

2 TIMOTHY 1:12

HE IS ABLE

“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.”¹

Theologically, the message today is meant for Christians—followers of Christ the Lord. This is appropriate since the text was originally addressed to a follower of the Master and since the current message is delivered during a time of Christian worship. Our world is experiencing a transition from historical Christian morality to strange, startling and novel standards that really are as old as sin itself. Society’s transformation is dizzying—the old order is being abandoned and the new moral order is not fully evident just yet. What is seen is disconcerting, to say the least. Cultural Christians and religious adherents are discomfited, though often willing to join in with a full-throated cry for censure of any who dare stand athwart the mad rush to jettison the old order while embracing a new, controversial social order.

We live in challenging days. Society is being transformed at a dizzying clip; activities and attitudes that were once universally abhorred are now approved and even celebrated, while what was once thought to be good is condemned. The Faith of our Lord Jesus is being tested; and the testing will grow more intense in days to come. Events are unfolding at a dramatic pace as evil brazenly strides through our world. Adherents of this dying world challenge followers of the Master to defend the Faith once delivered. While few are so direct as to openly confront believers, demanding an apology for what is believed, the prevalent tone implies that most inhabitants wish we would just go away. In such a hostile environment, the model for Christian life and service is provided in the words of the Apostle as he was poised on the edge of eternity.

Verse twelve of the first chapter of Paul’s final missive to Timothy is arguably among the best known of all the verses Paul penned in this missive. The assertion readily suggests three significant affirmations that will provide the outline for our message this day. First, Paul speaks of his boldness in the service of Christ when he says, “I am not ashamed.” The Apostle then asserts the reason underlying his bold testimony, “I know whom I have believed.” Finally, Paul testifies to the confidence that he, and assuredly all Christians, should possess when he pens the words, “I am convinced that He is able.” “I am not ashamed.” “I know Whom I have believed.” “I am convinced that He is able.” In three stirring affirmations we have the essence of Christian life and service.

I AM NOT ASHAMED — I have already stated that the Faith of Christ the Lord is being forced into the closet. There was a time, not so long ago, when the things that were done in darkness were concealed because those doing such things were ashamed of what they did. Those things were once universally recognised as “unfruitful works of darkness” [EPHESIANS 5:11]. At that time, we each recognised that “It is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret” [EPHESIANS 5:12]. However, that day has passed; this is a new day—wickedness is in ascendency and righteousness appears to be in retreat. Wickedness has burst forth from the closet where it once lurked. Today, the Faith is being shoved into the closet. Christians are being forced into the closet, as though faith in the Living Son of God is something shameful.

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.

Maybe it is time for us Christians to be in a closet—the prayer closet. In a recent radio broadcast, a well-known pastor said, “Sin which used to hide in the shadows has now come out into the light. I heard it said a few years ago that when some people get out of their closets, it’s time for Christians to get into theirs and pray. We need to pray in our closets and to pray openly as we’re doing today... God doesn’t need America. It’s a great nation. God has given us our life and our liberty. But God doesn’t need America to do what God will do in the world. But America desperately needs God and we need Him today.”² Doctor Jack Graham’s words apply with equal validity to our beloved Canada.

Contemporary morality has been turned topsy-turvy. Those who practise what is defined as indecent and against nature demanded acceptance only a short time past. Soon, not only tolerance, but celebration of those same rebellious acts will be compelled through judicial action. The cost of following Christ has never been cheap. Though I make no claim to being a prophet, it seems abundantly clear that a costly payment for being a Christian will soon be demanded.

Morality in dying days of the Roman Empire was not radically different from the moral condition that describes our modern world. Sexual license, self-centredness, a sarcastic outlook on life, an overweening desire to be entertained seems to have marked that ancient society. Looking out on the city of Corinth, a city that reflected the moral conditions prevalent throughout much of the Empire, the Apostle described the society he witnessed. First, he wrote of a culture that had little time for God—in fact, he described a culture that exalted man and declared an individual’s own pleasure to be the *summum bonum* of life.

