

A Remedy for Timid Souls

2 Timothy 1:12

By Phil Johnson

This morning I want to look at a familiar text of Scripture that deals with the matter of assurance. This is a key text on the subject: 2 Timothy 1:12. That's a verse probably most of you could quote from memory (2 Timothy 1:12). It says this: **"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."**

This verse is probably the strongest declaration of personal assurance anywhere in Scripture. It comes from the pen of the apostle Paul, writing to Timothy. And he expresses in the most definitive terms a settled, confident, positive, secure assurance. There's a sense of holy triumph here, and that's remarkable, because the verse begins with a reminder that Paul is in the midst of great suffering. He was in chains when he wrote this, very likely imprisoned in the cold, dark dungeon of the Mamertine prison, some 20 feet underground on the edge of the forum in Rome. It was basically an empty cistern carved out of solid rock whose only entryway was a hole in the ceiling barely large enough for a grown man to squeeze through. The only source of light in there would be a candle.

As a matter of fact, the context of this verse is both poignant and fascinating. You won't get the full impact of what Paul is saying to Timothy unless you understand exactly *why* Paul was writing this letter.

The apostle Paul was about to die. This is his farewell epistle—the last inspired letter Paul wrote before giving his life for the gospel's sake. He was already imprisoned in Rome. His death was imminent, and he was ready to

depart. He says so in chapter 4, verses 6-7: **"I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."**

Timothy was absolutely crucial to the continuation of the work Paul had begun. He was the one chosen by Paul himself and ordained by God to carry on the work Paul had begun. Paul had personally laid hands on Timothy—no doubt in a public ceremony designed to make it clear to everyone that the leadership and oversight of churches founded by Paul was formally passing to Timothy. This is not any kind of formal apostolic succession. Paul was not passing his apostolic authority to Timothy or installing him in the apostolic office. (Timothy is never referred to as an apostle.) Paul was committing to Timothy's care the ministry he had begun—the missionary work, the care and oversight of churches Paul had planted—and above all the duty of carrying on the work of preaching the gospel.

Paul refers to this in the second-to-last verse of 1 Timothy, where he writes, **"O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you."** The "deposit" was the truth he had learned from Paul. Timothy was to be a guardian of the doctrine Paul had given him, a proclaimer of the gospel, and a keeper of the truth. Paul reiterates this same command in our chapter, 2 verses after the verse we're focusing on (v. 14): **"O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you."**

Now, how do we know **"the deposit"** is the doctrine Timothy learned from Paul and not a bag of apostolic financial support Paul had given Timothy to keep? Because Paul lays out the plan in chapter 2, verse 2: **"What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."** The same truths Paul had taught Timothy needed to be passed to the

next generation, and they in turn would **"teach others also"**—and so on.

Notice: he told Timothy to pass on **"what you have heard from me,"** not a whole new version of the message altered and adapted to fit the next generation. The idea was not to take the spiritual themes and the vocabulary of the gospel and use them to create a new message suited for a younger generation and more modern times. Timothy needed to take the very same truths and the exact version of the message that was about to cost Paul his very life, and Timothy needed to proclaim that message and pass it to the next generation. Their duty would be to do likewise.

It's a simple plan, but one the church has frankly not always been faithful to. And perhaps no three successive generations in the history of the church have done a *worse* job at obeying this simple strategy than 1) the generation before mine, 2) my own generation, and 3) the generation that is coming along behind me. Most evangelicals nowadays seem convinced that the gospel needs to be re-contextualized, remodeled, and totally overhauled at least once every generation.

Paul gave Timothy no latitude whatsoever to do that. In fact, he warned in chapter 4, verses 3 and 4 that **"the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths"**—exactly what we are seeing today.

But Timothy was not to cater to itching ears. He had one message—the same message he had heard Paul proclaim—and he was to stick to it. Chapter 4, verse 2: **"Preach the word . . . in season and out of season."** In fact, notice the way Paul solemnly swears Timothy to this task (4:1): **"I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ**

Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word."

But Timothy had a major problem, and it seems to be a chronic character flaw that troubled him: he was too timid. I want you to see this. Go back to chapter 2, and look at verse 2 again: "**what you have heard from me . . . entrust to faithful men who will . . . teach others.**" That's Timothy's duty: carry on the legacy of Paul by doing for others what Paul did for Timothy. Simple, right?

Notice, verse 2 (the verse that gives Timothy his marching orders) is sandwiched between two other verses that command him to be strong and courageous—man up. It's evident from what Paul says in this letter that Timothy was struggling with a spirit of fear.

