

Introduction to 2 Timothy Chapter 1

Unashamed: The Gift of God, the Call to Suffer, and the Guard of the Gospel

Second Timothy is the last letter Paul ever wrote. He is in Rome, in chains, awaiting what he fully expects to be his execution. The letter is not a theological treatise or a pastoral manual for church order in the way 1 Timothy is — it is a final letter from a father to a son, from an apostle to his most trusted co-worker, from a man who has finished the race to the man he most wants to keep running it. It is the most personal of Paul's letters, and it is written from the most extreme position Paul ever occupied: not the productive imprisonment of Philipians, but the cold, isolated, abandoned imprisonment of a man whose colleagues have largely left him and whose execution is imminent.

Chapter 1 establishes the letter's most urgent theme with immediate intensity: do not be ashamed. The shame that Paul has in view is not personal embarrassment but the socially and spiritually costly act of publicly identifying with the gospel and with the imprisoned apostle who proclaims it. Timothy is apparently tempted — or Paul fears he is tempted — to distance himself from the disgrace that Paul's imprisonment represents in Roman eyes. The charge of the chapter is to resist that temptation: to fan into flame the gift of God that was given through the laying on of Paul's hands, to rely on the power of the Spirit rather than a spirit of timidity, and to join with Paul in suffering for the gospel.

The theological heart of the chapter is the remarkable compressed summary of the gospel in verses 9–10: the God who 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, and has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. This is the gospel that Paul has been appointed to proclaim, that he is suffering for, and that he refuses to be ashamed of — because he knows the one in whom he has believed, and he is convinced that He is able to guard what has been entrusted to him until that day.

The chapter closes with two contrasting examples: Phygelus and Hermogenes, who have deserted Paul in Asia — the negative exhibit of shame in action — and Onesiphorus, who has done the opposite: he searched for Paul in Rome, found him, refreshed him, and was not ashamed of his chains. Onesiphorus is the positive exhibit of what unashamed loyalty to the imprisoned apostle and the suffering gospel looks like in practice. The chapter thus brackets its central theological argument between two concrete examples — the desertion that shame produces and the service that unashamed love produces — and leaves Timothy to decide which pattern he will follow.

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father,

We come to 2 Timothy chapter 1 as people who understand the temptation that this chapter addresses — the temptation to be ashamed. We know what it is to be associated with something that the world around us finds weak, foolish, or socially costly. We know what it is to feel the pull toward distance — to keep our faith quiet, to avoid the association with the imprisoned apostle, to hedge our identification with the gospel when the identification becomes costly. We come to this chapter needing the same charge Paul gives Timothy: do not be ashamed.

Lord, fan into flame whatever gift You have placed in us by Your Spirit. Let the timidity that fear produces give way to the power and love and sound mind that the Spirit supplies. Let us hear the call to suffer for the gospel not as a burden we did not expect but as the participation in the purpose that You designed before time began — the holy calling that is grounded not in our works but in Your purpose and grace, given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began and revealed now through His appearing.

Give us the confidence of the man who says: I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day. Let the certainty of the God who is able be the resource for the unashamed boldness the chapter calls for. And let the example of Onesiphorus — who searched until he found, who refreshed the isolated apostle, who was not ashamed of the chains — be the model that shapes our response to the gospel's demands on our loyalty and our love.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

2 Timothy 1:1–5

The Greeting and the Gratitude: Faith That Travels Through Generations

- (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, my dearly beloved son:
Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.*
- (3) I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day;*
- (4) Greatly desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears, that I may be filled with joy;*
- (5) When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice;
and I am persuaded that in thee also.*

The Context

The opening of 2 Timothy differs from 1 Timothy in a way that is immediately perceptible even in translation. The greeting of 1 Timothy was apostolically authoritative — by the command of God our Savior. The greeting here is apostolically grounded but pastorally tender — by the will of God, according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus. The authority behind the letter is the same: Paul is an apostle by divine appointment. But the framing of that authority here is the promise of life — the eschatological anchor that will sustain the person who is being called to suffer for the gospel. The apostleship is grounded not in administrative command but in the promise that is the reason for the suffering: life in Christ Jesus, which no Roman execution can extinguish.

The term of address — my dearly beloved son — is warmer than 1 Timothy's my true son in the faith. This is the language of a father who knows he may not see his son again, and who is writing from that awareness. The triple blessing of grace, mercy, and peace is identical to 1 Timothy's greeting, but here it carries the weight of a man who is in chains and who knows that the son he is writing to will need all three in concentrated form for what is coming.

The thanksgiving of verses 3–5 is one of the most personally revealing passages in all of Paul's letters. He mentions his forefathers — a reference that places his Christian faith in continuity with the Jewish faith in which he was formed, not in discontinuity with it. He mentions his prayers for Timothy, which are continuous — night and day, without ceasing. He mentions Timothy's tears — almost certainly the tears of their last parting — and his longing to see him. And he names the generational faith that has produced Timothy: the unfeigned faith that dwelt first in his grandmother Lois, then in his mother Eunice, and now, Paul is persuaded, in Timothy himself.

