

FANNING THE FIRE

"Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee."
II Timothy 1:6.

Paul was in prison for the last time. He was not permitted the privilege of living in his own hired house, but was kept in chains as a malefactor. He had but few friends to cheer him. He knew what was ahead for him. In his loneliness he wanted to see Timothy, his son and successor in the ministry. To him Paul wrote this last letter that we have from his pen. In it he asked Timothy to hurry to him.

This veteran of many campaigns was giving a word of wholesome advice to a young man of whom he was very fond. Although there must have been at least thirty years difference in their ages, and perhaps more, Paul had a vital and abiding interest in the young man. In this personal letter to the young preacher, he tells him how much he thinks of him and how he longs to see him, since they had been separated for months.

Timothy was not only frail in body, but timid and shrinking in habit and character and life. Paul knew that he was leaving the retiring young preacher in a hard place with many trials ahead. Though his modesty would have kept him in the rear, Paul summoned him to the front. He reminded him of the fine heritage that had been handed down to him through his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice. He made the suggestion that he would have to move on if he expected to keep pace with his forebears.

It is interesting to recall that when our Saviour came to do His blessed work, He took twelve men aside, and for three years He taught them and drilled them and impregnated them with His ideas and ideals. He chose a few and put His truth, His ideas, His ideals and His spirit into them. Christ never put the emphasis on the crowd, but always on the individual. He worked with the individual.

Paul did not forget Timothy's need of encouragement in his faith and exhortation for his service. He challenged him to remember the special gift which God had given to him. Memory is mighty to help or to hurt. It does its work here and hereafter. Heaven will be sweeter and hell will be sadder because of memory. The rich man in hell was told to remember--to his sorrow. Timothy was told to remember--to his blessing. Memory of good blesses while memory of evil curses. Paul wanted Timothy to remember what would help him in the days ahead. He wanted him to remember for a very definite purpose, that he might stir up what God had given him.

Paul was greatly concerned because it was very evident that Timothy possessed latent abilities as well as undeveloped powers that he had never even suspected. Paul saw flashes of brilliance now and then, but Timothy, easy-going and complacent, was all but asleep. He was a fine, clean young chap, but he did not realize his own possibilities. He had never discovered himself. He 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 do not suspect. Paul saw such in Timothy. Therefore, he wrote, "Stir up the gift which is in thee." He seemed to say, "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."

Timothy had a genuine faith. Paul urged him to remember it. Timothy had a special gift for service. Paul urged him to stir it up. The word which is translated "stir up" literally means "make the fire live again" or "fan it into a flame." In other words Paul said, "Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou dost kindle into the highest flame that you can make burn every power wherewith God hath endowed you."

Many are not able to appreciate the meaning of this passage because they 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 from the night before, applied kindling and then blew hard 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 the heavenly flame within our hearts. Paul urged Timothy not to let the fire from God go out in his soul, but to fan it into a flame. Christians need to stir the embers of the holy fire until the heavenly zeal consumes them. Every believer has at least a few coals in his heart, but usually it is a bed of coals instead of a flame. When the gospel of Christ is preached and the breath of the Spirit blows on the hearts you can tell where the fire is, for faces will light up and the glow will return. But the fire has died down. Iniquity abounds and the love of many has waxed cold; they have quenched the Spirit and left their first love. Wet blankets of various sorts have smothered the flame. Keep aglow at any cost! No price is too great to pay to be a "burning and shining light" for Him.

There are so many things that can smother the fire. Wilful sin will do it. Neglect will do it. Let the fire alone and it will burn low and the ashes will gather. If we neglect the means of grace—prayer, Bible study and Christian exercise, we shall soon need a stirring and fanning. It was never easier to grow complacent than today. The spirit of the times is against the man on fire for God as never before. Certainly fear can choke the fire. Whatever fear you may have, it is not of God, for He does not give us the spirit of fear.

Our text mentions "the gift which is in thee." What is this gift? It is a gift of grace, a favor received without merit on the part of the recipient. Many-sided is the gift of God. It always starts in salvation—God's initial gift of grace. But it is never limited to salvation alone. Timothy had not only been saved by the gift of grace, but he had been given a special gift of grace for service. How good God is in not simply saving our souls, but in making us His co-workers and servants. He not only gave Timothy the gift of salvation, but He also gave him a gift for service, a special gift of spiritual power. Salvation and service cannot be separated. God has not divorced them nor can man separate them. We are saved to serve. We are given the general gift of salvation that we may use the special gifts of service.

By gift here is meant equipment for service. Paul knew that Timothy understood full well that he possessed the gift for service, but for some reason it had not been used as it might and should have been. It is worth remembering that everyone has a gift. That is the assumption underlying this Pauline exhortation. Timothy was not the only privileged person. In this respect all of us are partakers of the divine bounty. This does not mean that all of us are equally gifted. There are the five-, the two- and the one-talented people. A compelling motive for the exercise and right use of our individual gifts is the recognition of the fact that they are not our own. If the gift were our own, acquired by our own effort or earned by our merit, we might reasonably claim the right to do with it as we pleased. But this personal gift of ours, whose rightful use brings blessings to others is not our own, but God's. It is given to us in trust, and the condition of the trust is that it be used in the service of Christ. It is required of us as stewards that we be faithful. Possessors of gifts will be called to account for the use they make of them. Privilege always carries with it a corresponding responsibility.

God has not left any of His children without some gift. Life holds infinite endowments. These gifts are not for mere display or adornment. Their object is employment. It is not the possession of these gifts, but their use that counts. The parable of the talents teaches us that we are held accountable for the use we make of our talents. No matter what our resources may be, if we cannot command them they are vain. The difference between men is not so much in the resources at their command, as in the command of their resources. The man with meager equipment often outstrips his more largely endowed fellowman, simply because he knows how to use what he has. There are latent powers, abilities and possibilities in many a person who is utterly unaware of their presence. All such need to be aroused

and made acquainted with their resources. The unused gifts of God's children are not accomplishing any more good than if they were not possessed.

We should examine ourselves to see what gifts we really have. We should then use our gifts and try to improve them. We should stir up the gift that is in us, because all we shall do when we have stirred ourselves to the utmost, and when the Spirit of God has strengthened us to the highest degree, will still fall far short of what our dear Lord and Master deserves at our hands. Let us serve Him with all our might.

What is this gift of God in each of us? There is a variety of gifts. No two people have the same gifts. Every person is given some gift and to each God says: "I want that gift enlivened, kindled, brought to the highest and used for Myself." Among these many gifts are the following:

1. The gift of speech.
This gift ought not to be perverted, prostituted, debauched or wasted. Our Lord would say to us, "I want every friend I have to be a talker, to be a witness, to be a champion or to be a pleader for Me." We should talk for Him wherever we go.
2. The gift of writing.
How few people make enough of the gift of writing! Everyone who can write things that will help others ought to write. Write simple, straight-forward Christian letters to those who should accept Christ. People will appreciate and treasure those things.
3. The gift of prayer.
God's Word says, "Ye have not because ye ask not." Oh, that the world might learn the marvelous meaning of stirring up the gift of prayer! Do you pray for people? Magnify the gift of secret prayer to the last degree.
4. The gift of influence.
No man ought ever to harm his influence. We have our influence. No one lives to himself, nor does anyone die to himself. We must bring all of our influence and put it on the side of Christ. Let us make our influence count for the maximum of good and helpfulness.

Why should we stir up these gifts? Because it is our plain duty. We owe it to God to do our best. We owe it to Christ. We owe it to others. We owe it to ourselves. We owe it to our church to do our best at preparation, at training and at service. We should also stir up our gifts because of our incomparable opportunity now. Give your best in service for Christ now.

Paul earnestly exhorted Timothy to stir up the gift, to fan it into a flame. The expression fanning the fire suggests three things:

1. Let the clinkers out.
When the furnace is full of clinkers we cannot expect the fire to burn. When the heart is full of clinkers we cannot expect the fire to flame.

Many are the clinkers that get into our hearts and lives. We must shake them out. You and I know that some of these clinkers are--sin, selfishness, disobedience, defiance, pride, stubbornness, envy, worldliness, ease and wickedness. We must shake them out. Let no malice mar. Let no habit hurt. Let no sin stay. Get that unfulfilled duty out of your life. Shake that hatred loose in your heart and get it out. Pray to God to help you get rid of that sin in your soul. Let the clinker out.

2. Let the draft in.
The Holy Spirit is God's heavenly draft. The word "Spirit" comes from the Greek word which means to breathe or blow. The primary conception is wind or breath. To fan

the gift into flame we must open the heart to heavenly blowing and give the Holy Spirit right of way. Let the Holy Spirit take your memory of God's gift and fan it into real zeal for the Lord and His work. We cannot fan the gift with anything but the Spirit's draft.

3. Keep the fire going.

If we are to keep the fire going, we must give it something to feed on. We must be up and doing. A start and stop service is never a spiritual service. When we give ourselves to God and let Him fill us with His Spirit there is joy in it for us and blessing for others. Every Christian has some spiritual gift which can be used for God's glory, but some have let the fire go down. They need to fan into fire the gifts of God. Let us shake out the clinkers and let the Spirit of God warm our cold hearts until the fire is fanned into flame that we may use our gifts for His glory, the welfare of others and our joy. God help us to hear the exhortation of this text and to heed it.