

Unashamed of the Gospel

2 Timothy 1:8-12

5 August 2018 | Grace Bible Church Corinda | Ben Shannon

Big Question: Are there circumstances when we should be ashamed of the gospel?

Big Idea: We are unashamed of Christ and those who proclaim him.

Introduction

When I was studying at university, a few times each day I needed to cross from one side of the campus to the other.

If you're not familiar with the University of Queensland, at the heart of the campus, the original sandstone buildings are arranged in a semicircle around a large grassy area called the Great Court.

The warm winter sun is a haven for sleeping arts students. Just ask my wife.

On the hour, as everyone moved from one class to another, it's a hive of activity.

At lunchtime on a Wednesday though, you'd be met with an even stranger sound than an arts student sleeping, a sound you wouldn't hear the rest of the week: the sound of singing.

That wasn't the day that the university orchestra or choir performed, but one lone man singing.

Each week, a man – my guess was that he was in his 50s – would stand by himself, right in the middle of the university, and sing at the top of his lungs.

While he could hold a tune, I think it's also fair to say that he shouldn't have given up his day job either.

As if the very fact that he was there singing wasn't enough weird enough, what he was singing was even more confronting.

He was no busker covering the Top 10 or crooning golden oldies.

As people sat on the lawn and the busy lunchtime crowd bustled past, he sang hymns.

He stood there with his hymn book and belted out praises that proclaimed the truths of God to thousands of university students.

It was his genuine and sincere way of doing evangelism.

By singing truths about the Lord, he hoped that his efforts would be used to change hearts and minds.

Now, you might want to critically assess the effectiveness and efficiency of his evangelistic strategy.

I suspect that he saw little fruit from this ministry.

But that's not the point I want to make this morning.

He stands out in my mind as a man who was completely and utterly unashamed of the gospel.

I admire his courage and conviction.

He knew that he was pushing the bounds of social acceptability.

And yet he did it anyway.

He was unashamed of the gospel and his love for the Lord and desire for other people to hear it burst from his lips.

Outline

Last week, we began a study of the New Testament book of 2 Timothy.

As far as we know, it's the last letter that the apostle Paul wrote.

It was sent from gaol where he's on death row.

And it's addressed to his ministry apprentice and fellow-worker in the gospel, a bloke named Timothy.

This letter is all about being entrusted with the gospel.

Paul knows that his time is coming to an end and that the gospel baton needs to be passed on to the next generation.

He doesn't want Timothy to be distressed unnecessarily, so writes to encourage his young Padawan, encouraging him as he takes on the job of preaching and teaching the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Last week, in verses 1-7, we saw that Timothy was a faithful and trusted man of God.

Paul wanted him to know that he was prayed for regularly.

And he reminds Timothy that he's not alone in the task he's been given.

He's got the Spirit of God who gives the power, love and self-discipline that he needs for the task that's been given to him.

This morning, we're going to be looking at just the next sentence.

It goes from verse 8 through to verse 12.

In light of the power and enabling that the Holy Spirit gives, Timothy must resist the urge to be ashamed of the gospel.

Because being ashamed of something stops you from being bold with the gospel.

Just as Paul wanted Timothy to have courage, don't be ashamed of the gospel, brothers and sisters of Grace Bible Church Corinda.

As Christians entrusted with the gospel, **we are unashamed of Christ and those who proclaim him.**

The message we've been entrusted isn't a cause for shame because it reveals God's grace and gives us life.

There's nothing morally wrong with this message.

It's not a fairy tale. It's not made up.

Do, don't shy away from it, don't distance yourself from the gospel, but hold onto it tightly.

Verse 8 gives us a good summary.

Have a look with me:

2 Timothy 1:8 (NIV11) ⁸ So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God.

In this verse, we see that there are two things to be unashamed of.

Firstly, don't be ashamed of witnessing to what God has done.

Secondly, don't be ashamed of the people who are saying it.

Instead, Paul invites his young protégé to share in his suffering.

How could how could Timothy possibly decline an offer like that?

We're not going to look at the theme of suffering too much this morning, because he'll come back to it later in the book.

It's important to see though, that he can only suffer by the power of God.

Today, we'll focus on just these two things:

- Don't be ashamed to witness to what Christ has done (vv9-10)
- Don't be ashamed of someone rejected for proclaiming Christ (vv11-12)

Don't be ashamed to witness to what Christ has done

The message that Timothy has been entrusted with, the message of the gospel, is about what God has done.

And it's not something to be ashamed of.

What makes you a Christian?

Are you a Christian because you're born into a particular family in a particular part of the world?