The word unfeigned — the Greek is *anupokritos*, without hypocrisy — is the same word used in 1 Timothy 1:5 for the sincere faith that is the source of genuine love. It is genuine faith, not performed faith. Faith that is really believed, not faith that is adopted for social or religious advantage. And this genuine faith has a genealogy: Lois to Eunice to Timothy. The faith that now rests in Timothy is not a novelty. It has been shaped and passed on by the two women who preceded him in it. The grandmother and the mother are the first generation of the faith that Paul is now calling Timothy to guard and pass on to the next.

Plain American English

From Paul — an apostle of Jesus Christ by God's will, according to the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus — to Timothy, my dear son. Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. I thank God, whom I serve with a clear conscience just as my ancestors did, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. I long to see you — I still remember your tears when we parted — and I know that seeing you again would fill me with joy.

I'm reminded of your genuine, sincere faith — the kind that lived first in your grandmother Lois and then in your mother Eunice, and I'm fully convinced it lives in you too.

Key Observations

“The promise of life which is in Christ Jesus”: This signifies **The Apostolic Identity Is Grounded Not in Command Alone but in the Eschatological Promise That Makes Suffering Intelligible.**

The shift from 1 Timothy's by the command to 2 Timothy's according to the promise of life is not accidental. A man facing execution writes not from the platform of administrative authority but from the anchor of eschatological hope. The promise of life in Christ Jesus is the reason why the apostleship is worth exercising, why the gospel is worth suffering for, and why the execution that is coming cannot be the last word on anything. Paul writes from the promise. The promise is the ground under everything the letter will say. The person who receives the letter is being invited to stand on the same ground: not the ground of current circumstances, which are terrible, but the ground of the promise of life, which is in Christ Jesus and which no Roman authority can revoke.

“The unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice”: This signifies **Genuine Faith Has a Genealogy and the Transmission of Faith Across Generations Is One of the Most Significant Ministries Available to the Ordinary Believer.**

The naming of Lois and Eunice is one of the most important moments in the chapter for its pastoral implications. These are not apostles. They are not church leaders or teachers in the formal sense. They are a grandmother and a mother who passed on genuine faith to a child who became one of the most significant figures in the early church. The unfeigned faith that Paul sees in Timothy is not a product only of Paul's mentorship, though Paul's influence has been enormous. It is the fruit of the faith that was planted and cultivated by two ordinary women whose names appear in only one verse of the entire New Testament. The transmission of genuine faith from one generation to the next is the most ordinary and the most consequential form of ministry available to any believer.

“Without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day”: This signifies **The Continuous Intercession of the Senior Believer for the Junior Is Both a Pastoral Gift and a Theological Statement About the Nature of Christian Relationship.**

Paul's statement that he remembers Timothy night and day without ceasing is not a conventional expression of pastoral affection. It is the description of an actual prayer practice, conducted in actual darkness, in an actual Roman prison, by an actual man who expects to die. The prayers are for the person he has invested most in, from whom he is most separated, and whom he most wants to see. The intercession is a form of presence — the presence of the one who cannot be physically present. And it is a theological statement: the relationship between the mentor and the mentored in the faith is a relationship that the Spirit sustains across the distances and the circumstances that would otherwise sever it.

What This Means for Us Today

1. Ground Your Identity in the Promise, Not in the Circumstances: The apostolic grounding of 2 Timothy 1:1 in the promise of life rather than in the command of administrative authority is the model for every believer who is exercising a calling in circumstances that are difficult. The circumstances do not define the calling. The promise does. The person who is doing the work of the gospel in conditions that look like failure, isolation, or marginalization is doing the work from the same ground Paul stands on in prison: the promise of life in Christ Jesus that no adverse circumstance can revoke. Ground the calling there. Let the promise be the authority under the difficulty.

2. Invest in the Transmission of Genuine Faith Across Generations as a Primary Ministry: The example of Lois and Eunice is the most direct available encouragement to every parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, or older believer who wonders whether their quiet, ordinary investment in the faith of the next generation matters. It matters. The unfeigned faith that Timothy carries into his apostolic co-working with Paul grew first in the soil of a grandmother's and a mother's genuine faith. The most significant ministries in the church are often not the visible, public ones. They are the invisible ones: the faith transmitted at a kitchen table, the prayers prayed over a sleeping child, the conversations about God conducted in the ordinary rhythms of family life.

3. Practice Continuous Intercession for Those You Have Mentored in the Faith: Paul's night-and-day remembrance of Timothy is the model for the ongoing responsibility of the mentor to the mentored. The relationship does not end when the mentored person moves on to their own assignment. The prayers continue. The intercession persists. And from prison — from the most isolated and constrained position Paul has ever occupied — the prayers are the form of presence available to him, and he exercises them without ceasing. Practice the prayers for the people you have invested in. They are the form of presence available when physical presence is not.

