

# THE CALL TO COURAGE

by Ray C. Stedman

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During the presentation on the work of the Christian Service Brigade this morning, it struck me that the beautiful thing about the work of these men with young boys is that they are passing the torch of faith on to another generation. It is always encouraging to see that happening. That is the way a new and upcoming generation learns values, principles and guidelines that will steady it and hold it in the midst of the swirling maelstroms of unbelief and immorality it has to face.

This is what we have here in this second letter of Paul to Timothy. The apostle knows that he is about to leave this life -- he says so in this very letter: "The time of my departure is at hand," {2 Tim 4:6b KJV}. He is writing his last words to Timothy from that lonely, cold and sometimes boring cell prison cell in Rome, writing to a young man he knows is timid, frightened, and oftentimes pressured to be ashamed of the gospel.

We all can identify with that problem today. Many of you work in places where the majority of people around you are not Christians. Some of them are anti-Christian, perhaps even violently so, so there are times when you feel ashamed that you are a Christian. You are afraid people will find out; or, if they already know that you are a Christian, you tend to keep it quiet and not say much about it. That is an universal experience if we have any contact at all with non-Christians; and that is the problem the apostle takes up now with Timothy, his son in the faith, ministering in the great, pagan city of Ephesus.

Paul says two basic things to Timothy to help him overcome that, but we are only going to take the first of these today. In Verse 8 the apostle says, "Do not be ashamed of testifying to our Lord"; and then in Verse 14 he tells him, "Guard the truth that has been entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us."

This morning I want to look with you at the matter of how the apostle helped his struggling young son in the faith to overcome the tendency to be ashamed of the gospel. There are three things the apostle said that Timothy was apt to be ashamed of.

First, he says (Verse 8),

**Do not be ashamed then of testifying to our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but take your share of suffering for the gospel in the power of God, {2 Tim 1:8 RSV}**

I think Timothy was tempted, at least, to be ashamed of the Lord because Jesus is invisible.

You have probably felt ashamed because of that too. To talk about a Lord who is the most important Being in your life and yet not be able to show him to people or allow them to hear him, to maintain that a Man who lived two thousand years ago is still alive today in a vital relationship with you, is to expose yourself to the ridicule and incredulity of many. Timothy felt that way too.

Furthermore, Timothy was tempted to be ashamed of Paul because Paul was a political prisoner, on the outs with the administration of the Roman Empire, and viewed as an enemy of the Emperor and destructive in society. Paul urges Timothy to overcome that.

And third, Timothy was ashamed of the gospel. I have felt that way, and I am sure you have too, because the gospel in its basic element is insulting to the pride of men. The world loves to imagine itself to be adequate to solve its problems. Individuals oftentimes manifest a remarkable sense of self-sufficiency and independence; they refuse to admit that they need any help. But the basic declaration of the gospel is that man is helpless and lost.

At the Congress on the Bible in San Diego last week, the opening message was brought by Luis Palau, whom

I regard as a permanent member of this congregation. In his address, Luis told of two incidents:

- The first concerned his leading the president of one of the South American republics to the Lord; and
- The second of his leading a janitor to the Lord in the city of Atlanta just last week.

What Luis pointed out was that the president and the janitor had to come exactly the same way -- they both had to admit they were hopelessly lost, that they had no abilities in themselves to deliver themselves from what was destroying their lives. Both of them had to cast themselves on the saving mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ, and both of them manifested tremendous change afterwards.

That is what the gospel does: It undercuts the pride, the self-sufficiency and arrogance of man. As a result, we tend to be ashamed sometimes of speaking of the gospel to proud individuals.

So let us see how Paul helps this young, timid, introverted man overcome that tendency to shame. That is what can help us today. The passage is a rather complicated one, so to simplify it for you I am going to suggest that you take your pen and underline two phrases which the apostle uses here to help in understanding it. The first phrase comes at the end of Verse 8: Paul says, "Share in suffering for the gospel in the power of God." Underline the words, "power of God." The second phrase is in Verse 13. Underline these words, "follow the pattern of sound words." There are the two resources that will help us overcome any tendency to be ashamed of our faith.