Thus the Apostle begins his description. “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things” [ROMANS 1:18-23].

Having excluded God from life, making their own self-interest the centre of their existence, the inevitable result was that members of that ancient society began to worship themselves—their own desires took precedence over all else. “Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen” [ROMANS 1:24, 25].

Self-centred mankind moved inexorably toward utter debasement. Thus, we read, “For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error” [ROMANS 1:26, 27].

We want to believe that immoral individuals can somehow still be “good” people. However, the Apostle makes it plain that one who has excluded God from life is unrestrained; and when restraint no longer reigns, society—the culture of a nation—moves inevitably into every imaginable form of evil as described in the final verses of this chapter.

² Diana Chandler, “Jack Graham: It’s ‘crying time’ in America,” Baptist Press, Thursday, May 7, 2015, <http://www.bpnews.net/44712/jack-graham-its-crying-time-in-america>, accessed 7 May 2015

These are Paul's dark words concluding the passage. "And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them" [ROMANS 1:28-32].

During the days of the Republic, Rome was noted for reasonably high moral standards. After the death of Julius Caesar, Octavius effectively abolished the Republic near the end of the First Century BC, by which time the decline of Rome had begun. The Republic was a movement of the people, based upon the rule of law and a balanced constitution. The Empire exposed the transition that had taken place in society. Increasingly, the populace sought to be supported rather than assuming responsibility. As people ceased to assume responsibility for their own governance, seeking government leaders to rule over them, they ceased to hold to the old moral codes. Like Israel in the days of the judges, "Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" [JUDGES 17:6].

Of Roman society at the time Paul wrote these words, Edersheim has written, "The freedmen, who had very often acquired their liberty by the most disreputable courses, and had prospered in them, combined in shameless manner the vices of the free with the vileness of the slave. The foreigners—specially Greeks and Syrians—who crowded the city, poisoned the springs of its life by the corruption which they brought. The free citizens were idle, dissipated, sunken; their chief thoughts of the theatre and the arena; and they were mostly supported at the public cost. While, even in the time of Augustus, more than two hundred thousand persons were thus maintained by the State, what of the old Roman stock remained was rapidly decaying, partly from corruption, but chiefly from the increasing cessation of marriage, and the nameless abominations of what remained of family-life."³

Religion no longer had power to restrain people and no power to cope with the degeneration. The philosophies of the Greeks failed to meet the deep moral needs demanded by the times. The emperors had become criminal in their conduct and rule. Native born Romans were decreasing in number due in great measure to an emphasis upon sexually deviant acts and to a general decision that children inhibited fulfilment. Seneca testified that children were considered with great disfavour and infant exposure was prevalent. Lawlessness was rampant and unequal administration of the legal codes became commonplace; the moral fibre of society was vitiated. Because of the degeneration of society, corruption marked the governing class. Consequently, any movement that challenged the prevailing social condition was opposed. This was the world in which Paul ministered and in which he wrote the words of our text.

To be certain, Christian evangelists were beaten, imprisoned and treated roughly from earliest days following the Resurrection of the Master. Christians were derided and treated with contempt in a vain attempt to silence them, for the leading lights of that ancient world could not tolerate seeing their lost condition when exposed by the brilliance of Heaven's glorious light. The response of these leaders proved the verity of the apostolic warning delivered in this missive, "All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" [2 TIMOTHY 3:12]. The most common effort to silence the followers of the Christ was to respond with violence in order to force them into silence. Notice how often this is observed in the Word of God.

³ Alfred Edersheim, **The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah vol. 1** (Longmans, Green, and Col, New York, NY 1896) 256

Peter and John had just been employed by the Risen Saviour to heal a crippled man. People were running to them, hearing the message of life in the Son of God, when “the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them” [ACTS 4:1]. Doctor Luke notes of these august leaders of the nation that they “were greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead” [ACTS 4:2]. Thus, Peter and John were imprisoned and put in custody. Unwilling to punish them at this time, the Council threatened them and set them free [see ACTS 4:1-22].