How This Relates to Today

The generational dimension of the faith in verses 3–5 is one of the most counter-cultural elements of the chapter in a church context that often treats conversion as the beginning of a personal spiritual journey with no necessary connection to what came before. Paul's faith is continuous with his forefathers'. Timothy's faith has Lois and Eunice behind it. The faith is not a personal discovery made in isolation but a gift received and transmitted through relationships, through families, through communities of people who believed before the current generation and who passed on what they received. The recovery of this generational and communal understanding of faith is one of the most important correctives available to the contemporary church's tendency toward the individualistic spiritual consumer.

The pastoral warmth of verses 3–4 — the tears remembered, the longing to see, the joy anticipated — is also a reminder that the apostolic ministry is not an abstract institutional function. It is a set of deeply personal relationships, conducted between people who love each other, who pray for each other, and who long for each other's presence. The professionalization of ministry that treats the pastoral relationship as a service relationship between provider and consumer has lost something essential that Paul's letter to Timothy embodies: the father and the son, the prayers night and day, the tears at the parting, the longing for reunion.

Key Lesson: **The greeting of 2 Timothy is the greeting of a man who writes from prison according to the promise of life that no execution can revoke, to the son in the faith who carries the unfeigned faith of his grandmother and his mother, for whom the imprisoned apostle prays night and day without ceasing — and the first charge of the letter will be grounded in everything this greeting establishes: the promise, the faith, the relationship, and the prayers.**

2 Timothy 1:6–10

Fan Into Flame: The Gift, the Spirit, and the Gospel That Is Worth Suffering For

(6) Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands.

(7) For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.

(8) Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner:

but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God;

(9) Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works,

but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began,

(10) But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel:

The Context

The charge of verse 6 — fan into flame the gift of God — presupposes the danger that is being addressed: not that the gift has been extinguished, but that it has diminished, that the fire is still there but burning low, that the person who received the gift through the laying on of Paul's hands has allowed the circumstances — the imprisonment of his mentor, the hostility of the environment, the social cost of identification with the gospel — to reduce what should be a flame to an ember. The charge is not to receive a new gift. It is to stir up what is already there. The fanning is the active work of the person who has been given the gift — the deliberate rekindling of what the Spirit has placed in him.

Verse 7 is one of the most quoted and most practically useful verses in the Pastoral Epistles: God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. The contrast is not between the Spirit and a spirit of fear but between two possible orientations of the inner life: the one that fear produces — timidity, withdrawal, silence, shame — and the one that the Spirit produces — power, love, and sound judgment. The spirit of fear is not God's gift. The power,

love, and sound mind are. Therefore the timidity that Timothy is apparently exhibiting is not the work of the Spirit; it is the work of something else — and it can be resisted, because the Spirit who has been given does not produce it.

The charge of verse 8 arrives with direct force: do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner. The two objects of potential shame are linked: the testimony of Jesus and the imprisoned Paul. In Roman eyes, a man in chains awaiting execution is not a person of honor. Association with him is socially costly. The temptation to maintain a respectful distance from the disgraced apostle is the same temptation that leads to silence about the gospel. Paul refuses the distance: join with me in suffering for the gospel, according to the power of God.

The theological ground for the charge is laid in verses 9–10 — the most compressed and complete summary of the gospel in the chapter. The God who saved and called does not do so according to works but according to His own purpose and grace, given in Christ Jesus before time began and now revealed through the appearing of Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. This is what is being suffered for. This is what shame would abandon. The gospel about the God who purposed salvation before creation, who revealed it in Christ, who abolished death through His resurrection — this is the testimony that is worth the cost of the suffering.

Plain American English

That's why I'm reminding you to keep fanning into flame the gift of God that came to you when I laid my hands on you. Because God didn't give us a spirit of timidity and fear — He gave us a spirit of power, love, and clear judgment. So don't be ashamed of testifying about our Lord, and don't be ashamed of me just because I'm His prisoner. Instead, join me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God. He is the one who saved us and called us to a holy life — not because of anything we've done, but because of His own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before time itself began, but now it has been revealed through the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has completely defeated death and brought life and immortality into the open through the gospel.

Key Observations

“Stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands”: This signifies **The Gift Is Already Present and the Work of Rekindling It Is the Active Responsibility of the Person Who Has Received It.**

The command to fan into flame implies a gift that is present but diminished — not absent but not fully active. The fanning is the deliberate, active engagement of the person who has been given the gift with the gift itself: the Spirit-given capacity for ministry, proclamation, and service that was recognized and commissioned in the laying on of hands. The charge is not passive — it is not wait for God to stir it up, or hope that circumstances will rekindle it. It is active: you fan it. You stir it. You take the responsibility for engaging with what you have been given in such a

way that it burns as it was designed to burn. The diminishment of the gift is not God's doing. The rekindling is the believer's active response to what God has given.