First, realize that the gospel is "the power of God." You never have to be ashamed of power. Americans, particularly, worship and respect power. But when you really understand the power of the gospel you will lose every bit of shame; that is what Paul is saying. Furthermore, when you obey the Word of God, when there is in you a resolute determination to obey what the Scriptures tell you to do, then you discover that leads you into health and wholeness, and you lose your sense of shame of the gospel. Those are the two things we want to look at this morning.

Notice what the apostle now says about the power of God. It has been demonstrated for us, he says,

**... in the power of God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling, {2 Tim 1:8b-9a RSV}**

That is where we see the power of God at work. Every new birth, every regeneration, is an unquestionable miracle on the part of God. No one ever comes to God without God performing a transforming miracle; we must never forget that.

Last week I received a most interesting letter from a prisoner in the penitentiary at Tracy. I will merely summarize it for you because it is a rather lengthy letter. This man wrote,

"I found myself sitting in the Sacramento County jail, a three-time loser. I'm 66 years old, and I decided that, after having lost out three times, my life was no longer worth living. I had to go see my attorney, and as I passed by a trash bin, lying on top of the trash were some of your messages called Discovery Papers."

(A very logical place to look for them!) He said,

"Wanting something to read, I picked them up. Little did I know what was going to happen to me when I read them."

Then he added this line which I love:

"One man's trash is another man's treasure."

He went on to write that he read the first message, called, "How to be Saved" (taken from Romans 10). When he finished reading it, he wrote,

"I decided that though I never thought I needed to be saved from anything in my life, I now realized I did; and that if I wanted God to accept me I had better clean up my life and get it ready so he would be willing to take me."

He continued,

"I determined I was going to do that. Then I read the second message, 'Who Chose Whom' [from Romans 9], and when I finished that I knew that if I worked the rest of my life I could never make myself fit to be saved."

Continuing, he wrote,

"Lying on my bunk all alone, I woke in the middle of the night with the thoughts of that message on my mind. I seemed to sense a presence in the cell with me, and suddenly I found myself breaking into tears. Sitting on my bunk, I opened my heart to Jesus and asked him to come in, to deliver me and save me. And that's what he did. I didn't feel anything different except that I slept all night long for the first time in years."

He said,

"In the morning, everything seemed to be different. The cell looked different; the prisoners around me looked different; the food I had been complaining about tasted good. One of the other prisoners said to me, 'Pop, you look different. What's happened to you?'"

He wrote,

"A little voice inside of me said, 'Tell him,' so I did. There were twenty-five men in that cell and eleven of them asked Jesus Christ into their lives. I have been reading your first book on Romans and it says there is another book, so I want to get that one too. Will you send it to me? I will send you all the money I have got. It's only \$5.45, but what is money compared with the truth I am reading about."

So we have a new reader of Discovery Papers!

That example is a little dramatic, but it illustrates the fact that every regeneration, every salvation, is a miracle. It means that a transformed life, a new life, has been imparted. That is a demonstration of the quiet working of the power of God. Through the record of human history, there is nothing like that power that can take men who, oftentimes, are raging animals, wild and revolutionary, and transform them into sober, solid, delightful people. That power can take sharp, censorious people with acid tongues and soften them and make them over into new persons. It can take a proud, pompous, self-righteous, self-sufficient professor, or whatever, and transform him into a gentle, easy to live with, wonderful person. It can take a Chuck Colson, who openly swore he would run over his own grandmother to achieve his purposes, and turn him into a caring, concerned man who has dedicated his life to helping people in prison. That is a miracle. That is the power of God, and it ought to keep us from being ashamed of our Christian faith.

With that, the apostle links this term: "He called us with a holy calling." That is speaking of sanctification, the process of reformation as well as regeneration, where our lives start to be transformed. Not only is regeneration a miracle and a demonstration of the power of God, but the continuing growth and transformation of an individual is an evidence of the power of God. That power causes us to turn away from hurt and shame and ugliness unto health and wholeness. (That is what the word *holy* means, "wholeness.")

If you are really a Christian, you will find deep in your heart a relentless urge to break with your sin and your selfishness, oftentimes at great pain to yourself, to face the pain of withdrawal, and yet to walk with and grow with Christ. If you do not sense that urge there, you might well question whether you are a Christian or not, because that is a sign of the residency of the Spirit in the life. We all resist him, we all struggle, and dig in our heels, and do not want to be changed because we love our sins and the pleasure they give us, but God has set his heart upon transforming us into the image of his Son, and ultimately we cannot deny that urge. Though we may waste years and years in resistance to the Spirit of God, once he has begun to work in a truly regenerate heart he promises that he will fulfill it, and bring us, at last, to yielding in those areas of hurt and shame.