Threats were insufficient to intimidate the Apostles, so the high priest and the party of the Sadducees “arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison” [ACTS 5:18]. Threats had failed to silence Peter and John, so all the Apostles were haled into court. Though many on the Council wanted to kill these followers of the Way, they instead heeded the advice of Gamaliel, “they beat them and charged them not to speak in the Name of Jesus” [ACTS 5:40].

The story continues with one conflict after another as the Jewish leaders vainly attempt to keep the message of Messiah’s death and resurrection from being declared in Jerusalem. They went so far as to use an enraged rabbi named Saul of Tarsus, who engineered the murder of some and the imprisonment of many other Christians.

Opposition to the message of life was just as vicious outside of Jerusalem as it had been in the Jewish centre. Saul of Tarsus was converted to Christ and became known as Paul; he became known as the Apostle to the Gentiles [see ROMANS 11:13]. Chased from Damascus by threats to kill him [see ACTS 9:19-25] and rejected by the Christians in Jerusalem [see ACTS 9:26-30], it appeared that Paul’s evangelistic career would be short-lived. However, a man named Barnabas was sensitive to the Spirit of God; he saw what others couldn’t see in this erstwhile persecutor of the Faith. Thus, he brought Paul back to Antioch where God dispatched these two men on the first missionary journey of the Faith.

What a trip! It was the first of multiple adventures for this valiant herald of the Faith. Beaten, stoned and left for dead, deprived, but let the Apostle himself tell you about his life. Defending his ministry because he was challenged by some whom he called “Super Apostles,” Paul wrote the Church of God in Corinth, “Whatever anyone else dares to boast of ... 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—with 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. And, 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]?

Then, he concluded with a flourish by speaking of his strength, remembering one final incident that could have been overlooked since it was far in the distant past. “If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me, but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands” [2 CORINTHIANS 11:30-33].

In spite of the opposition, in spite of the bitter calumny spewed against the Faith, in spite of the physical violence, Paul boldly testified, “I am not ashamed.” And what was there to be ashamed of? Shame arises when we have acted in a manner that dishonours us, dishonours our identification or dishonours our parentage. When society has rejected the standard that defines what is moral, it will attempt to shame those who refuse to approve of the prevailing fluid morality. At such time, the one who is out of step with society may capitulate in order to embrace the new moral code, she may justify her refusal to concede her error or she may stand firm in averring the standard to which she is committed. However, if the standard held is aberrant and deficient, she will need exceptional chutzpah in her defiance of the common more.

This brings up a matter of great significance for the Christian. What is moral is defined by a standard. The moral code of a society is no better than the standard adopted. If our standard is determined by who shouts the loudest, by who employs the most caustic language or by who is most vigorous in promoting deviancy, morality will be constantly changing. Words will cease to have meaning and something akin to the Maoist purges will take place against those who fail to kowtow to the new morality.

Engrave a vital truth on your mind—*morality cannot be easily imposed upon a society. Morality comes from within society and is subsequently encoded through laws.* Without divine intervention, it is unimaginable that the morality of a culture can be transformed; and the morality of a society reflects the prevalent religion of that culture. Western civilisation has been generally founded upon and sustained by the Mosaic Code. While the United States was never officially a Christian republic and Canada was never a Christian confederation, for much of the history of these two nations, the Christian Faith has been a leading contributor to the unofficial civil religion which is the Faith of Christ the Lord. Western society was taught truths founded upon righteousness. John Adams, second President of the United States of America, famously wrote in a letter addressed the officers of the First Brigade of the Third Division of the Militia of Massachusetts, “We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion... Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”⁴

The times were dark when the Apostle wrote the words of our text to Timothy. Yet, the Faith of Christ the Lord flashed across the leaden skies of that ancient world and drove the Roman eagle screaming from her nest. Though the earth drank the blood of many believers who yielded their lives rather than deny the One who loved us and gave Himself for us, the truth advanced, destroying arguments and lofty opinions raised against the knowledge of God.

