

FAN INTO FLAME THE GIFT OF GOD

2 Timothy 1:1-14

Key Verses: 6-7, "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."

Did you know that Bible scholars say this letter of 2 Timothy was the last letter that Paul wrote before he was executed? We have been studying about the dynamic work of the Holy Spirit in and through Apostle Paul in the book of Acts. We recall that Paul brought a young disciple Timothy along with him on his second recorded evangelism and mission journey (Ac 16:1-3). Timothy was from Lystra, which was the city where Paul was pelted with stones and left for dead. But Paul survived. Timothy had a Jewish mother who became Christian, and a father who was Greek. Since Timothy was not circumcised like all Jews, Paul had Timothy circumcised (ouch!). It was to avoid that issue since they ministered regularly to a lot of Jewish people. Timothy was like a son to Paul. He was actually disciplined by Paul.

How would you like to be disciplined by Apostle Paul? There is a way that you can be. It is through deep, careful study of Paul's letters in the New Testament, and especially 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, which are known as the Pastoral Letters of Paul. In these letters, Paul disciplines Timothy and Titus. We are looking at 2 Timothy. As already noted, this was Paul's swan song, or last will and testament. He writes to encourage Timothy to take the baton from him and run the race of Christian faith and to fight the good fight of faith as a good soldier of Christ Jesus (2:3). Paul speaks these famous words in 2 Tim.4:6-8, "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing." Today's passage Bible, 2 Timothy 1, is part of our Spiritual Gift series of 2025. May God help us to fan into flame the gift of God all the more through this Bible excerpt.

Look at verse 1. "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God according to the promise of the life that is in Christ Jesus..." Paul was an apostle or missionary sent by Jesus Christ. Later in verse 11, Paul says he was also appointed by Christ as a preacher and a teacher. Paul was a missionary, a messenger and a teacher of God's word, all by the will of God. Paul was completely surrendered to God's good, pleasing and perfect will for his life.

Paul said that this was according to the promise of life in Christ Jesus. Christians have the promise of life. This has two senses of meaning. In one sense, we have the promise of eternal life after we die. In verse 10 Paul says that Jesus abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. This hope and promise drives out the fear of death, which we all have in our natural selves. Evangelist Ray Comfort likes to ask people this question when he shares the gospel: "Are you afraid of death?" If people are honest, they answer "yes." Some people pretend that they are not afraid of death. Listen to Hebrews 2:15. It says Jesus came that through his death "he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery." It means people live in slavery to the fear of death, unless they have the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus.

The other sense of the promise of life is the abundant life that Jesus Christ promises. Jesus said in John 10:10b, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." Some translations say, "and have it to the full." Did you know that Jesus promises abundant life, life to the full? We Christians are not kill-joys. Christians have life to the full. If your life does not reflect life to the full, then the problem is with you, not with Jesus. It means you might be holding on to the wrong promise, or focusing on something other than Jesus' promises.

Now look at verse 2. "To Timothy, my beloved child: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord." As already said, Paul loved Timothy like his own son. Paul had no children of his own. But he had many spiritual children, whom he dearly loved. This reminds me of Sarah Barry, who has no children of her own, but many spiritual children all over the world through her gospel ministry.

Paul wished and prayed for Timothy to have grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. What a blessing and greeting! Much better than, "What's up?" or even, "How's it going?" Grace, mercy and peace be with you all, my brothers and sisters in Christ!

Now look at verses 3-4. "I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy." Paul was full of thanksgiving, even though he was in a dark and cold prison on death row. Paul was so thankful for the privilege to serve God, and without any guilty conscience. Jesus had set him free from guilt and condemnation. He wrote in Romans 8:1, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

Twice Paul says to Timothy, "I remember you." He remembered Timothy day and night in his prayers. Isn't it love to remember people constantly in our prayers? Who do you remember constantly in your prayers? Paul even remembered Timothy's tears. Probably Timothy was weeping when they last departed. As we have read in the book of Acts, many other believers wept when they departed from Paul. Paul was indeed a man of love and care that was real, personal, and tangible. Paul said that he longed to see Timothy, and that seeing him would fill him with joy. Do you long to see anyone like this? Do you love anyone like this? Lord, help us to love and care for people like this, even with tears.

Now look at another beautiful verse, verse 5: "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." Timothy was already a third generation Christian! Wow! We don't know when or how his grandmother and mother became believers in Christ. Perhaps his grandma saw Jesus in Jerusalem when she was a little girl. Or perhaps both his mom and grandma became Christians when they heard Paul preach the gospel in Lystra, the city where he was stoned. The beautiful thing here is that his grandmother and mother passed on their faith, by their influence, faith and prayer, to Timothy.

We learn two things here. First, is there any godly influence among your relatives for which you can thank God. Perhaps someone prayed for you or influenced you to go to church or read the Bible or even trust in Christ. Thank God for these people of sincere faith in our lives and in the world. Second, what legacy or influence are you leaving to your relatives? Do they see your sincere faith? Do they sense your prayers and love for them? May it be so. May God increase our love and prayers for our relatives who need the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We have now arrived at our key verses, verses 6-7. Let's read them. "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." There is much to unpack in these verses.

First, "fan into flame the gift of God." What is the gift of God? Paul doesn't specify here. Paul writes in Romans 6:23 that the gift of God is "eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." In John's gospel, Jesus said to the Samaritan woman: "If you knew the gift of God" and then he spoke about "living water" and "a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (Jn 4:10,13). Later, John's gospel equates "rivers of living water" with the Holy Spirit (Jn 7:38). So the gift of God could refer to the Holy Spirit. Indeed, the Holy Spirit is God's greatest gift. In Luke 11:13, Jesus said, "If you then, who are evil, know how to give

good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

The gift of God to Timothy could also be referring to his gift of leadership or the gift of being a pastor. As we learned in an earlier message on spiritual gifts, Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus that Jesus gave gifts to the church: apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers (Eph 4:11). Paul said that Timothy received this gift of God in him through the laying on of Paul’s hands. This could be related to 1 Timothy 4:14 in which Paul says to Timothy, “Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you.”