Are you a Christian because that's what you answer on the census?

Are you a Christian because you come to church on Sunday mornings?

Are you a Christian because you're a good person and Christianity is the expression of being good that works for you?

Are you a Christian because when you're in trouble, you pray to the Christian God... if he's there?

None of these things makes you a Christian.

Paul tells us in verse 9 what makes us a Christian.

The way you become a Christian is by God saving you.

2 Timothy 1:9a (NIV11) ⁹ He has saved us and called us to a holy life.

The gospel is a message of salvation.¹

It's good news that we can be saved from our greatest danger because there's a solution to our greatest need.

What's our greatest need?

It's that sin separates us from God physically and spiritually.

We have all rebelled against God, told him to go away and that we'll be fine by ourselves thank you very much.

But he's acted so that we can be saved from the consequences of our sin.

Because of his great grace, according to his plan, we will forgive us.

He will pardon us, transform us and restore us to being the people that he created us to be.

He will repair the relationship between God and man.

How's this possible?

There's a question that we sometimes ask of ourselves and others that goes like this: "If you were to die right now, why should God let you into heaven?"

That's an important question, isn't it?

"If you were to die right now, why should God let you into heaven?"

Some people rely on their family tradition.

I come from a Christian family – “We’re Church of England”.

Others rely on the fact that they’re not a Christian family – for example, “We’re Jewish”.

In life, belonging to the right family often opens doors that would otherwise be firmly closed.

Being from the right family won’t get you into heaven though.

God isn’t impressed by the family you came from.

You’re not a Christian by default just because you’ve grown up in a Christian home.

Teenagers, you’re not a Christian just because your parents are.

Parents, that also means that you can’t make your kids become Christians.

If it’s not our family background, the natural tendency for many of us is to rely on what we’ve done.

We could answer that God should let us into heaven by listing out a few examples of our good deeds.

I paid my taxes. I supported a whole bunch of worthy causes. I did my best to reduce my carbon footprint. I was kind to other people. I stood up for what’s right and true. I came to church.

I’m sure you can come up with a very long, impressive and persuasive list in your mind.

But when we drill down into that list it starts to look less impressive.

Remember we’re talking about scrutiny from the God who can see hearts and minds, the God who knows our motives even when we don’t.

Even our good deeds are tainted by mixed motives.

When I say that I paid my taxes, I mean that I paid the bare minimum the government required. And while some of the deductions might’ve been a bit cheeky, at least I paid on time... most years.

I supported a bunch of worthy causes with my hard-earned money... as long as it was tax-deductable.

I did my best to reduce my carbon footprint... well, as far as it was convenient. As long as it didn’t affect my lifestyle or I had enough disposable income to do it.

I stood up for what’s right and just... as long as everyone else was too.

I gave you my Sunday mornings. I sang the right songs and prayed the right prayers. Even though I didn’t always mean what I said.

Blimey, I even sat through Ben’s sermons and was awake most of the time – if anyone deserves to go to heaven then surely it’s anyone who’s done that!

If you're relying on any of those things, if those are the answers you'd give, you're not alone.

But there's a big problem.

God's not impressed by those either.

God doesn't compare us against the person sitting next to us.

He doesn't even compare you to Adolf Hitler or Pol Pott.

We'd all look impressive next to them.

God compares us to himself, to his holiness and perfection.

Compared to that, none of our arguments will stand up to his scrutiny on the great day of judgment when God will examine our hearts.

All these things are really a celebration of the unholy trinity – me, myself and I.

But they're not a reason for God to let you into heaven.

There are two different ways that you can respond to this.

The first one is to be offended.

You can continue to be angry with God.

What do you mean that what I've done isn't good enough?

I get it, I understand why you might have that response, but it still doesn't solve our sin problem.

The second way to respond is with thanks.

Giving up on what you've done and celebrating what Jesus has done for you.

Instead of acting offended, you can trust Jesus and rely on his sin bearing death for you.

God's done what we couldn't do for ourselves.

God's plan and purpose was to show us grace.

That's always been his plan.

It was his plan long before you were even a twinkle in your mother's eye.

We're told that he showed his grace long before good works were even possible.

How good is that?

2 Timothy 1:9b (NIV) This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time,

This grace was given in to us before the beginning of time.

Not even at the beginning of time, but before it.

Put that in your pipe and smoke it.

God's motivation for saving us wasn't anything that we've done.

His motivation was his own character.

He's saved us because of who he is.

It was his own purpose and grace that has brought about our restoration.

That was always his plan.

But now, his grace has now been shown to us.

His grace was revealed to us at the first coming of Jesus.

