

What God Has Given

“God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.”

—II Timothy 1:7

THE BIBLE IDENTIFIES VARIOUS gifts of God, the chief among them being his beloved Son as stated in John 3:16. There is also the gift of the Holy Spirit, a blessing which Jesus said the Heavenly Father was more willing to give to his children than earthly fathers are to give good gifts to their children. (Luke 11:13) In our theme text, Paul assures us that God has not given us the “spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” The spirit of “power,” “love,” and a “sound mind,” is the Holy Spirit in three aspects of its operation in the life of the Christian.

All careful students of the Bible realize that any of its individual statements are best understood in relation to the context in which they appear. We think that this is particularly true with respect to Paul’s observation of what God has not given and what he has given.

There is much in the epistle which throws light on this text. It reveals that Paul was nearing the

end of his Christian way. He was incarcerated in a Roman prison and condemned to death. He was not at all disturbed by this, for he wrote, "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."—II Tim. 4:6-8

Paul was ready to be "offered," but he longed for some fellowship and comfort, and urged Timothy to visit him as soon as possible. After affirming that he was ready to be offered, Paul continued, "Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me: for Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry."—vss. 9-11

Paul refers to Alexander the coppersmith who did him much evil. (vs. 14) Continuing, Paul wrote, "At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion."—vss. 16,17

Paul said, "All they which are in Asia be turned away from me." (II Tim. 1:15) Taking this together with what he reveals in the 4th chapter concerning those who had forsaken him, and in some instances

turned against him, we can understand why Paul felt that he needed Timothy and Mark to visit him. At the same time, Paul knew that a certain risk was involved in this requested visit. His statement that no man had stood with him on the occasion of his first trial, might well suggest the reason for their forsaking him. They may have been fearful of being identified as his friends, imprisoned, and possibly condemned to death.

Paul did not endeavor to hide this situation from Timothy. Instead, he reminded his beloved spiritual son that any fear he might have in connection with the proposed visit was not from the Lord. The fact that a proposed service is dangerous, and will naturally entail a certain amount of risk, should not be used as a criterion as to whether or not it is the Lord's will. So Paul wrote, "Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God."—II Tim. 1:8

THE POWER OF GOD

Fear should have no part in directing the Lord's people as they seek to determine his will in any given circumstance. Paul asked Timothy to visit him in his Roman prison realizing that a certain danger was involved. Timothy must have also known this. We may not understand the full reason Paul considered this visit so important, but we do not need to know this in order to get the lesson which the situation presents to us. The lesson is that if a situation arises in our lives which calls for action, the mere fact that it involves danger does

not necessarily indicate that it is contrary to the Lord's will. The total situation must be taken into consideration.

On the other hand, the Lord's people are not needlessly to expose themselves to danger simply to display their courage. This might well be tempting the Lord, as Jesus indicated his jumping from the "pinnacle of the temple" would have been. (Matt. 4:5-7) While the Lord has not given us the spirit of fear, he has given us "the spirit of power" which enables us to be partakers "of the afflictions of the gospel." If we are faithful to the Gospel, bearing witness to the good news of the kingdom with zeal and courage, we will partake of the "afflictions of the gospel."

These afflictions of the Gospel may be in the form of persecution, or they might well be simply in the mental and physical weariness which often is involved in faithfully bearing witness to the Truth. The point is that we should be willing and glad to endure these "afflictions," knowing that, at all times, the Lord will give us the necessary strength. Paul assured Timothy that the Lord would give him "the spirit of power." We can be sure that he will do the same for us.

GOD'S PROMISES

An important source of strength for the Christian is found in the promises of God. By faith we lay hold upon these promises and receive strength to continue on in the difficult way of the cross. We hear the Lord saying, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." (Heb. 13:5) We take courage in the assurance that the Lord is always at our side to

guide us by his spirit and to overrule all our experiences for our good as New Creatures.

Then there is that wonderful promise, “The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.” (Ps. 34:7) By faith, we see these invisible messengers of God as they go about their assignment of ministering to the needs of those who are “heirs of salvation”—that “great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him.”—Heb. 1:14; 2:3

Paul assures us that the mighty power which raised Jesus from the dead is operative on our behalf. (Eph. 1:19,20) In order to experience the operation of this power, Paul was willing to suffer the loss of all things. (Phil. 3:8-11) He knew that this involved fellowship in the sufferings of Christ—a partnership which led to death. When Paul was first called into the ministry, the Lord revealed to him the course of suffering which lay ahead. (Acts 9:16) This did not deter him because he also knew that the divine “spirit of power” would sustain him through all the difficult experiences he would encounter. So now, from his prison home in Rome, he assured Timothy of this same glorious reality of the Christian’s way of life which leads to death.

