

Buzz King
buzz@BuzzKing.com
BuzzKing.com
303 437 7419

2 Timothy 1:8–2:14. New Living Translation

⁸ So never be ashamed to tell others about our Lord. And don't be ashamed of me, either, even though I'm in prison for him. With the strength God gives you, be ready to suffer with me for the sake of the Good News. ⁹ For God saved us and called us to live a holy life. He did this, not because we deserved it, but because that was his plan from before the beginning of time—to show us his grace through Christ Jesus. ¹⁰ And now he has made all of this plain to us by the appearing of Christ Jesus, our Savior. He broke the power of death and illuminated the way to life and immortality through the Good News. ¹¹ And God chose me to be a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of this Good News.

¹² That is why I am suffering here in prison. But I am not ashamed of it, for I know the one in whom I trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until the day of his return.

¹³ Hold on to the pattern of wholesome teaching you learned from me—a pattern shaped by the faith and love that you have in Christ Jesus. ¹⁴ Through the power of the Holy Spirit who lives within us, carefully guard the precious truth that has been entrusted to you.

¹⁵ As you know, everyone from the province of Asia has deserted me—even Phygelus and Hermogenes.

¹⁶ May the Lord show special kindness to Onesiphorus and all his family because he often visited and encouraged me. He was never ashamed of me because I was in chains. ¹⁷ When he came to Rome, he searched everywhere until he found me. ¹⁸ May the Lord show him special kindness on the day of Christ's return. And you know very well how helpful he was in Ephesus.

Chapter 2

Timothy, my dear son, be strong through the grace that God gives you in Christ Jesus. ² You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others.

³ Endure suffering along with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. ⁴ Soldiers don't get tied up in the affairs of civilian life, for then they cannot please the officer who enlisted them. ⁵ And athletes cannot win the prize unless they follow the rules. ⁶ And hardworking farmers should be the first to enjoy the fruit of their labor. ⁷ Think about what I am saying. The Lord will help you understand all these things.

⁸ Always remember that Jesus Christ, a descendant of King David, was raised from the dead. This is the Good News I preach. ⁹ And because I preach this Good News, I am suffering and have been chained like a criminal. But the word of God cannot be chained. ¹⁰ So I am willing to endure anything if it will bring salvation and eternal glory in Christ Jesus to those God has chosen.

¹¹ This is a trustworthy saying:

If we die with him,
we will also live with him.

¹² If we endure hardship,
we will reign with him.

If we deny him,
he will deny us.

¹³ If we are unfaithful,
he remains faithful,
for he cannot deny who he is.

¹⁴ Remind everyone about these things, and command them in God's presence to stop fighting over words. Such arguments are useless, and they can ruin those who hear them.

Teach these truths.

I took the title of today's message from words that appear in the New Living Translation of Second Timothy, which are different words than appear in other translations, although the meaning is the same. They accurately reflect what the original Scripture says – and they say it beautifully. The message is simple: near the end of his life, the now-older Paul is telling the younger Timothy, who at one

time was Paul's assistant, that it is critical to pass on the lessons of Jesus Christ to the next generation. This is an extremely imperative lesson for today.

Second Timothy is one of three so-called Pastoral letters, along with First Timothy and Titus. All three letters claim, in their text, to have been written by Paul, but his authorship is far from universally accepted. They are called pastoral letters because, unlike other letters attributed to Paul, they were written to individual pastors, not to churches. If Paul did write them, he would have had to have done so very late in life. In fact, these three letters describe travels of Paul that are very difficult to reconcile with the chronology of Paul's travels as presented in Acts and in other letters of Paul, ones that we are confident he did write. The only possible way of making both timelines logical would be if the travels described in the Pastoral letters occurred after the content of Acts concluded. The problem with this is that it is strongly believed that Paul was executed by the Romans just after the events described in Acts. This would mean that Paul somehow survived, returned to the eastern Mediterranean area, and launched a new evangelical effort on the island of Crete. What is far more likely is that someone else, after the death of Paul, wrote these letters in his name.

I'm not going to try to provide a comprehensive overview of these letters. Let me just say that these letters are often said to have "third generation"

content. Paul represented the first generation of Christians. Timothy and Titus were second generation Christians. The purpose of these letters was to give pastors like Timothy and Titus advice on how to spread the word to a third generation of Christians. Importantly, many of those in the church were children of Christians – and not raw converts themselves. Timothy and Titus represented the first generation of a challenge that faced the church for two millennia after this, and is so critically important today, and that is how to keep passing on the faith from generation to generation.

One thing we might want to wonder about is if we care who actually wrote these letters. There is genuine concern that these three letters contain much more conservative content than the letters we are confident were actually written by Paul. In particular, Paul seems to have shifted his beliefs toward slavery, suddenly supporting it. And, he seems to have become far more restrictive in his beliefs about women taking on roles of authority in the church. But I'd like to suggest that regardless of who wrote these letters, this issue of passing the faith on is important Scripturally. I don't think Paul wrote them. But it was very common at this time and in this place for people to write letters in the name of historically significant people, both to give the material weight and to honor the persons in whose names they were written. What's clear is that these

letters are authentic in one sense: they were written at the right time and in the right place. And they carefully and accurately model the state of the fledgling church. Even the fact that they are more conservative than Paul's true letters gives these letters authority – because the influence of conservative Roman values were indeed making inroads on the belief systems of the second generation of Christians. So, the letters present a valid historical perspective. They were written by someone who recognized a major, emerging issue.