“God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind”: This signifies **The Spirit's Gifts Are the Specific Antidotes to the Specific Temptations That the Call to Suffer for the Gospel Produces.**

The three gifts of verse 7 — power, love, and sound mind — are precisely the three things that the spirit of fear attacks. Fear undermines power: the person who is afraid retreats from the bold action that the ministry requires. Fear undermines love: the person who is afraid withdraws from the costly other-directedness that genuine love demands. And fear undermines sound judgment: the person who is afraid makes decisions based on threat-avoidance rather than on the clear assessment of what the situation actually requires. The Spirit's gifts are the targeted provision for the targeted attacks of the spirit of fear. Power for the retreat. Love for the withdrawal. Sound mind for the panic. Claim the gifts against the attacks.

“Be not therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner”: This signifies **The Specific Objects of Shame Are the Testimony and the Imprisoned Apostle — and the Refusal of Shame Is the Active Identification with Both.**

The specificity of the charge is pastorally important. Paul does not simply tell Timothy not to be ashamed. He identifies what Timothy might be ashamed of: the testimony of Jesus and the imprisoned Paul. These are the two specific things that social pressure in the Roman world would lead a person to distance themselves from. A crucified Savior was a scandal. An imprisoned apostle was a disgrace. Identification with both was socially costly. The charge is not to overcome generic shame but to actively identify with these two specific things — to testify to the Lord and to stand with the prisoner — in the face of exactly the social cost that the identification carries. The refusal of shame is active, specific, and costly.

“Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began”: This signifies **The Gospel That Is Worth Suffering for Is the Gospel of a Grace That Preceded Creation Itself.**

The theological grounding for the unashamed suffering of verse 8 is the theological statement of verses 9–10 — and the grounding is massive. The gospel is not a religious option among others. It is the revelation of a grace that was given in Christ Jesus before time began, purposed before creation, revealed in the incarnation and resurrection of the Son, and now proclaimed through the apostle who is in chains for proclaiming it. The person who is being asked to suffer for this gospel is being asked to suffer for the most ultimate thing that exists: the eternal purpose of God for the salvation of human beings, revealed in the only person who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light. Suffer for this. It is worth it.

What This Means for Us Today

1. Actively Fan Into Flame Whatever Gift the Spirit Has Given You: The passive waiting for the gift to rekindle itself is not the model of 2 Timothy 1:6. The active fanning is. This means deliberate engagement with the spiritual practices — prayer, scripture, community, service —

that fan the flame of the Spirit's gift rather than allowing the circumstances of difficulty, discouragement, or isolation to reduce it to an ember. Ask: what is the gift God has placed in me? And then ask: what am I doing, actively, to fan it into flame rather than allow the spirit of fear to diminish it?

2. Name the Spirit of Fear and Claim the Spirit's Gifts Against It: The spirit of fear that verse 7 addresses is a real spiritual dynamic that operates in real believers in real circumstances — and it can be named and resisted. When the temptation to silence, withdrawal, or shame is present, the resource is the identification of what is producing the temptation (the spirit of fear, not the Holy Spirit) and the active claiming of what the Spirit has given: power for the retreat, love for the withdrawal, sound judgment for the panic. The gifts are already present. They do not need to be acquired. They need to be actively claimed against the spirit that would suppress them.

3. Ground the Call to Suffer in the Theological Reality of the Gospel's Eternal Scope: The suffering that Paul calls Timothy to is not arbitrary discomfort. It is the participation in the proclamation of the grace that was purposed before creation and revealed in the only person who has abolished death. When the cost of identification with the gospel feels disproportionate, the grounding is the theological magnitude of what is being proclaimed: not a human religious system but the eternal purpose of God, revealed in the person who has conquered death and is bringing life and immortality to light. Suffer for this. The magnitude of the gospel is the measure of the worthiness of the suffering.

How This Relates to Today

The spirit of fear that 2 Timothy 1:7 identifies is perhaps the most immediately applicable diagnosis available to the contemporary church's epidemic of silence. The church in the Western world has access to more resources, more theological education, more communication platforms, and more social freedom than the church in any previous generation — and it is arguably less bold in its proclamation of the gospel than at many previous points in its history. The spirit of fear has produced the retreat into safe Christian subculture, the silence in the public square, the embarrassment about the specific claims of the gospel that might offend or alienate. Paul's diagnosis applies: God has not given us a spirit of fear. The timidity is not the Spirit's work.

The theological statement of verses 9–10 is also one of the most direct available correctives to the contemporary tendency to treat the gospel as a means of personal self-fulfillment rather than as the revelation of an eternal divine purpose. The gospel Paul is suffering for is the gospel of a grace that was given before time began, revealed in a person who abolished death, and proclaimed through apostles who are in chains for proclaiming it. This is not the gospel of personal improvement or spiritual experience, however real and wonderful those things may be. It is the gospel of the God who purposed salvation before creation and accomplished it in the death and resurrection of His Son. This gospel is worth suffering for. It was designed to be proclaimed in the face of exactly the hostility and social cost that made it costly in Rome and that makes it costly now.

