

(1) ...in God's power

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 20 July 2008

Preacher: Nat Charles

[0 : 0 0] 2 Timothy chapter 1, starting at verse 1. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, according to the promise of the life that is in Christ Jesus.

To Timothy, my beloved child, grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers, night and day.

As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelled first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well.

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

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, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works, but because of his 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 Saviour, Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, which is why I suffer as I do.

[1 : 5 1] 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.

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

You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are figulus and homogenes. May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Anesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains.

But when he arrived in Rome, he searched for me earnestly and found me. May the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that day. And you well know all the service he rendered at Ephesus.

Well, good morning. Thanks, Andrew, very much for reading. And thanks, Bruce, for your kind introduction earlier as well. I'm Nat, a member of the church family at Grace Church Dulwich.

[3 : 0 2] And we're starting our summer series this morning in 2 Timothy. So please do keep your Bibles open at page 1197. Bruce prayed for us earlier, so let's dive in.

Christian leaders tend to get a fairly rough time of things in the imagination of the British public. At best, portrayed as woolly ditherers, like the Vicar of Dibley, but without the gags.

Or at worst, portrayed as corrupt criminals, sheltering behind the protective wing of the church. Over the last couple of years particularly, Christian leaders seem to have been in the media rather more than usual, often complaining about the hard times that they get from their colleagues, or being dragged over the coals for daring to claim obedience to the Bible over matters of ethics or morality.

In the public imagination, at least, this does not seem to be a good time to be a Christian leader. And I'm sure, as most of you know, this week the Lambeth Conference started, the ten-yearly gathering of Anglican bishops from around the world.

It started this week amidst a great deal of uncertainty and confusion, not only over the future of the Anglican Communion, but also over the very nature of the Gospel itself. Different Anglican leaders from different parts of the world seem to be preaching different Gospels, and no one seems quite sure about who to listen to.

[4 : 39] Well, given the current climate then, 2 Timothy is a particularly timely letter for us to be studying over the summer. For in it, the Apostle Paul lays out a blueprint for what godly leadership, what godly Christian leadership will look like.

So as we go through the letter over the next six weeks, we're going to see what that godly leadership looks like, what it involves, what the nature of that leadership is, and what the nature of leaders should be.

And as we do that, it will be of enormous help to us as we think about godly leadership today. So 2 Timothy will help to give us a framework as we think about which leaders we should listen to and be led by.

And it will help us to see what leadership in the Anglican Church and our own church here at Grace Church should look like. Just a very quick note on the context of the letter.

2 Timothy is probably the last letter that the Apostle Paul ever wrote. As he wrote the letter, probably in or just around AD 62, he's in prison. He's on trial for his life, and he clearly knows that not only his ministry, but his life is approaching its end.

[5 : 56] Timothy is a local church leader in Ephesus, appointed by Paul to lead and establish churches in the area. And clearly there's a close friendship between the two of them. Verse 2 of our passage today, to Timothy, my beloved child, helps us to see that.

And as Paul writes this letter to Timothy, he's concerned to set Timothy's expectations of what godly leadership will look like. Well then, let's look in more detail at verses 1 to 8, and we'll cover 8 to 18 next week.

And as Paul starts his letter to Timothy, we'll see him begin to set Timothy's expectations of what godly Christian leadership will be like. And there are two things particularly to notice. So Paul describes the nature of the leader's task, and he describes how the leader has been equipped for that task.

Describes the nature of the leader's task and how the leader has been equipped for that task. Those headings are on the back of your service sheets, so do follow through as we go this morning.

So firstly then, the nature of the Christian leader's task. Let me read verse 8 again. 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.

[7 : 21] Verse 8 is really the heart of chapter 1. Everything else revolves around it. But more than that, verse 8 is the end point of everything else that Paul says in this chapter.

Everything else that we look at in chapter 1 is building towards verse 8 and encouraging Timothy to this end, that he wouldn't be ashamed of the gospel, but that he would suffer for it in God's power.

And that's revealing, isn't it? Because it means that Paul expects godly leadership will be really hard and will be characterised by suffering for the gospel.

There are two things, particularly in verse 8, that Paul says to Timothy. Firstly, he says, don't be ashamed of the gospel. And secondly, he says, do suffer for it. The temptation to be ashamed of the gospel is something that I presume every Christian has felt.

