



Faithful Followers

Two Ways to Share in
Suffering for the Gospel

2 Timothy 1:13-18

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Epigraph

*For to this you have been called, because Christ also **suffered** for you, leaving you an example, so that you might **follow** in his steps. (1 Peter 2:21)*

Introduction

What does it mean to be a faithful follower of Christ? What does it mean to be a faithful Christian? Does it mean spending your time at church? Does it mean giving your money to God? Or does it mean more?

Jess and I celebrate our wedding anniversary every July. I find it fitting to ask, what does it mean to be faithful to my wife? Does it mean spending time together? Does it mean collecting our money together in a joint bank account? Or does being a faithful husband mean more?

Context

2 Timothy is Paul's final letter and he is thinking about finishing his race. His course is complete, and he is calling the young Timothy to continue in the work of ministry specifically by sharing in suffering for the gospel:

*Therefore **do not be ashamed** of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but **share in suffering for the gospel** by the power of God...
(2 Timothy 1:8)*

An unashamed Christian is a faithful Christian. It is keeping fidelity to the Gospel. It means staying true to the Savior. Notice that being unashamed, being faithful, is tied to suffering. The Apostle Peter provides us with an unfortunately negative example of this when he denied Jesus three times in the Garden of Gethsemane. At that point, he was ashamed of being associated with Jesus, and he was unwilling to suffer for him.

Sermon Preview

In our passage today, Paul will show us what it means to share in suffering for the gospel. Jesus promises persecution to his people. We must stay faithful when persecution comes. I have not faced the type of persecution that Paul had endured, so he shows us how we can share in his suffering. This is what it means to be a faithful Christian - to live a faithful Christian life. Let's get started.



1. Keep God’s Word

The first way to share in suffering for the gospel is to keep God’s word.

The Spiritual Father

We see this in the life of the apostle Paul. I like to call him the spiritual father. The apostle Paul is Timothy’s spiritual father. Paul tells Timothy to keep God’s word, and he does this by following good doctrine and guarding the gospel:

***Follow** the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, **guard** the good deposit entrusted to you. (2 Timothy 1:13-14)*

Timothy is to follow the sound words that he has heard from Paul, his spiritual father. The sound words refer to the gospel, but specifically to the doctrines that he has learned about God and about living in God’s world. Following is more than simply remembering. He is to hold firm and keep them. Notice the mention of the Holy Spirit. This is how he is to guard the good deposit. The Holy Spirit is the means, the way, the Helper. This shoutout to the Spirit completes Paul’s mentioning of the entire Holy Trinity in verses 8-14. The full force of God will empower Timothy to endure. Paul has complete confidence in God – that Timothy will guard the Gospel and the good doctrine he’s learned. There is a relational aspect here. You can see that Timothy knows Paul personally. The spiritual son is to imitate his spiritual father. To keep the perspective of a spiritual father and son in mind, Paul is telling Timothy: “I’m passing on my ministry to you. Protect what I’ve taught you. Don’t forget it. Live it out. God will empower you to do it.” He is leaving a legacy of ministry marked by the grace and strength of God.

Paul will use the word “entrust” again later on, in 2 Timothy 2:2: “and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.” There is a following and guarding and entrusting and teaching that all ties in to what it means to keep God’s word.

Application: By Entrusting and Teaching

So, like Paul, Timothy’s spiritual father, will you keep God’s word by entrusting it and teaching it to others? While this mainly applies to pastors, we all can practice and participate in sharing and spreading God’s word. Keeping God’s word does not mean keeping it for yourself – it means to make

sure it does not stop at you – but that it continues to spread out to others. It means to protect it but also to pass it down. Playing football serves as a great illustration. Once you receive it, you don't just hold on to it. You run with it. You move it down the field. Notice that there is a certain “togetherness” when it comes to keeping the word. Paul is not giving ultimate responsibility to Timothy – he's telling him to get others involved, train and teach others, make mature disciples – and this is what I want to emphasize in our application point: Discipleship.

I recently shared with my Sunday School class that it has been 20 years since I graduated from high school. Why do I still stick around with the youth at our church? There are many reasons, but one reason is because of how I believe my Christian faith was formed and shaped by older men who disciplined me in my youth.

