

Power, Love, and a Sound Mind

*“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 MENTIONS

many things which God has given us. Outstanding among these is the gift of his beloved Son to be the Redeemer and Savior of the world. (John 3:16) Jesus is referred to by the Apostle Paul as God’s “indefinable gift.” (II Cor. 9:15, *International Standard Version*) Then there is God’s gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said that his Heavenly Father is more willing to give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him than earthly parents are to give good gifts to their children.—Luke 11:13

In our text Paul mentions the “spirit,” that is, disposition or influence, of “power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” These qualities are closely related to God’s gift of the Holy Spirit, in that power, love, and a sound mind are outgrowths of the operation of his Spirit in the life of the Christian. They are also evidences that the Holy Spirit is operative in our hearts, and Paul contrasts these

evidences with “the spirit of fear,” which, he emphasizes, is not given to us by the Heavenly Father.

Fear, should it enter the Christian life, has a very blighting effect. Satan is the great instigator of fear. The Apostle Peter wrote, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.” (I Pet. 5:8) The roaring of a lion in seeking out its prey is designed to instill fear in the animal being hunted. This fear, it is said, virtually paralyzes the animal so that it is incapable either of escaping or of putting up resistance.

Fear will also do this to us as followers of the Master if we allow it to take possession of our hearts. Peter gives the antidote for this fear engendered by Satan’s attacks. He wrote, “Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.” (vs. 9) Steadfastness in the faith means firm confidence in the outworking of God’s plan in our lives, and a knowledge that Satan cannot harm us as New Creatures in Christ Jesus. If Satan’s roaring brings “afflictions” to our flesh, we are to remember that these are the same as those common “in the world,” and are no evidence that God has deserted us.

Regardless of the origin of our fear, we are to remember that it does not come from God. To keep this always in mind, and to believe it with all our hearts, will enable us under all circumstances to proceed in the narrow way, doing those things which we believe the Bible indicates to be God’s will for us. Thus we can have confidence, knowing that the Lord will take care of us, not necessarily from a physical standpoint, but as New Creatures guided by his Spirit.

Peter also wrote, “Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?” (I Pet. 3:13) “That which is good” is God’s will which we are endeavoring to do. Here the apostle assures us that no eternal harm can come to us as long as we walk in the pathway of obedience to the Heavenly Father’s will. However, this does not mean that we will not have difficult experiences along this way of righteousness, for in the next verse Peter adds, “If ye suffer for righteousness’ sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled.”—vs. 14

We think of Jesus as one who always did those things which were pleasing to his Heavenly Father. Yet, he suffered for righteousness’ sake, and his enemies did all they could to cause him fear. At the end they spat upon him, beat him, hung him on a cross, and heaped ignominy upon him. (Matt. 27:27-31) However, as Peter assures us, they could not harm him. Indeed, they killed him as a man, but he came through that experience unscathed as a New Creature. So it will be with us. Peter admonishes that in the face of difficulties, from whatever source they may arise, we are not to be “afraid of their terror,” knowing that this type of fear is not of God, but of the Devil, in his attempt to turn us aside from our course of faithfulness in the narrow way.

PAUL’S INVITATION

We frequently gain a fuller meaning of a text when we consider the setting in which it appears. We believe this is true with respect to Paul’s reference to “the spirit of fear.” His second epistle to Timothy, in which this expression is used, was written from Rome,

where he was being held prisoner. Apparently Paul felt reasonably certain that he would soon be executed, and so he wrote: "Watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry. For 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. 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."—II Tim. 4:5-11

In the first chapter of the epistle, we find Paul saying, "All they which are in Asia be turned away from me." (vs. 15) The evidence seems clear that Paul felt quite alone and believed that a visit by Timothy would be of great value to him. Additionally, since he had been more or less training Timothy to carry on with the ministry after his own death, Paul doubtless also felt that it would be a great blessing to this spiritual son of his if they could talk matters over face to face.

In verse 8 of the first chapter Paul wrote to Timothy, "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." Evidently at least some of Paul's "friends" had turned away, being "ashamed of the testimony of our Lord." They were in a difficult position, for to be friendly with this prisoner

exposed them to danger. Despite this, however, Paul invited Timothy to visit him, though knowing that for him to do so could lead to complications with the Roman authorities.

THE LORD'S PROVISION

It is against this background that Paul reminds Timothy that “the spirit of fear” is not of the Lord, that instead, he gives strength, the spirit of “power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” From the standpoint of the flesh, journeying to Rome and visiting Paul, who apparently had already been condemned to death, would not be an easy task. The apostle knew, though, that God would give Timothy the necessary strength to do this. Being a follower of Jesus is never an easy task. It requires courage and strength beyond our own, but we have the assurance that the Lord does give “power,” and every follower of the Master can testify to the truthfulness of this promise.

How does God give strength to his people? One way he does this is through his promises. To know that God has promised to help us in every time of need is in itself a great source of strength. Isaiah wrote, “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

Another way the Lord gives strength to his people is by the providences with which he surrounds them. To know that he, through our guardian angels, and in other ways, is shaping our providences for our eternal good as New Creatures, is a wonderful source of strength! In addition, we know that, when necessary, the Heavenly Father will directly imbue his people with spiritual strength to help them through experiences which, in their own strength alone, they would falter and fall.

