

Living in God's Church Today

Follow the Pattern of Sound Words

2 Timothy 1:13-18

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Introduction

Paul Borthwick served as a professor of Global Christianity at Gordon College for 30 years. In his book titled, *Mission 3:16: God's One-Verse Invitation to Love the World*, he writes:

I had the privilege of attending the Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization in Cape Town, South Africa, in October 2010....

One evening after the meetings had ended, I was having coffee with a friend when I met David, a leader in Elam, a ministry dedicated to the training of pastors in Iran. I asked David if there were any Iranian pastors at the conference. I had never met an Iranian believer, much less a pastor!

David introduced me and my colleague to Farshid. We were transfixed by his story as he radiated enthusiasm for Jesus. He had become a follower of Jesus Christ out of his Shiite Islamic heritage, and after training, he was now involved in church planting with multiple new congregations made up of Muslim-background believers.

I came home inspired by Farshid's testimony and his courage to lead in a place where opposition to the gospel is blatant. I committed myself to praying for him. Over two months after the Cape Town congress ended, I received word from a friend at Elam that Farshid had been arrested and sentenced to six years in Rajai Shahr, one of Iran's worst prisons. His sentence later became seven years. He lost his health, and he released his family to exile (for their safety), but he didn't lose his faith. Though severely persecuted and tested, Farshid was finally released early in December 2015.¹

¹ Paul Borthwick, *Mission 3:16: God's One-Verse Invitation to Love the World* (Westmont, IL: IVP, 2020), n. p.

Farshid's story is a modern story of a Christian maintaining faithfulness to Jesus Christ. He suffered willingly for the sake of the gospel. He was not ashamed of Christ, even though he was arrested and imprisoned for many years.

Paul's Second Letter to Timothy was written from prison. Paul was anticipating his execution to take place soon. He knew that Timothy was by nature a timid, young man. Paul wrote to Timothy to encourage him to stand against the false teaching in Ephesus by teaching the word of God faithfully.

Paul also urged Timothy not to be ashamed of Christ. In 2 Timothy 1:8-12, Paul set down four ways not to be ashamed of Christ. Now, in our text for today, Paul set down two more ways not to be ashamed of Christ.

Scripture

Let's read 2 Timothy 1:13-18:

¹³ Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁴ By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.

¹⁵ You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes. ¹⁶ May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains, ¹⁷ but when he arrived in Rome he searched for me earnestly and found me— ¹⁸ may the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that day!—and you well know all the service he rendered at Ephesus. (2 Timothy 1:13-18)

Lesson

2 Timothy 1:13-18 shows us two ways Christians guard against being ashamed of Christ.

Let's use the following outline:

1. By Guarding the Gospel (1:13-14)
2. By Serving the Faithful (1:15-18)

I. By Guarding the Gospel (1:13-14)

First, Christians guard against being ashamed of Christ by guarding the gospel.

In today's text, 2 Timothy 1:13-18, there are only two commands. One occurs in verse 13 and the second in verse 14. They show us what is involved in guarding the gospel.

A. Following the Pattern of Sound Words (1:13)

First, guarding the gospel involves following the pattern of sound words.

Paul wrote in verse 13, **“Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.”** Paul commanded Timothy to take hold of **“the pattern of sound words.”** The **“sound words”** refers to the Scripture and the doctrine that it teaches. Paul himself taught these sound words that Timothy was to follow. **“Faith”** is the confidence that God's word is true. **“Love”** is the kindness that flows from God's word. Both these virtues are found in union with **Christ Jesus** and exemplified in the life of Paul. So, Timothy was to follow the pattern of sound words that he heard from Paul.

Whether we like it or not, believers are models of the

Christian faith. All believers are to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (see 2 Peter 3:18) so that we look more and more like him. The way this is done is by reading and studying and putting God's word into practice in our lives. One cannot grow in Christ if one does not read God's word. But reading God's word is not enough. We must also commit to applying God's word to our daily lives.

Let me suggest a way to do this. When I was a new Christian, I read one chapter of the Bible each day. Although I had a little familiarity with God's word, much of it was still new to me. So, I read one chapter a couple of times. The first time was just to get a sense of what the chapter was all about. The second time was to understand in a little more detail what was contained in that chapter. Finally, I read the chapter a third time to find a personal takeaway. I asked several questions, such as: "Is there a command to obey?" "Is there a warning to heed?" "Is there a sin to avoid?" "Is there a promise to claim?" I would often see something in a verse (or portion of a verse) that answered one of these questions. Then I spent the rest of the day thinking about that truth and its application to my life. That was a great way to learn from God's word.

It was also a great way to begin following the pattern of sound words.

B. Guarding the Good Deposit (1:14)

And second, guarding the gospel involves guarding the good deposit.

Paul wrote in verse 14, **"By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you."** Paul concluded his First Letter to Timothy with an almost identical command, where he wrote in 1 Timothy 6:20a, "O Timothy,

guard the deposit entrusted to you.” The “**good deposit**” refers to the sound words that Paul taught Timothy regarding the good news of salvation that was revealed in the word of God. In other words, the “**good deposit**” is the essence of the gospel. The Greek word for “**guard**” (*phylasso*) is a military term that carries the idea of protecting or standing watch over something. Timothy was to use military-like precision in watching over the truth of the gospel. However, Timothy was not alone. He had the presence of the **Holy Spirit** to help him.

People constantly assign meaning to the word of God that conforms more to their idea of right and wrong than to God's will. There is pressure to make God's word suit our current cultural moment rather than us conforming ourselves to the truth of God's word. Our culture wants us to soften God's word on sexual orientation and gender identity issues. Our culture wants us to embrace critical race theory. Our culture wants us to support abortion. Our culture wants us to remove parents from their responsibility for their own children. Our culture wants us to turn away from a morality that is informed by the word of God.

All Christians, but especially elders, must watch over and protect the good news of the gospel from error. We do this by guarding the good deposit. That means we must speak up in our places of business. We must stand for the truth of God's word in school. We must go to school board meetings and community meetings and business meetings. And when something is said that is contrary to God's truth, we must speak up. That may mean facing ridicule and opposition. But that is how we guard the good deposit.

So, first, Christians guard against being ashamed of Christ by guarding the gospel.

II. By Serving the Faithful (1:15-18)

And second, Christians guard against being ashamed of Christ by serving the faithful.

We serve the faithful in two ways.

A. *Not Deserting the Faithful (1:15)*

First, we serve the faithful by not deserting the faithful.

Paul wrote in verse 15, **“You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes.”** Paul reminded Timothy that people in Asia deserted him. Asia was not Asia Minor but rather something like a province in what is modern Turkey, and it was the area in which Timothy was now serving. Paul used hyperbole when he said that **“all”** had turned away from him. Timothy, for one, had not turned away from Paul. However, Paul mentioned **“Phygelus and Hermogenes”** who had turned away from him. Nothing is known of these two men. Perhaps they had shown promise as leaders and had been close to Paul and were well known among the people in the Asian churches. But perhaps under the pressure of persecution and suffering, they deserted Paul. When Paul needed them, they deserted him.

When people disagree with the pastor and elders of the church, they usually just leave and go to some other church, if they go to church at all. Many times people just leave the church. Sometimes, however, people get into conflict with the pastor and elders and, if they are not able to get what they want, then they leave the church. Young pastors are usually rattled by this. Seasoned pastors are also rattled by this, but perhaps less so. In all cases, however, it is disappointing when people who seemed to show such promise turn away from supporting

the mission and ministry of the church.

B. Not Being Ashamed of the Faithful (1:16-18)

And second, we serve the faithful by not being ashamed of the faithful.

Paul wrote in verses 16-18, **“May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains, but when he arrived in Rome he searched for me earnestly and found me—may the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that day!—and you well know all the service he rendered at Ephesus.”** We know little about **Onesiphorus**. He is mentioned in this verse and again at the end of this Second Letter to Timothy where Paul wrote, “Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus” (2 Timothy 4:19). In both places, Paul refers to the **“household of Onesiphorus”** rather than to Onesiphorus himself. Therefore, some commentators speculate that Onesiphorus may have already died but because of his noble service to Paul, he wanted Onesiphorus’ household to be remembered. But, likely, Onesiphorus was still alive. Paul wanted Timothy to know that Onesiphorus was one of Paul’s loyal assistants who had not deserted him, especially when Paul was in prison. He found Paul in prison in Rome and refreshed him, both physically and spiritually.

