

Ashamed?

2 Timothy 1:1-14

October 6, 2019

“Therefore, do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel...”

I. Paul, Timothy and Shame

“Do not be ashamed.” That was St. Paul’s directive to his protégé, the timid young Pastor Timothy. “Do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord.” Timothy was young, new to preaching, and making bold proclamations didn’t come naturally to him anyway. So, while Paul wrote I Timothy with instructions to **protect** the Gospel, he wrote this second letter with encouragement to **proclaim** the Gospel—and not be ashamed of doing so. You see, if a preacher grows ashamed of the Gospel, there’s the very dangerous temptation that he’ll come up with a different message completely—but call it the Gospel anyway. But it’s a false Gospel that gives no forgiveness, and so that preacher leads many away to hell. Paul mentions two of them in this letter, Philetus and Hymenaeus, who were now spreading irreverent babble and ungodliness. And so, he warned Timothy, “Do not be ashamed.”

But what would Timothy find shameful about the Gospel? The unspoken “given” is that Timothy was a Greek lad in a Greek world. And, in that world, anytime you speak, you want to sound rational and competent so that people will respect what you say. For the Greeks, thanks to the likes of Plato and Aristotle, the idea that a god would become man was ludicrous: gods were so much greater and more powerful that it was inconceivable for one to become human flesh. Therefore, when Timothy preached the Gospel that Jesus had become flesh, he was preaching about a God that the Greeks had ruled out before he started. When he got to the part about how God had died for their sins, he’d sound like a lunatic. It’s tough to speak boldly when your message has been pre-rejected. It’s easy to be ashamed.

There was another reason that Timothy might be ashamed. He was from the rowdy town of Lystra, whose citizens had reacted poorly when Paul preached the Gospel to them: in fact, they’d stoned Paul and left him for dead. In the Lord’s mercy, Paul had recovered and moved on.

However, Paul was now in prison—why? For preaching the Gospel! You can bet the local paper had a field day with that one, and the citizens of Lystra could slap each other on the back with the knowledge that they’d been right all along about this Gospel of Jesus Christ. It wasn’t the sort of audience to inspire a young preacher to boldness.

Add it up: Timothy was to preach a pre-rejected Gospel that his mentor was in jail for. You can imagine that he wasn’t counting on the keys of the city for telling people their sins were forgiven. If they stoned Paul, what might happen to Timothy?.

Nevertheless, he was to preach. “Do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord,” said Paul, “nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God.” Why?

Because the message was vital: God “saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began.” (Verses 8-10 of our epistle are worth underlining in your Bible, a wonderful proclamation of the Gospel!) That’s why: no matter what people thought about Jesus, He had become flesh and died on the cross. He was calling them to a holy calling: by the speaking of His Word, He was taking away sins. He wasn’t doing it because people were doing good works, but because of His own work, His own purpose and grace.

By His death on the cross, He had abolished death. Now, with forgiveness, He was making people alive forever—He was giving immortality away free.

And that, dear friends, is nothing to be ashamed of.

But with such a wonderful message, why could Timothy count on a tough reception? Because to confess Christ is to deny self. To live in Christ is to die to self. Your sinful flesh hates that. Old Adam doesn’t want do confess, “Jesus was right and I was wrong.” It doesn’t want to give up all sorts of deadly sins and false beliefs. Death hates life. Sin hates grace. Sinful man will come up with all sorts of reasons to oppose Jesus and the grace He died to win. He will make the Gospel sound ridiculous or intolerant or harmful. That’s bad enough, but here’s the kicker: as a forgiven child of God, Timothy still had his own sinful flesh: not only would he hear the critics on the outside, but his own doubts would whisper that he was on the wrong track. That’s why it would be easy to be ashamed.

So Paul said, “Do not be ashamed about the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner.”

The testimony of the Lord was the Gospel: and whenever Timothy preached it, he’d have the assurance that the Holy Spirit was working through that Word to give faith to many who were hearing it. That proclamation was enough even to make snobby Greeks leave their philosophy behind and believe in a God who became flesh. They might believe. They might not. But that Gospel was the means of salvation to all who would believe, and it was also the grace that would defeat whatever doubts haunted Timothy. Furthermore, as people heard the Gospel, the fact that Paul was imprisoned for it would only show how wicked man was—a further proof of the sinfulness of man.

Even if Timothy faced a nearly barren mission field and suffered for it, what of it? As Paul would write elsewhere, “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18). The time was coming when Paul and Timothy and all believers would be delivered from this world—where they would know only peace and joy and glory...and where they would know no shame before God.

II. The Gospel and Shame Today

Dear friends in Christ, do not be ashamed about the testimony of our Lord Jesus. Easy to say, but it will only grow more difficult to do.

Shame is a powerful emotion—no one wants to feel ashamed. In a sinful world, the threat of shame can be a blessing that prevents us from doing what our sinful flesh desires—because if people found out, we’d be ashamed. Unfortunately, the devil has subverted shame in our society today so that shamelessness is exalted. If a group is guilty of some sort of immorality or other ungodliness, do they

sneak around and try to hide these days? Not at all. Instead, they hold a public demonstration on the steps of the legislature to prove that they have nothing to be ashamed of. And if you happen to object that their behavior contradicts God's Law, what is the response? You're intolerant: you're the one with the problem. In fact, you ought to be ashamed of yourself for imposing God's Law on others. (The truth, by the way, is that you're imposing nothing by speaking. You're simply trying to warn them of what God's Law says, since they're under God's Law whether they like it or not.) In our world today, there are few things more shameful than adhering to God's Law.

