

2 Timothy 1:6,7

Introduction

In these verses Paul gives Timothy the first exhortation to get on with the job he was called to. Then he gives him assurance about God's enabling grace. This is a very practical subject not least because it deals with the problem of temptation and fear. This text finds us out, and is never out of date.

Using our gifts

Fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands (2 Timothy 1:6). Timothy had been set apart on the occasion of his ordination or commissioning, by Paul who laid his hands on him. The laying on of hands was an apostolic way of setting a man apart for the Christian ministry. The gift did not come through Paul's fingers, but it was given at the same time or coincided with the laying on of hands. What was this gift?

Timothy received the gift or office of pastor-teacher, or evangelist (Ephesians 4:11). He had the authority to be minister of Christ, not only because he was officially appointed but also because he had been given the divine equipment needed, and a special anointing. "Fan into flame" – stir up the fire, keep the fire at full flame – doesn't necessarily mean that Timothy had let the fire die down, but is a reminder to Timothy that the fire must be kept aflame at all times. He was to do so through waiting on God for its constant renewal, by constantly exercising his gift and developing it.

Paul is repeating an earlier exhortation; **Do not neglect the gift that is in you** (1 Timothy 4:14). Every one of us has a gift or gifts, either directly spiritual, or natural talent that can be devoted to spiritual purposes. These gifts are given to us for building up one another in the Body of Christ. The list of gifts is endless – speaking, writing, helping, encouraging, administration, and generosity c.f. lists in 1 Corinthians, Romans and Ephesians – and even these are not complete lists.

Never let the flame burn low. Don't leave it someone else, with the excuse that someone else can do it better. Don't say that you have no gifts. Don't envy the gifts others have been given. Accept yourself as the way God has made you, be content with your gifts, and put them at the Lord's disposal, c.f. the parable of the talents. They are not to be used to further our own ends, but for the Body of Christ. Be faithful, not slothful. Seek to develop your gift. "Use it or lose it." Train it. Seek to be as effective as you can – the preacher must read and study, the musician must practice, etc. If we don't, we will soon be exhausted. Are we doing all we can for Christ? Could we do more? Are we at full stretch? Are we growing in usefulness? Too many Christians are like sponges in pews – getting more and more wet, when they ought to be squeezed and let something out.

A word of reassurance

Paul goes on to anticipate Timothy's objections. What a load this man had to carry, and how unsuitable he was! He bore responsibility for leading the church at Ephesus, a church with many problems, determined opposition within the church and persecution from outside. He was young and inexperienced, subject to stomach problems, timid by temperament, shrinking from responsibilities and hard tasks, an introvert, a natural follower, not a leader.

Here was Paul, soon to die, saying "Over to you, Timothy". It was a hard act to follow. He would need to exert himself and use his gifts to the full. Paul understood exactly how he felt, and gives him the reassurance he needed to hear: **God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline** (2 Timothy 1:7).

A sense of fear is a very real thing. Paul knew it. When he went to Corinth, **I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling** (1 Corinthians 2:3), and in 2 Corinthians he reveals his outside conflicts and inside fears. Fear is often the experience of the Christian minister. It is one of the greatest weapons the Devil uses against ministers. They feel protective over their flock, and are always concerned. What has happened while I was away? What letters await me? Who has died? What problems have arisen in the church? What about the young people in the church? It is easy to get a craven fearful spirit in Christian work. Frequently a man wants to run away from the pulpit, or from dealing with a difficult issue, or from picking up the phone. There is also a fear of failure, letting the Lord down, being overwhelmed, and losing support.

Often these fears are just part of our natural temperament. Even though our regeneration results in a huge change, God putting a new spiritual life in us, the natural temperament is still the same. But God is, by the Holy Spirit, working in our spirits to give us a spirit of power, love and sound mind. Because of God's work in our souls, we have power. When we face a task or responsibility, the fear and trembling is still there, but also the divine power to live the Christian life, to take hold of that responsibility, to endure, to hold out, even in face of death.

We see this elsewhere in the New Testament. Peter was gripped by fear, and denied Jesus. But in Acts he was possessed by divine power, ready to face the authorities, ready to die. **Obey God and not men** (Acts 5:29), he boldly proclaimed. Paul took pleasure from his infirmities, reproaches, persecutions, distresses, because he saw that when he was weak, then he was strong – the power of God was resting on him in those very times (2 Corinthians 12:9,10). Christian martyrs down the centuries have not only included strong men, but also weak women and frightened children – all possessed with the same power of God. They rose to the occasion, able to do things that they could not have done by themselves.

Paul says to Timothy – God has given you power. He is within you. You won't know yourself. You will be amazed at yourself. You have the Holy Spirit, and He is the Spirit of power.

Then he promises Timothy a spirit of love. Love is a strange word in this context. How is love the answer to fear? The main cause of fear is concern about one's self. We love ourselves, want to protect ourselves, defend ourselves and look after

ourselves. We are fearful because we are absorbed with ourselves. Love is the great antidote to self's problems. When we love, we are absorbed in someone or something else. When we love God, we are taken up with God, our mind is on Him, self recedes and we forget our troubles. Love is outward looking. Thus fear over ourselves takes a back seat, and love for others preoccupies us.

And finally the promise of sound mind (A.V.) or self discipline (N.I.V.), self-control, a balanced mind, mastery over self. This is the answer to fear. Jesus commands us not to be afraid when we are on trial for our lives. We are not to worry what to say. It will be given to us in that hour. So do not be afraid, do not lose nerve or become excited or alarmed.

The person with a sound mind is as **shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves** (Matthew 10:16). The most nervous and ignorant of believers have possessed a sound mind and displayed it in times of crisis.

In place of fear there can be power, love and a sound mind. It is good to remember this. The Devil can build four walls around us, but he cannot put a roof on top. When we are blocked in on every side, look up - God is still there.

Conclusion

We have a life to live, responsibilities to shoulder, innumerable problems to encounter, gifts to use. We will feel fearful and cowardly at times, for that is our temperament. But because we have the Holy Spirit within, He will give us power, love and a sound mind. We are called to take ourselves in hand. Do not be controlled by temptations, but by the Holy Spirit.

We are not an ordinary people. God has wrought something wonderful in our souls. We do not face life as unbelievers do. They have no option but to be ruled by their temptations, and they cannot help themselves. We have the Holy Spirit to help us remember what God has done for us and is doing in us. We are to be controlled by Him. This changes our whole outlook. Don't dwell on your weakness – dwell on the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Think these things through. Let the great eternal truths which are the foundation of our salvation be applied to you. Realize the wealth you have in Christ. Remember the greatness of the Gospel. Let it under gird your fainting spirit. No matter how fragile and timid by nature and in temperament, you have been divinely equipped and you are more than conquerors. If God has assigned you tasks and given you responsibilities, you are not to fear, for He has enabled you too. Go forth steadily, fearing nothing, living in the present, not worried about the future. He is all you need and He has promised never to leave you or forsake you.