Key Lesson: **The call to fan into flame the gift of God is the call to active, deliberate engagement with the Spirit's provision against the spirit of fear that would diminish it — and the*

*ground for the unashamed suffering to which the call leads is the theological magnitude of the gospel: the grace that was purposed before creation, revealed in the person who abolished death, and proclaimed through the apostle who refuses to be ashamed of it from prison.**

2 Timothy 1:11–14

I Know Whom I Have Believed: The Confidence of the Suffering Apostle and the Guard of the Gospel

*(11) Whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle,
and a teacher of the Gentiles.*

*(12) For the which cause 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 that which I have committed unto him
against that day.*

*(13) Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me,
in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.*

*(14) That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost
which dwelleth in us.*

The Context

The movement from verses 11–12 to verses 13–14 is the movement from Paul’s confidence to Timothy’s charge. Paul has identified his three-fold calling — preacher, apostle, teacher of the Gentiles — and named the suffering it has produced. And then, in one of the most luminous declarations in the New Testament: I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that day. The confidence is not in his own faithfulness or his own theological precision. It is in the One in whom he has believed — the personal, known, trusted God who is able to guard the deposit.

The phrase I know whom I have believed is important for what it does not say. It does not say I know what I have believed — though Paul knows that too, and the content of his belief is enormously important. It says I know whom. The confidence is personal and relational before it is propositional. It is grounded in the character of the Person who is the object of the faith, not only in the correctness of the content of the faith. The God who is known — whose faithfulness, whose power, whose purpose, whose love have been demonstrated in the gospel — is the God who is able to guard the deposit. The persuasion is based on the character of the One in whom the faith is placed.

The charge to Timothy in verses 13–14 is the charge that flows from Paul’s confidence: hold fast the pattern of sound words that you heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

And guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you, through the Holy Spirit who lives in us. The deposit is the gospel — the pattern of sound words that Paul has transmitted to Timothy and that Timothy now carries as his primary pastoral responsibility. And the guard of the deposit is not accomplished by Timothy's own strength but by the Holy Spirit who dwells in him. The charge is active: guard. The resource is divine: the Spirit.

Plain American English

And for this gospel I was appointed as a herald, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles. That's exactly why I'm suffering these things. But I'm not ashamed at all — because I know the One I have trusted, and I am absolutely convinced that He has the power to protect everything I have placed in His care until that final day. Hold on to the pattern of healthy teaching you've heard from me — hold it with the faith and love that come from Christ Jesus. Guard that precious treasure that has been entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

Key Observations

“I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day”: This signifies **The Confidence of the Suffering Believer Is Grounded in the Known Character of the Person Trusted, Not in the Observable Outcomes of the Trust.**

Paul's declaration from prison is one of the most personally costly and theologically significant statements in his letters, because it is made from the position where the observable outcomes of the trust are at their most discouraging: abandoned by colleagues, in chains, awaiting execution. The confidence is not — cannot be — based on how things are going. It is based on the known character of the One in whom the faith is placed. I know whom I have believed: the personal knowledge of God that has been developed across a lifetime of encounter with the God who met him on the Damascus road, who sustained him through shipwreck and beatings and imprisonment, who revealed His character in the gospel and in the person of the Son. That knowledge is the ground of the confidence. It does not shift with the circumstances.

“Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus”: This signifies **The Pattern of Sound Words Is the Shape That the Received Gospel Takes and the Holding Fast Is the Active Preservation of That Shape Against the Pressure to Distort It.**

The form of sound words — the Greek is *hupotuposis*, a pattern or outline — is the shape that the received gospel takes when it is faithfully transmitted. It is not the mechanical repetition of identical phrases but the preservation of the essential pattern: the shape of the theological content that Paul has passed on to Timothy and that Timothy is now charged to preserve and pass on. The holding fast is active resistance to the pressure to alter the pattern — the pressure that the false teachers of 1 Timothy were already exercising and that will continue throughout the second letter. And the context in which the holding fast happens is faith and love in Christ Jesus — the interior conditions of genuine faith that produce genuine love, which 1 Timothy 1:5 identified as the goal.

“That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us”: This signifies **The Guard of the Gospel Deposit Is the Work of the Spirit, Not the Achievement of the Individual Believer’s Theological Precision.**

The charge to guard the deposit is accompanied by the specification of the means: the Holy Spirit who dwells in us. This is the critical balance of the passage: the guard is Timothy’s active responsibility (keep — an active imperative), but the resource for the keeping is the Spirit’s indwelling power, not Timothy’s own theological competence or personal fortitude. The person who guards the gospel by their own strength will exhaust themselves and eventually fail to hold it. The person who guards it in the Spirit — in the reliance on the indwelling resource that does not depend on the circumstances — is guarding with the resource that does not run out. The charge is active. The resource is divine. Both must be held together.

What This Means for Us Today

1. Ground Your Confidence in the Known Character of God Rather Than in the Observable Outcomes of Your Faithfulness: Paul’s I know whom I have believed is the model for every believer who is in a position where the observable outcomes of their faithfulness are discouraging. The person who has prayed without visible answer, served without visible fruit, suffered without visible vindication — the resource is not the outcomes but the character of the One in whom the faith is placed. Know Him. Develop the personal knowledge of the God who is revealed in the gospel and whose character does not shift with the circumstances. The confidence is in the One who is able to guard what has been committed, not in the visible evidence that the guarding is happening on the timeline we prefer.