But certainly it's something that Timothy is in danger of. Otherwise, Paul would see no need to warn him against it. But it's worth asking why it is that we are tempted to be ashamed of the gospel and why it is that Timothy was tempted to be ashamed.

[8 : 36] And verse 8 seems to suggest that the opposite of being ashamed of the gospel is suffering for the gospel. Don't do this. Do not be ashamed, but share in suffering.

Don't do this, but do this. Don't be ashamed, but suffer. So the danger that Paul has in view in verse 8 is that the cost of Timothy nailing his colours to the mast for the gospel will simply be too great.

It will simply be too high. And therefore, he will instead be ashamed of the gospel or deny it. The danger is that there are things that Timothy will refuse to give up for the sake of the gospel.

There are things that quite simply he may value more than the testimony about the Lord Jesus. And therefore, rather than give them up, he will be ashamed of the gospel instead.

Maybe not denying the whole thing, but just changing the bits that seem to be causing the most offence. But whatever it is that Timothy is tempted to hold on to, rather than suffer for the gospel, Paul is telling him here quite clearly that the gospel must come first in his list of priorities.

[9 : 49] It's a higher priority than Timothy's own personal respectability or popularity. It's a higher priority than people thinking well of Timothy or liking him.

The gospel comes first. And I take it that the danger with making other things priorities over the gospel is that gradually, Timothy will keep taking steps back and away from the action of what he should be doing, preaching and teaching God's words.

Eventually, he will be tempted just to take a back seat, forever thinking something like, this battle isn't my battle. Or, I agree with Paul's gospel, but he just takes it a little bit too seriously for my liking.

Or even, I believe the gospel, but I don't want to be someone who rams it down people's throats. But Paul reminds him the gospel demands first place in your priorities.

Ahead of what people think of you, ahead of how you are perceived, ahead of your own comforts, the gospel comes first. So do not be ashamed of the gospel, but suffer for it.

[11 : 00] That's the second thing that Paul tells Timothy in verse 8, that not being ashamed of the gospel will mean instead that he will suffer for it. Making the gospel his first priority will mean suffering for Timothy.

Now, I guess that if you were to chat to the average Christian in Britain after a church service on a Sunday morning, and you were to ask them what the nature of Christian leadership is, my guess is that most of them would not say suffering for the gospel.

But it's just clear, isn't it, from verse 8, that Paul thinks suffering is going to characterise the work of a godly leader. So Timothy shouldn't be surprised when it happens.

He shouldn't be surprised when people in positions of authority within his own church start leading people astray through false teaching, and he has to correct and rebuke them. He shouldn't be surprised when he is given an undeserved reputation amongst the locals for being a fundamentalist and a troublemaker.

He shouldn't be surprised, even if he faces physical hostility, just as Paul did for preaching the gospel faithfully. As I mentioned at the beginning, it's striking, isn't it, how little things have changed over the past 2,000 years.

[12 : 20] And some of the things that Timothy faced are exactly what some of the Anglican leaders making a stand for the gospel are facing today. We've seen exactly these things happening in some small measure over the past weeks.

as godly leaders within the Anglican communion who are making a stand for the gospel within their own church are regularly bad-mouthed in the press, often by their own colleagues, accused of being out of touch, accused of being troublemakers, accused of being power-crazed fundamentalists.

But the real surprise is that none of this should be a surprise. According to Paul, this is the nature of godly leadership. preaching the gospel, living a godly life will be costly.

And under circumstances like these, it's easy, isn't it, to see why Timothy would feel the pressure to be ashamed of the gospel, to change it ever so slightly to suit his own needs. But he's not to do that.

He's to join with Paul in suffering for the gospel. Well, if that's the nature of godly leadership, it would be no surprise if Timothy were wondering at this point whether it's really worth it after all.

[13 : 38] If his ministry, his task, is going to be characterised by suffering and fighting the temptation to be ashamed of the gospel, well, how on earth is he going to carry on and do that?

Paul gives him one big encouragement in these verses. Let me read verses 6 to 8 again. Paul says, 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.

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

I wonder if you noticed reasons here for Timothy to be confident. Firstly, verse 6, he has been given a gift to lead.

On and into verse 7, Timothy has been given a spirit. And what's this spirit like? Well, it's not a spirit of fear, but a spirit of power and love and self-control.