That work does not originate with us. The apostle says very clearly that it is:

**... not in virtue of our works [that he does this] but in virtue of his own purpose and grace which he gave us in Christ Jesus ages ago, {2 Tim 1:9 RSV}**

That is an amazing declaration. It is saying that though we know we have to make decisions or those things do not happen -- we have to obey the Word, we have to follow our Lord -- nevertheless, we learn also that God has determined before the world began that he would bring into our lives the factors that would make us make those decisions.

Imagine that you arrive in a city where a great political convention is going on. You know that when you get there all the hotels are going to be sold out, but in a frail hope that you might find something you go into a big hotel and ask for a room. To your amazement, the clerk says, "We have a reservation for you already. We have been expecting you for months; it is all ready." That is something of the feeling you get when you read a passage like this. You know that you had to decide to give up the things that were hurting you in your life. You struggled with that, but you gave in, and when you did you read that God had determined that you would do that before the ages began.

Isn't that amazing?

But we are dealing with the power of God, not the weakness of men, an omnipotent God who knows how to work out his purposes through strange and wonderful ways.

Not only that, but that power has been demonstrated, says the apostle, in the historic work of Jesus. Paul puts it this way (Verse 10):

**[He] now has manifested [that] through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. {2 Tim 1:10 RSV}**

I hope you never allow any reference to the death and resurrection of Jesus to become mechanical and indifferent to you. This is the heart of the Christian faith: The work of our Savior, the blood of the cross, the glory of the resurrection. I try to remind my own heart never to let these things ever be expressed without some corresponding response in my own heart, because, according to this, the death and resurrection of Jesus accomplished two fantastic things for us:

The first is, Jesus nullified the power of death. It says here that he "abolished death." That does not mean that he eliminated it, because, just like others, Christians die. The word is the Greek word for "nullify, to bring to nothing." As Paul declares in First Corinthians 15, it is that treatment of death which causes Christians to be able to say, at the edge of the grave, "Oh, grave where is thy victory? Oh, death where is thy sting?" {cf, 1 Cor 15:55 RSV}. Jesus has taken the sting out of death.

*On Golden Pond*, the movie with Henry Fonda, Jane Fonda, and Katherine Hepburn that is currently showing in the theaters, is the story of an 80-year-old professor who is facing the relentless approach of death. It is a beautiful picture, although the language is a bit unpleasant at times. All through the movie you sense that there is a growing dread at the fact of approaching death. Haunting the background and tainting every delightful scene of all the beauty of nature that is displayed in the film is the increasing awareness of the cold, clammy hand of death that will bring an end to all the delight and beauty that these lives have known. In subtle ways, not overtly but covertly expressed, there is the expression from all the participants in the story of the dread of death. The film is in some ways a hopeless, tragic story. Everyone walks out of the theater sober and quieted. It is a beautiful but tragic story which captures, as no other film today has captured, the feeling in millions of hearts as they face the fact of death.

I could not help but contrast that story with the many Christians, some of whom I have recently sat with, who are facing the approaching end of their lives. In almost every case there is a light on their face, a sense of anticipation, of hope and of certainty in the hour of death; I have talked with many and seen them express a

sense of peace, a quiet anticipation of glory to come. What a difference! That is what the resurrection of Jesus has accomplished: it has removed the fear of death.

I read once of a Christian man whose doctor told him he was dying. The man was so happy about this that it charged his body with so much adrenaline he lived for two more weeks! He thought he was going to be dead by evening and he was disappointed. That is what Jesus has done: He has nullified the power of death.

Further, the apostle says, Jesus "brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." The Old Testament does not give a lot of information on what lies beyond, but when Jesus came -- and ever since he was here we have had this -- he made clear the glory of anticipation of immortality, i.e., life in its fullest degree, permanently enjoyed into the future.

