

2 TIMOTHY 1:8

SHARE IN SUFFERING

“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.”¹

The call of Christ is not as is commonly presented in contemporary church life. We preachers do issue a call for our hearers to receive the freedom that is offered in Christ; and sinners will find freedom in the Lord Christ. In Christ we are freed from condemnation and freed from judgement; we are set free to come into the presence of Holy God. And while it is essential that we preachers stress the freedom that is ours in Christ, what is not often mentioned is that the call of Christ is not a call to an easy life. Christ calls His followers to do hard things; and the call of God often entails suffering. We who teach the Word are guilty before the Lord when we neglect to caution would-be disciples that God’s call is a call to suffer.

It is common among western churches to restrict the concept of suffering to physical ailments that afflict the whole of mankind. Reading the text for this day, it is difficult to believe that Paul is calling Timothy to suffer from gout, or to experience headache or muscle cramps. Reviewing the Apostle’s life, it is obvious that he experienced pain—real pain and heartache. Writing the Corinthian Christians, Paul was compelled to recite the forms of opposition he had faced as an Apostle, together with the very real trials that accompanied practise of the Faith.

“Whatever anyone else dares to boast of—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast of that. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they offspring of Abraham? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman.” At this point, the Apostle begins a recitation of his life as an Apostle of Christ. He begins by noting, “far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.” All these things speak of physical trials and toil; they do not even begin to mention what a servant of Christ feels for the work he oversees. Therefore, the Apostle turns to the emotional toll of serving Christ. “Apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant” [2 CORINTHIANS 11:21-29]?

When Paul calls Timothy to suffer, it is evident that he is not inviting Timothy to endure an upset stomach, ingrown toenails or the pain of psoriasis. The context makes it abundantly evident that the Apostle is calling the younger minister to join in that particular suffering that arises whenever one stands with the Gospel. The suffering to which Timothy is called is the suffering that all who dare serve will experience even in this day; moreover, it is quite likely that all Christians can anticipate opposition, frequently being called to endure both physical and emotional suffering. Make no mistake, as the Apostle shall shortly attest, “All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” [2 TIMOTHY 3:12].

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Paul has in view genuine assault against the faithful when he issues this warning. The Risen Lord of Glory used this precise term when He first confronted the enraged rabbi of Tarsus. Recalling the day he met Jesus, the Risen Master, Paul testified before an enraged Jewish mob, “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day. I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women, as the high priest and the whole council of elders can bear me witness. From them I received letters to the brothers, and I journeyed toward Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished.

“As I was on my way and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me. And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’ And I answered, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And he said to me, ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, *whom you are persecuting*’” [ACTS 22:3-8].

The Apostle knew that those who were aware of his past life would understand that he endeavoured to injure the followers of the Master. To the Corinthians, he testified, “I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because *I persecuted the church of God*” [1 CORINTHIANS 15:9]. The Churches of Galatia received this written testimony from the Apostle: “You have heard of my former life in Judaism, how *I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it*” [GALATIANS 1:13].

The term Paul used speaks less of an incidental attack than it does of a systematic, organised assault against an identifiable people. As used in this letter, and as implied in our text, the idea conveys the probability of pursuit with the intent of extirpation. It is the appropriate concept applied to the continued attacks by Muslims against Christians in Syria, in Iraq, in Libya, in Egypt—in short, in virtually every land where Islam is the majority religion.

I am bringing this message, speaking openly because of my love for this congregation. I do this because of what I see on the horizon. I live in the hope of the resurrection, and I believe in the return of Christ the Lord for His people. I believe that He may come momentarily, and that when He comes the redeemed of God shall be transformed into His likeness, in a moment, in the twinkling of the eye. Nevertheless, while we are in this flesh, we must know that we are not loved by the world. Because the world cannot love us, it will attack the Faith. Pogroms against the faithful are not some novel event just starting; they have been conducted since earliest days. Therefore, Paul’s invitation to a younger minister has relevance for us in this day.

