

Guard the treasure

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Date: 09 March 2020

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[0 : 0 0] One of the major themes in this letter that Paul writes to Timothy, probably the most central theme, in fact, seems to be the charge of verse 14 that we're considering today, and hence the title of this series, Guard the Treasure. Over the course of the letter, Timothy is challenged to hold on to sound doctrine. He's challenged to teach it. He's challenged to abide in it. He's challenged to preach it, to guard it against all possible threats, and that process begins this evening.

There's a lot packed into these verses that we're considering, but we can break it down into the following headings. Firstly, do not be ashamed. Secondly, don't be ashamed because of the gospel of grace. And thirdly, rather than being ashamed of the gospel, guard it carefully. Do not be ashamed because of the gospel of grace. Rather, guard it carefully. And we'll see as we go through a number of kind of different sub-points and sub-headings that Paul makes under each of these areas. Firstly, then, do not be ashamed. Paul seems to be concerned in these verses, concerned in verse six, as we come to it, concerned that Timothy will be tempted to downplay the gospel, will be inclined to go for an easy path. And so, having reminded Timothy of his faith in the opening verses of the chapter, he exhorts him now in verse six to fan into flame the gift of God. Some people have been inclined to interpret this charge in the sense of kind of rekindle, of bring back to life a fire that had gone out or at least very close to it. That's linguistically reasonable, but I think contextually inappropriate. The sense here is not so much of bringing back to life as of stirring up, as of pumping the bellows to get the fire really blazing. He's being exhorted to more, not rebuked for a lack. And Paul says to Timothy that he can confidently exercise his gift because, because verse seven, he's been granted the spirit of power, love, and self-discipline. And the great encouragement for you and I as we look at our lives, as we head into this coming week, the great encouragement to us is that we have been granted that same spirit. And more broadly as well, the same is true of us as is true of Timothy. It is also true that we are perhaps in danger of letting the flames die down a little bit. Not that they've gone out, not that we've lost all hope and lost all interest, but the fire is not blazing quite as hot as it might. Well, the charge to us is the same, to fan into flame that gift of God, to keep pumping those bellows. Fan into flame the gift that is in you. The gift that's in you may not be the same as

Timothy's gift. Paul seems to be focused particularly on his gift for teaching and preaching and proclaiming the gospel. The gift may not be the same as Timothy's gift. But the spirit that is in you is the same as the spirit in him. Timothy doesn't need to be timid. Timothy doesn't need to be ashamed. But instead, he can go boldly in power, and so may you and I. But we need to be careful here. Because whilst the emphasis, I think, is on the power as contrasted to the timidity, we do well to not overlook the other two points that Paul makes about this Holy Spirit who is in us. Because this is not about undisciplined power, but rather it involves both love and self-discipline. Some of us perhaps would do well to remember that spirit of love. Some of us, as we are bold and unashamed, some of us need to remember that our desire, our purpose, is not to win arguments. The intention is not to craft the most logical case and to demolish someone by force of intellectual argument or even of kind of emotional pressure, as it were. Now, our goal is not to win arguments, but to win souls for Christ.

So if in speaking to your friends, you crush them in the debate and leave them unable to respond to your cutting arguments, well, the reality is you have not won because he is the spirit of love.

That's true in speaking to our friends outside, as it were, and it's true speaking to one another here as well. It's true in our own fellowship that if in seeking to exhort one another to greater godliness, if we leave one another feeling crushed by a burden of obligations, then maybe we have utilized a spirit of power. But I suggest we have not demonstrated a spirit of love, and therefore I suggest it is not the Holy Spirit who has been at work within you. We should have the self-discipline to restrain

that particular spirit, because the Holy Spirit gives us power, love, and self-discipline.

[5 : 49] In verse 8, Paul moves to a slightly more specific question. Timothy should not be ashamed, specifically he should not be ashamed of Jesus. And we should be honest that this is a very real possibility. Not because Timothy was unusually susceptible to such a danger of being ashamed of Jesus, but because it is all too plausible in a universal sense. Because remember this Jesus that we're talking about, this is a religious leader who's been put to death by the Roman authorities.