God's plan from ages past has been revealed through Jesus' earthly ministry where he showed people God's grace, mercy and love as he went around teaching and healing.

We see the fullness of his grace at the climax of his ministry, when he died on the cross.

Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sin.

The Bible tells us that the wages of sin is death.²

You sin and what's the reward?

At best it's a short-lived feeling of pleasure, which is why we convince ourselves that it's a good idea.

But it's always followed by death.

That's a really strange reward to be chasing, isn't it?

Yet we all do.

It's really a penalty.

And at the cross Jesus took that penalty on himself, so that we can be forgiven.

He died so that we can live.

But Jesus didn't just die for us.

He didn't stay dead. He rose from the grave.

He defeated the power of death by God raising him back to life again.

So now, the power of death has been defeated.

Paul writes to Timothy in verse 10:

2 Timothy 1:10 (NIV11) ¹⁰ but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

For some reason, those words “destroyed death” really stuck out to me this week.

They’re powerful words.

It’s an exciting thought that Jesus has destroyed death.

But how does that tally with my everyday experience?

It’s 2,000 years since Jesus came and people are still dying.

Clearly that doesn’t mean that death has been annihilated since we still experience it.

In fact, Paul himself says elsewhere that death is the last enemy to be destroyed.³

It means that the power of death has been broken.

Death has been defeated and so he can talk about its future destruction as if it’s a reality now.

When he returns, death will be obliterated.

That’s certain because at the cross, Jesus won a decisive victory.

So in 1 Corinthians 15 – the great chapter on the resurrection – Paul can describe Christians who’ve died as having fallen asleep.

Because they’ll live again.

The gospel gives everlasting life and immortality.

All those who trust in Jesus can live with him forever, just as God always intended us to.

This might sound all well and good to us when it’s theory.

But it wasn’t for Paul.

In gaol on death row, he was staring death in the face.

How precious these truths must’ve been to him.

He knew that he was going to stand before God and he wouldn’t need to worry.

He could say with full confidence:

Romans 1:16 (NIV11) ¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile

What's all this got to do with being ashamed?

Well, firstly, some of us are paralysed because we're deeply ashamed of our sin.

Many people are ashamed of the gospel, but we should be ashamed of our sin.

The gospel calls us to the confrontational reality of seeing ourselves as we truly are.

Are you ashamed of your sin?

There is massive shame in our sin.

We've all done things that we aren't proud of.

But don't let it stop you going to the Lord with it.

You might be so ashamed of your sin that you can barely admit it to yourself.

You wonder "How could you possibly admit it to a holy God?"

You're afraid that he'll think less of you.

And so your shame and pride stop you from confessing your sins to God.

It's not easy to humble yourself before God and admit your guilt and shame.

Yet it doesn't take him by surprise, it's nothing that he doesn't know already.

And it's not going to stop him loving you because Christ's death was enough to cover all your shame.

Friend, if you confess your sin to God, you're not going to receive condemnation.

What you'll find is forgiveness.

Others of us are stuck in our sin, weighed down by the shame, feeling like we can't go to God again because we've been to him so many times before.

You might be wondering how God could possibly forgive you for the fifth time or the fifty-fifth time.

The first two or three you can understand, but again?

God invites you to come to him in repentance and ask for forgiveness again and again.

And he will wipe the slate clean because Jesus has paid for it all.

It's not just you. We all need to repent of our sins again and again.

I need to repent and confess my sin again and again because I sin again and again.

And I know that he will forgive me again, and again and again.

1 John 1:9 is one of the most precious promises in the Bible and that's why I like to quote it:

1 John 1:9 (NIV11) ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Secondly, you might be ashamed of the gospel because it sounds so far-fetched.

I suspect that we all feel this one.

That God would enter our world as a man to die for us sounds almost unbelievable.

Can the death of Jesus on the cross really save me from an eternity of separation from God?

We can be ashamed of this message because we think it might sound silly to people.

In fact, we know that it probably will sound crazy.

And so we don't want to testify to what Christ has done.

Not because we think that it's not true, but because we're worried that other people will think less of us.

We're worried of being shamed for believing it.

It matters though, because to be ashamed of this gospel is to be ashamed of what Jesus has done.

Denying the gospel actually means denying Jesus and what he's done.

Don't kid yourself, the pull to deny Jesus can be strong.

Be aware of it and don't be afraid to admit it.

We don't just know this from experience.

The best reason to take this seriously is that Jesus warned us of it.

One day when Jesus was talking to his disciples, he told them that following him would mean denying themselves, taking up their cross and following him.