There are two things here:

The word *life* here is a reference to the change which occurs in the human heart when we become Christians, the new quality of life imparted to us, that quality which made our prisoner friend's fellow prisoners say to him, "What's happened to you? You're different." That is *life*. Jesus brought that into visibility, and that tremendous change is apparent in many, many Christians as they come into this new experience. But more than that, it is immortality -- that life goes on beyond this life in a glorious experience of the fullness of redemption.

My wife went to visit her 94-year-old mother this week. Gram is growing very frail and fragile. She spends her time, for the most part, just sitting and watching a little TV and talking to a few people around her. They began to talk about heaven, and her mother said to Elaine, "What will it be like then? Will we just sit around? I'm so tired of sitting around." Elaine was able to reassure her that, "No, we will leap and run and fly with new bodies, capable of responding to every demand of the spirit."

The glorious expectation of the fullness of the life to come, that is immortality. These bodies are subject to death and weariness. "The spirit is willing," we say, "but the flesh is ready for the weekend." In those new bodies, however, the spirit will make its demand and the flesh will be equal to it. We are given wonderful pictures in the Scriptures of what that is like.

It is the power of God that brings that kind of certainty and hope into a Christian life. It is the gospel, so we need not be ashamed of it, for the gospel is the answer to the deepest longings of men and women everywhere. These things that make us ashamed, the cynicism etc., that we run into, are only superficial reactions. When you get down underneath, when you explain and demonstrate in your own life what the gospel means, you awaken a hunger and a restlessness in the hearts of everybody observing you to want to find out what this marvelous thing is. We do not need to be ashamed, for "it is the power of God unto salvation," {cf, Rom 1:16}.

But not only is the gospel demonstrated in salvation, Paul goes on to say that he himself has modeled what Timothy's courageous response ought to be. Timothy is under great pressure, he is facing severe temptations to shut up, and be quiet, to disappear into the woodwork, and say nothing. But Paul has been there too, he says, and he has modeled a response (Verse 12):

**For this gospel I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, and therefore I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me. {2 Tim 1:12-13 RSV}**

Paul has already gone down the path. Looking back now to the young man coming behind him, he says, "Timothy, you don't need to be ashamed. I'm not ashamed, and I've been through everything you're going through. I know that the resources that were available to me are available to you, and they are sufficient for the task."

Paul had been called, as Timothy had been called. "I was appointed," he says, "a preacher, an apostle and a teacher." A proclaimer of the good news -- that is a preacher; a pioneer to lay new foundations -- that is an

apostle; an explainer of the intricacies and meanings of the truth he proclaims -- that is a teacher. Timothy is sent to be a preacher and a teacher. So was Paul, therefore he understands what Timothy is up against.

But, Paul says (and notice the connection) because of that he suffered. It is important to see what Paul is saying. It was the very fact that he was challenging the mores, the ethics, and the philosophy of the world that was the cause of his suffering. If he had been content to talk like everybody else, and think like everybody else, he would never have been persecuted; but because he was different he ran up against opposition, misunderstanding, ostracism and sometimes violent persecution.

Paul tells us that every one of us who will live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution; that is promised to us. But that will encourage you. It means that if you are faithful in that task the suffering will be a sign that you are standing firm and fast, doing what God has sent you to do. Adoniram Judson, that great Baptist missionary who in the 19th century pioneered the gospel in Burma, and planted churches all over that land, endured great personal suffering. His life story was a challenge to me as a young Christian. He said a very significant thing about suffering:

Success and suffering are vitally and organically linked. If you succeed without suffering, it is because someone else has suffered for you without succeeding; and if you suffer without succeeding, it is that someone else may succeed after you.

That is a vital truth. Success and suffering belong together.

Paul had experienced both, so he says to Timothy, "I've been down the road." But his attitude is, "I am not ashamed, of course not. When I see the power of God released, and when I see what changes are coming in others' lives because of my pain, it is as though it is nothing." In another place he says, "I'll gladly be poured out as a drink offering upon the altar in order that you might succeed," {cf, 2 Tim 4:6 KJV}.

Then Paul tells us what his resource is: "I know whom I have believed, and I know that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me [the gospel]." To keep me faithful in the gospel, is Paul's implication.