He's been executed as a common criminal. And not only that, but he's also been repudiated by the Jewish religious leaders. Both church and state, if you like, have united together to say, this man deserves to die. This man is wrong. This man is a blasphemer. In some respects, the humanity of Jesus, the fact that he was able to die, makes being ashamed of him all too possible. Romans chapter 1 verse 16, Paul needed to assert that he was not ashamed of the gospel.

I think he needed to say it because there was a possibility that he could have been. And certainly it was likely that people would suspect that he would be ashamed. As John Stott puts it, if this were not a temptation common to man, then the Lord Jesus would not have needed to issue the solemn warning. For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels. Mark 8, 38. We are all more sensitive to public opinion than we like to admit and tend to bow down too readily before its pressure, like reeds shaken by the wind.

It may be. It may be that for some of us this evening, we need to hear that challenge. That challenge not to be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord. The challenge not to be ashamed of the gospel. Ashamed of Jesus. And therefore, therefore Paul offers the reassurance that everything will be smooth sailing. Everything will be all right. As long as you are not ashamed, God will make your life easy.

No? No. Now that's the letter I'd like to be reading. That's what I'd be tempted to write. But that's not what Paul says, is it? The second half of verse 8, the alternative to being ashamed of the testimony about the Lord, join me in suffering for the gospel. Don't be ashamed of the gospel, instead suffer for it. Paul is quite the motivational speaker, isn't he? But here's the thing.

[8 : 37] That's the reality. Believing the gospel will most likely result in more suffering, not less. Paul doesn't sugarcoat the reality of the situation. But he does give a note of hope.

Because see there that this is to be done by the power of God. That's that hope. That God's power is stronger than any suffering that we could ever possibly experience. And that power is within you, as verse 7 has already said. That power of God enables us to withstand the suffering, enables us to be bold and unashamed. And therefore, sharing in suffering is not something that we grit ourselves to be able to do. It's not something that we reach down and muster up the ability to stand firm in the face of suffering. No, we do it according to God's power.

We have, however, there skipped over the middle of that verse. Timothy is not to be ashamed of the gospel, not to be ashamed of Jesus. But also, Paul says, Timothy ought not to be ashamed of me, his prisoner. Timothy should not be ashamed of Paul. And again, one could well believe that he might be ashamed of Paul. That seems to be the case with Phygelus and Homogenes down there in verse 15.

And they're not the only ones. Paul seems to have had plenty of fair weather friends. He says everyone has abandoned him. People have refused to stand by him when the going got tough. It sounds like when he was brought to trial, nobody was willing to stand and testify in his defense. Nobody even was coming to bring him a meal to eat in prison. He has been abandoned by all and sundry. Why? Because they're ashamed. And Osiphorus alone has not been ashamed of Paul's chains. And Timothy exhorted to be like him, not like the others. It would be tempting, wouldn't it, for people to turn away from Paul? Tempting not to want that negative association of being linked to somebody who's on death row. It doesn't make you look good to have a friend who is subject to execution. Now, I think there are lots of people who are ashamed of Paul today. Probably not so much for the reason that these guys were. Probably not so much because he was about to be killed or now has been. I think lots of people today are ashamed because they don't like what Paul had to say. Plenty of sections of the church which like to say, well, that's just Paul. Jesus never said that. We don't have that luxury, do we? It's only through the writing of Paul and the writing of others like him that we know the gospel. It's the Holy Spirit's intention that we have all of Holy Scripture to profit from, not a kind of sanitized, comfortable version of just a few books of it. People want to drive a

wedge between Paul and Jesus, but Paul here speaks of being ashamed of the testimony about the Lord and being ashamed of himself in one and the same breath. He could hardly make a closer link between the two. We should be wary of being ashamed of Paul. And in terms of the application for us today, I think we should probably add in a third point. But we should not be ashamed of Jesus. We should not be ashamed of Paul. And we should not be ashamed of other Christians either. Just as these other believers were ashamed of Paul's chains, we can perhaps be in a situation where we're proud of Christ, but ashamed of his people, embarrassed to be associated with them. Now, we have to be a little bit careful here because there are those who claim the name of Jesus but are not truly following him and his teaching. I am ashamed that Joel Osteen claims to be a Christian and his transparent self-enrichment scheme tarnishes the name of believers everywhere. It is shameful. My point isn't that we shouldn't be ashamed of such charlatans.

