



2 Timothy 1:8-18

The weather was nice this past week almost reaching ninety degrees on Tuesday, but still it's time for another campfire. We are picking up where we left off two weeks ago in 2 Timothy 1—Fan into flame the gift of God. We're gonna take the lid like we did two weeks ago and pour oxygen into this fire. We're gonna fan this flame into a roaring fire. Before I remind you of the first four principles, tell me—what is the gift we are fanning into flame? Do you remember? What is this gift? The gift is the Holy Spirit. In 1 Thessalonians 5, Paul said, "Do not quench the Spirit." Every believer has the Holy Spirit dwelling within them. Our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. We have received the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Every believer has this gift of the Holy Spirit and now we each have two options before us—either we fan this gift into a flame or we quench the Spirit. The easiest way to quench a fire is to throw water on it. Now a good camper will always throw water on a campfire when he is done with it and leaving the area, but you never want to do this with the fire of the Holy Spirit. Let me remind you of the first four principles before we move onto the remaining ones.

1. Sincerity
2. A Godly heritage
3. Holy Spirit power
4. Freedom from the fear of man

There are five more principles from this passage.

5. **Suffering for the gospel—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.

Bill Maher is known for slamming Christian beliefs as often as he can so it was refreshing to see him take a stand for reason recently. He was talking with an interviewer about the Boston bombings. The other man had just made the comment that people from all religions do evil things. Even the hard left-leaning Maher had to strongly disagree with this statement.

You know what?" he broke in to disagree. "Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. You know what? That's liberal b___s___ right there. I mean yes, all faiths. They just, they're not as dangerous. I mean, there's only one faith, for example, that kills you or wants to kill you if you draw a bad cartoon of the prophet. There's only one faith that kills you or wants to kill you if you renounce the faith. An ex-Muslim is a very dangerous thing. Talk to Salman Rushdie after the show about Christian versus Islam. So, you know, I'm just saying, let's keep it real.¹

Here is the key difference between the way Muslims and evangelical Christians practice their faith. Some Muslims are willing to kill others for their beliefs and some Christians are willing to **be** killed for their beliefs. Without even examining the actual truth claims from both religions you can already tell which one is the better of the two.

Paul was willing and eventually was killed for the sake of the gospel. We know that he suffered for the gospel but what we need to understand is how we can suffer along with people like Paul. Unless we are alive during the Great Tribulation, most of us will not be killed for our faith, but we do need to suffer with those who are much worse off than we are.

One way that we can simply do that is to not be ashamed. Paul did not think it was likely that Timothy would be ashamed of him but he also knew that far too many Christians in the church at Ephesus were ashamed of the true gospel message. Just imagine how devastating it would have been for Paul to know that while he was suffering for the gospel, the folks in the church that he had started were ashamed of the gospel.



Last week I mentioned the Wurmbbrand family—Richard, Sabina and Michael. After his father died, Michael recounted the following story. His father had just been released after fourteen years in a Romanian, Communist prison. This took place at the First Baptist of Rome.

Hardly had my father, who was fluent in Italian, started his sermon when this minister stood up and interrupted him. "In this church you cannot say one word against communism. I am a Communist and a Baptist," the pastor

shouted. My father asked him loudly, "How can you be a Christian Baptist and at the same

time a communist when communists are atheists? Communism denies the existence of God?"

To our horror, as fresh refugees from a communist country, the church stood up, chanting again and again, "Io sono Comunista i Batista, Io sono Comunista i Batista! (I am a Communist and a Baptist!)." We had been happy to arrive into the Free World and here we were meeting the nightmare of communism. This "church" service ended in true bedlam.²

This must have illicited anger in Michael's father but also deep heartache. Entire churches, entire nations of churches were all ashamed of the gospel. Through ministries like Voice of the Martyrs we have endless opportunities to lend practical help to those suffering for the gospel. The kids and teens through SWAP have been doing this for the past ten years. But even if you do not physically support those suffering for the gospel at the very least our confidence in the gospel is itself a form of support for them. Which leads directly to our next principle.

