

Chapel of St. Timothy at Lutheran Theological Seminary in Tswanee (Pretoria, S. Africa)

6 April 2016

2 Tim 1:6-10: “Not a Spirit of Cowardice”

6 For which reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. 7 For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but [a spirit] of power and of love and of self-control. 8 So don't be ashamed of the witness of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but join me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, 9 who saved us and called us with a holy calling—not according to our deeds, but according to his own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages [which are] everlasting, 10 but have been revealed now through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus—who, on the one hand, abolished death but, on the other hand, brought life and immortality to light through the gospel...” (2 Tim 1:6-10).

Grace to you and Peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. Seminary is an occasion for students to become acquainted with the theological disciplines—things like Greek, Hebrew, church history, Dogmatics, and so forth—and begin to think like a pastor and deaconess. Of course, when one begins to think along these lines, the worries begin: what kind of congregation will I serve one day? Will people in the village be drawn to the gospel of Christ Jesus, or will it be opposed—perhaps by Muslim terrorists? And now the really big question: will I be paid enough as a pastor to support a wife and family? Or if I am single: will I ever find a wife? Or as a deaconess: will I ever find a suitable husband to lead a “chaste and decent life,” as the Catechism teaches. These are the kinds of concerns that students such as you face—whether here in South Africa, or also in America. That's why mentors and sponsors are so important for students preparing for the ministry—especially for pastors-to-be (charged to preach the Word), and also (albeit secondarily) for deaconesses-to-be. Without a mentor or a model to follow the young student of Theology is cast adrift by himself on an ocean of doubt, in a difficult place, alone with his worries and problems.
2. St. Paul presents himself as such a mentor for Timothy in our Scripture reading for today: “For which reason I remind you to rekindle-into-flame the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.” Paul writes as though Timothy's faith was about to be extinguished, so he reminds him of what is faithful and true. This is one of the passages

from the pastoral epistles demonstrating that Paul took a personal interest in Timothy—invested in him, so to speak. But it’s even stronger than that: he says that God’s “gift” (τὸ χάρισμα, in the Greek) was “in” Timothy due to the imposition of the apostle’s hands.

3. This is universally interpreted as the imposition of hands, which is still the custom of the church at the ordination of a pastor into holy office. We know from this passage—and others like it—that Paul ordained (or commissioned) Timothy personally, for pastoral service in the church. Those of you that were in my pastoral epistles class last year may remember that Paul apparently commissioned Timothy to remain in Ephesus—i.e., as Paul’s personal representative, almost as one of the early bishops of the church. It was a churchly assignment fraught with many dangers and difficulties, even though Timothy was young and untested: “charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine,” Paul tells young pastor Timothy in 1 Tim 1:3. Then he goes on: “nor to occupy themselves with myths and endless genealogies which promote speculations rather than the divine training that is in faith” (1:4-5).
4. So there was ample opportunity for young pastor Timothy to get it wrong, and bring to naught the ministry that had been entrusted to him. Any young pastor or deaconess faces the same challenge today when they soberly assess the life/ministry that awaits them. Therefore, Paul continues with today’s encouragement: “For God did not give us a spirit of cowardliness, but [a spirit] of power, and of love, and of self-control.”
5. Just a couple of things to consider about this encouragement: first, Paul says, “God did not give us”—i.e., he uses the first-person plural. He could have said, “God did not give you a spirit of cowardliness,” etc. Which is to say, that Paul includes himself in the encouragement. The Word of Christ is also intended for the pastors who deliver it—not just for the congregants who, to be sure, are the primary recipients. The psalmist says, “O taste and see that the Lord is good...” (Ps. 34:8). The Word is first for the pastor. Then, fed and rejuvenated, he is in a position to apply it joyfully and courageously to others—in giving the pastoral encouragement to Timothy, for example, or in addressing any of a number of challenges that face the faithful pastor in office.

6. Secondly, Paul mentions the “spirit of cowardliness.” If we review just a few highlights of Timothy’s life we see that he was of an exceptionally sensitive disposition and must often have been in despair of his ministry. Paul relied on young Timothy as no other associate. For example, when he had to deal with the cantankerous Corinthians he sent Timothy first on that sensitive assignment. He has a number of exhortations to the Corinthians to treat Timothy with respect and not despise him—as if that indeed was going on (1 Cor 16:10, 11). But for all that it appears that Timothy was unsuccessful as an emissary to the large, wealthy, though thoroughly troubled Corinthian congregation for, by his second letter to Timothy, it appears that the apostle had chosen Titus for that assignment, not Timothy. And Titus was more successful. So that must have damaged Timothy’s morale and psyche. But disappointments are sure to come for any as bear the pastoral office.
7. That’s why Paul encourages him here: “Don’t be ashamed of the witness of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner—but join me in suffering ill for the sake of the gospel according to the power of God.” I wonder: was Paul kind of encouraging Timothy here because he suspected Timothy of giving up on Paul, on the entire gospel enterprise? We have to read between the lines here but, perhaps to Paul’s way of looking, Timothy was expending a half-hearted effort, now that Paul the apostle was in chains. The challenges of ministry just looked too great. So Paul rather forcefully lays into Timothy here—the way I’ve seen Dr. Weber lay into an African student far from home who wonders what he’s doing here at the seminary in Pretoria. Some of you know what I’m talking about. I think the Paul-Timothy relationship resembled—perhaps even superficially—the one we see going on around here where Dr. Weber and other mentors take a keen interest in a student, and perhaps come off too strongly. Why? Because the Rector has invested in him or her. The church has expended money. Good pastors are needed for the Kingdom. There is a lot at stake.
8. But this is not the final word. Paul writes about the God who has saved us, and called us with a holy calling. Here Paul alludes to the salvation of mankind itself in the ministry, suffering, dying, death, and resurrection of Jesus Himself, our “Savior” (Paul several times

calls him: 1 Tim 1:1; 2:3; 4:10; 2 Tim 1:10; Titus 3:4). And He has called us with a “holy calling.” This alludes to the call of the Gospel itself, which “calls us out of darkness and into his marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9). This is the gospel that pulled us out of unbelief in the first place and maybe (quite possibly) set us on our way to pursue the office of the Holy Ministry. This is the “calling” you hear now in my preaching—the gospel that pulls you out of death to life, from out of hopelessness and despair into confidence, joy, and contentment in what shall be your chosen vocation.

9. “Not according to our deeds,” Paul says, “but according to his own purpose and grace—the grace that was given to us (there’s that first-person plural again!) in Christ Jesus before the everlasting ages...” And Paul waxes on and on. It is, I submit, a blueprint for Timothy’s future preaching, the themes that this young pastor will touch upon throughout years of devoted service, as he remembered his former mentor Paul. Time fails me to deliver all that Paul gives in this text. But that is the very nature of preaching that is biblical, inspired, and true: always more “in Christ Jesus” than we can possibly exhaust. Not because of our great lights, but because we walk with Christ, have been forgiven, and now maybe—just maybe—have something of the gospel in Christ Jesus for others besides ourselves. To his name be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

“And the Peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” AMEN.

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