For those of you who are older, I challenge you to find someone younger and walk with them in their faith. There is nothing more helpful to a freshman than having a senior as an older friend. And for those of you who are younger, or for those of you who are going off to college, I encourage you to seek out these relationships – to be humble and to ask someone older to come alongside and guide you in your walk with God. The heart of discipleship is entrusting and teaching the Gospel to others.



2. Care for God's Church

The second way to share in suffering for the gospel is to care for God's Church. When I say God's Church - I don't mean the physical building. I'm talking about God's people. We're going to see this in the lives of Phygelus and Hermogenes, and then Onesiphorus. Let's look at them one at a time, starting with Phygelus and Hermogenes.

The Disloyal Deserters

Phygelus and Hermogenes – I like to label them as the disloyal deserters. This is the only time that these two are ever mentioned in the entire Bible, and this is what they get to be known for – to have deserted, turned away from Paul:

*You are aware that all who are in Asia **turned away from me**, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes. (2 Timothy 1:15)*

They abandoned him, they turned against him, turned their backs on him. He was left and forsaken by his friends. Paul was ministering in what is now modern-day Turkey. It was then known as the Roman province of Asia, including cities like Ephesus, and he was ministering there probably for about 2-3 years. To be clear, there were more who deserted Paul – notice how Paul says that all who are in Asia abandoned him – but these two men seem to have been more prominent and well-known. Perhaps they were leaders. In fact, Paul says that Timothy is well aware, meaning, you know this - this was common knowledge - so you know these leaders and their situation. There's a sense of shame, feeling forgotten. You can sense the despair in Paul. It's discouraging when well-known, famous figures forsake the faith. Some speculate that maybe Paul was arrested and put in prison and no one was there to help him. Imagine being put in prison, or in the hospital even, and no one comes to see or visit you. They were unwilling to suffer with him. They were ultimately ashamed to associate with Paul. They refused to relate to him. You can understand why it brings so much joy to Paul to see Timothy remain loyal.

This language of loyalty is actually the language of love. Later in this letter, Paul mentions Demas, another disloyal deserter, saying in 2 Timothy 4:10: "For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica." Demas deserted Paul because he loved the world – more than his Savior and more than his friend.

The Faithful Partner

Onesiphorus is next, and I like to call him the faithful partner. Onesiphorus is Paul's faithful partner in ministry. Look at all the ways Onesiphorus was a faithful ministry partner to Paul:

*May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often **refreshed** me and was **not ashamed** of my chains, but when he arrived in Rome he **searched** for me earnestly and **found** me— may the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that day!—and you well know all the **service** he rendered at Ephesus. (2 Timothy 1:16-18)*

Onesiphorus is said to have refreshed Paul. Paul used this language of refreshment in Philemon 7, speaking about receiving joy and comfort from love. Specifically, he says that his heart is refreshed as Christians receive and welcome each other. There's this language of actively taking in – and you can see it continues with these action words of Onesiphorus having searched and found Paul. Onesiphorus, the faithful partner in ministry, could not keep distant, but persisted in getting to Paul. Paul brings up his chains, his imprisonment, and Onesiphorus not being ashamed of this, possibly pointing to something darker as Onesiphorus may have well been persecuted or imprisoned himself for getting to Paul. Notice that Paul asks God to grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, with some stating the possibility that Onesiphorus had given his life to get to Paul. Paul writes with winsome words, saying that just as Onesiphorus found Paul, he blesses Onesiphorus to find mercy from God. Paul is saying that when you make sacrifices for the gospel - God will pay you back. Not in this life, but in the life to come.

I already talked about being loyal and loving to fellow believers, and this was certainly the case for Onesiphorus and Paul. We're reminded of Matthew 25:35-40 about how ministering to Christians is actually ministering to Christ himself. When we serve each other, we are serving our Savior. And in Hebrews 6:10, we read that: "For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do." Good works are evidence of true faith – the fruit of your love for God and serving God's people. Paul actually ends by mentioning Onesiphorus' service. His service to Paul was not strange. Onesiphorus was well known for his service to the church. It's an artful way to end, for as he served in Ephesus, so does he serve as an example to believers everywhere.

To summarize our examples of what it means to care for God's church, I would say it comes down to loyalty and love. To put it in more practical terms for application, this loyalty and love is exercised and experienced as we stay with and serve God's church.