No wonder. Timothy's mentor, Paul, was about to be executed for what he believed. It wasn't merely that Timothy was scared of having people reject his message or mock his faith. (Those are the kinds of fears that keep *us* silent when we ought to speak out, am I right?) But Timothy's life was on the line just like Paul's, and as he watched his friend and teacher prepare to die for the gospel's sake, Timothy was grappling with fear. Perhaps it was fear that Timothy himself would be called upon to be a martyr. Perhaps it was fear of what would become of him and his ministry when Paul passed from the scene. Perhaps it was a feeling of inadequacy in the face of a task so large and a culture so hostile to the message. Perhaps it was a lack of assurance about his own calling. Most likely it was a combination of all of these.

And on a *human* level, we can certainly understand Timothy's fear. We have all been there.

But notice: Paul treats Timothy's shyness as a serious deficiency in his faith. It was a form of *unbelief*, not a

charming sign of Timothy's great "transparency"—or "authenticity"—or "epistemological humility"—or whatever. It was a potentially hurtful habit that Timothy needed to mortify and set aside.

That is virtually the starting point of this whole epistle. Paul jumps right in and gets to the point within the first eight verses. Two sentences of greeting (three if you're reading the ESV; they have broken the clauses differently). But then, **BOOM!**, the third sentence launches Paul to the very heart of the matter. Verse 4:

As I remember your tears [tears, no doubt, involving sorrow over Paul's sufferings, but the context also suggests there is a powerful element of fear moving Timothy to weep], **I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy.**

5 I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well.

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,

7 for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

8 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,

All those exhortations not to fear and not to be ashamed and not to shy away from the privilege of suffering for Christ's sake reflect Paul's deep concern about Timothy. Throughout the entire epistle, Paul urges Timothy to be strong, courageous, bold, and confident. Evidently Paul had observed in his young disciple a tendency to cringe in the face of persecution and recoil from situations where he might be required to stand up and give a bold testimony. There's a suggestion in verse 8 that Timothy had failed in

some way to stand up for Paul, or that he had missed an opportunity to declare his loyalty to Christ—or both. Paul urges him: "**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.**" (Can you imagine how it must have torn Timothy's heart out to get a letter like this from Paul?)

Then Paul reminds Timothy about the *basic facts* of the gospel, the *eternal importance* of God's saving purpose, the *amazing significance* of what God has called him to do, and the *unfathomable privilege* it is to be given such a high calling. Those were the things that motivated Paul. Verse 9:

**[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,
10 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,
11 for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher,
12 which is why I suffer as I do.**

And that brings us to our verse.

Now I think the text makes it clear that the most fundamental weakness underlying all Timothy's fears was a lack of assurance. His reluctance to stand up and be bold reflected a lack of confidence—and I don't mean merely that he lacked self-confidence. The deeper problem *causing* Timothy's fear was a serious defect in the assurance of his faith. There was a lack of depth in his fundamental convictions. Uncertainty was at the root of all his fear, and therefore the only cure was stronger faith. So Paul focuses on the matter of assurance, and that's the whole theme of our verse.

By the way, look at the word *ashamed* in verse 8: "**do not be ashamed.**" Same Greek word in verse 12 ("**I am not ashamed**"), and then Paul uses the very same word again in verse 16 ("**OnesiPHORus . . . was not ashamed of my chains,**"). The same word is used in chapter 2, verse 15 with a Greek prefix that turns it into a negative—literally "**not ashamed**": "**Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.**"

That's a loaded word, "*ashamed.*" It is often used in Scripture, and it is capable of several shades of meaning. Here in this context it seems to signify a fear of persecution. That's why in verse 8 Paul contrasts *being ashamed* with "**shar[ing] in suffering for the gospel.**"

The word "*ashamed*" in Scripture always carries the stigma of dishonor. Romans 10:11: "**Everyone who believes in [Christ] will not be put to shame.**" Paul is quoting Isaiah 28:16, which says, "**Whoever believes will not be in haste.**" And the "**haste**" Isaiah is talking about is the urgency of someone who flees out of fear. So there's a definite connection between the idea of being "*ashamed*" and the idea of being afraid—fearful in a way that dishonors one's own character.

So the central idea of "*shame*" is embarrassment, disgrace, disrepute, humiliation. That's the obvious sense of this, and there's very clearly an element of that sort of dishonor and personal disgrace in the cowardice that Timothy was struggling with.