It is interesting to note what Onesiphorus did to serve Paul. Remember that Paul was in prison in Rome. The Christians in Rome were reeling from Nero’s persecution. He had just recently burned Rome and blamed the Christians for setting Rome on fire. To press his charge against the church, he had Christians rounded up and they were burned at night to serve as lights. So, Christian believers were living in fear and

terror of being exposed and possibly captured and burned. Along came Onesiphorus. He went to Christians he knew and asked for the whereabouts of Paul. I am sure that door after door closed in his face. But Onesiphorus persevered. He would not give up looking for his beloved Paul. Finally, he found him! What a wonderful reunion it was. Paul was so encouraged by Onesiphorus. Listen again to what Paul wrote about Onesiphorus in verses 16-17, **“May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains, but when he arrived in Rome he searched for me earnestly and found me.”** Of course, this fit with the way Onesiphorus served in Ephesus, as Paul wrote in verse 18b, **“and you well know all the service he rendered at Ephesus.”**

I was recently interacting with a bunch of pastors. One of them said that he had been an assistant pastor for about nine years. Someone commented that he must get along well with his senior pastor. He said that he loved his senior pastor and they worked well together. I am sure that they make a wonderful team as they work well together and serve God’s people. That is not always the case but it is a wonderful thing when it is the case.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed 2 Timothy 1:13-18, let us guard against being ashamed of Christ. That involves us guarding the gospel and serving the faithful.

Let me close with a lengthy quote from Paul Borthwick:

In the affluent, middle-class life many of us live—at least in North America—I often think that we have replaced

the biblical Trinity with our own trinity: comfort, convenience, and consumerism.... We fear giving up our lifestyles of over-choice, our oversized cars and houses, and our dreams of health and wealth. The prosperity preacher Joel Osteen observes that we want our best life now!

But if we look at both the current state and the history of our global Christian family, we cannot avoid being inspired to join in making greater sacrifices—financially, socially, and even with our security. Consider the following examples.

An inspiring mission movement coming out of China (which I cannot name here due to security reasons) aspires to send Christian workers across the Buddhist, Hindu, and Muslim worlds. They estimate that 10 percent of their sent ones will be martyred.

British star athlete of the late nineteenth century, C. T. Studd gave up his lucrative sporting career to serve in Africa, India, and China. His motto was, “If Christ be God and died for me, no sacrifice I make is too great.”...

At a student mission conference in Accra, Ghana, more than four hundred university students came together to give their lives by taking the gospel message in word and deed to the ends of the earth, especially to the tough places where Jesus had never been preached. The first four speakers—all Ghanaians—told stories about the British missionaries who first brought the gospel to Ghana in the mid-nineteenth century. They reminded the students that their faith was a result of people coming to Ghana who literally died while bringing the gospel message to the students' Ghanaian forefathers and foremothers. As young adults, the British missionaries set sail from England, having packed their earthly belongings in their own caskets because they knew that they would most likely never return home from West Africa. An estimated 60 percent of these servants of Christ died in their first two years of service. In one location, a graveyard bears the headstones of the children of missionaries who died as their parents served: most of those children were younger than ten years old.

The stories of sacrifice characterize life for many in other parts of the world where Christianity faces fierce opposition. On a visit to one of my friends who teaches in Beijing, China, I attended a church with four young men who were new believers thanks to my friend's ministry. The service was in Mandarin, so I understood nothing, but I did think the pastor, a very senior man, seemed a little boring—he was soft-spoken, a little stooped over, and preached without any expressions of excitement or emotion.

At lunch after the service, I asked the four young Christians, "Is your pastor a good preacher?" They exclaimed, "Oh yes! He is a great preacher. He spent many years in prison for Jesus Christ." Their measurement of the sermon had nothing to do with oratory ability and everything to do with a life faithfully lived in the face of suffering.

At a conference of African leaders, I listened to a testimony by a woman from Senegal. This dear sister left the faith of her village and decided to follow Jesus.... She lost her marriage, children, home, and front teeth after her family beat her. But she decided that following Jesus was worth it all, and now, over a decade later, her son is a fellow Jesus follower, and together they are explaining the grace and power of Jesus Christ to their ethnic group—the very people that had persecuted her.²

Friends, if we are going to see the gospel spread in our community and even to the ends of the earth, it will be accomplished by Christians who are not ashamed of Christ and who are willing to suffer with him. Let us be courageous—not fearless but rather confessing, like the psalmist who said, "When I am afraid, I put my trust in you" (Psalm 56:3). Amen.

² Paul Borthwick, *Mission 3:16: God's One-Verse Invitation to Love the World* (Westmont, IL: IVP, 2020), n. p.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can
be found at:

1. <https://tampabaypresbyterian.org/SermonAudio>.
2. www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp.
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