Application: By Staying and Serving

So, will you stay with and serve God's church? Again, this first applied to our pastors — but we are called to stay with and serve in our local church. While our first application was towards personal relationships, I want to aim this second application towards commitment to the local church body. Many of us want community, but we must remember that true community comes from commitment to each other. And our community isn't built on our friendships, but our faith. The disciples didn't start out as a group of friends. They started out as single people called together around the communal mission of serving Christ and his kingdom. Commitment is being loyal to your local church. My upbringing as an Asian American actually illustrates this well. There is an ingrained sense of loyalty to family, parents, and elders. There is a loyalty towards our work. There is a loyalty we have towards those with authority. We should be loyal towards the Lord and his Church! So we stay and serve, committed to our church community.

Steve Robinson wrote a book called *Serve: Loving Your Church with Your Heart, Time, and Gifts*. He gives two scenarios where we might be scared to commit ourselves to serving God. He describes the problem of "waiting for what's next," where people put off serving because they are waiting for the perfect timing. But he also describes the problem of "the good old days" where people refuse to serve because they are stuck in whatever people they served with or methods they used in the past. Robinson tells us that God calls us to commit to serve him in the present, with what he has given us and whoever is with us.

I sometimes ask myself if staying and serving at FCBC Walnut for my entire life was worth it. Would I have been better off if I went to a new church when I was in college? Every time, my honest answer is no. This is the church that disciplined me. This is the church where I met my wife. This is the church where I made my best friends. But it's not about me — this is the church where I get the privilege to participate in God's work. It is not a stretch to say that God used FCBC Walnut to shape my life. I pray that he will continue to use it to shape the lives of others.



The Gospel

As you and I share in suffering for the gospel, we join closely with Jesus when he went to the cross:

*He was **despised** and **rejected** by men, a man of **sorrows** and acquainted with **grief**; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. (Isaiah 53:3)*

The gospel message and the Son of God himself suffered for our sake. It was our sin, our despising and rejecting of God that grieved him. It severed our relationship with him. We deserve to be punished. But God made a way of escape. Admit you are a sinner, believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who died on the cross for your sins, and confess him as the resurrected King and Lord over your life. You will be saved. The world will see you as foolish, but you will find eternal treasure and everlasting joy.

Through the life of Paul, we along with Timothy are able to see a real-life example of what it means to bear the reproach of Christ. We are reminded of Hebrews 13:13: “Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured.” And in Romans 1:16 Paul powerfully proclaims: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”

Big Idea

Faithful followers of Christ share in suffering for the Gospel by keeping God’s word and caring for God’s Church.

It’s doctrine and devotion. It’s the Bible and believers. This would be an appropriate time to think about our fellow believers around the world, especially for those who face persecution like Paul. We must pray for them and support them – knowing God’s Church is global.

Conclusion

Let's go back to the beginning again for our conclusion. I asked you: What does it mean to be a faithful follower of Christ? Faithful followers of Christ share in suffering for the gospel by keeping God's word and caring for God's Church.

The Apostle Peter, the one who denied Christ, learned this lesson:

*but if anyone **suffers** as a Christian, he is not to be **ashamed**, but is to glorify God in this name. (1 Peter 4:16)*

And as I think about my wedding anniversary and marriage, being a faithful husband means keeping my wife - to lead and guard her - and also to care for her with loyalty and love - to stay with her and to serve her. Being a faithful follower of Jesus means to share life together with Christ and his Church. It's more than giving your time and money - it's a giving of yourself. God wants your whole heart. We rejoice with those who rejoice, and we weep with those who weep - especially with those who are suffering for the sake of the Gospel.

Jesus promises persecution to his people. No matter what happens to us, we are to keep God's word and care for God's church. For those who want to be faithful followers of Christ, for those who seek to share in suffering for the Gospel, God also gives us this promise:

*But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore **God is not ashamed to be called their God**; for He has prepared a city for them. (Hebrews 11:16)*



Come and Follow Me

Come and follow me
Take up your cross, deny
And keep the word
Care for the church
To find true love and life
You'll suffer, not forever
And I will hold you close
You'll keep the word
Care for the church
And bring my sheep back home
I'll help you to be faithful
To glorify my name
To keep the word
Care for the church
My people, unashamed

References

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