2. Hold the Pattern of Sound Words as a Shape to Be Preserved, Not a System to Be Defended: The form of sound words that Timothy is charged to hold fast is a pattern — a shape — not a system of propositions to be defended in theological combat. The holding fast is the active preservation of the essential shape of the received gospel against the pressure to distort it, conducted in the context of faith and love in Christ Jesus. The person who holds the pattern in faith and love is holding it in the soil from which genuine theological fidelity grows. The person who holds it as a system to be defended against opponents has shifted from the holding that the verse describes to a different activity entirely — one that may be necessary but that is not the same as the faithful preservation of the pattern in faith and love.

3. Guard the Gospel Deposit in the Spirit’s Power, Not in Your Own Theological Strength: The balance of verse 14 — guard it (your active responsibility) through the Holy Spirit (the divine resource) — is the model for every aspect of the ministry of the word. The person who guards the gospel by their own strength will eventually fail: will be worn down by opposition, will become theologically brittle, will lose the love that is supposed to accompany the sound doctrine. The person who guards it in the Spirit’s power is guarding with the resource that is as inexhaustible as the indwelling of the Spirit itself. Practice the active reliance on the Spirit in the exercise of the guarding — the prayer, the dependence, the ongoing submission to the One whose resource is sufficient for every form of the keeping.

How This Relates to Today

The statement I know whom I have believed is one of the most needed corrections to the contemporary church's tendency to ground its confidence in theological correctness rather than in the personal knowledge of God. Theological correctness matters — the whole chapter is about sound words and the guard of the deposit. But the confidence that sustains the suffering is not the confidence of the person who has their theology right. It is the confidence of the person who knows the God of whom the theology speaks. The correction is not to care less about the content of the faith but to invest more in the personal knowledge of the One who is the faith's object. Know whom you have believed. Let the content of the faith be the map to the territory of the personal knowledge of God.

The balance of verse 14 — guard it / through the Holy Spirit — is also one of the most needed correctives to the two most common failures in the ministry of the word: the passive failure that treats the guard of the gospel as God's responsibility and contributes nothing of active effort to it, and the activist failure that treats it as the minister's own achievement and exhausts itself in the effort. The active imperative and the divine resource must be held together: guard actively, in the Spirit's power. Neither alone is the model. Both together is the charge.

Key Lesson: **The confidence of the apostle in chains is the confidence grounded not in observable outcomes but in the known character of the One in whom he has believed — the One who is able to guard what has been committed to Him until that day — and the charge to Timothy that flows from this confidence is to hold the pattern of sound words in faith and love, and to guard the good deposit not in his own strength but in the power of the Spirit who dwells in him.**

2 Timothy 1:15–18

Desertion and Devotion: Two Responses to the Suffering Gospel

(15) This thou knowest, that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me; of whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes.

(16) The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain:

(17) But, when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently, and found me.

(18) The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day: and in how many things he ministered unto me at Ephesus, thou knowest very well.

The Context

The chapter closes with two contrasting examples that give concrete human flesh to the abstract charge of the chapter's earlier verses. The desertion of those in Asia — the broad, vague, painful reference to the colleagues who have turned away — is the negative exhibit: this is what the

spirit of fear produces when it is not resisted. It produces turning away. It produces the calculated distance from the imprisoned apostle that shame recommends. And Phygelus and Hermogenes are named as part of this group — not, apparently, as heretics or false teachers, but as people who were once close to Paul and who, faced with the social cost of that closeness, chose the distance.

Against this dark background, Onesiphorus is the luminous exception. He came to Rome. He searched for Paul — diligently, the text says, which suggests that finding Paul was not easy, that the imprisoned apostle was not in a convenient or publicly accessible location, and that finding him required sustained effort. And having searched, he found him. He was not ashamed of Paul's chains. He refreshed him — a word that suggests the renewing of a person who is depleted, the bringing of energy to a person who is exhausted. And the prayer that Paul offers for Onesiphorus — may the Lord grant him mercy in that day — is the apostolic blessing on the person whose unashamed loyalty has been the most concrete demonstration of what the chapter's charge looks like in practice.

The mention of Onesiphorus's ministry in Ephesus — in how many things he ministered to me at Ephesus, you know very well — establishes that the Roman visit is not an isolated act of loyalty but the continuation of a pattern of service that Timothy has personally witnessed. Onesiphorus is not an opportunistic friend who shows up when the apostle is famous. He is the consistent servant who has been serving for a long time and who has not allowed the apostle's imprisonment to change the pattern.

Plain American English

You already know that everyone in the province of Asia has turned their backs on me — Phygelus and Hermogenes among them. But may the Lord show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus — he has refreshed me so many times and was never embarrassed by the fact that I'm in chains. When he got to Rome, he searched hard to find me — and he did. May the Lord grant that he will find mercy from the Lord on that final day. And you know better than anyone just how much he served me back in Ephesus.