FOUNDATIONS —“I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well. For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

“Therefore...” [2 TIMOTHY 1:5-8a]. I have reminded you on multiple occasions, anytime you see a “therefore,” ask what it is there for. The text opens with this device designed to remind us of the reason this particular invitation to experience opposition and suffering is issued. Timothy is invited to embrace his heritage—a heritage of vibrant faith. He is encouraged to avoid fleeing from opposition precisely because he is a follower of the Christ. Moreover, Paul acknowledges that Timothy’s pursuit of the Saviour began in his youth, growing out of the instruction provided by both his mother and his grandmother. Timothy must not disgrace those who invested themselves into his life. Neither must he imagine that he can honour God and seek approval from the world. Such efforts are always doomed to failure in the Christian’s life.

More than this, Paul is making a pointed application drawn from the reminder that Timothy has just been urged to accept responsibility to be fanning into flame the effective work of the Spirit who dwelt in his life. The Holy Spirit of God takes up residence in the life of each believer at the point of salvation. Your body, if you are a child of God, was instantly transformed into a Temple of the Lord as the Spirit of God moved into your life. Whether He now works in power or whether He is now quiescent depends upon whether you are obedient to God's will or whether you are exalting your own desires over His will. Obedience to the commands of the Master determines how effective you shall be in service to His cause. At this point in the missive, Paul was urging the younger minister to remember his heritage and to remember the One who even now was working in his life.

Ultimately, no Christian wants to dishonour the Master. However, the more immediate relationships enjoyed with other mortals often dictate our responses. Though we live in the presence of the Living Saviour, we are not always conscious of His proximity. We are, however, aware of how other people see us. It is only as we allow ourselves to remain self-centred that we cease to allow the perception of others in the congregation to guide our choices. It is an axiom of the Faith that *the cowboy who rides off into the sunset rather than investing himself in the life of those who love him is exposed as self-centred*. Such an individual is acting in the most selfish manner imaginable. Assuredly, he is not following the example of Christ in such actions.

While I would not turn your attention from honouring the Master who gave Himself for you, I am compelled to remind you that your choices reflect on those with whom you share worship. If the assembly of the faithful is merely an organisation you join and leave at your convenience, then your time may be better spent snowmobiling, fishing or vegging on Sunday. However, if the congregation is the Body of Christ, you must consider that your actions will either enhance the beauty of Christ's chosen bride or you will demonstrate through your actions that Christ's bride is but a tawdry trollop that can be used for your own perverted purpose.

We play a dangerous game whenever we begin to degrade the Body of Christ in our own mind, justifying our own fallen desires. Whenever we exalt our pique to the point of justification for satisfying our fallen desires, we dishonour the Lord, to be certain; worse still, we show contempt for Him whom we call "Lord" by treating His bride as though she was a plaything. We read the Congregational Covenant before the Communion Meal, and if we fail to recognise the work of Christ in our midst, we say by our choices that everything we confess is a lie.

Does the Christian actually forget holy relationships she once enjoyed? Can a twice-born individual actually turn from pursuing the will of God to pander to her own interests? Tragically, it appears that such can be the reality. Paul decries saints who place their own interests—whatever those interests may be—above those of Christ. Commending Timothy to the Philippians, Paul wrote, "I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ" [**PHILIPPIANS 2:20, 21**].

I've served among the churches of our Lord for many years. During those years of service to the people of God, I've witnessed multiple people who became disgruntled and left the fellowship where they had been appointed by God. Some became disillusioned, thinking that they didn't receive enough recognition for what they did. Others were piqued by something that was said from the pulpit. Still others felt slighted by some individual within the assembly. In every instance, those who left failed to implement the very statement they repeated before the Communion Meal: "We ... promise to watch over one another in brotherly love; to remember each other in prayer; to help each other in times of trouble; to be not easily offended and always ready to forgive and settle differences, remembering Christ's command to do so quickly."

Some who left would seek out another congregation where they could worship. It is a wonderful thing that God has provided congregations where Christ is honoured, where the Word is declared and where the people of God endeavour to honour Christ as Lord. Such congregations will be found throughout our world—we should be grateful that such is the case. Often, however, it appears that those who left in anger chose to attend another congregation less as a matter of seeking Christ's honour than seeking to make a statement. Their choice often appeared to be an act of spite as though their action could hurt those they had just left. Throughout the many years of observing such actions, I can testify that though these individuals may have been wonderfully used by God in their previous service, seldom have they made a lasting contribution to the congregation they sought out.

Others would cease pretending to serve God in order to pursue their personal interests. Their choices were justified by various stratagems—they needed a break (though I can recall none who returned to service after a rest) or they needed to pay more attention to work or to family (though the attention was normally centred on themselves). Perhaps these deluded souls actually thought they were making their families stronger, though in many instances where I've been able to observe the outcome after some years, children or grandchildren of these erstwhile saints have little to do with the Faith. How could it be otherwise? The younger members witness their parent or their grandparent demonstrating through their choices that relationship with Christ is optional. These are exposed as people who served God and His people so long as such service complemented their personal agenda. In short, their actions revealed that they had served because they imagined that they were getting something in exchange for their service.

When I forget who I am and ignore where the One I confess as Lord has placed me, I will soon gain a new name—*VICTIM*! When I allow the Spirit who dwells in me to cease working in power, I immediately become susceptible to loss and ruin. If there is hope that I can withstand the trials that come to all who know Christ as Lord of life, it will be because I have fulfilled the admonition given in the preceding verses. The “therefore” in our text is critical to a holy life. The “therefore” in our text is essential to a successful Christian life. The “therefore” in our text is necessary for a victorious witness and for honouring the Lord Christ.

DO NOT BE ASHAMED — “Do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner.” The Spirit who lives within us is revealed in the believer's life through “power and love and self-control.” Since this is the Spirit we inherited from God, then how is it that we can ever be ashamed. Since the child of God that is controlled by the Spirit cannot be fearful or distracted from what is vital, I must wonder about the words of the Master found in **MARK 8:38**. “Whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.” By implication, the one who is ashamed before the denizens of this darkened world is obviously not filled with the Spirit.

What causes us to be ashamed? Especially, what causes a believer to be ashamed? Shame results from exposure of differences with those from whom we seek acceptance. Why does shaming work in some instances and not work in others? Shaming results when our differences are pointed out to people from whom we seek acceptance or approval. If we try to fit in with a particular group and our differences are exposed, we feel ashamed. What is tragic about shaming is that the basis for acceptance is often so perverted. The groups from which we seek acceptance are often grossly out of step with the Word of God. It is only our desire to be acceptable to the world that allows the world to have any hold over our actions.

Let's think about this briefly. Aberrant behaviour invited swift censure from people in an earlier day. Those on the receiving end of such social censure were shamed by the response of society. Society shared a moral code that was understood to seek God's approval. Though individuals sometimes transgressed social mores, these actions were exceptions and not the rule. However, those halcyon days are long gone and the things for which people are ashamed are far different today. Because society appears to have lost its moral bearings, things that once caused shame are no longer shameful. Actions that were once commendable are ridiculed and mocked. The Faith is reduced to a caricature. And the faithful are marked by their silence.

In an earlier, more stable day, a licentious or lascivious lifestyle was cause for shame. Today, people boast about multiple affairs or aberrant sexual proclivities. I read this week of a swingers club in Nashville that could not get approval for zoning. So, the club rebranded itself as a church and the city complied with zoning requests. The dance floor was designated as the sanctuary. Forty-nine little side rooms were designated as "prayer rooms." Two rooms set apart for sadomasochist activities are now designated as a "choir room" and a "hand bell room." The club is experiencing an influx of new members.² One has to ask, "Have they no shame."

After reviewing the conditions to which Israel had plummeted before the Babylonian conquest, Jeremiah spoke of the conditions of the people of the land. He asked,

"Were they ashamed when they committed abomination?
No, they were not at all ashamed;
they did not know how to blush."

[JEREMIAH 6:15a]

The censure delivered is akin to that pronounced on another occasion. Having berated Israel for deserting the LORD God, Jeremiah assessed the response of the nation:

"You have the forehead of a whore;
you refuse to be ashamed."

[JEREMIAH 3:3b]

Today, those who are moral, those who seek to honour God, find themselves out of step with society. Christians are attacked and shamed through public assault. Even the President of the United States feels free to castigate the faithful, instructing them to get off their high horse.³ He imagines himself an apologist for Islam while inferring that Christians need to be humbled.