He ended by saying:

Mark 8:38 (NIV11) ³⁸ If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

If you are ashamed of Jesus, he will be ashamed of you.

That's a weighty warning, isn't it?

If you trust the gospel, then you have everything to gain.

If you deny it, if you're ashamed of it, you have everything to lose.

Don't be ashamed to witness to what God has done.

Don't be ashamed of someone rejected for proclaiming Christ (vv11-12)

Secondly, don't be ashamed by Jesus' servants.

Don't reject someone for proclaiming Christ.

Paul reminds us in verse 11 that he was "a herald, and apostle and a teacher."

In short, you could say that Paul was given the job of testifying to Jesus as we saw in the first point.

As we saw last week when we looked at Acts 9, Paul wasn't chasing these roles.

Quite the opposite, Jesus found him and appointed him to them.

In verse 12, he makes clear that the reason that he's suffering is because of the gospel.

He's suffering for no other reason that Jesus made him a herald of the gospel.

2 Timothy 1:12a (NIV11) That is why I am suffering as I am.

He's suffering shame because of the gospel.

It's not that he was obnoxious or that he'd done anything wrong.

It was because of the gospel.

Unlike most commentaries on 2 Timothy, I don't want you to miss the significance of shame in what Paul writes here.

Shame isn't the main category that we work in.

Western culture, Australian culture is most concerned about guilt and innocence.

Although at least one leading missiologist thinks we're moving into a new form of culture – a pleasure/pain culture, historically we've had what sociologists call a guilt/innocence culture.

What matters most to us in a guilt/innocence culture is whether you're right or wrong.

A good person is right and a bad person is wrong.

Like many parts of the world today, Ancient Mediterranean culture thought differently.

It was a shame/honour culture.

What matters in that kind of culture is whether you're honourable or not.

A good person is honourable and a bad person is dishonourable.

So, if you're at work and you send out an email and it has the wrong information in it, what do you do?

In a guilt/innocence culture, you send out another email that corrects the information.

Yes, it's a bit embarrassing that you made the mistake, but it's most important that people have the right information.

In a shame-honour culture, it matters less about being right and more about the shame of admitting that you were wrong.

So, you probably wouldn't send the correction email because that would bring disgrace on you.

To get this letter, we need to understand that being shamed isn't minor, it's a big deal.

Yet we're still familiar with the idea.

As I've been thinking over what to say this morning, I've been thinking a lot about what it means to be ashamed.

I've really struggled with how to illustrate a sermon about being ashamed.

A whole heap of times in my life came to mind when I've been deeply embarrassed and wished the ground would open and swallow me up.

I don't love doing it, but I can share those stories with you and laugh at my own expense.

I'm not going to today, but I could.

But there are other events from my past that go far deeper than just embarrassment.

Shame takes things to a whole new level.

There are I've said, things I've done, things I've thought that I am just too ashamed to ever tell you.

By very definition, they're the things that I don't even want to think about them, let alone illustrate my sermon with.

Shame runs deep.

Shame is painful. It means more than being embarrassed.

It means losing status in the eyes of others.

I wish those things could be erased – burned and buried under cement because they're so shameful.

I don't have enough courage to share them with you because I'm afraid that you'd think less of me.

Shame is powerful enough in our culture, imagine how much more that's the case in a shame-honour culture.

Being put in prison was one of the greatest disgraces that a person could experience.

Being gaoled would bring massive shame on someone.

And that shame wouldn't be forgotten, it would last for their whole life.

Even if they were found not to be guilty.

In fact, we have ancient records that cases where someone was denied their right to pay a fine so that they'd be put in prison.

Why? So that the shame and stigma would stick with them for life.

It's a massive disgrace for Paul to be in gaol.

It was shameful to be there and add to that the official assessment was that he'd done something wrong.

He'd been completely discredited in the court of public opinion.

He couldn't sink any lower.

He was *persona non grata* for preaching the gospel.

Yet Paul refuses to be ashamed.

2 Timothy 1:12b (NIV) Yet this is no cause for shame...

Paul looks like he's Rome's prisoner.

He been denounced by Roman authorities, Jewish religious leaders and the public.

But he says in verse 8 that he's really Christ's prisoner.

Other people might've denounced and rejected him, but he feels no shame.

Jesus has allowed all this happens and Paul cares much more about Jesus' opinion of him.

He might be in gaol according to the laws of human courts.

But the worst that they can do is take his life.

There's a bigger picture. There's more going on.

Paul has entrusted his life to Jesus.

He trusts that Jesus will guard him, in the gospel, to protect him on the day of judgement when he comes again.