6. Understanding and rejoicing in the gospel (9-10)

*9*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, **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,

Now why would Paul take the time to review the gospel with Timothy? Timothy was a pastor and church planter extraordinaire. Why would he need to be told about the gospel? Isn't this a bit like teaching Albert Einstein the multiplication tables? It might be except that the gospel is not like math. Math is a hard science but we have a living relationship with the God of the gospel. And we forget. We may know the gospel in our head but it doesn't reach our heart. As Paul did for Timothy, let's remind our head and our heart about the gospel. Why? So that we can have confidence in it. So that we will never become ashamed of it. So that it can fan into flame the gift of God.

- *not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace*

No one who truly understands the gospel would ever say that we are saved by our good works or by our good works in combination with Christ's work on the cross. However, I don't think we always comprehend the depth of our inability to be saved. The reason that God saved us was due to his "own purpose and grace." It was his decision and initiative that accomplished our redemption. Ephesians 2 says that "even when we were dead in our trespasses, [God] made us alive together with Christ." Romans 5 says "while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son." God saved us while we were enemies and dead in our transgression and sins because of his own purpose and grace. It was his plan, not ours. It was according to his purpose, not ours.

- *which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began*

This is a staggering thought to me. God's plan of salvation was set down before the ages began. From before the foundation of the world, as it says in Ephesians. Before we were created God had a plan to redeem us. But it's not as if the thought suddenly popped into his mind one day in eternity past (never mind the fact that in eternity you can't even use the word "day" or "time.")

Since God is eternally perfect and unchanging, good ideas don't just come to him. This means that from all eternity, God's purpose was to save you. There never was a time in the mind of God that your redemption was not in view. He's always known your name. He's always known the precise moment that you would be saved. He knows the moment of your death and entrance into glory. And yet we cannot trust him with the small worries that are filling our mind this very moment.

- *who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel*
Has death been abolished already? Paul speaks here as if it has already happened. However, 1 Corinthians tells us that death will be swallowed in victory when we receive our resurrected bodies.³ Paul speaks as if death has already been abolished and in a real way, it already has. The second death has no sting for the believer but the first death, is still inevitable. Death may be inevitable but immortality is still promised.

7. Developing total confidence in God—11-12

for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, 12 which is why I suffer as I do. But 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.

Paul did not want Timothy or anyone else to be ashamed of the gospel and he certainly was not himself. In Romans 1 he wrote, *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.* (Romans 1:16—AD 57) Seven years later, while in prison and facing certain death, he again declared his confidence: *But I am not ashamed* (AD 64).

How was Paul able to have such confidence in the gospel while sitting in a cold dark Roman prison? Verse 12 is the key to his confidence. I want to break this down into three parts.

- *for I know whom I have believed*

Paul knew the Lord Jesus. He knew the historical Jesus by talking with the disciples and dozens of others who walked with Christ. He knew Jesus as the fulfillment of Scriptures that Paul had been studying since he was a young boy. He knew Jesus as the one who sustained him through more than thirty years of stonings, floggings, shipwrecks, hunger, cold, betrayal and immense joy.

- *and I am convinced that he is able*

Paul was a theologian and probably understood God better than we ever will. Among all that he did know, Paul knew that God was able. No more than that—Paul was convinced that God was able. If God made a promise then God had the ability to keep that promise. To keep a promise requires immense power.

This past week I promised Ethan that I would help him set up the volleyball net in our yard. Did I possess the ability to keep that promise? It seems like something so simple yet there could have been multiple things which would have been outside of my control. The most obvious thing that would have blocked my ability to fulfill my promise would have been rain. You could argue that I could have still put the net up in the rain but I was not going to do so. I could have been pulled away by an emergency phone call or visit. I could have broken my leg or even had a fatal heart attack. Most of these things were not very likely to happen but the fact is that I did not have

complete control over all possible scenarios and therefore could not have made a guaranteed promise to Ethan.

When we make promises like these to our children, they instinctively realize that rain and emergencies will keep us from fulfilling the promise. But God doesn't have loopholes and exceptions to his promises. His promises are always fulfilled. But if the guaranteed fulfillment of even one promise requires immense power, then the guaranteed fulfillment of hundreds of promises requires perfect power. God is sovereign. God is able. This is the God whom Paul knew.

- *to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me.*

Here is a rare place in the ESV translation where I disagree with the translators. Every other translation has the phrase "He is able to guard *what I have entrusted to Him*" where the ESV has "what has been entrusted to me." The Greek grammar will allow for this translation but I am not sure why the ESV translators chose this one. The ESV even includes the footnote: "Or what I have entrusted to him." I think this translation is the correct one.