At the Congress on the Bible last week I listened to Jim Boice, who is now the pastor of the historic Tenth Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia. He is a fine Bible teacher, a great expositor of the truth, an apt successor to Donald Grey Barnhouse, who for years pastored that church. Listening to Dr. Boice reminded me of an incident that occurred when Barnhouse was pastor there. He used to have Sunday afternoons dedicated to a meeting with young people from college and high school, who would pack the auditorium in that great church to hear Dr. Barnhouse answer questions from the Bible. On one such occasion a young man asked this question: "Dr. Barnhouse, how could it be that two million Israelites could wander through the wilderness of Sinai, a barren desert, for forty years, and be supplied with adequate food, water and clothing, so that at the end of that forty years it is recorded of them that their clothing had not even worn out?" Dr. Barnhouse's answer was one word. In that deep voice, he replied, "God! Next question, please."

Yes, God is our resource. "I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep what I have committed unto him and what he has committed unto me." Our resource is adequate. That is what Paul says to Timothy to encourage his heart.

There is something more yet to encourage Timothy. I will touch on this very quickly. Verse 13:

**Follow the pattern of the sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus; {2 Tim 1:13 RSV}**

The Word of God is given to us for our resource. It is a pattern to follow, a guide to our behavior, a specific instruction as to what to do when we are up against certain circumstances. That is very significant.

Every one of us in this room today (young people especially) is under a powerful assault from the spirit of the age, expressed through the media, which challenges the morals and the ethical standards of the Bible. This

assault makes many of us wonder, at times, if the standards of the world are really so bad after all.

- Many young people are asking themselves, "Is it really wrong to sleep with somebody outside of marriage?" (Recognize that is a euphemism: the thing they do not do is sleep.) "Everybody else is doing it," they say, "everybody says it is not going to hurt anything; no bad results will follow."
- Many a couple today is faced with the thought, "Is it so bad to get a divorce these days? Everybody seems to be doing it. When marriage becomes boring or difficult, what is so bad about breaking up, and getting a partner with whom you feel more compatible? Is that so bad?"
- This time of the year some of us may be thinking, "Why not fudge on my income tax a little. Does the government have to know everything? Can't I keep a little for myself now that financial pressures are so extreme?"

We have all felt this alluring temptation to change our standards. What should you do when all your friends are doing it, urging you to do it, and telling you it is OK? The apostle's advice is: Read your Bible!

"Follow the pattern of sound words." *Sound* means "healthful, wholesome words," words that will lead you ultimately into life. Remember the proverb, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but the ends thereof are the ways of death," {cf, Prov 14:12, 16:25}. "Follow the pattern of sound words":

- "Flee youthful lusts, which war against the soul," {cf, 1 Pet 2:11}.
- "To the married I command (yet not I but the Lord) let not the wife separate from her husband and let not the husband divorce his wife," {cf, 1 Cor 7:10-11}.
- "Pay taxes to whom taxes are due," {cf, Rom 13:6-7}.

And, Paul says, sound words are a channel of "faith and love which are in Christ Jesus."

Have you noticed that when you obey the Word of God, even though it is painful at times and you have to apparently lose something, that it is not very long before the Lord himself is dearer and closer to you than he has ever been before? You experience "the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus."

There is a song that was very much sung in the early days of the Jesus Movement. It is a simple ditty which I do not hear much any more, but it always seemed to me to express a wonderful word of advice to people under pressure:

Put your hand in the hand of the Man who stilled the waters;  
Put your hand in the hand of the Man from Galilee.

He is present, he is available to strengthen from within, so that you can stand in the moment of decision. That is what Paul is saying now to Timothy: "Timothy, remember that the faith which you have is the channel of the power of God let loose among men; and the Book that you hold in your hand is the guide to behavior that leads to life. It will lead you to a closer, dearer expression of the Lord Jesus himself."

Warm, sweet, tender, even yet,  
A present help is He,  
And faith has still its Olivet,  
And love its Galilee

## Prayer

Lord, we pray that in these dark days when men are lovers of themselves rather than lovers of God, lovers of pleasure, implacable, violent, selfish, disobedient to parents, that we may be manifestations of a different style of life. We pray that we may be willing to stand, willing to

be tested, willing to endure, willing to resist the temptation to be ashamed of the gospel. Help us to look on to that day when all the redeemed shall gather around the throne and praise the name of him who has brought us safely along. Help us to sing anew that great song, "Tis grace has brought us safe thus far, And grace will lead us home." We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

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