Whatever gift Paul is referring to here, whether to the Holy Spirit, or to a specific leadership gift, Paul tells Timothy to fan it into flame. What does this mean to fan it into flame? Paul is using the metaphor of a fire. To keep a fire burning, one must fan it into flame. If a fire is not tended properly, it will die out. Or it might just smolder, which is to burn slowly, with no flame. A fire that is ignored or neglected will not burn brightly. So Paul is saying, “Let God’s gift to you burn brightly.” The Message translation of verse 6 says, “And the special gift of ministry you received when I laid hands on you and prayed—keep that ablaze.”

So how do we keep the gift of God ablaze, or fan this gift into flame? Well, if we are referring to the Holy Spirit, please understand that every believer has the baptism of the Holy Spirit to begin with. No one can believe and trust in Jesus without the indwelling gift of the Holy Spirit. As Paul says in Romans 8, “The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Ro 8:16). Bible scholar John Stott explains that Christians have one baptism in the Spirit, but there can be many fillings of the Holy Spirit. He also says we are “leaky vessels,” meaning we don’t maintain well being full of the Holy Spirit. Why not? Because we get full of ourselves or the world or something or someone else that fills our mind and heart. We don’t lose our salvation, but we lose our fervor or fire. So, we must fan into flame the gift of God.

Again, how can we do this? One way is to come back to the spiritual disciplines of repentance, prayer, singing, worship, or reading, reflecting, and memorizing God’s word. We can also hang out with other fiery Christians to catch their fire. “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another” (Prov 27:17, NIV). If you enjoy the company of unbelievers without showing any Christian identity, what’s going to happen? Your fire will smolder.

If God has given you a gift and you don’t use or exercise it, what will happen? Well, we know what happens to our bodies when we don’t exercise them. They get flabby and

weak. We've talked about this already in other spiritual gift messages, right? Do you remember?

Fanning into flame the gift of God means don't ignore or neglect your gift. Don't put it on the back burner. Move it to the front burner. Listen to Bible messages. Read Christian books. Go to prayer meetings and Bible studies. Go evangelizing. Share your faith with someone, or even a Bible verse. Get more excited to talk about Jesus than talking about yourself or your favorite hobby or some singer, or actor, or athlete, or sports team. Get more excited about your own spiritual growth and the spiritual growth of others, rather than just your physique or image or academic achievements. Let people pray over you and for you. Ask to pray with others, bold believing prayers, based on God's promises.

Now look again at verse 7. "...for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control." Fear and calculation causes the fire of God's gift to diminish. What makes you fearful? Rejection? Failure? Humiliation? Suffering? There are so many things that make us fearful.

But God did not give us a spirit of fear. Rather, God gave and continues to give us a spirit of power, love, and self-control. Let's meditate a bit on those three words: power, love, and self-control.

First, a spirit of power. There is a saying, "Power corrupts; and absolute power corrupts absolutely." That's not the kind of power Paul is talking about. God gives power to us not to defeat and crush people and win a physical battle. Look at Jesus. God gives us power to defeat sin, death and the devil. When I was a college student, there was a short, popular Christian book out called, "Power for Living." It was the testimonies of famous people who trusted Christ. They each testified that their power came not from worldly success, but from Christ. The Spirit of God gives us power to overcome darkness by the light of Christ, to overcome hatred by the love and forgiveness of Christ, and to overcome discouragement and failure by the victory of Christ in his resurrection. Power is opposite of weakness. We are full of weaknesses. But Christ gives us power. When we are weak, we can experience that he is strong.

Second, a spirit of love. I can't explain this any better than Paul's description of love in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8, which is the most popular Bible passage at Christian weddings: "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails."

Third, a spirit of self-control. This seems like an oxymoron, or paradox, or contradiction. If I control myself, how can the Holy Spirit control me? Self-control sounds selfish. But self-control is only truly possible by the Holy Spirit. This word occurs in Greek only here in the New Testament. The Greek word means: “an admonishing or calling to soundness of mind, to moderation and self-control.” The Spirit of God gives us a sound mind. Do you ever get emotional and you immediately regret your response? That is contrary to self-control. James 1:19 describes this kind of self-control: “let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.” If you find yourself getting angry with a fellow Christian, try this: “What can I agree with here? They’ve got a good point.” The Spirit of God gives us wisdom and humility to answer a contentious person with gentleness and respect, rather than an immediate rebuke.

We’ve come near the end of this message. Now look at verses 8-10a: “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...”

The power of God can enable us to suffer for Christ and live a holy life, by his grace. We need not be ashamed of our identity as Christians. Paul was not ashamed to identify with Christ, who was crucified like a common criminal. Paul said in verse 12, “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.”

Finally, look at verses 13-14, “Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.” Timothy had heard Paul preach and teach many times. Now he is charging Timothy to teach sound doctrine, with faith and love in Jesus Christ. Paul tells Timothy to rely on the Holy Spirit within him and who is at work in the Church, the body of believers in Christ. Paul ends this chapter mentioning discouraging deserters, and praising one refreshing, encouraging believer who was not ashamed of Paul’s chains and who earnestly sought out Paul in Rome and found him. May we be among those who encourage and refresh others in their service of our Lord Jesus Christ. May we all fan into flame the gift of God that he has given us and exercise a spirit of power, love and self-control.