That's what really matters.

Verse 12:

2 Timothy 1:12 (NIV11) Yet this is no cause for shame, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day.

Paul entrusted his whole life to Jesus.

He trusts him completely.

He trusts the gospel that brings life and immortality completely.

His fate is in completely trustworthy hands.

Centuries later, Daniel W. Whittle wrote the words to the famous hymn:

*I know not when my Lord may come,
At night or noontide fair,
Nor if I'll walk the vale with Him,
Or meet Him in the air.*

He doesn't know when Jesus will come back.

During the day or during the night? He doesn't know.

Will he walk through the Valley of the Shadow of death like those who fall asleep?

Or will Jesus come back when he's alive and meet the Lord in the air as 1 Thessalonians says?⁴

Who can say?

But there's one thing that he can be certain of:

*But I know whom I have believed
And am persuaded that He is able
To keep that which I've committed
Unto Him against that day.*

Can you sing those words with conviction?

Are you ashamed of the gospel, or do you trust Jesus with your life, even if it means bringing shame on you?

In the modern world, most people wouldn't want to admit that their relative is in gaol.

There's a shameful stigma at being associated with someone who's locked up.

There was a strong belief in guilt by association in the ancient world too.

By being connected to Paul, Timothy would be shamed, even though neither one had done anything wrong.

That's what's Paul's got in his mind when he says, "Don't be ashamed."

He's worried that Timothy will walk away from the gospel because of it.

It's always hard to be on the losing team.

Ultimately, the winning team is Team Jesus, but in the short term, that might be the harder side to be on.

Are you embarrassed by other Christians?

Let's be honest, there are lots of Christians who it's right to be embarrassed by.

There are people who call themselves Christians who don't honour Christ because they don't go about things in a very loving or helpful way.

I'm not talking about them.

Are you embarrassed by other Christians, are you ashamed, when they stand for the gospel?

Would you be ashamed if someone from this church was put in gaol?

Not for doing something stupid, but for speaking faithfully of Christ

Paul wasn't cavalier, reckless and unwise.

He wasn't looking for ways to get himself arrested so that he could be a martyr.

He didn't want to be in gaol, he wasn't wearing it as a badge of honour.

He was unashamed because he was in gaol for nothing more than preaching the gospel.

Don't be ashamed of someone like that.

I hope that you will stand with someone like that unashamed, just as they're unashamed of Christ.

Don't be ashamed of someone who's rejected for preaching Christ.

Conclusion

Sadly, it'd be all too easy for us to be ashamed of Jesus.

It's easy for us to be timid.

But we need to remember, as Paul reminded Timothy, that we've been given the Spirit who gives us boldness.

Like Timothy, we've been entrusted with a gospel we don't need to be ashamed of.

If you were there in the Great Court, how would you feel when you heard the bloke I talked about singing hymns?

If you're polite, you might think that he's a little misguided.

You might wonder if that's really the most effective way of sharing the gospel with people.

But I also wonder if there mightn't be a little part of us that's a bit ashamed of the gospel?

Interestingly, a friend of mine once went and asked some of the students sitting around what they thought of the bloke singing.

Did they particularly appreciate his singing? No, not especially.

Did they like him interrupting the peace and tranquillity of their lunchtime? No, not particularly.

But they did appreciate the courage of his convictions.

He clearly showed that he cared about what he believed.

And he wasn't afraid to say it.

He wasn't the kind of guy who'd sell out on the gospel.

He was unashamed about the gospel.

What about you?

¹ Acts 13:26

² Romans 6:23

³ 1 Corinthians 1:26

⁴ 1 Thessalonians 4:17

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Big Question: Are there circumstances when we should be ashamed of the gospel?

Big Idea: We are unashamed of Christ and those who proclaim him.

Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever seen someone preaching in a public place like a street corner? Did you feel ashamed or embarrassed? Why or why not?
2. An Persian friend at work corners you in the lunch room and asks, "What is a Christian and how do you become one?" What are three points you'd want to get across?
3. What do you think Paul mean when he says at the end of verse 9, "This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time"?
4. Why do we struggle so much with God's grace?
5. Being ashamed of the gospel can be subtle. We often deny it in lots of small ways. What is it about the gospel that you feel most ashamed of?
6. What's the difference between shame and embarrassment?
7. Why does Paul refuse to be ashamed of the gospel?
8. Why do you think that Paul trusts Jesus so completely?
9. What are some reasons that you should be ashamed of a Christian preaching the gospel?
10. If you were ashamed of a brother or sister preaching the gospel, what are some things that shame would stop you from doing?