THE RESURRECTION POWER

In his letter to the brethren in Ephesus, Paul speaks of the “exceeding greatness” of God’s power which raised Jesus from the dead and exalted him to “his own right hand.” (Eph. 1:18-20) Paul says in this passage that the same mighty power which raised Jesus from the dead is now working “to us-ward who believe,” and in his letter to the Philipians he expresses his willingness to suffer “the loss of all things,” that he might know and experience this power working in him.—Phil. 3:7-10

There is no question of God’s ability to care for his people, and there is no question about his desire to do so, because he has promised it throughout the Scriptures. However, we must exercise faith in God’s promises. Peter could walk on the water until his faith wavered; and so can we go through any experience, or have any “mountain” removed which may loom up in front of us, if by faith we continue to hold on to the Heavenly Father’s precious promises.—Matt. 21:21

PERFECT HEARTS

Satan will endeavor to instill doubts and fears into our hearts on the grounds that we are not worthy

of God's continued love and care. Then we think of self, of all the imperfections we know we have, and we begin to tremble. When this happens we must remember that God is not dealing with us according to the flesh, but according to our heart intentions, and that our fleshly imperfections are covered by the robe of Christ's righteousness.—Isa. 61:10; Phil. 3:9

The Scriptures say, "The eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect [Hebrew: complete] toward him." (II Chron. 16:9) If our hearts are pure then we know that the Lord will continue to strengthen us by giving us the spirit of power.

THE SPIRIT OF LOVE

A pure heart, one that is complete before the Lord, is a heart that is emptied of self, and filled with love. This again is one of the provisions mentioned in our theme text, for God not only gives us the spirit of power, but also the spirit of love. Paul wrote that "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us." (Rom. 5:5) It is through the Scriptures, which reveal his divine purpose for the church and the world, that we learn about God's love. The Bible tells us that he delights to exercise lovingkindness in the earth. (Jer. 9:23,24) In God's Word, too, we learn about the loving gift of his "only begotten Son."—John 3:16

This knowledge, when properly appreciated, begets the desire to be like God. Hence, we earnestly strive to eradicate selfishness from our hearts, and to be filled instead with the spirit of love. With God's love "shed abroad" in our hearts, we are motivated

by this spirit in all that we do. If Timothy were to go to Rome and visit Paul, love would need to motivate him to do this, else he would not be specially blessed. Earlier in his ministry, Paul wrote that though we might give our bodies to be burned, if we have not love, it will profit us nothing. (I Cor. 13:1-3) How important, then, that we open our hearts to receive this gift from God—the spirit of love.

A SOUND MIND

The third gift mentioned by Paul in our text is the spirit of a “sound mind.” A sound mind is one that can reason correctly, upon the basis of available knowledge, and reach proper conclusions. Among members of the fallen race there are no perfectly sound minds, for all minds are contaminated with sin to some extent. Even among the minds which are considered sound by accepted human standards, there are varying degrees of intellect, though still imperfect in all cases.

However, when Paul speaks of a sound mind he does not refer to human standards of soundness, but to a mind that is regulated by the will of God. Here again the Word of God comes into the forefront as the principal source of instructions which produce soundness of mind from the divine standpoint. To the extent that we forego our own reasoning and accept for our guidance the instructions of the Lord, we have the soundness of mind referred to by Paul.

The Apostle Paul speaks of “casting down imaginations [Greek: reasoning], and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” (II Cor. 10:5) The mind of the flesh

is prone to set up its reasoning contrary to the knowledge of God, and by this means endeavors to induce us to be disobedient to his will and to the will of our Head, Christ Jesus. The reasoning of our fleshly minds may not be unsound from the human standpoint, but it will not reflect the spirit of a “sound mind” which is given to us by the Heavenly Father.

PAUL NOT MAD

After the Apostle Paul had testified to Festus, a Roman governor, of the many difficult experiences through which he had passed as a result of his ministry in behalf of Christ, “Festus saith with a loud voice, Paul, thou art mad; thy much learning turneth thee to madness.” Paul answered, “I am not mad, most excellent Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and sound mind.” (Acts 26:24,25, *Revised Version Improved and Corrected*) Those who follow in the footsteps of Jesus, suffering and dying with him, are often considered confused in their viewpoint and unsound in their conclusions. Actually, however, they are only following the words of “truth and sound mind” which are in the Bible for their guidance.

Paul sets forth the proper viewpoint again in Romans 12:1, which reads, “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.” A sound mind is a reasoning mind, and from God’s standpoint the reasoning and conclusions must be based on his instructions if we are to have the spirit of a “sound mind” mentioned by Paul in our theme text. We have been invited to lay down our lives in sacrifice, which was illustrated in the services of the ancient

Tabernacle of Israel by the offering of animals on literal altars. In this present Gospel Age we do not offer animals in sacrifice, but we present ourselves. This, Paul says, is a “reasonable” service—that is, it reflects sound reasoning from the divine standpoint.

