

Staying strong in the face of intimidation

Intimidation has long been a tactic used to silence opposition and control individuals. It is effective because it instills fear in the hearts of many, causing them to retreat and remain silent rather than acting. Unfortunately, intimidation is widely practiced, and its use has intensified over the past decade with the rise of social media. Intimidation can manifest in various forms, from personal relationships to workplace dynamics, or societal pressures. Those who intimidate often aim to control, manipulate, or exert power over others, creating a climate of fear and oppression.

During the past month several examples of intimidation were brought to the writer's attention. The first instance was from an individual who was present and heard firsthand some very offensive, hateful public comments made by an elected official. The caller chose to remain silent fearful of the repercussions if they came forward. The next was from a person who declined signing a petition fearing retribution from his neighbor who has a history of retaliatory behavior. Lastly, a discussion with an elected official being verbally pressured to vote a certain way on an issue or risk losing their voting base. In each example, a fear of loss was generated leading to anxiety, insecurity, a sense of powerlessness and woefully a lowering of self-esteem.

For those who embrace the Gospel of Jesus Christ, intimidation is still an ever-present foe. In Matthew 5:13-16 Jesus calls us to be salt and light in the world. This means that we are to be a positive influence by resisting evil and doing good. The Great Commission, Matthew 28:18-20, is instructive on what on earth disciples should be about doing. Whether it be from fear of rejection, ridicule, or persecution, intimidation can hinder us from boldly living and instead become salt without saltiness and a dim light in a basement closet.

Christ followers will experience intimidation starting with the fear of rejection. 1 John 3:13 warns us that culture often opposes Christian values and beliefs. Be prepared as it can be difficult to stand firm as who does not wish to be liked by others?

Another form of intimidation that believers face is ridicule or mockery. It is not uncommon for Christians to be made fun of or belittled as a casual perusal through social media will reveal.

Believers may also experience internal intimidation, such as doubts and insecurities about

our ability to boldly live out our faith. Some might be trapped by unconfessed sin and fear being found out.

To overcome intimidation, we must recognize that our strength does not come from ourselves, but from God. In 2 Timothy 1:7, we are reminded that "God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind". When we rely on the power of the Holy Spirit within us, we can overcome any intimidation that comes our way.

As believers Jesus calls us salt and light, we must remember that our identity and mission is found in Christ. In John 15:16, Jesus tells his disciples, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit". 2 Timothy 3:17 we are prepared, "so that the man *or woman* of God may be fully capable, equipped for every good work". If the source of intimidation is from our own unconfessed sin, then deal with it as the Apostle John writes in 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness". Lastly, many have sung the Bethel song "No Longer Slaves" and the chorus is a stark reminder that, "I am no longer a slave to fear, I am a child of God".

We will face intimidation in its various forms. By relying on the power of the Holy Spirit, seeking support from fellow believers, meditating on God's Word, and remembering our identity in Christ, we can overcome intimidation and shine brightly for the glory of God. courage in the words of Joshua 1:9, "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."