Tragically, mini-tyrants operating at state and local levels are emboldened to attack Christians that actually dare practise their faith. Conscientious followers of the Christ will be compelled to violate their faith or they will be driven into poverty.⁴ Now, even candidates for high office feel free to demand that religious beliefs must be changed.⁵

² Travis Loller, "Nashville sex club claims church status to open near school," <http://metronews.ca/news/world/1349912/sex-club-seeks-nashville-blessing-by-vowing-to-be-a-church/>, accessed 25 April 2015

³ Anthony Zurcher, "Obama's 'high horse': IS, the Crusades and moral equivalency, 6 February 2015, BBC News, <http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-echochambers-31156153>, accessed 25 April 2015

⁴ See George Rede, The Oregonian/OregonLive, April 24, 2015, "Same-sex couple in Sweet Cakes controversy should receive \$135,000, hearings officer says," http://www.oregonlive.com/business/index.ssf/2015/04/same-sex_couple_in_sweet_cakes.html, accessed 25 April 2015; Michael Allen, 17 April, 2015, "Washington State

I have invested time looking at the growth of anti-Christian sentiments now taking place in society in order to consider Paul's admonition. Society has always opposed active and ardent pursuit of the Faith. However, the pressure against the Faith has intensified from what was evident even a few years ago. Today, anyone who dares pray in public, or who even admits to praying, is liable to be ridiculed. Those hardy souls who actually read the Word of God and who endeavour to live according to what is written therein can anticipate opposition and even open mockery. Their concern for others is often parodied, their compassion is misconstrued and they are treated with open contempt. The great tragedy is that this scorn is so effective!

Writing the Roman Christians, Paul testified, "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" [ROMANS 1:16]. His testimony demonstrated that he was walking in the Spirit; thus, there was no fear. Too often we modern followers of the Christ are more concerned with how the world views us than with how Christ views us. So, we are careful not to appear overly religious. We are cautious in our speech, perhaps even telling a few salacious stories so we will fit in with the crowd. And we do not want to make anyone uncomfortable; so obeying the Great Commission is out. Perhaps it is time for us as Christians to begin memorising Scripture again. An excellent verse with which to begin our memorisation is this testimony from the Apostle to the Gentiles. "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" [ROMANS 1:16].

The writer of the Letter to Hebrew Christians spoke of our union with Christ the Lord. "It was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers" [HEBREWS 2:10, 11]. If Christ is not ashamed to call us "brothers," how is it that we who call Him Lord are hesitant to live boldly in His Name and openly seek His will?

Timothy was not to be ashamed of "the testimony about our Lord," and he was not to be ashamed of Paul, prisoner of the Lord. Since Paul is speaking of "Christ Jesus our Lord," the reference here in our text is obviously to Jesus. I am intrigued to read of the serenity displayed by those Christians that are martyred by the Islamist murderers in Syria and especially in Libya. Secular reporters imagine they have found the reason these men don't struggle or inveigh against the unfairness of their situation, curse their captors or call down imprecations on their heads. Reporters have decided that the murders are practised repeatedly so the prisoners will not struggle. I suggest an alternative reason for their courage. These who are being slaughtered as lambs have commended themselves to Him who judges faithfully. They are comforted by the Spirit of God, knowing that they shall soon be in the presence of the Living Saviour.

That phrase Paul uses, "the testimony about our Lord," is more powerful than we might imagine. Paul uses the Greek word *martúron*, from which we derive our English word "martyr." He is not urging Timothy to focus on the death of the Master; rather, he is urging the younger minister to remain focused on the Gospel concerning Christ the Lord. The truth that God became man, offering his life as a sacrifice in the place of fallen man, conquering death and ascending into Heaven was moronic to the Greek mind.