See, the gospel promises that those who believe *will not be put to shame*. And that's absolutely and perfectly true in the ultimate sense. "**There is . . . no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus**" (Romans 8:1). We are fully forgiven, justified by faith, given a right standing before God—clothed in the perfect righteousness of Christ. And

therefore in the most important sense, on that final day, those who believe in Christ will not be put to shame.

Still, the world tries hard to put believers to shame. That's what persecution is all about. The world wants to embarrass Christ's followers, as if that would somehow discredit Christ and thereby nullify His lordship. Of course, that's a foolish way to think, but *lots* of Christians succumb to the lure of worldly thinking, and they become fearful because they fear the dishonor the world threatens us with. They are afraid they will be put to shame. If they kept focused on Christ and understood the promise of the gospel, they would not be afraid of that. They would stand up with absolute confidence that not only will God completely vindicate Himself at the end of history; He will also vindicate all who belong to Christ. If you lose sight of that truth, *of course* you're going to be fearful of the shame. So being "ashamed" is the practical result of a lack of true, settled assurance.

That was Timothy's problem. His fear of the world was rooted in his own lack of faith in the Lord's promise. His *faith* needed strengthening. His assurance needed to be bolstered. That's why Paul writes this powerful expression of settled assurance in order to encourage Timothy.

Verse 12: "[**Though**] I suffer as I do . . . I am *not* ashamed," Paul says. Why? because his faith was strong. He had settled the matter of assurance long ago. "**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.**"

I love that statement. It is an absolute manifesto of settled certainty—with a note of holy triumph that, frankly, I find contagious. And I hope you do, too.

But let's be honest: A statement like that is severely out of harmony with the spirit of *our* age. The fashionable thing today is to question everything. Even among Christians.

The visible church is overrun with bad preachers and weak-willed people who are convinced that the very epitome of humility is never to state anything with too much conviction.

Everything nowadays is carefully qualified with lots of ambiguous expressions—and weasel-words like *"perhaps,"* or *"possibly,"* or *"It seems to me . . ."* or *"maybe."* Everything (including the gospel itself) is always prefaced with, *"I could be wrong, but to the best of my knowledge this seems a reasonable explanation—although other people might see it differently, so I don't want to be dogmatic."* Doubt has been canonized as a virtue and renamed as "epistemological humility"—as if doubting what God says could be excused by labeling it "humility."

Paul's message to Timothy is deliberately of the opposite style: **"I know,"** he says, and then he strengthens it even more by a second expression of firm conviction: **"I am convinced."** He emphatically eliminates every hint of doubt or uncertainty.

Notice: Paul is not the least bit concerned about how that might sound to someone who holds a different opinion. He doesn't preface it with any apology for his "tone." He doesn't soften it in case someone who is more timid about the truth than Paul is might think he sounds arrogant. He doesn't qualify it down with a lot of self-effacing disclaimers about how he might be wrong because he is, after all, merely human and therefore incapable of fully comprehending everything perfectly. There's none of that. Why?

Because Paul really *was* that certain. In our verse (and its context) Paul not only declares his own unshakable confidence in Christ, but he also tells Timothy *exactly* how he came by that confidence—and the clear implication is that Paul expects Timothy to have a the same kind of settled assurance—absolute conviction; a heart that refuses to waver from the truth.

The further implication is that you and I are supposed to cultivate the same kind of assurance. That means it is imperative that we gain victory over doubt and come to a settled conviction so that we can say along with Paul, "**I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me.**" We can have that assurance for the very same reasons Paul did. And so this morning I want to point out to you from this text three reasons why Paul's assurance was so strong. Three things that worked together to convince him beyond any shadow of a doubt that the claims of Christ were true, that Paul was therefore secure in Christ, and that he would remain secure until the last day when God would vindicate righteousness itself, usher His people into their eternal reward, and banish the evil from His presence forever. "**Until *that Day*,**" Paul says—the final culmination of Day of the Lord—"until *that Day*," "**I am convinced**" God can keep secure what I have entrusted to His care.

Three reasons for that confidence: *Because of what had happened to Paul*; because of Whom he trusted; and because of what he knew. Let's take those one at a time. First, Paul was confident—

1. BECAUSE OF WHAT HAD HAPPENED TO HIM

He says, "**I am not ashamed, for I know.**" In contrast to the faintheartedness of Timothy, Paul was "**not ashamed,**" because he was absolutely, definitively, unconditionally, wholly and utterly certain. As I said, Paul really was that sure. And it was not the false assurance of an arrogant self-confidence. Just the opposite.