Contemporary Christians are prone to imagine that we live in the worst possible times. We bemoan the loss of reverence in society. We are beset by wicked people who ridicule the Faith and taunt our morality, doubting that God is capable of doing anything good or bad. Though the Roman world was wicked, we forget the condition of the New World and of the Old World at the time George Whitefield preached. English society in the early 1700s had thrown off all moral restraint as it forcefully rejected its Puritan heritage from the previous century. Spiritual depravity and moral degradation characterised society when this bold man began to preach. The Reformers and the Puritans had been relegated to murky backwaters of derision. England had become a gin-crazed society where immorality flourished. God was publicly mocked on the stage and in the press. It was out of such dark, hopeless circumstances, that revival came through the preaching of George Whitefield.

⁴ Richard R. Hammar, **Pastor, Church & Law: Liability & Church and State Issues, Volume Four**, Marian V. Liataud (ed.), (Your Church; Christianity Today, Carol Stream, IL 2008) 506

I KNOW WHOM I HAVE BELIEVED — Christianity is not a religion—it is a relationship. Too many professed Christians attempt to live by rules, only to grow discouraged and disappointed. Were we to write this affirmation as though we adhered to a religion, we would say, “I know *what* I have believed.” However, our faith, as is also true of the Apostle’s faith, is in a Person—the man, Christ Jesus.

The great problem of modern preachers is that we do not preach Christ. Too often we preachers preach morality, decrying select sins while ignoring the sinful acts of the professed people of God. We denounce judicial activists who exalt sin while resisting righteousness. Yet, we have been silent about the pornography that floods into our homes. We call that entertainment, never admitting that our standards are steadily eroded by our amusement. We are quick to express shock at the language of our children, but we do not want to alienate them by censuring the songs of the day. We say our language is salty, though it is more accurate to say that our speech has become coarse through association with uncouth language in our entertainment. We preachers are uncomfortable addressing the matter of stewardship of life. If we Christians were to spend on missionary advance what we spend on our hobbies or on cosmetics, we would evangelise our nation within a generation. I say these things not to complain about the sinful behaviour of the day, but to confess that we fail to preach Christ. Surely, if we walked with Christ we would be transformed.

The Apostle has taught us, “Walk by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do” [GALATIANS 5:16, 17]. If the Spirit of Christ dwells in me, and if I allow Him to direct me in all things, including my speech and my entertainment, I will soon see blooming in my life the fruit of the Spirit. “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” [GALATIANS 5:22-24].

The Apostle has also taught us, “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory” [COLOSSIANS 3:1-4].

Lynda and I came to faith in a church that taught us all the rules by which we were to live. No one ever said that we were saved by knowing and keeping the rules; but the unspoken assumption was that anyone who didn’t know or who failed to maintain those rules likely was not a Christian. We would just about have the rules down pat when something would occur that exposed yet another rule that I could not have anticipated. As I read the Word of God I made the discovery that Christ is our Saviour and He is our Guide. It seemed radical to me at the time to permit new Christians freedom to make a mistake! The Spirit of God was far more effective than I could ever be at transforming the outward expression of faith in believers.

I remember quite well when that message finally came home to me. We were serving in a congregation in the San Francisco Bay Area. It was during the seventies, and San Francisco was sort of a mecca for people looking for purpose. God was moving in great power on a daily basis. Men and women were coming to faith quite regularly. Many of those coming to faith were street people. We had been informed by pastors of sister churches that our people were not acceptable because they were too scruffy.

I had been privileged by God to serve as an instrument of His grace to one young man who became a fellow believer. The young man had a thin, scraggly beard and long, matted hair. He wore old faded jeans and a shirt open to his chest. He slouched as he casually shuffled along to some distant beat which others could not hear. Nevertheless, he appeared convinced that Jesus was risen from the dead and that the Lord of Glory had saved him.

