



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

Sermon for Pentecost 17

October 5, 2025

Unfeigned Faith

2 Timothy 1:1–14

¹ Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus,

² To Timothy, a beloved son: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

³ I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as my forefathers did, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day, ⁴ greatly desiring to see you, being mindful of your tears, that I may be filled with joy, ⁵ when I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also. ⁶ Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. ⁷ For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

⁸ Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, ⁹ who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began, ¹⁰ but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, ¹¹ to which I was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles. ¹² For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.

¹³ Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁴ That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.

Fear can be paralyzing, rendering a person ineffective. This is especially true when it comes to our life as Christians in a hostile world. We're in enemy territory, folks, and the bullets are literally whizzing around us. Where can we find the courage to be faithful Christians who are unashamed of the gospel, and not afraid to suffer for it? Unashamed, unafraid. I mean, what's the alternative? That we turn into spineless jellyfish or abandon our faith altogether? This is what Paul is addressing as he writes to Timothy in today's Epistle.

Timidity is a serious drawback to living a faithful Christian life and giving a clear gospel witness. Let's be honest: We Christians can be intimidated by the world around us. We



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see the ridicule that Christians are getting, the threats of violence mounting against us, and it is ever so tempting to pull back, to keep our faith close to the vest. Maybe it's not even a conscious decision, but when fear takes hold, we tend to hide our faith and compromise our values. We want to blend in with the crowd. We want to downplay our differences from the culture around us. At the very least, we're afraid that people won't like us or that they'll reject us if our Christian faith is too much a part of who we are. But we need to recognize that that is timidity. And it weakens our Christian witness. And, in the long run, it'll begin to chip away at the foundation of our faith and make us weak.

But it's helpful to understand that cowardice isn't unique to Christians of the twenty-first century. First-century Christians were also tempted to be timid. Listen, they had a lot to be afraid of! Active persecution was a risk they faced on a daily basis. Imprisonment and death were always a threat. That's the backdrop as Paul writes to his young protégé Timothy and he gives him this charge: "Do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel."

Paul himself was suffering for the gospel at that very time. As he writes this, he's sitting in a cold Roman dungeon. He knows he could be executed at any moment for the unpardonable crime of being a Christian. And he knows that Timothy could one day face a similar fate.

But he also understands that there is a fate worse than death, and that would be to disown the gospel. To bow to threats and forsake the faith – that is the greater danger. Paul didn't want Timothy to be intimidated by persecution. Not only was Timothy's own spiritual life at stake, but so was the spiritual well-being of all the Christians under him in the churches in and around Ephesus, where Paul had left him in charge. Timothy's example would no doubt rub off on others. A pastor's hearers can always tell the heart of their preacher. So Paul tells him: "Don't be ashamed of the gospel of Christ. Join me in suffering for it. Unashamed, unafraid."

Paul reminds Pastor Timothy of his ordination, when he was called into the ministry of the gospel. He wants Timothy to keep alive the fire for the gospel burning within him: "I remind you to stir up 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 of a sound mind."

"Of a sound mind." It's ironic that Paul should use that expression. The Roman emperor at the time was a lunatic by the name of Nero, who had a thing for persecuting Christians. A few years earlier, the city of Rome had been heavily damaged by a great fire, and a rumor circulated that Nero himself had been the one to set it. So, to take the "heat" off himself, Nero looked for someone else to blame. The scapegoats he picked were the Christians. This then was the motivation for Nero's first great persecution of Christians in Rome (64 AD). The Roman historian Tacitus writes: "To suppress the rumor, Nero fabricated as culprits, and punished with the most refined cruelties, a notoriously depraved



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class of people whom the crowd called 'Christians.'"

Tacitus also tells us the grisly details of those "most refined cruelties." "A farce was made of their deaths," he writes. "Dressed in the skins of wild animals, they were torn to death by dogs; or they were fastened to crosses, and when daylight ended, they were burned to serve as torches by night. Nero had provided his gardens for the spectacle."

