurrection of Christ encourage believers who face times of suffering?

**LOYAL (2 Tim. 1:13-14)**

**VERSE 13**

Hold on to the pattern of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.
Having explained his reason for willingly suffering on behalf of the gospel, Paul gave Timothy two additional exhortations related to the young leader’s task in Ephesus. First, Timothy needed to hold on to the pattern of sound teaching Paul had given him. The pattern (“form,” KJV) in question involved not only what Timothy had witnessed in his missionary travels with Paul but also the instructions about true and false teaching that Paul had written in the previous letter. Timothy was to use Paul’s teaching as a pattern for his own teaching.

The Greek term rendered teaching literally means “word” (ESV, KJV). The term rendered sound can also mean “healthy” and “free from error.” Paul saw no distinction between the sound teaching of the gospel (see 1 Tim 1:10-11), the sound words of Jesus (see 1 Tim 6:3), and the sound words Timothy had heard from Paul (2 Tim 1:13). Paul’s focus was on the content of Timothy’s teaching; it must be untainted by the false teachers’ unsound doctrines.

Paul ended this verse by addressing the manner in which Timothy was to hold to Paul’s pattern of sound teaching. Timothy’s faith (trust) was to be focused on God, just as his love for God would equip him to minister to the believers under his care (see 1 Tim. 1:14). True faith and love are found only in a relationship with Christ.

VERSE 14

Guard the good deposit through the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

Second, Paul commanded Timothy to guard the good deposit. The Greek term rendered the good deposit is the same word Paul used in 2 Timothy 1:12. Here the term probably refers to the sound teaching Timothy had received from Paul. The gospel message must not be misappropriated or diluted by false teachers. Paul was emphasizing Timothy’s accountability for his ministry. Even in that context, however, Paul reminded Timothy that he would not be successful in his own power. Success would come through the Holy Spirit who lives in believers. For Timothy, reliance on the indwelling Spirit would empower him to teach the sound doctrine that was the antidote to the false teachers in the church at Ephesus.

EXPLORE FURTHER

Timothy was charged to “guard the good deposit.” What is the good deposit that all believers should guard throughout their lives? How can our confidence in the Holy Spirit equip us as believers to guard the good deposit?