Why do we care so much today? Recently, at the hospital where I am a chaplain, I was sitting with someone whose wife had just had a sudden brain bleed. She was deeply unconscious, had nominally survived major brain surgery, but was not likely to have a good outcome. He was very emotional. He was losing someone he deeply loved. Then he said something to me that I have heard, in one form or another, many times. He said that he and his wife believed in God, *but not in a religious fashion*. You might, at face value, wonder what that could possibly mean. Doesn't believing in God mean that you believe in religion? Well, it's easy to see how people could make a distinction between believing that they have a creator and believing in organized religion. Today, that is an increasingly important distinction. What I do find is that in times of crisis, people seem to reach back into their past and remember their childhood days when they did

indeed take part in formal religious practices. This is where their vague notion of God tends to come from. They say they don't believe in religion, but their God is very much a Christian God. The Christian notions of creation, faith, forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life have survived, but for some, Christianity hasn't.

Let's look at our two quotes, which are actually a single passage. Running through it is the suggestion that Paul is once again in prison, something that happened to him multiple times in his career as an evangelist. The first part, from Chapter 1, has a major theme. Here is something from the middle of it: *That is why I am suffering here in prison. But I am not ashamed of it, for I know the one in whom I trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until the day of his return.*¹³ *Hold on to the pattern of wholesome teaching you learned from me—a pattern shaped by the faith and love that you have in Christ Jesus.*¹⁴ *Through the power of the Holy Spirit who lives within us, carefully guard the precious truth that has been entrusted to you.* We see two things. First, there is repeated mention of not being ashamed in our first passage. Second, faith is described as a precious truth, something to be protected at all costs.

First-century Mediterranean society has been described as embodying an honor/shame culture. Major cities were filled with statues and honorific plates that typically honored people who donated money; these people were considered

leading citizens because of their gifts. Conversely, shame fell on those who did not meet their societal obligations, who did not live up to the expectations that were commensurate with their positions in society. To a lesser extent, we see the same thing in our society today. If you are wealthy, you can get a huge building named after you at a major university. If you are homeless or a poor single parent, you might be held in very low esteem. But although this is a cruel, biased phenomena we do indeed see today, this honor/shame duality isn't anywhere near as strong or unfair as it was during the early days of Christianity. Here is how this plays out in our passage. Our author – our pseudo-Paul – is suggesting that the Gospel, the teachings of Jesus Christ has turned the moral code of society upside-down. It was the poor and those with little power who were the best Christians. The one who was being praised as the savior had been crucified, the most humiliating and degrading way of being executed. The biggest leaders of the faith, the most successful evangelists, were many-time jailbirds like Paul. The author is giving advice to a new generation of evangelist, and that is to remember that things are very different now. Timothy is to remember that sound teaching is what is important, not what the world thinks of him. He is not to be corrupted by society. He is to remember the roots of the faith and pass them on unaltered.

In our second quote, which runs continuously from the first – remember that the chapter boundaries in Scripture were added centuries later – Timothy is being told to be tough, to accept the fact that as an evangelist and a pastor in a minority church, he would soon be subjected to intense physical and social abuse. But he is to keep his eye on the true faith. The author reminds him:

*If we die with him,
we will also live with him.*
¹² *If we endure hardship,
we will reign with him.*
*If we deny him,
he will deny us.*
¹³ *If we are unfaithful,
he remains faithful,
for he cannot deny who he is.*

The bottom line is this. Timothy is to *teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others*. It is the chain of faith that is the critical part. I've said a bit about my efforts to build a virtual reality church. What I'm trying to do is find a way to keep that chain from being permanently broken. There's already a missing link. There is a generation that sees themselves as believing in God, but often they're not even willing to use that word. Yet, when they are under intense personal pressure, they fall back to believing in some sort of creator and some sort of afterlife. Now, these are not

bad people, not at all. In fact, I've learned a lot from them. They've reminded me that there does need to be something deep and intuitive about one's faith. Faith can get stuck in the rut of ritual. We can't substitute formality for true belief and for living like Christ taught us to live.

One evening, I was with a large family who had a young loved one in the ICU. That person was badly injured. The patriarch of the family, a man who was a Korean war veteran and who had survived very serious combat wounds, asked me to say a prayer with the family. They were sitting in two facing rows of chairs in the waiting area. They pulled the two rows together and I knelt down between them. We all held hands and I offered a prayer of healing. There is one problem with this story, though. As we bowed our heads, I noticed that none of the family members under forty was taking part. There were a handful of stragglers on the perimeter, aged maybe twenty to forty, clearly uncomfortable with the notion of offering a prayer. They all remained respectfully silent. A couple of them bowed their heads. But they simply were not able to actually pray.

Teach these truths: that's what we are told to do. We need to do this. We must find a way to pass them on, even if part of a generation must be skipped. Our descendants aren't just our biological descendants; they are all believers who follow us - and we must teach them these truths.