He came to church for a few weeks, quietly drinking in the teaching that was presented both in the Sunday School class and from the pulpit. He listened intently, nodding in all the right places and interacting appropriately. It was perhaps a month after he had requested and received baptism when I greeted a young man at the door. As I welcomed him, I asked whether this was his first time to visit with us. The gentleman began to laugh and asked, “Brother Mike, don’t you recognise me?” It was that same young man. However, he was shaved and his hair was neatly trimmed. His shoes were shined and he was wearing a suit and tie.

“What is this?” I asked.

“You know, I have been trying to tell others about Jesus. Too many don’t take me seriously. I prayed and decided that I needed to look as if I meant business if I wanted to be effective. So, here I am!” God was teaching that young man; and God was doing a far more effective job than any mere mortal could ever do.

If that had happened only in San Francisco, I might be inclined to think it was an “American” thing. However, to my dismay I’ve discovered that such attitudes are nearly universal. In New Westminster a young man came to a church service where I was preaching. He was obviously struggling with emotional conflicts. As I talked with him he blurted out that he had gone to another congregation in the city only to be turned away. When he asked where he might find help, the pastor of that congregation told him to come over to our church because we would help anyone.

A man in this community brought his family to a church I was pastoring. He had been sent over by the pastor of another larger church who told him that we were an “entry level” congregation. As that man told me of this, I remembered the words of the Master, “The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds” [MATTHEW 11:19].

One of my dearest friends in an ethnic congregation in the city of Vancouver came to our services because he was told that we specialised in getting people saved.

In each of these instances, and in multiplied other instances, the message has been, “Look to Christ. He will receive you and He will save you.” Jesus invited those who were tired of the struggle with sin, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” [MATTHEW 11:28-30].

John the Baptist saw Jesus coming toward him and he cried out, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” [JOHN 1:29]! He said this for those who were perhaps unaware of the coming Messiah. However, the very next day John was standing with two of his disciples when he saw Jesus walk by. Again John cried out, testifying to the disciples stand with him, “Behold the Lamb of God” [JOHN 1:36]! John had one consistent message, pointing people to Jesus. If they were to meet the Saviour, He would care for the necessary transformation.

“I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed” [2 TIMOTHY 1:12]. If all you have is a religion, it is quite likely you will be ashamed when trials come. You will have no root, there will be no depth to your life. However, if you have a relationship, you will never be put to shame, for you will rest in Christ the Lord.

I cite **ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13** frequently as I point to the Saviour. There is a verse I seem to neglect—and I should quote it. **ROMANS 10:11** reads, “The Scripture says, ‘Everyone who believes in Him will not be put to shame.’” The statement iterates something Paul quoted shortly before he caused that statement to be entered on the letter. In **ROMANS 9:33**, the Apostles cites Isaiah when he says, “It is written,

‘Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence,
and whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame.’”

Paul cites the final strophe of **ISAIAH 49:23**: “Those who wait for me shall not be put to shame.”

I AM CONVINCED THAT HE IS ABLE — We live in challenging times. Wickedness seems to be in ascendancy. Governments promote what is taught in the Bible to be dishonourable. The churches of this day are disoriented; the pastoral staffs feel threatened. Many Christians are intimidated, silently anticipating the gathering storm. In the late 1980s, Charles Colson pondered the next step for our culture when it has rejected its Christian heritage. He speculated that as had happened after the collapse of the Roman Empire, Christians would retreat into pockets of community which he called enclaves of light. They would be surrounded by a hostile culture espousing neobarbarian values which will have gained complete ascendancy.⁵

If we focus on the opposition to our message, we will indeed retreat into enclaves. Whether they will actually be enclaves of light or whether the light will be greatly dimmed will be immaterial—we will still be isolated and effectively silenced. When England and the New World was sunken in moral turpitude and the faith had been reduced to a few glowing embers, God was at work preparing for revival. Whitefield burst onto the scene with a message that denounced evil and pointed to Christ the Lord. Whitefield shook the Wesley brothers out of their own religious stupor and impelled them to set in motion the societies for methodical study of the Word and powerful prayer meetings. There is little question but that Whitefield and the Wesley were used mightily to revive England and to bestir the New World, rescuing the nations from the certainty of moral irrelevance and divine judgement.