Except, of course, believing God's Gospel. You and I can expect no respect for telling the world that Jesus has become flesh and died for all. We should expect little support for telling people that their sins are forgiven. We should anticipate little gratitude for the proclamation that people can live forever, all for Jesus' sake. Why? Remember: this Gospel kills the Old Adam.

Unless someone is a believer, he is lost in sin; therefore, by nature he resists the Gospel. Remember, too, that faith is a gift of the Holy Spirit. It is not a matter of reason. In other words, you can't argue anyone into believing. It is not a matter of practicality: you cannot show anyone a visible benefit of Jesus right now. It is not a matter of emotion: you cannot promise better feelings to those who are forgiven. Instead, it's a matter of faith, and that's the Holy Spirit's work: you and I only speak the Gospel, and He works faith from there.

Rest assured, however, that the Gospel will not be well received. And when you speak it, you can count on being dismissed by others for your foolishness. In other words, you can count on being shamed along the way.

So, be prepared. As we said before, it may come at the hands of some group that promotes some ungodly agenda, be it sexual immorality or abortion or whatever. It is especially painful when it comes from those who should support us, not shame us. Sadly, many of our fellow Christians today fight for these causes, and dismiss you as backwards for following God's Word. Do not be ashamed. You have better news to speak than support for sin: the Lord has died and risen to set people free from these sins and all sins. His forgiveness is for all, that all might live.

Your shame may come at the hands of our land's theological snobs, who promote the false idea that all religions are the same and lead equally to heaven. If that's true, then none of them lead to heaven. At any rate, they will shame you for declaring that Jesus is the only way to heaven, and how can you criticize others? But do not be ashamed, for Jesus is the one true Savior sent by God. If a building is on fire, you and I would point people to the exit—not say, "Any old closet door is going to get you out of here, just take your pick." Likewise, we have the joy of declaring the Gospel of life to those who are perishing. Rejoice, and do not be ashamed.

Your shame may come at the hands of the religion of evolution, truly a religion that requires an immense amount of faith in the impossible. Yet evolution holds sway these days, and those who believe in a loving Creator are dismissed as nut-cases. Do not be ashamed: we gladly speak the news of a living Savior to those who have no hope beyond the grave without Christ.

Your shame may come at the hands of the medical establishment at a time most painful already. You may have to look an experienced nurse or renowned doctor in the eye and say, "We're going to continue

treatment. We're not going to pull the plug because the quality of his life is less than what you like. Christ died for him, and so his life is precious before God." To an unbeliever, that's nonsense and an irritating superstition. Do not be ashamed: it's the fruit that follows the Gospel. As you speak that Gospel, the Holy Spirit is at work upon those who hear.

Your shame may also come at the hands of fellow Christians, whose teachings have been invaded by Plato and Aristotle. There are many Christians who believe that Jesus could become flesh, but it's abhorrent to believe He's truly present in bread and wine. Some preachers will declare that we teach cannibalism for saying that Christ is present in Holy Communion.

We do not: we simply hold firmly to Jesus' own words. But once you've been branded a cannibal, it's tough to bounce back from the shame. Nevertheless, we are not ashamed of our confession, but gladly proclaim that Jesus is present in, with and under the bread and wine. Why? Because He says He's there, and He's there for the forgiveness of sins.

Dear friends, do not be ashamed of Jesus. Endure the suffering that comes with being His servant in a fallen world, for your deliverance is coming and your Savior is already with you.

Don't be ashamed: easy to say, but not so easy to do. You **will** be ashamed at times, for whatever reason. It may be because you want to avoid an argument, or because you're cowed by someone's bluster. It may be because you're beaten down enough that you don't have much fight left. It may be that you haven't fed your faith enough with your Savior's Word and Supper, and so you've left your faith weak. At times, the Gospel will seem so weak and pathetic when confronted by trial or human argument. Whatever the reason for shame in the Gospel, repent.

Repent and confess your sin when you become ashamed of the cross. Repent when you see the means of grace as weak and ineffective. Confess your shame for God's grace, because that is the devil's whisper to leave you dead and lost.

Repent, and then rejoice. Rejoice in this: that the Lord has become flesh. He has died for your sins and He is risen again. Deliverance is coming; and in the meantime, Jesus is not far away. He is as near as His Word. He is as near as His Supper. He is present with you not to shame you for your sin, but to take it away. He is present to declare that you were once dead, but in Him you are now alive. He is present to declare that He has done it all to save you.

Dear friends in Christ, the Lord comes to you this day with this incredible news: though you were once dead in sin and an enemy of God, that is true no longer. Forget what the world says, for this is the Good News: for Jesus' sake, God is not ashamed of you. Why? For only one reason: because for Jesus' sake, you are forgiven for all of your sins. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen