

Paul's Antidote for Pastoral Timidity in 2 Timothy 1:6-14

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I am proud to be a pastor of the Lutheran Church, since, like Paul, I am not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes in him (Rom 1:16). What's more, I know that Jesus is not ashamed to call me his brother (Heb 2:11). Yet that confidence is often challenged by people around me. When people outside the church discover that I am a pastor they quickly lose interest in me. They regard me as a social leper and treat me as if I were engaged in a shameful business. That, in turn, leads, all too readily, to personal discouragement and spiritual demoralisation.

A sense of shame and embarrassment at religious belief and practice pervades much of our public life in Australia and elsewhere in the western world. Increasingly, Christians are marginalised by the chattering classes and treated with polite contempt in our pluralist society, a society in which fashion and appearance are far more important than reality and truth, a society that tolerates all kinds of beliefs except the teaching of the church, a society in which those who hold power defend their position by ridiculing and shaming those who threaten their power.

This sense of public disgrace has been aggravated by the scandal of sexual abuse within the church. The church, to be frank, is on the nose. That sense of disgrace is not likely to diminish in the years to come. It will, most likely, become much worse as the western world more openly rejects the Christian faith and more frequently treats Christians with contempt. That contempt will, no doubt, eventually breed social exclusion and public persecution.

We Lutherans in Australia often bring to that anti-Christian sentiment our own inherited sense of shame as an ethnic minority that was identified in the public eye with the enemy in the two world wars, just as many Muslims are now regarded with suspicion. Our shrinking membership, coupled with a loss of confidence in the gospel to produce church growth, aggravates that pervasive sense of shame. Add to that the perception that we are old-fashioned and out of touch with the modern world. No wonder then that some of our pastors are paralysed by a spirit of timidity that makes them feel frustrated and confused, demoralised and powerless.

So it may be good for us to consider what Paul has to say to young pastor Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:6-14 about God's antidote to his timidity, his fear of ridicule and public embarrassment.

God's Antidote for Pastoral Timidity

Paul deals with Timothy's fear of embarrassment by reminding him of what he had received at his ordination. He says:

⁶For this reason (Timothy's faith) I remind you to rekindle the gift of grace that is in you through the laying on of my hands; ⁷for God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and sound-mindedness.

When Timothy was ordained by Paul and his colleagues, he was not just called to do the Lord's work; he was empowered to do that work by the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit was his *charism*, a gift of grace from God the Father through Jesus. This gift was given to him when Paul laid his hands on Timothy¹ and spoke the Spirit to him. When Paul ordained Timothy he may actually said to him: "God the Father give you the Spirit of power and love and sound-mindedness." Yet the Holy Spirit was not given to him once and for all time on the day of his ordination for him to possess for the rest of his life as a pastor; it was made available to him as an ongoing gift that he could pray for and receive from God each day, without ever owning it and controlling it.

By receiving the Holy Spirit Timothy was able to overcome his chronic timidity and fear of embarrassment with three gifts for ministry. First, the Holy Spirit gave him *power* for his work as a pastor, the same death-destroying power that raised Jesus from the dead, the power to bring life and incorruptibility to light through the gospel, the power that makes for resilience in the face of the knock-backs and setbacks that come from people who reject the gospel.

Second, the Holy Spirit gave Timothy the power to *love* his people with the love of Christ, lavishly and self-sacrificially. That is often the hardest thing for a pastor to do, because Satan does his level best to get the members of his congregation to fall out with him and each other.

Third, the Holy Spirit would give the gift of *sōphronismos*, the gift of *sound-minded self-control*. In ancient Greek this word, which shares the same root as the term for 'salvation', was a medical term. It was used for a sane, clear-minded person with sound mental health. Its opposite was mental insanity with its impulsiveness, confusion, delusions, and loss of physical and emotional self-control. Sound-minded people are not driven by disordered passions and desires, but have a clear understanding of themselves and others. They have clear minds, minds that can think clearly and clearly sense what others are feeling. Paul uses root and its cognates frequently in the pastoral letters for that healthy spiritual common sense which enables believers to think and feel and act as Christ did.² The gift of sound-mindedness gives

¹ See also Acts 8:18; 1 Tim 4:14; Heb 6:2.

² See 1 Tim 2:9, 15; 3:2; Tit 1:8; 2:2, 4, 5, 6, 12. In secular Greek it is the term for sound-mindedness and sexual self-control. Its opposite is insanity. The New Testament uses this Greek word in its various forms for the sound-mindedness and spiritual sanity of a redeemed person. The emphasis does not lie on autonomous self-control, as most translators seem to imply, but on clear-sighted self-appraisal. At its most literal level, it describes the mental sanity of a person who had been freed from a demon (Mark 5:15; Luke 8:35). But sound-mindedness is also used to describe the spiritual sanity of a person with a clear conscience. Christ redeems us from our ungodliness and disordered passions so that we may live "sound-mindedly" (Tit 2:12). Sound-

Timothy the ability to moderate his thoughts and feelings, so that he does not deal with abuse by becoming emotionally and spiritually abusive. Without this gift he would not be able to love properly and exercise spiritual power in a loving way.

Paul, surprisingly, does not speak of power and love and sound-mindedness as three separate charismata, but as one gift of grace, a single endowment. They belong together and work together in ministry. God the Father gives Timothy the power to love in a sound-minded way.

Paul uses a vivid picture to describe Timothy's daily empowerment for ministry. He tells Timothy to *rekindle, anazōpurein*, God's gift of grace that was placed in him at his ordination. This odd verb combines two graphic images: rekindling a fire on the kitchen hearth from the left-over coals in the morning before breakfast and the revival of a dying or dead person.

Here Paul alludes to the rekindling of the holy fire on the altar at the temple. In the Old Testament the priests did not light the fire for the altar of burnt offering. It was lit by God himself. On the day that the divine service was inaugurated at the tabernacle, fire came from the Lord's presence in the Holy of Holies and kindled the wood on the altar (Lev 9:23-24).³ Each morning the priests on duty rekindled the fire with the coals from the previous day; each evening they covered them up with ashes to keep them alight overnight (Lev 6:8-13). Through that holy fire God manifested his life-giving, glorious presence to his people; through that perpetual fire he sanctified the altar and all the offerings that were placed on it. That fire, with its pillar of smoke, was his epiphany to his people, the theophanic manifestation of his glory (Lev 9:6, 23).

Like that heavenly fire, God's gift of the Holy Spirit to Timothy needs to be rekindled each morning on the altar of his heart. By his use of that picture Paul encourages Timothy and us to keep the Spirit's fire alive by daily meditation and prayer.⁴ The kindling of that flame, the flame of devotion, is like a daily resurrection, empowerment for daily ministry by the daily reception of the Holy Spirit. It sanctifies him each day to do holy work in his holy calling to be a pastor, for as Paul says in 1 Timothy 4:5: *everything is sanctified by the word of God and prayer*.

Unusual Empowerment

After reminding Timothy of the need for the ongoing reception of the Spirit, Paul adds something unexpected about the use of Spirit's power:

minded people have a clear sense of themselves and their situation in the world, a sense of sober self-appraisal that comes from faith in Christ and the knowledge of God's grace (Rom 12:3). Its awareness of God's judgment leads to prayerfulness (1 Pet 4:7). Sound-mindedness is both a gift of the Spirit (2 Tim 1:7) and a requirement for all Christians, whether they are male pastors (1 Tim 3:2; Tit 1:8), women at prayer (1 Tim 2:9, 15), older men (Tit 2:2), younger men (Tit 2:6), or older and younger women (Tit 2:4-5).

³ See Kleinig, *Leviticus* (Concordia Commentary. St. Louis: Concordia, 2003), 146-49.

⁴ See Paul's similar instruction to be aglow with the Spirit in Rom 12:11.

⁸So do not be ashamed of our Lord's testimony or of me, his prisoner, but suffer abuse together with (me/Christ) for the gospel according to the power of God, ⁹who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages of time began, ¹⁰and has now been manifested through the epiphany of our Saviour, Christ Jesus, who abolished death itself and shone out life and incorruptibility through the gospel, ¹¹for which I have been appointed a herald and apostle and teacher.

The Holy Spirit empowers Timothy in two ways. First, God's Spirit frees him from shame, the shame that comes from his identification with Jesus, the crucified Messiah and his association with Paul in his imprisonment by the Romans. That shame comes from the preaching of the gospel, the *testimony* of Jesus to himself as the Holy Messiah who had to be crucified to save the world from sin and the apostolic *testimony* that Jesus, a disgraced criminal, is their *Lord*. The message of Christ crucified and risen has never been and will never be socially acceptable and culturally respectable.

Second, God's Spirit empowers Timothy to *suffer the abuse* that comes to those who preach the gospel of Jesus.⁵ The Spirit gives courage to withstand antagonism and the power to endure opposition, because it unites Timothy with Jesus and Paul in the solidarity of suffering. They suffer for the gospel *according to God's power*, the power to endure abuse, graciously and confidently, without succumbing to a victimised sense of shame that lashes out in retaliation against those who set out to shame them. That supernatural power is needed to cushion and curtail the destructive impact of abuse, for, as we all know, those who have been abused physically or verbally or emotionally all too readily become abusive in turn.

The gospel gives the criterion for understanding how God exercises his power by repaying evil with good. Suffering abuse is not just the inevitable result of the faithful proclamation of the gospel; its endurance shows how God exercises the power of his Holy Spirit in a mysterious, paradoxical way. God uses His power to absorb the impact of evil and confront death head on. He shows His great power by enduring abuse without recourse to self-defence and retaliation. He does not exercise his power by promoting himself and disempowering others, but by disempowering death and honouring humanity. So God's gracious endurance of abuse bears witness to His grace which endures evil and brings good out of evil.

Paul mentions four aspects of this mysterious sense of empowerment. First, God uses his power to *save* Paul and Timothy and us from eternal death and to *call* us to do his holy work together with Jesus. As pastors we have a *holy calling*; we share in his holiness and administer it to others through God's holy Word. We are stewards of His holy mysteries (1 Cor 4:1).

Second, God does not use his power to reward pastors for their service of him, but to honour them by giving them the *grace*, the privilege, of administering His grace here on earth. That is His *purpose* for us as ministers

⁵ See also the use of the same verb in 2 Tim 2:3; cf. 2 Tim 2:9; 4:5; James 5:13.

of the gospel. Like Paul we work with Jesus as ministers of God's grace (Eph 3:2-12).

Third, even though God's gracious purpose, his *purpose and grace*, is an eternal gift, a heavenly mystery, something that God had already provided in Christ before time began, God *now manifests* his gracious power in time and space through *the epiphany* of Jesus as the Messiah. In ancient Greek epiphany was a pagan religious term for the visible appearance of a hidden god, an appearance that made his character and power known to people on earth. While Paul normally uses this term in the pastoral letters for the final revelation of Jesus as Judge and King on the Last Day (1 Tim 6:14; 2 Tim 3:1, 8; Tit 2:13), he uses it here for the present appearance of Jesus to the saints in the church.⁶ The present epiphany of Jesus as Saviour, through the proclamation of the gospel, anticipates his final epiphany in glory at the close of this age. So wherever the gospel is preached we have an epiphany of the risen Lord Jesus. There those who have the eyes of their hearts enlightened see Jesus and know his riches and power (Eph 1:15-19).

Fourth, the power of God is evident in his abolition of *death* itself by Christ's death and resurrection and his delivery of *life and incorruptibility*⁷ through the gospel. Jesus, the Spirit-raised Christ, did not just preach the gospel directly to the apostles after his resurrection; he now preaches it through them and its other heralds, the pastors who come after them in the apostolic ministry of the gospel. Paul envisages its proclamation as a light that *shines out* into a dark place and lights it up, like the sun at the dawn of a new day.⁸ The gospel brings *life and incorruptibility* to light by disclosing the presence of Jesus and his life-giving, life-preserving light to those who hear it.

That's where Paul fits into the picture. As a *herald* he proclaims the good news of Christ; as an *apostle* he represents the risen Lord and bears witness to him and his grace; as a *teacher* he initiates people into the mystery of Christ by catechising them with God's Word. Best of all, God has appointed him to do this together with Jesus. Like Paul we too are privileged to be heralds of Christ and teachers of God's Word that reveals the mystery of Christ present with us in the divine service.

Guarding Christ's Investment

That demonstration of God's gracious power by appointing him as a minister of the gospel affects Paul in two ways. He says:

¹²For this reason I too suffer these things, but I am not ashamed, for I know him whom I have trusted, and I am convinced that he has the power to guard my deposit until that day.

The abuse that Paul suffers as a teacher of the gospel does not have its desired effect on him. It is meant to shame him publicly and discredit his message. But

⁶ See also the use of the verb 'appear' in Tit 3:4-7.

⁷ This term which is normally used for the enduring state of the resurrected body (4 Macc 9:22; 17:12; Wis. Sol. 2:23; 6:19; Rom 2:7; 1 Cor 15:42, 50, 53-54) here describes the incorruptible life that Christ provides already now to God's people.

⁸ See 2 Cor 4:4, 6; Eph 1:18; 3:9.

the abuse is, in fact, counterproductive, because shows that the power of the gospel does depend on Paul and his own resources; it depends on Jesus and what Jesus has entrusted to Paul as his *deposit* with him. When Paul speaks about this *deposit*,⁹ he envisages Jesus as a wealthy benefactor who entrusts his own property to Paul as a steward for safe-keeping, a manager of it for delivery to others.¹⁰ That deposit is the gospel, the teaching of Jesus, the tradition that Paul has received from Jesus and now ‘deposits’ with students who are properly qualified to teach that heritage to others as well (2 Tim 2:2). The gospel is our inheritance from him.