Paul follows up this admonition in verse 2, which reads, “Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” This tells us that in order to have the spirit of a sound mind from God’s standpoint, our view of things has to be transformed by a renewing, or renovation, of our minds. Our old and selfish ideas and the reasoning which supported them must give place to the new viewpoint—to the will of God as expressed through his Word; and his will is that we lay down our lives in sacrifice.

JESUS’ VIEWPOINT

Jesus is our perfect example and guide, and it is interesting to note how his soundness of mind as a New Creature directed him in the doing of his Father’s will. From the very beginning of his ministry his enemies were seeking occasion against him. However, while Jesus knew that he was to lay down his life as the Redeemer and Savior of the world, he did not recklessly expose himself to danger until he knew it was the Father’s due time. (John 7:10) Meanwhile he continued faithfully laying down his life in the service of others.

However, when Jesus knew that the time had come for his sacrifice to be consummated he did not hesitate. We read, “From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must

go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.” Peter did what almost anyone governed by human reasoning would do. He endeavored to dissuade Jesus from going to Jerusalem under such circumstances, saying, “Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.”—Matt. 16:21,22

Jesus turned and said to Peter, “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) By advising Jesus not to go to Jerusalem where he would be killed, Peter was obstructing the execution of the divine will, and, in this was unwittingly acting out Satan’s desire. Jesus further explained that the viewpoint expressed by Peter was based upon human reasoning, and “not the things that be of God.”

Generally speaking, sound reasoning influences us to stay out of danger. However, at that time, this was not sound reasoning for Jesus from the divine standpoint. God’s will had been clearly expressed for him, and Jesus had dedicated himself to the doing of that will. It was his Father’s will that he should die as man’s Redeemer, and the due time for his death had now come. Thus, there was only one reasonable thing that Jesus could do, and that was to present himself to be sacrificed, and that was to take place in Jerusalem, so he went there without reservation.

WE FOLLOW

Jesus took the occasion of his exchange with Peter to teach his disciples that this same principle was

to guide them. He said, “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.” (Matt. 16:24,25) This would be strange reasoning from the human standpoint, but it is sound for those who have entered into a covenant with God by sacrifice. They cannot reason any other way and be pleasing to the Heavenly Father.

In the case of Jesus, he had covenanted to give his human life in order to restore life to the world. To shrink from doing this would mean unfaithfulness. In that case, he would not be worthy of the divine nature. Indeed, he would not be worthy of a resurrection at all, and when he went into death it would result in the loss of life eternally. The only way he could “find” divine life in the resurrection was to “lose” his earthly life in sacrifice, as he had voluntarily covenanted to do. Since we are following in the footsteps of Jesus, the same principle applies to us, and it is by faithfulness to this that we manifest the spirit of a sound mind.

It is quite possible that the Apostle Paul had this experience and lesson of Jesus in mind when, near the end of his third missionary journey, he spoke these words to the elders at Ephesus. “Behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: Save that the Holy Spirit witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But 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 20:22-24

WRONGLY ADVISED

Even as Peter had done with Jesus, so Paul's friends in the city of Caesarea tried to dissuade him from going to Jerusalem. (Acts 21:8-12) Then Paul said to them, "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) Surely the apostle was here following very closely in the footsteps of the Master. There is little prospect of our having an opportunity to suffer and die with Jesus in a literal Jerusalem, but we do have our symbolic places of sacrifice. These are the opportunities, small and large, that come to us to demonstrate our loyalty to the Lord and to our covenant of sacrifice by faithfulness in doing the Heavenly Father's will, regardless of the cost, whether it be our time, abilities, influence, material means, and reputation.

Timothy had one of these opportunities when Paul invited him to travel to Rome and visit him before he was put to death. Whether Timothy was able to carry this out and visit Paul before his death is unknown. The Scriptural narrative is silent. However, from everything we know about Timothy's faithfulness, we believe that he would have likely made every effort possible to fulfill the desire of Paul, his spiritual father and mentor.

Situations confront us in which decisions have to be made as to the course we shall follow, whether we shall do this or do that. What is the basis upon which we should make these decisions? Is it whether or not one way would be easier than the other, or more pleasing to the flesh?

The basis of all our decisions as Christians should be what the will of the Lord may be. We should be

guided by his Word as far as possible, even in the little things of life. When we see the will of God in any situation, it should not matter whether the doing of his will may be difficult or entail suffering, or whether it may be pleasant according to the flesh. The decision must be based on the doing of God's will. If we strive to follow this to the best of our ability, then we are being guided by the spirit of a sound mind.

Let us be thankful to the Heavenly Father that, through the Holy Spirit, we are able to overcome the human "spirit of fear" by using the divine provisions afforded us—power, love, and a sound mind. By these we will be given the needed strength to walk daily in the narrow way, and through his Word be guided that we might "follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth." Thus will we be counted worthy to stand with the Lamb on mount Zion, together with all those "having his Father's name written in their foreheads."—Rev. 14:1-4 ■