Key Observations

“All they which are in Asia be turned away from me”: This signifies **The Desertion of the Suffering Apostle by Those Who Knew Him Is the Most Personally Painful Form of the Shame That the Chapter Warns Against.**

The reference to the desertion of those in Asia is one of the most humanly vulnerable moments in all of Paul's writing. He does not name all the deserters — the all they is deliberately vague, perhaps to protect the individuals, perhaps because the number is too large to enumerate. But he names Phygelus and Hermogenes — two people who were apparently significant enough that Timothy would recognize the names, and whose turning away was therefore not merely the loss of acquaintances but the loss of people who had been close. The desertion is the human reality of

what the spirit of fear produces when it is not resisted: not dramatic apostasy, but the quiet, calculated withdrawal from association with the person whose imprisonment makes the association costly.

“He oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain”: This signifies **The Unashamed Service of Onesiphorus Is the Concrete, Biographical Exhibit of What the Chapter’s Central Charge Looks Like When It Is Obeyed.**

The description of Onesiphorus’s service is the most practically grounded statement in the passage: he refreshed Paul, repeatedly; he was not ashamed of the chains; he searched diligently until he found Paul in Rome. These are not abstract virtues. They are concrete acts of loyalty performed in the specific conditions that make the acts costly: the imprisonment of the person being served, the social disgrace of the chains, the difficulty of finding a prisoner in Rome. The refreshment is physical and personal: the presence of the loyal friend who is not embarrassed by the circumstances, who brings something of warmth and encouragement to the cold and isolated man. Onesiphorus is what the charge of verse 8 — be not ashamed — looks like when it is lived.

“The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day”: This signifies **The Apostolic Prayer for Onesiphorus Is the Most Direct Available Statement That Unashamed Loyalty to the Suffering Saint Is a Form of Service to the Lord Himself.**

The prayer that Paul offers for Onesiphorus — may the Lord grant him mercy in that day — is eschatological: the day is the final day of judgment and reckoning, when the accounts will be settled and the service will be rewarded. The prayer is not for present prosperity or social advantage. It is for the final mercy of the Lord on the day when every act of service to the imprisoned apostle will be evaluated by the One who receives such service as service to Himself. The eschatological dimension of the prayer is the theological ground for the importance of the service: what Onesiphorus did for Paul in Rome is the kind of thing that will matter on that day.

What This Means for Us Today

1. Name the Desertion That the Spirit of Fear Produces Without Excusing It: The naming of Phygelus and Hermogenes in the letter is the apostolic refusal to pretend that the desertion did not happen or to minimize its pastoral cost. The desertion is real. The pain of it is real. The people who are named did something that caused genuine harm to the isolated apostle. The contemporary church’s tendency to avoid naming failure — to protect reputations, to avoid conflict, to maintain the appearance of unity — sometimes prevents the honest assessment of the desertion that Paul models here. Name it. Not to damage the deserters but to be honest about the cost of the spirit of fear when it is not resisted. The naming is the warning for those who might otherwise make the same choice.

2. Practice the Onesiphorus Pattern: Seek Out the Isolated and Refresh Them Without Embarrassment: The Onesiphorus pattern is simple and reproducible: find the person who is isolated in difficulty, seek them out with diligent effort, and be with them without embarrassment about their circumstances. The contemporary equivalents of Paul’s chains — the illness, the depression, the failure, the disgrace, the imprisonment that makes association with the sufferer socially awkward — are the arenas in which the Onesiphorus pattern is most needed and most often abandoned in favor of the comfortable distance that shame recommends. Search diligently.

Find the isolated person. Be not ashamed of their chains. Refresh them. This is what the chapter's central charge looks like in the hands of an ordinary believer who takes it seriously.