The truth Paul knew came to him from *God*. It wasn't the product of his own skill as a philosopher and theologian. In fact, his academic achievements in the realm of philosophy and theology were extremely impressive by every human

standard—but those things had nearly cost Paul his soul. He says in Philippians 3 that those things were of no more value to him than excrement—dung. And he's not talking about processed manure; that would be good for fertilizer. He's saying all those things are good for nothing—pure waste; useless for anything—ORdure, the most defiling and disgusting kind of filth. So Paul's certainty did not come from being an educated, learned man. It came from the fact that God had opened his spiritual eyes and *shown* him the truth.

Now, for Paul that happened under extraordinary and miraculous circumstances. Christ appeared to him and spoke to him on the Damascus road. The risen Christ came in person to Paul visibly, he tells us in 1 Corinthians 15. He saw and heard and handled the resurrection body of Christ just like the eleven original apostles. How could he go through that and doubt Christ? That was inconceivable.

Timothy did not have the benefit of that kind of firsthand tactile and visual experience. Christ never appeared to Timothy on the road to Ephesus. We *know* that because in 1 Corinthians 15:8 Paul says he was the last person to have that kind of experience with the risen Christ. Also, when he talks to Timothy about the truth that was committed to him for care and safekeeping in 2 Timothy 2:2, he calls it that which "**you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses.**" But Paul makes a point of stressing that he, Paul, received the gospel directly from Christ by special revelation. Galatians 1:11-12: "**The gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.**" Timothy could not make a claim like that. Neither could you or I.

And yet, get this: Paul wants Timothy to have the same kind of settled assurance Paul had. Same with you and me. It's not necessary for Christ to appear physically to us in His

resurrection body for us to have the same confidence Paul is talking about in our text. Because Paul's confidence ultimately was not grounded in the fact that Christ appeared to him physically, but in the fact that God had opened his spiritual eyes to see and embrace the truth.

And if you are truly a Christian, you should be able to say that as well. If your faith is authentic saving faith, it is *not* grounded in the fact that someone convinced you with clever apologetics and a convincing argument. Authentic faith is not gained through proofs or philosophy or human reason. Authentic faith is the result of God's work in the heart. If you believe, it is because God has opened your eyes to see the truth, not because your mind has apprehended some unassailable proof drawn from reason or experience.

Even Paul's experience, stunning as it was, was not the ground or the source of the knowledge he is talking about. He doesn't say, "I am not ashamed, for I have experienced something . . ." Experience can be *deceiving*. Our senses can deceive us. But Paul knew the truth because God had opened his heart to believe, given him spiritual eyesight with which to see, and granted him spiritual understanding to apprehend truth. First Corinthians 2:9-11:

as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him"—

10 these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.

11 For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

That was the ground of Paul's knowledge and the source of His confidence. The Spirit of God had enabled him to lay

hold of the truth, and the Spirit now indwelt him, bearing witness to the truth. That's what most of Romans 8 is all about. Verse 16: "**The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.**" Verse 9: "**the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.**" Read Romans 8 if you want to grasp how important this whole idea is: The Holy Spirit indwells us, and He is the One who enables us to see, understand, affirm, and obey the truth of God. That's the theme that runs through Romans 8.

If the Spirit of God indwells you, you already have the basis for the settled assurance Paul describes here. You just need to cultivate it. That doesn't mean your rational mind won't be assaulted with doubts; but it *does* mean that you have a voice within that speaks with more authority than those doubts, and you need to listen to that voice.

To be clear, it's not a voice that speaks to you in your mind or imagination in words you have never heard. I'm talking about the voice of the Holy Spirit who speaks to you through the Word of God—the Scriptures. As you study the word of God, the Spirit of God enlightens your understanding and affirms the truth in your heart. That's what I'm talking about. And that, I believe, is what Romans 8 and 1 Corinthians 2:10 is describing: the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking in Scripture. That is the basis for the knowledge Paul is speaking about.

That brings us to reason number 2 why Paul's conviction was so powerful. First, it was *because of what had happened to him*. Now, second, it was—

2. BECAUSE OF WHOM HE TRUSTED

Look at the verse: "**I am not ashamed, for I know *whom* I have believed.**" He's talking about Christ, here. And that goes with what we have just been saying about the role of the indwelling Holy Spirit. In John 15:26, where Jesus promises His disciples that He is going to send the Holy Spirit, He says, "**The Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father . . . will bear witness about me.**" That is the Holy Spirit's work: to testify about Christ; to point us to Christ; to teach us that Christ is the One in whom we should place our trust.