Grandma Won't Sell Flowers For Gay Marriage," <http://mynewspress.com/washington-state-grandma-wont-sell-flowers-for-gay-marriage-video/>, accessed 25 April 2015

⁵ Mark Hensch, "Clinton: 'Deep-seated' beliefs block abortion access," April 24, 2015, <http://thehill.com/blogs/ballot-box/239974-clinton-deep-seated-beliefs-block-abortion-access>, accessed 25 April 2015

Recall the response of the learned Athenians when Paul preached at the Areopagus. Their first encounter with the messenger of life is recorded in **ACTS 17:18**. “Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, ‘What does this babbler wish to say?’ Others said, ‘He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities’—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.” Having declared Christ as Lord and the resurrection of the dead, we are provided the classic summation of his message in Athens. “Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, ‘We will hear you again about this. So Paul went out from their midst. But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them” [**ACTS 17:32-34**]. Mockery, ridicule, deflection marked most. But some believed.

God delights to use what appears foolish and weak in the eyes of mankind. Recall the Apostle’s view of God, society and the message we bring. “The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written,

‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.’

“Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men” [**1 CORINTHIANS 1:18-25**].

The wise of this world must one day die; and they are unprepared for that death. Perhaps they have arranged for cryogenic storage of their body in a vain hope that a cure for what killed them will one day be found. Perhaps they have bravely denounced us who proclaim the message of life, calling us sky pilots and mercenaries seeking only to enrich themselves. However, at the last they face death alone and in fear. It cannot be otherwise, for they are as we once were, “having no hope and without God in the world” [see **EPHESIANS 2:12**].

We Christians are the ones living without fear, for we are confident in Him who saved us. Paul urges believers, “Consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, ‘Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord’” [**1 CORINTHIANS 1:26-31**].

Timothy was to be unashamed of Paul, the prisoner of the Lord. Paul could have meant, “Me, a prisoner for Jesus’ sake”; but he appears to have meant, “Me, one taken captive by Christ Jesus.” The former was true; but the reference is obviously to the latter. Paul is saying that Christ has taken him captive—so much so that he was obedient regardless of what came his way. Even if obedience meant imprisonment, Paul was a captive of the Lord Jesus. ***Bind a man with cords of love and he will never again be free to do his own will.*** This view of Christ as Master not only sustained Paul in prison, but such an understanding would lift Timothy’s spirit as well.

There is close association between suffering and shame. Listen as I read this paragraph the Apostle penned. The paragraph begins with our text for this day. “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, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me” [2 TIMOTHY 1:8-12]. Paul has kept his gaze on the One who called him to serve. He has run with endurance the race that was set before him, “looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith” [see HEBREWS 12:2].

We tend to be timid before the denizens of this fallen world; we are uncomfortable with being bold in Christ. So, we fall silent in the face of evil. We are ashamed of those who are bold in Christ. We often say that we want a preacher who preaches like the Apostle Paul. Do we? Can we actually tolerate such boldness? What if that preacher should embarrass us as Paul embarrassed Peter before the Galatians [see GALATIANS 1:11-14]. What if our preacher exposed our pet preachers who are toning down the Gospel or even disseminating heresy? That is what Paul did to people he called “Super Apostles” [see 2 CORINTHIANS 11:5; 12:11]. We want a bold preacher, until his boldness confronts our timidity. At that point we say that the preacher has quit preaching and begun meddling.

SHARE IN SUFFERING — “Share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God.” Paul calls Timothy to follow a different path than that which is commonly witnessed, even in church life. When the Apostle calls Timothy to “share in suffering,” he uses one Greek word. It is an unusual word made up of three parts: “suffer” (*páschein*), “evil” (*kakòs*) and “with” (*sùn*).⁶ What is more, Paul uses the aorist imperative, indicating that this action is to be taken at once. There was no time for Timothy to weigh the consequences, deliberating his response. Soon after these words were written, the Apostle would invite the younger minister, “Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus” [2 TIMOTHY 2:3].

Identifying as “a good soldier of Christ Jesus” likely cannot be understood by those who have not seen combat. Recently, I posted a note of my concern on a forum. Social engineers in the the United States Government are attempting to force integration of women into the military, the final barrier to full integration is the Infantry Officers Course for Marines. The Marine Corps is under intense pressure to lower the standards for the course so women can pass and become infantry officers. No woman has passed the course to date, and about twenty-five percent of the men who enter wash out. It is a gruelling test of resolve and strength. When men are sent into combat, no one wants them to be led by people trailing behind and yelling, “Wait for me.”