The Lord gives strength to his people: “Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall:

But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint. “—Isa. 40:28-31

THE SPIRIT OF LOVE

Paul informs us that the Lord also gives his people the spirit “of love.” It is through the divine plan that God’s love is revealed to us. Through this glorious truth of the Word, “the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts.” (Rom. 5:5) For this to be true, we must empty our hearts of selfishness. Divine love cannot operate in the lives of the self-seeking.

How important it is that the spirit of love does find expression in our lives and becomes the motive for all that we think, say, and do. Paul wrote, “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity [love], I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity [love], I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity [love], it profiteth me nothing.”—I Cor. 13:1-3

Paul requested that Timothy visit him in prison which, from the human standpoint, involved a great risk. If this visit, in the Lord’s providence, had led to a complete sacrifice of life on Timothy’s part—the giving of his “body to be burned”—the sacrifice would have been without profit from the Lord’s standpoint had it not been motivated by

love. It is a privilege to suffer and to die with Jesus. Those who are called to thus walk in his steps are assured of the future privilege of living and reigning with him, but only if we have been emptied of self and have wholeheartedly embraced God's gift "of love."

THE SPIRIT OF A SOUND MIND

In addition to the spirit of "power, and of love," the Lord also gives his people the spirit "of a sound mind." What is a sound mind? From the human standpoint, a sound mind is a mind which can properly assess and evaluate the various facts, ideas, and circumstances of life, and make rational decisions based upon them. To the mentally unsound, almost nothing is seen and understood in its true light. Everything becomes distorted.

The present is not the time in the divine plan when God is giving soundness of mind to the mentally unsound in general. We rejoice, however, in the assurance that, in "the times of restitution of all things" (Acts 3:21), all who are physically and mentally unsound will be restored to soundness of mind and of body.

We think that the spirit of "a sound mind" referred to by Paul is something which goes beyond the ability of the human mind to think rationally and reach logical conclusions. It is, we believe, a reference to the manner in which the New Creature is guided by the Holy Spirit to do the Lord's will. It is quite possible, in fact almost certain, that one who is thus directed by the Spirit of God will do things, even take a course in life which, from the standpoint of worldly wisdom, would seem quite irrational.

We have a good example of this in the Apostle Paul. At the point in his Christian walk when he appeared before Festus and bore witness to him, this Gentile ruler said, "Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad." (Acts 26:24) The "learning" referred to by Festus is what Paul had received in the school of Christ. It gave him the spirit of "a sound mind" which to an outsider, seemed sheer folly, or worse.

TIMOTHY'S VISIT

From the human standpoint, it would probably not have seemed wise for Timothy to visit Paul in the Roman prison. The mind of the flesh would reason that nothing could be accomplished by such a visit, and that, perhaps, he would lose his life. In his letter to Timothy, Paul expressed a different view. Should this beloved young soldier of the cross be fearful, Paul reminded him that the spirit of fear is not from the Lord. Instead, God gives strength unto his people to do what he calls upon them to do. Paul, the mouthpiece of the Lord, evidently believed there was an important reason why Timothy should visit him in Rome.

Paul's second letter to Timothy contains much instruction for this young teacher in the church. These were instructions which would help him to continue on successfully in the ministry after Paul's departure. He wrote, for example, "Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that thou has heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." (II Tim. 2:1,2) Probably, Paul felt there were

many more instructions and admonitions he would like to impart to Timothy than would be possible by letter. This may well have been one of the reasons he wanted to see him.

A REASONABLE SERVICE

In any case, Paul certainly felt that Timothy would be exercising the spirit of a sound mind to visit him in Rome, even though it would entail hardship and a certain degree of danger. After all, this is what they both believed was involved in following the Master. Paul wrote, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." (Rom. 12:1) A sound mind is a mind capable of reasoning. The New Creature knows that it is a reasonable thing to present one's body a living sacrifice. Having thus presented oneself to the Lord, it would be unreasonable, or the exercise of an unsound mind, to hold back from the way of sacrifice.