So there are two important ideas I want you to understand that arise from that simple phrase: "**I know *whom* I have believed.**" First is this: authentic assurance is the furthest thing you can imagine from self-confidence. Again, Paul's confidence here is not in his own learning or intelligence. His certainty doesn't arise from the fact that he has studied hard and learned a lot. He did do that, and it's a good thing to do, but it won't give you assurance. He didn't feel good about his faith just because of how well it was working for him, because frankly, from the perspective of 21st-century American Showtime religion, Paul's faith wasn't working for him very well at all. He wasn't prosperous; he was in prison. He wasn't enjoying physical health and material wealth and the abundant life; he was about to be put to death because of his testimony.

Paul had not attained some level of spiritual level of sinless perfection that gave him confidence because of how holy he was in practical terms. Paul puts that notion to rest emphatically in Philippians 3:12, where he expressly says it's "**Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on.**" And in Romans 7, that famous passage—he chronicles his frustration over his inability to live at the standard of righteous perfection he desired. In fact, he said

he still struggled with sin constantly. So Paul's assurance was not grounded in a feeling of confidence about what he had achieved with his life or what he had done for Christ—even though he had already done far more than any of us could ever hope to do. His assurance was still grounded in Christ: I'm confident, he said, because **"I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day."**

So authentic assurance has nothing whatsoever to do with self-confidence. If your assurance looks or smells or sounds anything like self-confidence, you need to repent of it.

And the flip side of that principle is a truth that applies especially to those who struggle with chronic doubt and a perpetual lack of assurance. If that's you and you are desperately looking for assurance of salvation, I have one thing to say: It's not about you. Get your focus off yourself. You will never get assurance through any contemplative process of self-examination. Self-examination is valuable because it destroys the *false* confidence of proud and pretentious people whose comfort is rooted in their own apathy. But you will never find assurance by looking at yourself. You have to look to Christ for that.

Assurance is the fruit of faith that is focused on Christ, and Him alone. That's what Paul is describing here. You'll find assurance when (like Paul) you size yourself up, take all your accumulated strengths and virtues, and realize that they are no better than dung. Then look to Christ for the true righteousness you need.

Christ is a powerful Savior and an able guardian. He can keep what we entrust to Him. He is worthy of our trust, and you will not find assurance at all—you have no right to assurance—until you learn what it means to place your trust in Him.

And that brings us to the third reason for Paul's unshakable certainty. First, he was confident *because of what had happened to him*. Second, he was confident *because of Whom he trusted*. Now, third, Paul was confident—

3. BECAUSE OF WHAT HE KNEW

Once more: **"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."** The word translated "able" is a strong Greek word that speaks of *power*. It comes from the same root as the word for "power"; the same word from which we get the English term *dynamite*. It means not only that **"He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day"**; He is *mighty* to do so. Paul was confident in the omnipotent power of Christ to guard and preserve everything that matters. His theology taught him to be confident.

Now, there's an ambiguity in the text here. Most translations have this verse the way I have been reading it: **"He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him."** The ESV says this: **"he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me."** Literally, it says this: **"I am persuaded that He is able to guard my deposit until that Day."**

"My deposit." The idea seems to be—"my sacred trust." Is that speaking of what Paul had committed to Christ, or what Christ had committed to Paul? It seems to me this is talking about what Paul had committed to Christ. "My deposit" is what I put in the bank. The reason there is a question about it is that this is the same word Paul uses in verse 1 Timothy 6:20, where he says to Timothy, **"guard the deposit entrusted to you,"** and again in our chapter, verse 14: **"guard the good deposit entrusted to you."**

Still, it doesn't matter a great deal which way you translate this verse; the point is that even when we are fearful and unfaithful, *Christ* is faithful, and powerful, and He will guard what is important to preserve, and that fact gave Paul assurance.

Now at this point I could preach a whole sermon on how our security rests in Christ's faithfulness, not our own, but we're running short on time this morning, so let me stress another aspect of this.

Now remember our point three: Paul was confident because of what he *knew*. He is not describing blind faith here. This is not the kind of superstitious confidence rooted in ignorance.

