

YOU ARE YOU

There are two verses of Scripture upon which I should like to speak to you this morning, and they are equally applicable to us all. "Neglect not the gift that is in thee" (I Timothy 4:14), and "Stir up the gift of God, which is in thee" (II Timothy 1:6).

Paul, the man who penned these words, was sitting in the dark, dirty, and damp dungeon and facing death. Instead of complaining, as most people would have done in similar circumstances, Paul meditated on the blessings which he had received and sincerely desired to express his gratitude. His gratitude was evoked especially by the blessed memories which he cherished of those whose lives had meant so much to him. Paul was indebted and thankful to God for his own godly ancestry and heritage. He considered himself fortunate in coming from a line of godly people who loved the Lord and His truth. Paul was also grateful to God for his memories of Timothy. These fond and precious memories caused him to pray for his intimate and younger companion.

Paul knew that he was leaving his timid and retiring successor in a hard place with many trials ahead. He challenged Timothy to remember the special gift which God had given to him. Paul knew that Timothy possessed latent abilities and undeveloped powers that he had never even suspected that he had. Timothy did not know what he could do. That is not at all strange. It is often easier for someone else to see in us possibilities that we are not aware that we possess. In Paul's exhortation there is the implication, "If I can only wake that man up, what a power he will be. He needs to be aroused and shaken out of his complacency."

It takes a lot of thought and planning to erect a building of any kind. First of all, the original idea must exist in somebody's mind, then in the form of a blueprint, and then carried out in actuality. At last it stands complete for its purpose.

How like life is this entire process! There is a "divinity that shapes our ends." God has a specific task in mind for each one of us. He is the Master Designer and Architect. While we do not always live up to the specifications as designed in His blueprints, nevertheless our lives take a certain course. God has given us certain personalities and individualities, so that through our individual lives we may contribute toward the broader and higher ends of mankind. In other words, God says to you: "You are you." You are an individual; now go ahead, stir up the gift within you, and live your life in the very best way possible. This challenge comes to every person under the sound of my voice, and especially to you who are young.

"Neglect not the gift that is in thee." People are not endowed equally. Some are born with a more attractive or a stronger physical body than others. Some have more abilities than others. Some are given better opportunities than others.

God has endowed every person with some talent or ability. So, it is not the business of any person to compare himself with others, but rather to use what talent or ability each has in the best way possible for the Lord. Some neglect to cultivate and use the gift which is in them because they are so anxious to possess the gift of somebody else. God needed you and me, so He made us, and gave us the talents or gifts that He wanted us to have. Each one has his own God-given talents, faculties, or special aptitudes for effective performance along certain lines. God has given to every man his work, and also some capital for the doing of that work. Every person has the capacity to render some service without which the world must be the poorer.

No two of us are alike. From birth, some are more gifted than others. They are born with sound bodies, while others are born with inherited tendencies toward disease. Some are born with fine mental endowments, while others are mediocre or below par. Some are born with the moral momentum of a godly ancestry flowing in their veins, while others are hampered by an ancestry that was weakened and poisoned by unclean living.

We differ also in our opportunities for the development of our talents. Some are born into an atmosphere of culture and are surrounded by the best educational advantages. But others are born into an atmosphere of ignorance. Then we differ vastly in our opportunities for using our talents.

All of these talents, which we possess, were presented to us as gifts by the Master. So, it is not the wealth of our endowment that entitles us to honor, but rather the use we make of that endowment. God has given each of us all that we can handle wisely, and He depends on us to use what He has given us. If you have only a few talents, seek to turn them over a great many times, and thereby increase them. A man who starts in business with a large capital, and who only turns it over once in the year, will not do so well as the man who, with a smaller capital, manages to turn it over every week, and so has rapid returns. Whatever your gift may be, use that which God has given to you. He is simply asking you to do your best for Him with what He has entrusted to you. God will certainly deal with the result of your efforts in the light of your ability, opportunity, diligence, and faithfulness. Do your best with what you have.

In seeking to arouse and quicken Timothy, Paul said: "Stir up the gift of God, which is in thee." It is the picture of a smoldering fire or a banked furnace which has been smothered overnight. In the morning the ashes must be pushed aside and the fire stirred, in order to let the air through that it may flame up and burn. Many of you are not able to appreciate the meaning of this verse because you never arose, as some of us country-bred mortals did, on cold winter mornings to shiver before an old-fashioned fireplace while we uncovered the leftover coals of fire from the night before, applied kindling, and then either blew hard or fanned with a piece of cardboard until the flame appeared.

Such is the picture here. There come times in our experiences when the fires of God burn low and we must stir up or fan the heavenly flame within our hearts. Paul urged his young friend not to let the fire from God go out in his soul, but to fan it into a flame. Keep the flame aglow at any cost. No price is too great to pay to be a "burning and shining light" for Him. Paul said to Timothy, and to us, "You have in you banked fires, smoldering heat, gifts that lie dormant; now stir up these gifts. Push aside the ashes of hindrance and awaken the gift within you." In other words, "You are you," and because God has given you these special gifts you should use them.

Our text mentions "the gift which is in thee." By gift here is meant equipment for service. Every Christian has a gift. A compelling motive for the right use of your individual gifts is the recognition of the fact that they are not your own. If the gift were your own, acquired by your own effort, or earned by your merit, you might reasonably claim the right to do with it as you please. But this personal gift from God is not for your own selfish use, but it belongs to God and you are required to use it for His glory and for the welfare of others. It is given to you in trust, and the condition of the entrustment is that it be used in the service of Christ. All possessors will be called upon for an account of the use they make of the gifts they have received. Privilege always carries with it a corresponding responsibility.

These gifts are not for mere display or adornment. Their object is employment. It is not the possession of these gifts, but it is their use that counts. The man with meager equipment often outstrips his more largely endowed fellowman simply because he knows how and is willing to use what he has. Unused gifts do not accomplish any more good than if they were not possessed.

Recognize the fact that you are a distinct person. You are yourself and not somebody else. God has made you different from all others. No two bodies are alike, and no two minds are alike. The feelings, temperaments, and emotions of people are different. You are yourself.

Because you are you, a distinct value attaches itself to you as an individual. All history centers around individuals. It was Moses who led and molded the Hebrews. It was David who welded the tribes of the Jews into one nation. There is always a You behind every great event in history. There is a You behind every successful business enterprise, and every great movement.

How are you going to value yourself if you are thus a distinct person? You may think too much of yourself, become self-centered and egotistical. On the other hand, you may be too modest and unassuming, and think too little of yourself.

Think of Christ our Lord. He had unique powers. He felt that these powers within Him must be used in the service of mankind. Likewise, any gift that we have received from the Lord must be used in the service of our fellows. If you have received from God, through the training of your parents and in school, a development of your powers, it is now up to you to use these gifts. Don't be a mere imitation of someone else.

To fit more completely into the place which you should occupy in life use the means to grow and develop. One of these means is education. Do not graduate from study with your graduation from high school, but continue to study, and keep educated. Keep using your abilities and powers. Only as you exercise these can you grow and develop. As you try to make the most of yourself for the sake of your fellowmen and for God, then at the end of your life your influence will be deeply inscribed in the hearts and lives of others, and that will be the best diploma that you can ever get.

Every person is given some gift and to each God says, "I want that gift enlightened, kindled, brought to the highest, and used for Myself." Among these gifts is the gift of speech. This gift ought not to be perverted, prostituted, debauched or wasted. Talk for the Lord wherever you go. Among these gifts is that of writing. How few people make enough of this gift! Everyone who can write things that will help others should do so. People will appreciate and treasure those things which help them to know Christ and His will. There is also the gift of influence. Bring all of your influence and place it on the side of Christ. We owe it to our Lord to do our best. We owe it to others. We owe it to ourselves. Fan the flame to something brighter than it has ever been. During the time of shortages, on account of World War II, sugar was one of the rationed commodities. A customer in a restaurant, who had already gotten his share of sugar called loudly for more sugar in his coffee. The answer of his waitress was a classic in brevity and wisdom. She said, "Stir what you've got!" Our only hope of being more accomplished is to stir what talent the Lord has given us and we already have. Every gift from God should be used always for His glory and the advancement of His kingdom.