We have in Jesus an excellent illustration of this. He is our exemplar, and we are walking in his footsteps. Jesus poured out his soul unto death and was led as a lamb to the slaughter. In the beginning of his ministry, Jesus avoided exposing himself to danger. Realizing that he had bitter enemies in Judea, he moved north to Galilee. He did this not because he was fearful, but because he knew that the Father's time for the consummation of his sacrifice had not yet come. However, when the "due time" did approach, Jesus unhesitatingly returned to Judea and announced to his disciples "that he

must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed.”—Matt. 16:21

PETER OBJECTS

Peter seemed certain that his beloved Master was making a serious mistake in thus exposing himself to danger. He rebuked Jesus, and said, “Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.” (vs. 22) Jesus replied to Peter, saying, “Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.”—vs. 23

Peter meant well, but he was using human reasoning as a guide. Anyone not guided by the Holy Spirit would reason the same way. From the standpoint of the divine will for those who have covenanted to lay down their lives in the divine cause, such human reasoning is not sound. Jesus explained why, and included his followers in the explanation. “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?”—vss. 24-26

In this explanation, Jesus assured the disciples that he was not actually throwing away his life, but taking the only possible course that would lead to life—divine, immortal life, that is. Jesus had entered into a covenant with the Heavenly Father which called for the sacrifice of his life as the world’s redeemer. In return, the Father had given the Master many assurances of life in the resurrection.

These promises were a great joy to Jesus. They were a joy that enabled him, in the laying down of his life, to endure the cross and to despise the shame entailed in being viewed as a blasphemer in the eyes of his enemies.—Heb. 12:2

Jesus knew that the only way to enter into that future life in the resurrection and to be with his Heavenly Father in glory, was to faithfully consummate the sacrifice of his earthly life. If he failed in this, he would lose everything. Thus, to him, the only way to “find” his life in the resurrection, was first to “lose” it through obedient and loving sacrifice.

WE FOLLOW HIM

Jesus invited his disciples to take up their cross and follow him into death. When we take this step of full dedication to the Lord’s will, we are obligated to walk in the way that he walked. The Lord’s mind becomes our guide, and thus we are given the spirit of a sound mind. This is not a mind that holds us back from sacrifice, but a mind that urges us to take advantage of every opportunity to lay down our lives. Having devoted ourselves to this course of sacrifice, let us not allow human reasoning to turn us aside from the pathway of faithfulness, whether it be our own, or someone else’s.

Paul was well acquainted with the fact of Jesus’ life. He knew how courageously Jesus took that final journey to Jerusalem, knowing that death awaited him in that holy city. It is quite possible that Paul had this experience in mind when he, likewise, found himself confronted with the question as to whether or not he would go up to Jerusalem where bonds—and possibly death—awaited

him. Paul was warned by the Holy Spirit, through Agabus, that he would be bound in Jerusalem and delivered to the Gentiles.—Acts 21:10,11

Paul's friends, as Peter did with Jesus, endeavored to dissuade him from going to Jerusalem. Although not realizing it, they were using human reasoning which, from Paul's standpoint, and the Lord's, was unsound. "Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."—vs. 13

OUR "JERUSALEMS"

Our "Jerusalems" consist largely of little ways of laying down our lives. Is our earliest thought each morning a reaffirmation of our consecration vow to lay down our lives in divine service? Each evening, as we look back upon the experiences of the day, can we say to the Lord that we have done as faithfully as possible all that he gave us to do? Can we say that we did not turn down any opportunity simply because it seemed too difficult?

As day by day we face our little "Jerusalems" may it be without fear, knowing that fear is not of the Lord. Let it be with courage, knowing that the Lord will give us the spirit of power. He will give us all the power we need to do the things he gives us the opportunity of doing. May we also daily cleanse ourselves of the spirit of selfishness. Having denied self, let us seek to do the Lord's will, in his way, which is the way of love, for he has given us the spirit of love.

If we are ridiculed by the world and our worldly friends for being too one-sided, too radical in the

way we serve the Lord, let us ever remember that presenting our bodies daily as a living sacrifice is our “reasonable” service. It is only by the sacrifice of our earthly life, that we can hope to gain heavenly life, and live and reign with Jesus. Let us be like Paul who, in referring to experiences which awaited him in Jerusalem, said, “None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.”—Acts 20:24 ■