[12:43] We should. But the point is that we ought not to be ashamed of people just because they express their faith in a slightly different way. Let me flesh this one out. There are times when I'm inclined to be ashamed of David Robertson. There's times when I think he's expressed himself far more brashly than was wise. There are times when I'm not 100% sure that I agree with everything that he has said.

But the reality is he is standing firm for the truth of God's word. He is willing to stick his neck above the parapet in a way that frankly I am not. I am wrong to feel ashamed to be associated with him, not only associated with him as a Christian brother but as a fellow minister of this denomination. I should sooner feel ashamed of my own timidity and of him.

And it's more local and more personal and more prosaic as well. Are you sometimes embarrassed by other Christians? Because we're an odd bunch, aren't we?

I'm sure there are things that I have said and done that you would rather not be linked with. And every church seems to have the guy whose personal hygiene lives a little bit to be desired and the woman with no sense of personal space and the person who asks embarrassing personal questions and so on and so on and so on. And isn't it easy to feel ashamed of one another? To think, well, I really wish so and so wouldn't come to this evangelistic film because he'll only put everyone off. People would be so much more likely to come if she weren't there every Sunday making silly comments.

[14:27] But folks, it ill becomes us to be ashamed of one another. Why? Because we see one another as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Because we see the love that God has shown to us and think, how could we treat one another in any other way? 1 John 4, verse 20, Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar.

For whoever does not love their brother and sister whom they have seen cannot love God whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command. Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.

It is a command that we love one another. And I'm not sure you can be ashamed and loving at the same time.

And I guess if you're feeling the pressure of that sense of, yeah, but isn't it off-putting to other people to be associated with the person with no sense of personal space and so on.

[15:38] Well, maybe on one level. But the reality, I think, is that the love that we show to one another, the love that we show specifically to the unlovely, the way that we are not ashamed of one another, the reality actually is that this adorns the gospel.

That there is something attractive about our willingness to welcome those whom others reject. So do not be ashamed of Jesus, of Paul, or of one another.

Why? Well, because verses 9 and 10 of the gospel of grace. Three points I want to make about the gospel as unveiled in these verses.

Firstly, we are not only saved, but we are called to holiness. Do you see that there at the start of verse 9? He has saved us and called us to a holy life. We're called to be holy.

The same God who saved us, as Paul puts it here, or as theologians would phrase it, the God who justifies us, the God who declares us to be righteous. That same God calls us to be holy.

[16:44] He calls us not to stay mired in the sin where he found us, not to go running back to our old patterns of behavior, but instead to be holy. Of course, this is not a new theme for Paul here in his last letter.

For instance, he writes in chapter 4 of his first letter to the Thessalonians, God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. And you can find similar points in numerous of his other letters. John Stott's helpful again. He says that this term salvation that we kind of throw around, this term needs to be rescued from the mean and meager concepts to which we tend to degrade it. Salvation, he says, is a majestic word that denotes that comprehensive purpose of God by which he justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies his people. First, pardoning our offenses and accepting us as righteous in his sight through Christ, then progressively transforming us by his spirit into the image of his son until finally we become like Christ in heaven with new bodies in a new world. We should not minimize the greatness of what Hebrews 2 calls such a great salvation. That is not only because we were so sinful that we needed a massive salvation to rescue us, but it is a great salvation because it is more comprehensive than that act of justification of making us righteous. [18:15] Great is the gospel of our glorious God. Another commentator says, the consequence of salvation is the consecration of Christians.