⁶ See Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, **Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains** (United Bible Societies, New York, NY 1996) 285-6; James Swanson, **Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)**, (Logos Research Systems, Inc., Oak Harbor, WA 1997); William Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, et al., **A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature: A Translation and Adaption of the Fourth Revised and Augmented Edition of Walter Bauer's Griechisch-Deutsches Worterbuch Zu Den Schrift En Des Neuen Testaments Und Der Ubrigen Urchristlichen Literatur** (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL 1979) 773; Joseph Henry Thayer, **A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Being Grimm's Wilke's Clavis Novi Testamenti** (Harper & Brothers, New York, NY 1889) 592

A friend, retired with the rank of Major in the USMC, responded to the post. He is a graduate of the IOC; he served his time. This is what he wrote. “People either don't understand, or don't care, about how brutal infantry combat and even routine infantry operations are. At 30 you're old. It's a tough, fast-moving, violent life. It's humping a 75 pound pack, 25 miles, up hills and down. It's throwing out food, to make room for radio batteries, grenades, claymores, 5.56 ammo, 7.62 ammo for ‘the guns,’ mortar rounds ... and all sorts of stuff... It's sleeping on the ground, wearing only your uniform, no bag, no poncho, just lay down and try to sleep... The military has sometimes been used for ‘social engineering.’ Don't let this happen. Marines and Soldiers still have to meet the enemy, eyeball to eyeball, and kill him. Lots of bad guys must die. Marines and Soldiers do just that. They kill. This is what it's all about. Nasty work.” That puts a whole different perspective on what Paul wrote.

Timothy is called to suffer together with Paul. Moreover, he is called to suffer “for the gospel.” The Apostle’s call is sufficiently broad to encompass each Christian; this is not a call restricted to elders and missionaries. The Apostle implies that Timothy would suffer because of his identification with the gospel as a believer and that he would suffer because of his proclamation of that same gospel as a servant of Christ the Lord. Because Timothy identifies as a believer, he can anticipate opposition and the suffering that attends such opposition.

Suffering is a primary theme of this letter. Note a few instances. “I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me” [2 TIMOTHY 1:11, 12].

“I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory” [2 TIMOTHY 2:10].

“You ... have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” [2 TIMOTHY 3:10-12].

“As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry” [2 TIMOTHY 4:5].

The theme of hardship was first presented by Christ Himself when He said, “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, and you will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next, for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes” [MATTHEW 10:16-23].

On another occasion, Jesus warned, “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours” [JOHN 15:18-20].

1 TIMOTHY 1:8
SHARE IN SUFFERING

For too long, preachers have promised what they cannot deliver—a cushy life filled with bouquets and butterflies for those who come to Christ. The call to serve Christ is much more rigorous than that; it is a call to experience hardship and persecution. However, Timothy—and we who now serve the Master—are not required to depend on our own stamina. God has given us His Spirit who empowers us to accomplish all that Jesus appoints us to do. Thus, Timothy is called to suffer for the gospel “by the power of God.” Emphasise in your mind an essential truth: *our ability to endure is never measured by our self-resolve, but by the Spirit of God dwelling in us.*⁷

I do not know what the coming year holds; but I do know who holds the coming year. Neither can I predict the course of Canadian society; but I can say with confidence that I know who directs the course of history, working out all things according to His purpose. I cannot say that we shall or shall not encounter trouble as Followers of the Way. I can say with certainty that I know Him who always stands with His people. The call issued to Timothy in this letter is a call that is issued to each believer. It is a call to keep our eye on the goal of the high calling in Christ. The call of God is a call to stand firm, knowing that victory is certain in Christ our Lord.

And that is our invitation to you who believe. Having placed your faith in the Son of God, serve Him boldly. Do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord. Neither be ashamed of those godly men and women who stand firm in this holy Faith. Rather, share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God. Amen.

⁷ John A. Kitchen, **The Pastoral Epistles for Pastors** (Kress Christian Publications, The Woodlands, TX 2009) 316