There is, however, a strange twist to Paul’s use of this illustration. Paul does not have to guard Christ’s investment in him; since it is Christ’s investment, Christ himself guards it so securely that no one will ever be able to take it from him. That has been borne out by Paul’s own experience. By the abuse that he has endured from his faithful stewardship of the gospel, Paul has learnt to trust in Jesus more fully for his vindication; he has come to know him and his power better, the power that is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor 12:9). That sense of protection and empowerment produces conviction and confidence because it proves how trustworthy Christ is.

Paul then gives two pieces of advice to Timothy as a teacher to help him avoid spiritual disempowerment. He needs to hold onto those things that empower him in his teaching of the gospel and guard them as his life-lines. He says:

¹³Hold onto the pattern of healthy words that you heard from me. ¹⁴By the faith and the love that are in Christ Jesus, guard the good deposit through the Holy Spirit who dwells among us.

Since success in ministry depends on the power of God’s Spirit that is at work in the gospel, a good teacher needs to do two things. A good teacher needs to use the right words in the right way. The right words are the “healthy teaching” of Jesus and the apostles.¹¹ That apostolic teaching is now written down in the New Testament. Its Spirit-inspired, Spirit-inspiring words are “healing words,” hygienic, wholesome words, “the healthy words of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Tim 6:3), because they produce a “healthy faith” (Tit 1:13) and make people “healthy in faith and love and endurance” (Tit 2:2).

The picture here is of the pastor as a doctor engaged in the care and cure of souls. While false teaching produces a sick conscience, healthy teaching, teaching that is consistent with the gospel, produces good conscience, a conscience that trusts in the gospel and expects good things from God (1 Tim 1:5-11).¹² Yet these words cannot be used anyhow, but they must be used in the right way, the right *pattern*¹³ as is set out by the creed and

⁹ See also 1 Tim 1:18; 6:20 and the use of the verb in Luke 12:18; 1 Tim 1:18; 2 Tim 2:2.

¹⁰ Paul may be influenced in this by teaching of Jesus in Luke 12:42-48; 16:1-12; 19:11-27.

¹¹ See 1 Tim 1:10; 2 Tim 4:3; Tit 2:2.

¹² See Acts 23:1; 1 Tim 1:19; 1 Pet 3:16, 21.

¹³ The term *ὑποτύπωσις* which Paul had used in 1 Tim 1:16 for himself as the exemplary prototype for Christ’s dealing with sinners, here describes the

taught helpfully with the right distinction between law and gospel. That orthodox pattern of teaching the gospel comes to Timothy and us from Paul himself.

As well as that, Timothy and every teacher of the gospel must not just prize it but must also *guard* the heritage of healthy, healing teaching that he has received from Christ. Yet even that is done in a strange way. The deposit of good teaching is not guarded best by a commendable zeal for pure doctrine; it is best guarded *by the faith and the love that are in Christ Jesus*. The use of the article here with faith and love indicates that they are given and available to every Christian; they are created and maintained by the Holy Spirit. *The faith* is what we believe in, our common faith in the triune God, the faith that the Holy Spirit creates in us; *the love* is God's love, the love that is poured out on us by the Holy Spirit, the love that we, in turn, pass on to others. Satan attacks the deposit of teaching by attacking that faith in Christ and that love for each other. So that deposit is guarded and preserved for posterity by our reliance on the Holy Spirit to keep our faith and love alive. The fire of the Spirit is kept burning by daily meditation on God's word and daily prayer for the Holy Spirit to make his residence in us and to *dwell*¹⁴ among us as his holy temple. The Spirit sanctifies us so that our bodies are temples of the living God.

Daily Encouragement

Well what does all this have to do with us? This teaching gives me great encouragement to overcome the fear of embarrassment. It encourages me to seek daily empowerment for ministry from the Holy Spirit; it encourages me to endure opposition as a powerful affirmation of my work as a teacher of the gospel; it encourages me to rely on God's healing word to do its work through my teaching; it encourages me to rely on the Holy Spirit to guard the heritage of teaching in the church. The success of my ministry does not depend on me; it depends on the power of God's Spirit in me and my proclamation of the gospel.

So I am proud to be a pastor, a minister of the gospel in a society that feels so threatened by Jesus that it abuses its preachers. With Paul I say:

I am not ashamed, for I know him whom I have trusted, and I am convinced that he has the power to guard my deposit until that day.

standard that he himself provided as a pattern for Timothy to emulate.

¹⁴ The indwelling of the Spirit in Rom 8:11 coincides with the indwelling of faith in 2 Tim 1:5.