The result of being saved is that we are made holy. It is one and the same thing. Not one and the same, but linked, inherently associated, an unnecessary result. Secondly, in these verses, we see this is all of God's grace. The salvation, the justification, our holiness, our ongoing salvation, all of this is because of his own purpose and grace, not for anything that we have done.

Nothing could make it plainer, could it, than the fact, sorry, nothing could make it plainer that our own actions contribute nothing to our salvation than to know that it all took place before we were born.

I don't know about you, I wasn't doing a whole lot before I was born. Indeed, Paul says it was before time itself existed, before the ages began. In eternity past, our triune God decreed that it should be so.

[19:21] The means of our redemption was established before a single atom of this universe came into being. This is sometimes called the *pactum salutis*, if you want a little bit of Latin.

They're the eternal covenant between father and son in which the father promises to redeem this elect people and in turn the son volunteers to earn the salvation of his people by becoming incarnate, acting as surety of this covenant of grace.

And as mediator of this covenant of grace to the elect. And we can go still further. Because we can point out too that this is not not a kind of abstract, general grace of Jesus before the dawn of time, but it is particularized.

It's effective for those whom he chooses. Not only was the plan of redemption established before the stars existed, your place therein was determined before your first ancestor drew breath.

These doctrines of grace, this understanding of election, it is sometimes hard to accept and to wrap our heads around. There are intellectual questions to ask, and we also have to grapple with our ongoing inclination to want a system where we're in control, where we have something that we can do about it.

[20:45] But you can't avoid the fact that God's free sovereign will is taught consistently in his word. It is by grace that we are saved.

Thirdly, with respect to the gospel, still we know that this is accomplished through the work of Christ. I don't want to kind of go into the details of how Christ takes our sin, particularly, and I don't want to focus this evening on the grounding of our faith in historical facts that we touched on this morning.

No, my point here is what Paul says in the second half of verse 10. He has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

That is the work of Christ that Paul is particularly thinking about here. Death is the key problem that results from sin. And the Bible talks about death in three different ways, three different experiences, all called death.

Physical, bodily death is the first and most obvious of those when the soul is separated from the body. But we also talk about spiritual death when the soul is separated from God.

[22:01] And then third, you have eternal death where both body and soul are separated from God forever. In all three of these respects, the wages of sin is death.

And in response to that, says Paul, Jesus has abolished, Jesus has destroyed death. It is destroyed. Except people still die.

And plenty of people are still dead in their sins too. And it's still true that some will die the second death in hell, as Revelation 20 and 21 call it, and warn us thereby. To the Corinthians, Paul writes in his first letter, chapter 15, verse 54, Therefore, when the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true.

Death has been swallowed up in victory. In other words, it's for the future. It's yet to come that that saying will be true, that death has been swallowed up in victory.

It isn't true now. And yet, Paul says essentially the same thing here. He has destroyed death. I think what's going on here is that he's kind of thinking about the same question from slightly different angles.

[23 : 25] So the root meaning of the verb here is something like make ineffective or nullify. And I think that's maybe what Paul has in mind. And it's the same idea as lies behind 1 Corinthians 15, 55.

Where, oh death, is your victory? Where, oh death, is your sting? We say that now. Death does not have the victory.

Death's sting has been pulled from it. That's true already that even physical death is transformed, is no longer as terrifying as it once was, because we are able to have hope.

Even in some ways, that death is gain, a gateway to being with Christ. And it's true of spiritual death as well, that it has lost its sting, that it has no victory, because it is not our inevitable lot.

But we can rather be brought to new birth because death is defeated. And those who are found in Christ, well, they will not be hurt by the second death, says Revelation 2.

[24 : 34] Yes, it is true. Death has been defeated. It may still be running around like a chicken with its head cut off for a while before it finally admits that it has been abolished.

But death is dead. We don't have time tonight to dwell at length on the positive counterpart that he has granted us life and immortality. But we should note briefly that both are true, that our hope is not only in eternal life after we die, but life here and now.

He's given us both life and immortality. In other words, eternal life has already begun. And that is perhaps rendered all the more poignant by remembering that these words are written by a man who expects a death sentence any moment.