[14 : 48] On into verse 8, Timothy, you are doing all of this in God's power. Paul is saying, Timothy, be encouraged and be confident because you have been given all that you need for the task that you have to do.

Be confident. You've been given a spirit of power and love and self-control. It's not a spirit of fear. God has equipped you for what you have to do, so be confident and do it.

live as someone, Timothy, who has this spirit inside them and this gift given to them because you do. I suppose the question is then, how do these things equip Timothy?

How do power, love, and self-control equip Timothy? What difference will it make to him as he goes about leaving the church? The first thing to see then is that Timothy is to suffer for the gospel in God's power.

He's not working alone in the task, lonely though it may often feel. He's equipped for the task with God's power. And that makes sense, doesn't it?

[16 : 04] Given all that Paul has to say about the gospel in the rest of his letters, that the gospel is God's gospel, that the church is God's church, that God is building his people, that God is growing his kingdom.

So Paul's really keen that Timothy understands his role and understands God's role in the work that he's been given to do. Whilst he's to work hard as a godly leader, Timothy must not start thinking that the fruit of the gospel depends upon him, that the success of the church ultimately depends upon him.

Those things depend entirely upon God. Timothy needs to have that right perspective on God's sovereignty over his church. Neither is Timothy to start thinking that because God is sovereign over his church, that because the success of the church depends upon God, he can put his feet up and relax.

Trusting God's power shouldn't lead Timothy away from what he's been called to do, but should equip him for the work that he's been called to do. It's worth just saying too that the spirit of power that Timothy has is not the spirit of power to make hard things go away.

Often when we talk about power, we mean the power to sort of beat up the opposition, to be stronger than the other guy, to triumph over bad things, to make bad things and opposition go away.

[17 : 32] Or Paul doesn't seem to have that sort of power in view here. the power that Timothy has is the power to carry on doing what he should be doing in the face of opposition, not to make that opposition go away.

So God's power is seen then as he equips Timothy to go on faithfully preaching the gospel. God's power won't necessarily be seen in extraordinary spiritual triumphs or in revivals, although should those things happen, praise God for his power in them.

But God's power in Timothy is seen in his faithful preaching and faithful life. I guess that Timothy is probably not feeling very powerful as he leads his church, as he faces rampant false teaching and fierce opposition.

But that's exactly where God's power is seen. In the weak, frail, fragile people who carry on trusting God as they hold out the word of life. Well, that spirit of power is also a spirit of love.

Timothy's power is a power to endure, but that's not all that he should be doing. That's not the only thing that will characterise his ministry. As a leader, he's been equipped with a spirit of love too.

[18 : 58] Love for the Lord, love for the gospel, love for the people in his church, and love even for those who oppose him. As we'll see at the end of chapter 2, that Timothy is to hope for and work towards the repentance of people teaching false things.

And that's what the spirit of love equips him for and equips him to do. It's worth just saying, I think, that the faithful leaders in the Anglican church at the moment are doing what they are doing partly because of a spirit of love.

Because they love the Lord Jesus and his gospel and they want to see him honoured. Not only that, but even they love the false teachers who are teaching wrong things about the gospel, but they want to see them corrected and rebuked in the hope that they will turn to repentance.

Even though Arias find the language of correction and rebuke hard to take, culturally and instinctively, and naturally we don't like language like that, but I take it that actually those Gathcon leaders making a stand for the gospel are doing it partly because of a spirit of love.

And that's what a spirit of love equips for. It should lead Timothy into the work that he has to do and not away from it. Well, that same spirit that Timothy has is a spirit of self-control, that when he is discouraged and demoralised, that when, humanly speaking at least, it seems as though things are falling apart and he can't be bothered to carry on, he will.

[20 : 39] He'll be disciplined and keep going. Even when he thinks that there's no point and that nothing's going to happen, even when, humanly speaking, it looks like nothing is going as it should be, Timothy will keep going because God has given him a spirit of self-control.

So Timothy should continue in the task that God has given him because God has equipped him to do it. He's given him everything that he will need to do the job.

He's given him a spirit of power and love and self-control. He's given him a gift for leadership in verse 6 and Timothy needs to live out what God's spirit has given him.

I'm sure that some of you were as gripped by that Wimbledon final a couple of weeks ago as I was when Rafa Nadal and Roger Federer seemed to just go on deep into the night in this titanic battle.