And it matters because in this case because Paul is entrusting his immortality with the Lord until "that day"—until Christ returns in glory. In other words, Paul trusted God with his life and he trusted him with his death. I find that often we reverse these two. We trust God with our death in that we believe we will spend eternity with him but we don't trust him with our life. We don't trust him with the things which come at us throughout the day.

Brian Larrington sent me an article which contained the following quote. "The things you pray about are the things you trust God to handle. The things you neglect to pray about are the things you trust you can handle on your own."⁴ We can be convinced that God is able to guard what we have entrusted to him until that day but we are not convinced that we can entrust him with this very day! And our prayer habits determine which is which.

God is able but our lack of prayer says that we are able. And our lack of prayer is like changing one key word in this worship song.

I am able, more than able, to accomplish what concerns me today
I am able, more than able, to handle anything that comes my way.
I am able, more than, to do much more than I could ever dream.
I am able, more than able, to make me what I want me to be.

It sounds idolatrous and sick when we say it—or sing it—like that but the absence of prayer means that we are able.

8. Following sound doctrine—13-14

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.

Paul knew that his death was imminent. As he had done since first meeting Timothy, Paul had poured his life and doctrine into Timothy so that he could carry on the work of the true gospel.

I have said a lot about sound doctrine while preaching through 1 and 2 Timothy and will get into this more in chapter two.

9. Practicing mercy—15-18

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.

This last section of the chapter describes the courageous devotion of a man named Onesiphorus. Paul was in a tight spot as not only was he in prison but he was abandoned by “all who were in Asia.” Now I really doubt that every believer in Asia turned away from him but neither was anyone seeking to help him.

Then along came Onesiphorus. You and I will probably never meet a man named Onesiphorus but we would sure be fortunate to have a friend like him. He was busy practicing mercy. I am intentionally adding the word “practicing” to the word mercy because too often mercy is left as a mere feeling. True mercy always begins with a feeling but it never stops there. I have broken down his ministry to Paul into several steps.

1. **Aware of the need**—This may seem obvious but why did Onesiphorus know what Paul need and no one else did? Because he intentionally found out about Paul’s needs.
2. **Felt compassion/mercy for Paul**—I will say it again—mercy always starts with a feeling. Many people do not do acts of mercy because they have little sense of compassion. Some people are bleeding hearts by nature and others are more stoic but anyone can have feelings of genuine compassion for those in need.
3. **Determined to act in mercy (THE KEY)**—I think this may be the key step in practicing mercy. Many will have warm feelings and will feel sympathy for someone in need but they never move beyond the stage of emotions.

Now some will think that they do not need to practice mercy since mercy is not their spiritual gift. Some people either are naturally compassionate or else have the spiritual gift of mercy—or both. But a lack of a certain gift does not exempt us from obeying a command. We are commanded to show mercy to others even if it takes us out of our comfort zone. Most people don’t have the gift of evangelism but we are still commanded to do evangelism. Most of us do not have the gift of service but that does not let us off the hook for serving.

4. **Overcame obstacles to meet the need**—Paul said of his friend: *when he arrived in Rome he searched for me earnestly and found me.* It’s hard to imagine a first century environment. Onesiphorus knew that Paul was in a prison in Rome but that’s all he knew. He had to search around the city and ask all kinds of questions until he found Paul. A common barrier to our acts of mercy is thinking that the task is too difficult.

5. **Gospel-driven mercy**—*was not ashamed of my chains.*
6. **Persevered in repeated acts of mercy**—*for he often refreshed me.* Mercy is not a one-time activity. In fact, we see that Onesiphorus had...
7. **A lifestyle of mercy and service**—*and you well know all the service he rendered at Ephesus.* This man was known for his acts of service and mercy. He sounds like he may have been like Barnabus—a son of encouragement.

Every day of our lives we are actively engaged in either feeding the flame of the Holy Spirit with oxygen or else we are quenching the Holy Spirit. There is no middle ground. What happens when you sit around a campfire for a while? It starts to die down. We either quench or feed the fire. What do you plan to do tomorrow to fan the flame of the Holy Spirit?

Rich Maurer
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¹ http://www.worldmag.com/2013/05/connecting_obvious_dots

² <http://torturedforchrist.com/remember/>

³ “When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” 1 Co 15.35

⁴ H.B. Charles Jr., *It Happens After Prayer*.