And therefore we come, verse 11 through 14 to the third point, guard the gospel carefully.

Do you not be ashamed of Jesus or his people because of the gospel of grace, which you should guard carefully. The first half of verse 14, as I said already, is the nub of the issue. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you.

[25 : 45] Guard the treasure. Guard the gospel. It must be protected. Timothy is going to need to serve as a watchman, as a soldier standing on guard. Guard the gospel.

Because, as we're going to be reminded in the coming chapters, because many are going to wish to distort the gospel. Because many will be seduced by their ability to gather a following by preaching what people want to hear, not what they need to hear.

Because Timothy might be tempted to turn away from this pattern of sound teaching. He might be inclined to downplay those less palatable aspects of the pattern in order to avoid offense, because he doesn't want to suffer.

He might be tempted by these things, but he must guard the gospel. He might forget that God is able to guard Paul's life, Paul's very soul that he says, verse 12, he's entrusted to him.

And therefore Timothy might forget that God can and will guard Timothy's soul too. You and I might forget that God will guard Paul's life and Paul's soul and Timothy's life and Timothy's soul and your soul and my soul.

[26 : 47] We might forget that. We might not want to stand firm and preach the gospel even when people are threatening to throw rocks at us as they were at Paul as we were thinking this morning.

And so the charge is to guard the gospel. The gospel is a true treasure. What could be more valuable than these words of eternal life?

And that treasure is entrusted to the church to preserve. I chose the picture for the sermon series to reflect this language of treasure because that language grabbed me as I was reading through a few commentaries and things before we started.

Because I think we are often tempted to value the gospel less than we should. But it is a treasure. However, in one way, this picture is slightly misleading.

Because if you are guarding a treasure chest, well, you do that by going and keeping it locked away, don't you? Well hidden, away from anybody else lest they come and steal it. But the treasure of the gospel is the exact opposite, isn't it?

[27 : 49] How do you guard the gospel? You give it away. More on that in the coming chapters. It is a deposit entrusted to Paul's care, entrusted to Timothy's care, entrusted to our care.

We are not at liberty to do as we wish with the treasure. It is a deposit preserved on behalf of someone else, not a possession of ours to utilize as we see fit.

So Timothy is called to continue the same way as he has already been going, to keep the pattern of sound teaching, to keep on in the same way.

That's what Timothy is called to, and that is what we are called to. Guarding the gospel will be a difficult task. Paul is not ashamed to say that it will involve suffering for Timothy and for us.

But fortunately, we have the same help as Paul promises Timothy. Verse 14, guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you. Guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

[29 : 02] The same Holy Spirit as we were talking about back up in verse 7. The Spirit of power and love and self-discipline. The Spirit who is able to preserve these things.

It is not in our strength. Once again, we do not guard the gospel by thinking that we can do it ourselves. We guard the gospel by dedicating ourselves to it in his strength that he supplies to us so abundantly.

Let's pray. Lord God, our Heavenly Father, we are ashamed to admit that there are times when we are tempted to be ashamed either of you or of one another.

Now, we sometimes don't like what you have said, that there are sometimes aspects of this good news that we're called to proclaim that are uncomfortable for us for what they say to us about our own lives and for what they call us to say to our friends and our neighbors and our families.

Lord, we are sorry that we are sometimes unwilling to suffer, tempted to shy away. But Lord, grant us that strength, we ask, in order that we might continue to guard this same good deposit, that this same treasure that was entrusted to the apostles and to Timothy and to those who came after and on down.

[30 : 45] Lord, thank you that the gospel we proclaim is that same gospel, that this treasure has indeed been preserved thus far because you have done it.

So continue to do it. We ask continue to guard it in our understanding and in what we say and proclaim. Continue to guard this deposit that we may speak rightly of you in order that others might come to know the riches of this salvation, of such a great salvation that not only justifies us but sanctifies us and brings us all the way home into your loving arms.

What a joy. How that suffering pales by comparison to that hope that we have of an eternity in your presence.

Thank you, Lord. Amen.