

Reading 2 Timothy 1:1-14.

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Rev Dr Richard Anderson

In the drama of Pentecost, rushing wind and fiery flames may seem remote from us. Were they not for special people in special times? Is the coming of the Holy Spirit relevant to us in our humdrum lives?

Here is a chapter about two ordinary people struggling with lives which in many ways reflect our own. Paul is in prison, feeling lonely, cold, bored and, worst of all, expecting execution. He writes to Timothy, a youngish man in his early thirties, often unwell, shy, uncertain of himself, fearful, aware of his lack of experience. Aware that his own ministry is drawing to a close, Paul sees Timothy as a key Christian minister, despite all his uncertainties.

This is the message of Pentecost: God gives His Holy Spirit to frail people like Timothy so they can live as God wants. What a great gift to those of us who feel inadequate!

So Paul tells us, ***God has not given us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power***. He focuses first on Paul's journey of faith. Timothy's granny Lois and mum Eunice had taught him the Scriptures from an early age. Many of us have enjoyed the privilege of godly parents or churches who have grounded us in the Bible. But we need something more! All this teaching is of no avail unless the Holy Spirit applies it to our hearts so that we experience God for ourselves. A secondhand faith will not get us to heaven; we need our own. The powerful Spirit of God set fire to all that Bible knowledge so that Timothy came to his own *sincere faith*.

John Newton's mother taught him the Scriptures and sang hymns with him. In his teens he joined the navy, rejected her influence, proudly ridiculed the Gospel and abandoned himself to a dissolute life. In a desperate storm at sea, snatches of truth came back to him and he grasped at them, finding forgiveness and acceptance with God. In his hymn, *Amazing grace*, he describes the great kindness of God. God gave him his own Spirit of power who transformed his life.

Paul too knew that power, but he needed more. He tells Timothy, ***God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power and of love***. God is always giving. In verses 9-11 Paul speaks of being *saved*, and *called*, of *grace* and the gifts of *life and immortality*. The whole Bible describes a generous God, always reaching out to us in compassion, kindness and mercy. His greatest gifts come to us *through Jesus Christ*. *Not because of anything we have done, says Paul, but because of his own purpose and grace*.

As the Holy Spirit reveals this wonderful love to us, He creates a love in us for God which makes us want to please Him more than anything else. Paul applies this motive of love to three major challenges:

Challenge 1: Suffering. Paul suffers in jail and tells Timothy *Join with me in suffering for the Gospel by the power of God.* (v.8) The Holy Spirit reveals Christ's love so powerfully that Paul is glad to suffer too along with His Master.

Challenge 2: Sin v. 9 says He *saved us & called us to a holy life.* Even a great apostle who has established many people in the Christian faith must still strive after holiness. We all know that this struggle against sin's guilt and power never ceases. This Spirit is HOLY. He motivates us to holy living by love for the one who first loved us and gave Himself for us on the cross.

Challenge 3: Service v 11: tells us, *Of this gospel I was appointed a herald, apostle & teacher.* None of us has the same ministry as Paul, but we are all called to lovingly tell others about the Lord Jesus. After He rose from the dead Jesus told His disciples, *You will receive power when the HSp comes upon you and you will be my witnesses.* (Acts 1:8) LOVE for Jesus stirs us to lovingly tell others about Him.

Newton became a great preacher because of this love the Spirit gave him for Jesus and for the people who needed to know Him. He exclaims, *I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see. How precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed.*

But the Christian life is not a matter of sitting back and passively accepting all God gives us for **God has not given us a sp of timidity, but of power, of love & of self-discipline.**

V 13 tells us to *keep the pattern of sound teaching with faith and love in Jesus Christ.* We once encouraged the development of a hospital in Uganda. I had to fly from Nairobi with the architect to check on the building. The architect noticed errors where the builder had departed from the plan in an effort to save on materials. I sensed his mounting fury. Jesus once said, *I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter nor the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the law until everything is accomplished.* And then He goes on to say what should make many of the delegates to the General Assembly tremble, *Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven* Matthew 5:18,19.

My architect friend insisted that it was not enough to get most of the building right. We must *keep the pattern of sound teaching* or face the anger of the divine architect! Paul insists on the same discipline as he goes on (v 14), *Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you.*

Sherlock Homes has a story of a group who rented a shop next to a bank. From the basement they tunelled through into the vault of the bank and attempted to rob the treasures stored there. Paul fears that thieves will seek to rob the churches of the riches of God's Word. How can we guard it? in v:14 he commands *guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.* How does the Spirit give us this help? By *self-discipline*, by a life of regular study and prayer. Read the Bible daily, ponder it, listen to preachers, discuss the teaching, earnestly desire understanding and ask the Holy Spirit to make it clear.

An old American saint, AW Tozer, wrote, *it is not mere words that nourish the soul, but God Himself. The Bible is not an end in itself, but a means to bring men to an intimate and satisfying knowledge of God that they may delight in His presence and know the inner sweetness of the very God Himself in the core and centre of their hearts.*

Among the Turkana people of northern Kenya I have often seen people rise before dawn when the country is cold and turn to a dead-looking heap of ashes beside them. They carefully prod it with a stick, find a glowing ember, and blow on it, feeding it with dry grass and then thin sticks until it flares up into a glorious fire. Likewise Paul tells us in v:6, *Fan into flame the gift of God that is in you.*

Amen