The early Christians were imbued with certainty that they had received a commission—a Great Commission from the Risen Saviour. He had commanded those who would follow Him, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” [**MATTHEW 28:19, 20**]. Consequently, they were obedient to Him. Their obedience grew out of the confidence of His final statement—“Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

This Jesus who spoke as no man ever spoke was with them. This Jesus who gave sight to blinded eyes, enabled the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak, restored strength to withered hands and crippled legs was with them. This Jesus who broke up every funeral he ever attended by raising the corpse to life was with them. This Jesus who fed multitudes with a little boy’s lunch was with them. This Jesus, who gave His life as a sacrifice for sin, taking upon Himself the sin of all mankind, thus freeing us forever from the fear of death, was with them. This Jesus who conquered death, hell and the grave, rising from the dead and being seen by those who knew Him was with them. This Jesus who is now seated at the right hand of the Father was with them. Knowing Him and believing Him, they would be obedient to His Word.

⁵ Charles Colson, **Against the Night: Living in the New Dark Ages** (Servant Publications, Ann Arbor, MI 1989)

Here is what is needed if we will be successful in this changing world—we must recapture the wonder of this powerful statement given to all who believe. “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 1:12]. We must incorporate this truth into our own lives.

None of us know what the future holds; but we are assured of Who holds the future! Does it mean that one day we may be imprisoned because we declare Christ and serve broken humanity in a spirit of love? We can say with confidence, “I am not ashamed.” Does it mean that we will face ridicule and censure because we cannot dishonour Him who loved us and gave Himself for us? We can courageously testify, “I am not ashamed.” Does it mean that we may be fined and wealth seized because we cannot agree with what is dishonourable? We can assuredly attest, “I am not ashamed.” We are not ashamed in this dying world. We fear God and we have heard the words that warn us, “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” [MARK 8:38].

This is not a time for retreat! This is the time for each of us to be Christians. It is high time that we quit playing church and began being the church. We Christians have sounded off quite enough about how evil and wicked the choices are that are being made by our government. It is time that we began to serve the dying in a spirit of compassion and humility. It is time for us to refuse to participate in evil and to resist the temptation to just get along with those who are intent on ridiculing the Faith. We are not to be a silent people, but neither are we to be a boisterous people. We are to stand in the power of the Risen Lord, serving those who are dying through declaring the truth in a spirit of brokenness and gentleness.

The days definitely appear dark, and if we focus on the darkness we will cease working. However, we do not know what the Master will do; we are not given the details of His coming. If Christ delays His return, then it may be that He is preparing to revive His people and to give us a time of refreshing. Until He blesses us from on high, we must prepare for that coming renewal, anticipating a great harvest of souls to be ushered into the Kingdom of God. If Christ should return shortly, then let us be found working when He comes. Don't fall into lethargy and grow quiescent in a vain attempt to preserve your life. The Master has cautioned, “Whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the Gospel's will save it” [MARK 8:35].

He is able! This must become the watchword for us as a congregation. This must become the watchword for each of us as individuals in the service of our King. I am spoken to people who are perhaps called to some great task that I cannot even imagine. Will you accept the Master's call? Will you go out in His strength because you know that He is able? Listening today may be the preacher whom God will use to spark that great revival. It is possible that some great thinker is pondering the words, and she or he will challenge the evil, driving it back into its lair. The God we serve is able; and He will accomplish what He wills.

The question for each one who listens is whether you have discovered for yourself that He is able to deliver you from sin? Jesus has paid the penalty for sin, taking upon Himself the sin of all mankind, and that includes you. Jesus now offers to all who will receive it, life. The Word of God says, “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is my Master,’ believing with your mind that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be set free. It is with the heart and one believes and is made right with the Father and with the mouth that one agrees with God and is set free.” God has promised, “Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord shall be set free.” Our prayer is that you have accepted this freedom, even today. Amen.