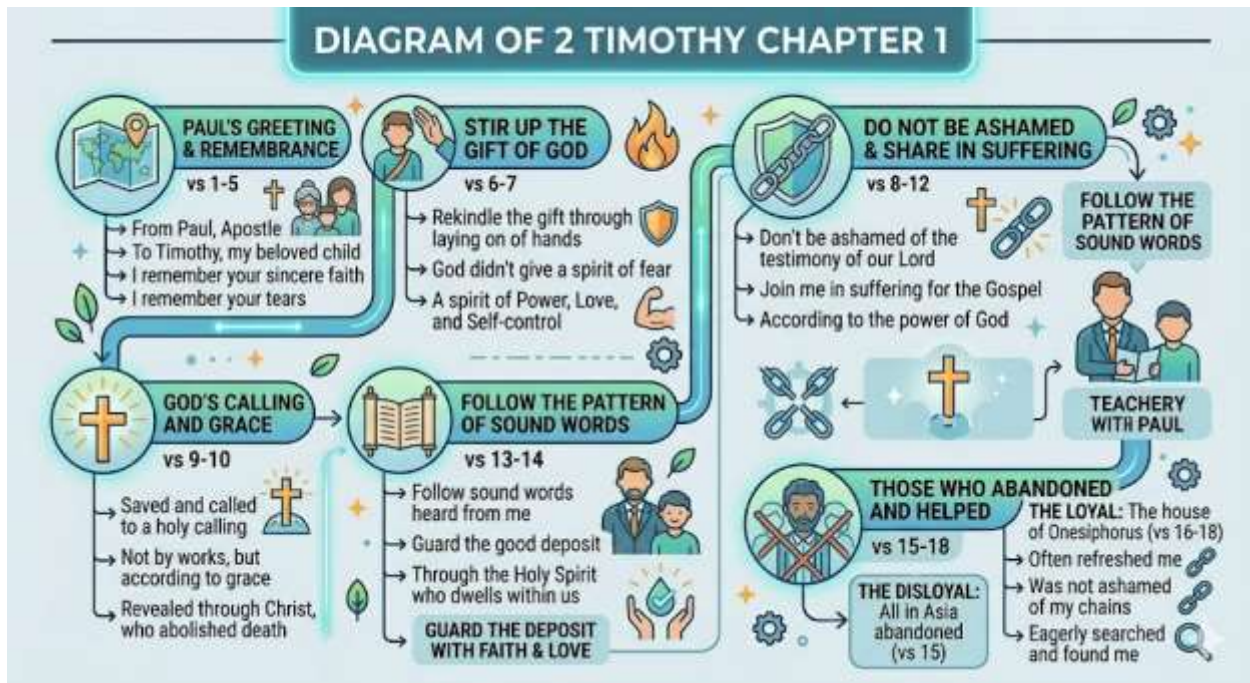
3. Live with the Eschatological Awareness That the Service Rendered to the Suffering Saint Is Service Rendered to the Lord Himself: The prayer for Onesiphorus — may he find mercy in that day — is the reminder that the acts of service performed in the present are accounts that will be settled in the future, by the One who receives service to the least of His brothers as service to Himself. The contemporary church's tendency to evaluate ministry by its scale, visibility, and measurable impact misses the eschatological accounting that Paul's prayer for Onesiphorus presupposes. The small, private, unreported act of finding the isolated prisoner and refreshing him is the kind of thing that the Lord notices, remembers, and will reward in that day. Live with that awareness. It changes the calculus of what counts.

How This Relates to Today

The contrast between the deserters and Onesiphorus is the contrast that every generation of the church faces in every season of persecution, difficulty, or social pressure: the contrast between the person who calculates the cost of the association and retreats, and the person who absorbs the cost and advances. The contemporary church in the Western world does not face chains and execution in the way Paul faced them. But it faces the milder forms of the same social pressure: the cost of identified association with the unpopular claims of the gospel, the cost of standing with the theologically or socially disgraced colleague, the cost of searching out the isolated sufferer when the search is inconvenient. The Onesiphorus pattern is available and practicable in every one of these contexts. The question is whether the spirit of fear or the spirit of power and love and sound mind will govern the response.

The eschatological framing of Paul's prayer for Onesiphorus — may he find mercy in that day — is also the most important corrective to the contemporary church's this-world accounting of ministry value. The things that will matter in that day are not the things that are most visible, most celebrated, or most measurable in the present. They are the things that the Lord notices and remembers: the diligent search, the found prisoner, the unashamed presence, the repeated refreshment. These are the currencies of the eschatological economy. Invest in them.

Key Lesson: **The chapter closes with the two most concrete exhibits of the central charge: the desertion of Phygelus and Hermogenes is what the spirit of fear produces when it is not resisted — the calculated withdrawal from the costly association — and the service of Onesiphorus is what the spirit of power and love and sound mind produces when it governs the response: the diligent search, the found prisoner, the unashamed presence, the repeated refreshment that the Lord will remember and reward in that day.**



Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

We close 2 Timothy chapter 1 having received both the charge and the exhibit — the charge to fan into flame the gift of God, to refuse the spirit of fear, to be not ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of His prisoner, and to guard the good deposit in the Spirit's power. And the exhibit: the deserters who let the spirit of fear govern their response, and Onesiphorus who searched until he found, who refreshed the man in chains, who was not ashamed of anything the chains implied.

Lord, give us the confidence of the apostle who says I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that day. Let the knowledge of You — the personal, relational, experiential knowledge of the God who is revealed in the gospel — be the ground of our confidence when the observable outcomes of our faithfulness are discouraging. Let the persuasion that You are able be the resource for the unashamed boldness that the charge requires.

Fan into flame whatever gift You have placed in us by Your Spirit. Let the timidity that fear produces give way to the power, love, and sound judgment that the Spirit supplies. Let us hold the pattern of sound words in faith and love, and guard the good deposit not in our own strength but in the Spirit's power who dwells in us.

And let us be Onesiphorus to the people in our lives who are isolated in difficulty — who need someone to search diligently for them, to find them, to be with them without embarrassment about their chains. Let the example of his unashamed service be the pattern that shapes our response to the gospel's demand on our loyalty and our love. And may we, like him, find mercy from You in that day.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria
Glory to God Alone