But imagine just for a moment that a minute before he had walked out onto centre court Rafael Nadal had started thinking I can't do it.

[21 : 52] I'm scared. Roger Federer he hasn't dropped a set yet. He's just playing too well. He's too good. I'm going to lose. So I'm not even going to try.

Now clearly Rafael Nadal is never going to entertain thoughts of that sort. but if he did it would demonstrate wouldn't it that he didn't recognise and understand that he was equipped precisely for going out and playing a Wimbledon final.

He'd been equipped with his extraordinary talent for tennis. He'd been equipped with all the latest tennis gear designed for him especially by Nike. He's got all of the willpower and determination in the world.

He's ready to go out and play and there's no doubt is there that he had the power to do it. One look at his left arm would have dispelled all doubt on that score and clearly he loved the challenge of winning Wimbledon.

You could just see that in his interviews couldn't you? And he had the self-control to keep going even when Roger Federer was coming right back at him. Rafa had all that he needed and could be confident because of that.

[23 : 05] He was ready. A minute before he was due to go out onto centre court he was ready. He had everything that he needed. He wasn't equipped for sitting on the sidelines. He wasn't equipped for watching on TV like I am.

He was equipped for being right out there in the middle of the action. Well so it is with Timothy. Except that he's just not going out to play a tennis match.

He's been equipped to do the work that God has called him to do. He has all that he needs to do. He's ready to be out there in the middle of the action. So he should be confident and keep going.

Well we started this morning thinking about Christian leadership and we've begun to see what that leadership involves. we've begun to see that it means suffering for the gospel.

It means fighting the temptation to be ashamed of it for the sake of an easier life and doing all of this confidently and in God's power. I guess the question is then how does all of this apply to us?

[24 : 23] It's worth saying isn't it that most of us here aren't church leaders. So actually as we go through to Timothy over the next six weeks over the summer we may find that not all of it applies to us directly and I think that's the case this morning.

These words to Timothy don't have a direct or immediate application to us but I think that there are at least a couple of things to say here by way of indirect application for us.

first thing to say is that we know then what a godly leader looks like. We know that a godly leader is someone who will not give in to the temptation to be ashamed of the gospel even in the face of fierce opposition.

Church leaders who are changing the gospel just to fit a prevailing wind of culture or to give themselves a slightly easier life are not leading in a godly way. We've seen too that church leaders will continue to preach the gospel even in the face of enormous pressure not to do so even when faced with the possibility of looking weak or looking out of touch or looking like a fundamentalist the godly church leader will with God's power and love keep going in the task that God has called him to do.

And that helps us doesn't it as we think about who we should be listening to as we think about who we should be led by it helps us to see the types of people who we should be listening to.

[25 : 57] If our church leaders are changing the gospel because it suits their needs clearly according to Paul they're not the sort of people that we should be following or being led by. Second thing to say is that it's just clear isn't it that being a church leader is not an easy thing to do.

it's not the job for someone looking for a quiet and painless life. So it's just clear for us isn't it therefore that we should be praying hard for our leaders particularly here at Grace Church we should be praying for Simon and for Mark and Judy T that they would hold fast to the gospel especially when it's costly to do so.

So we should be praying locally but we should also be praying more broadly too. Praying that the leaders who are making a stand for the gospel and the Anglican communion will continue to do so with confidence trusting in God's power trusting in God's spirit at work in them.

In a moment there'll be an opportunity to ask any questions. I don't think we've heard this morning but before we do that why don't I pray and pray particularly for those men at the Lambeth Conference who are making a stance for the gospel.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father we do give you great thanks and praise for the gospel. We give you great thanks and praise for all that the Lord Jesus has won for us and is to us.

[27 : 36] And we pray Heavenly Father particularly for those people who are at the Lambeth Conference at the moment seeking to faithfully and clearly proclaim Jesus and we do pray that you would strengthen and equip them to do that.

We do pray that you would help them to be confident in the gospel even when it's costly to do that, even when it looks like they are out of touch, even when they're accused of being weak and godless.

Father please would you help them to have real confidence in you and in your gospel. Father pray that too for Mark and Simon and Judy here at Grace Church and pray that you would help them to keep confidently holding out the word of life in God's power.

And in Jesus' name we pray these things. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.