As Paul is writing these letters to Timothy, it's a couple of years into this Neronian persecution (66 or 67). Being a Christian carries the death penalty. Paul knows this is his last imprisonment; he's running out of time. Of course, as a Roman citizen, Paul couldn't be crucified; his death sentence would be carried out by the more civilized method of decapitation. But he knows the sentence will be death, all the same.

Christians in America today are rarely in danger of death, recent events notwithstanding. But the temptation to be timid is real, nonetheless. To be a consistent Christian means that you will not always blend in with the crowd. Your faith, your beliefs based on the Word of God, will be noticed by others, and they may not like it. They may not like you. The way you live may make them feel uncomfortable, maybe even guilty about their sin, and as a result they may lash out at you.

Maybe you invite a friend to come to church with you, because you know that he or she needs the gospel. Maybe you talk about Jesus when someone asks you what's important to you. Maybe you don't take part in things that compromise your witness, because the gospel of Jesus Christ really is the most important thing in your life.

And then, suddenly, co-workers begin to give you the cold shoulder. You don't get invited to as many things as other people do. The pressure is subtle, but it's real: "Conform to the group or be banished!" And the suffering has begun. It's in such times that you need the courage to be faithful, not fearful. Unashamed, unafraid. You need *encouragement* – literally, you need courage put into you.

And that's what you have, my friends! That's what God will give you when you need it. He'll put the courage into you. Today, be renewed and strengthened in this encouragement. Receive God's help and strength to be a faithful Christian.

Do you really think that the God who loved you so dearly that He came here to suffer the weight and burden of your sin, to carry it to a cross and be nailed there for it, who was there for you when you needed Him most, would suddenly abandon you when you need Him now? Beloved, God gives you what you need. Listen to what Paul tells Timothy: "For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and a sound mind." He also encourages him to carry on "by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us." My brothers and sisters, this same Holy Spirit dwells in you! In your baptism, you received the gift of the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit does not cause you to cringe with fear at the threats of men. The Holy Spirit fills you with confidence in the power of God. "If God is for us, who can be against us?" "The Lord is my light and my salvation – whom shall I fear?" By giving us the Holy Spirit, God has given us a spirit of power. That's why Paul can say to Timothy and to us:



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"Share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God."

Here then is the key: The help you need to suffer for the gospel is found in the gospel itself! The gospel itself provides you with the power you need to live a faithful Christian life.

The gospel of God's grace in Christ – this gospel is itself the power of God. It's a saving power entirely of God's doing, not ours. Paul says that God "saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace." Salvation – your salvation – is God's free gift. You can't earn it, you don't deserve it, but it *is* yours.

Rejoice in this salvation, beloved! Receive it as a gift! God planned it for you for a long time: "This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time. . . ." And what God planned for you from eternity has now, in time, appeared in human history: ". . . and has now been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."

That's it! That's the gospel! In love, Christ Jesus, the Son of God, entered into human history to be your Savior. He saved you by dying on the cross for your sins – sins that had condemned you to eternal death. He saved you by conquering sin and death for you. And His resurrection on Easter morning is the proof that your salvation is complete. It's all about our Savior Christ Jesus, "who by his death has destroyed death, and by his rising to life again has restored to us everlasting life."

This gospel, being preached to you today – this gospel declares to you Christ's great victory and makes it present for you. Your sins of fear and failure, of being timid – all your sins are forgiven, for His sake. Death has been defeated; its power has been deflated. Life – *new* life that lasts forever – this life is yours in Christ. Live in this reality with confidence and joy and courage!

"For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and of love and of a sound mind." Empowered by the Spirit, alive in the gospel of God's grace in our Savior Christ Jesus, you and I will be those faithful Christians we're called to be. Unashamed of the gospel, unafraid to suffer for it. Unashamed, unafraid, because of the great encouragement God gives. In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen