

**Bethel Christian Fellowship**  
**Fair Lawn, NJ**

**The Message Of 2 Timothy (3): “God’s Gift to Timothy”**  
**2 Timothy 1:6-7**

**April 30, 2023**

In the early church, Christians were taught the Word of God, and they were instructed about the basic meanings of important Christian doctrines. But in many churches today, the pulpit has become a place of entertainment, rather than a source of enlightenment and enrichment. Yet all the while false teachers are hard at work trying to lead Christians astray.

That’s one of the primary reasons Paul wanted Timothy to carry on his ministry in the Ephesian church. Toward the end of the letter he writes; *“For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry”* (4:3-5).

But how will Timothy be able to do all this? Paul begins to answer that question in the verses before us today. Following his salutation (vv. 1-2) and thanksgiving (vv. 3-5), he now writes, *“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 did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline”* (vv. 6-7). These are two of the more important verses in 2 Timothy; they are also two of the most misunderstood. It will serve us well, therefore, to look at them carefully, in light of the purpose for which Paul has written them.

**First**, the transition from the preceding section is an easy and natural one. In verse 5, Paul has thanked God for Timothy’s “sincere faith,” which was firmly established by his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice. It’s “For this reason” (v. 6a) that Paul doesn’t hesitate to exhort Timothy to “fan into flame” the gift of God which is in him. Timothy is a man firmly established in the faith, and therefore must fulfill his God-given responsibilities by exercising his God-given gift. In the words of one author, “God never calls men to service without equipping them” (Homer Kent, The Pastoral Epistles).

**Second**, Timothy’s gift was a *spiritual* gift. The Greek word for “gift” is *charisma*, which is related to grace (*charis*). A spiritual gift, therefore, is a gift of God’s grace, enabling us to serve others in the body of Christ. We can’t say with certainty what Timothy’s gift was, but in light of his charge to guard and preach the Word *and* to protect and nurture the church, we can “hazard a guess” (Stott). God’s gift to Timothy was most likely that of teaching and pastoring the flock, or perhaps evangelism.

All three gifts are essential for equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:11-12), and all three would have been necessary for Timothy to fulfill Paul’s directive; *“discharge all the duties of your ministry”* (4:5). Like all spiritual gifts, they can and should be used to edify and build up others in the Body.

**Third**, Timothy's gift is already in his possession (it "*is in you*"); but Timothy is also responsible to "*fan into flame*" (NIV) or "*stir into flame*" (NEB) this God-given gift. Paul's point is that spiritual gifts are not given in full bloom; they need to be developed by *use*. In Paul's first letter, he exhorted Timothy not to "neglect" his gift (4:14); here he uses a vivid, spiritual metaphor and exhorts Timothy to "rekindle" his gift. "The gift is likened to a fire," writes John Stott; "The Greek verb (a stirring up or rekindling), which occurs nowhere else in the New Testament, does not necessarily imply that Timothy has let the fire die down and must now fan the dying embers into flame again . . . it seems, that Paul's exhortation is to continue fanning it, 'to stir up that inner fire' (JBP), to keep it alive, even ablaze, *presumably by exercising the gift faithfully and by waiting upon God in prayer for its constant renewal*" (Guard the Gospel).

**Fourth**, Paul indicates that Timothy's gift was bestowed on him "*through the laying on of my hands*." Once again, 1 Timothy 4:14 sheds further light on what this means; "*Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you*." The reference is to Timothy's public ordination, which set him apart for ministry. Perhaps this took place before Paul left Ephesus and went into Macedonia (1 Tim. 1:3). At this time, he *and* the elders of the church would have placed their hands on Timothy and prayed over him, committing him to the Lord.

It appears that in the process of praying, an inspired prophet revealed to Timothy what the gift was (pastoring, and/or teaching, and/or evangelism). The laying on of hands symbolized the transfer of leadership from Paul and the elders to Timothy; but the act itself did not produce the gift. It was the prophetic utterance that may have been the instrument through which the Holy Spirit imparted this gift. At the very least this prophetic word informed Timothy and others of the gift Timothy had already received. **Q.** Does this sort of thing happen today? **A.** Not if one believes that the gift of prophecy is no longer necessary for today's church (as I do). With the completion of the New Testament canon, the Scripture *alone* is our all-sufficient guide to reveal God's will for us today (2 Tim. 3:16-17). We love our charismatic and Pentecostal friends, but on this issue we must respectfully disagree.

**Fifth**, the reason for Paul's directive is found in verse 7: "*For God did not give us a spirit of timidity* (or "fear," ESV, KJV), *but a spirit of power, of love, and of self-discipline*." In his first letter, Paul has already addressed the problems related to Timothy's youth (1 Tim. 4:12) and his frequent illnesses (1 Tim. 5:23). Now he addresses Timothy's timid temperament. "Use your God-given gift," Paul says; "because the gift of the Spirit Himself has been given to all of us who are in Christ. And the Holy Spirit is a Spirit not of fear *but* of power, and love and self-control."

In a number of his letters, Paul will make a negative statement and then reinforce it with positive counterpoints (i.e., Rom. 14:17); "*For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit . . .*" Here Paul does the same.

*First*, the negative: "God gave us a spirit *not of fear*" (v. 7a, ESV). As we read in our ESV Study Bible note: "The Greek (word for fear) in extrabiblical literature refers to one who flees from battle, and has a strong pejorative sense of referring to cowardice. Boldness, not cowardice, is a mark of the Spirit." What an encouragement this must have been to Paul's dear son in the faith. At a time when Christians were being fiercely persecuted by the state, the pressure Timothy was under can only be imagined by most Americans today.

Now the positives: **(a)** God gave us a spirit “of power;” if so, then we can be confident of His supernatural enablement as we minister to others through our spiritual gift(s); **(b)** God gave us a spirit “of love;” which is also a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). The *use* of our gifts is really *useless* if not motivated by a genuine love to serve others. That’s the reason for the inclusion of 1 Corinthians 13 (the love chapter) between the two chapters on spiritual gifts (12 and 14); **(c)** God has given us a spirit of self-discipline; if so, then we are also able to use our gift with restraint, and in the right way. The Holy Spirit enables us to know *when* and how to use it, and when not to use it. (The importance of this becomes clear in Paul’s directives for how the gift of tongues should operate in the Corinthian assembly; 1 Corinthians 14:27.)

Timothy would have had every reason to be encouraged by Paul’s initial exhortation. Paul has reminded him of the time when God called him into the ministry and the local church had ordained him. Through Paul, God had imparted to him the spiritual gift he needed to accomplish that ministry. The indwelling Holy Spirit would also provide the supernatural power, love, and self-control necessary for using his gift in the right way. What must have been even more encouraging to Timothy was that he didn’t need any new work of grace in his life; all he had to do was “stir up” what he already had.

In the words of one author, “He was to do everything in his power to enhance that gift. He was to study ways that the gift could become more effective. He was to practice and practice and practice until the gift developed into a very smooth technique. Over the passage of time, the gift would increase in effectiveness, *its value and contribution toward the growth of the body of Christ becoming greater and greater*” (Robert L. Thomas, Understanding Spiritual Gifts).

This past week a new friend came to Ocean Grove for the first time. He was amazed at the beautifully restored house the Lord has provided for me and my family (including our granddaughters). As I told him the story of the restoration process (with the “before” and “after” pictures), I was once again reminded of the many gifted contractors and craftsmen who transformed this historic house into what it is today. The painters, the plumbers, the electrician, the masons, the carpenters, and the roofers were all working together, using their wide variety of tools. They had a common goal in view. They wanted to do their part to bring the house back to life. As it turned out, they outdid themselves. We received a restoration and preservation award from both the Historical Society of Ocean Grove and the Monmouth County Historical Commission. No one was more surprised than I was.

By way of analogy, Bethel Christian Fellowship is the house of God, a local expression of the body of Christ. It would be foolish to think that we will grow into what the Lord has designed for us – if we fail to “get to work” and make use of “the tools” He has given us by His Spirit. That’s what Paul wanted for Timothy, and that’s what God wants for each and every one of us.

There are speaking gifts and there are serving gifts (1 Peter 4:10-11), and both are important to our fellowship. Not everyone is gifted in teaching and pastoring, but there are those “behind the scenes” ministries that help to make these public ministries possible. God has graciously given each of us a gift, *and* the ability *and* the opportunities to use them. If so, then what are we waiting for?