That's a vital point. There *is* a kind of phony assurance that is irrational. It's unjustified, founded on blind stupidity rather than knowledge and understanding. It is willfully naive. A lot of nominally religious people cultivate that kind of false assurance. They don't want to know the truth; they are happier with their blind presumptuousness. They willfully refuse to subject their beliefs to the scrutiny of careful study because they know their faith is irrational to start with and they are afraid if they think too much about what they believe, their faith will unravel.

That's not true faith at all. You cannot divorce authentic faith from knowledge that way. The Catholic church encourages that kind of faith. They call it "implicit faith"—blind, ignorant trust that the church is right, whether you understand what the church teaches or not.

Paul's faith was decidedly not of that sort. "**I know**," he says. Furthermore, "**I am convinced**." I have thought it through. I understand the implications of my faith. It is an intelligent faith. I'm not afraid to meditate on it, and study it, and mine it for deeper understanding by analyzing it and investigating it. I'm *convinced* of it.

Listen: that is one of the keys to true assurance, because you cannot have assurance without true understanding, and you cannot have real understanding without study and meditation. Let the truth permeate your mind. Don't erect a barrier around your intellect and try to consign your faith to the emotions or your volition alone.

I *hope* your faith stirs powerful passions. But if it's passion alone, you'll never be able to find settled assurance, because your passions rise and fall. They become fatigued. Feelings are no solid foundation for true assurance. In fact, grounding your confidence in how you feel is a sure recipe for no assurance at all. You need to *know* the truth and *be convinced* of it, and that means (as 1 Peter 3:15 says) you need to be able to give "**a reason for the hope that is in you.**"

Now someone might be thinking that contradicts what I said earlier, that our faith is not grounded in apologetic arguments.

No, I stand by that. Here's the proper order: first faith, then knowledge, then assurance. You have to believe *something* before you can know anything. Authentic faith always seeks understanding. The fruit of that is *knowledge*, and the fruit of knowledge is assurance.

If you're struggling with assurance, you might be thinking to yourself, *none of that is helpful to me. I'm not like the apostle Paul. I don't have that kind of confidence. You're aggravating my doubts. You're killing whatever confidence I came here with.*

Now think through this with me. If faith comes *before* understanding, and knowledge comes only when we pursue understanding, and assurance is the product of knowledge—then assurance is not automatic. *Timothy*

lacked the confidence of Paul, and Paul was saying that he needed to *cultivate* the assurance he lacked.

That's the message for you, too. Full assurance doesn't come spontaneously when we first believe. True, settled assurance comes with maturity; and a diligent love for the truth; and serious-minded study. It is gained by learning the truth. Paul essentially says that a chapter after this, in that famous text 2 Timothy 2:15: "**Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.**" If you don't want to be ashamed—timid, fearful, uncertain, fainthearted—be diligent to learn God's Word. Be a student of truth.

If you lack assurance, don't let that fact alone make you even more doubtful. I struggled with assurance for more than a year after my conversion. My best friend, who was remarkably converted from an agnostic Jewish background, never doubted the truth of the gospel but wondered if he himself was truly saved for two years or longer.

Full assurance—the settled confidence Paul describes in our verse—comes from being immersed in the truth, captivated by it, absolutely devoted to it. People who are half-hearted are always faint-hearted.

In closing, let me give you some practical pointers from the text. Time only permits me to list these and point them out in the text, but do try to take these down. Here are four practical remedies for your lack of assurance:

- ! 1. Stir up your gift. Verse 6: "**Stir up the gift of God which is in you.**" Get involved in ministry and serve others with whatever spiritual gifts you have. Be more sacrificial and you'll have less time to be introspective, and that alone will bolster your assurance.
- ! 2. Face those fears. Verse 7: "**For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.**"

Quit nurturing your fears and draw on God's power to face whatever makes you timid and uncertain.

! 3. Embrace that suffering. Verse 8: "**Share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God.**" I've never met anyone suffering for the sake of his or her testimony who struggled with a lack of assurance. Assurance is an element of the grace God gives to sustain those who suffer. Finally—

! 4. Trust our savior. Verses 9-10: understand that "**[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, 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.**"

Again, that is the key to assurance: look away from yourself, and fix your heart on Christ. Know *Him*, and the power of His resurrection as you are made conformable to His death. And if you truly know Him and rest your hope in His ability to save, your heart will echo this affirmation of assurance Paul made: "**I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day [my deposits].**"

Lord, help our unbelief. Strengthen faith that is weak, overthrow unbelief, and teach us to look to you alone not only for our salvation, but also for our assurance.