

## **“Fan Into Flame”**

### **II Timothy 1:6-8**

~ Delivered at DHBC on May 18, 2014 (Soli Deo Gloria)

#### **INTRODUCTION**

- **(SHOW SLIDE)** Please open your Bibles to II Timothy 1.
  - **READ 1-8** – *“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, according to the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus, To Timothy, my dear son: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. I thank God, whom I serve, as my forefathers did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also. 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. So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God.”*
- I could feel myself starting to sweat. I was sitting in the financing office of a car dealership a few weeks ago. The woman in charge of the financing had just asked about my profession. Once she found out I was a pastor she started talking about how she thinks religion is a good thing because everyone needs a spiritual foundation to guide them.
  - She talks about some of her friends who have made really poor decisions because they do not have a spiritual basis. She says it does not matter what a person’s spirituality or religion is as long as they have something to guide them. She then looks at me with a kind smile that said, **“Of all people, I know that you agree with me on this.”**
- My mind is now going in a million different directions. On the one hand I want to affirm her and agree that all people need this foundation. I know that if I say this and stop there she will be happy and there won’t be any awkwardness.
  - At the same time I know she needs to hear about how Jesus is not just one other spiritual guide. I also know that if I start talking about Jesus like that it will make things awkward. Add to this that she is now done printing the papers and they are in front of me to sign. I’ve got maybe 60 seconds.
    - So I started talking but let’s just say I bumbled my way through the next minute. I tried talking about how if Jesus really is who he says he is then he is one to follow but I did not even say it that well. Let’s just say it was not my finest hour.
- Do you know these kinds of moments? Times when you know that what you will say about Jesus will cause awkwardness? Times when you are tempted to avoid speaking because you can feel the rising heat of embarrassment?
  - I confess to you that many times I have wimped out. The flame of my courage has gone out. Do you know what I am talking about? If you do

then this message is for you. Today we will see Timothy's temptation to withdraw in embarrassment at being a Christian. But we will also see Paul calling Timothy to fan into flame his gift of unashamedly speaking for Christ even if it means he must suffer for doing so.

- So let's develop verses 6-8 in three parts. First, let's speak about the problem of the dwindling flame. Second, we will hear the call to kindle the flame. And finally, we will look at the fuel to ignite the flame.

## THE PROBLEM OF THE DWINDLING FLAME

- Let's start then with **(SHOW SLIDE)** the problem of the dwindling flame.
  - Paul's main point here is in verse 6 where he calls Timothy to, "*fan into flame the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.*" So Timothy has a gift. This gift is compared to a fire. Just like a fire will dwindle and die if it is not tended, so Timothy's gift will dwindle and fade if he shies away from using it. That is why Paul exhorts him not to let it dwindle but rather to fan his gift into flame.
    - So what is this gift? And why is it in danger of dwindling?
  - We do not know exactly what the gift was but it must have something to do with speaking unashamedly for Jesus in his role as a church leader. This makes sense because verse 6 says the gift came when the elders and Paul laid hands on him and commissioned him to be a pastor.
    - Paul says the same thing in 1 Tim 4:14: "*Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you.*"
      - It also makes sense to understand the gift as something to do with speaking about Jesus because in verse 8 Paul has to exhort Timothy to "*not be ashamed to testify about our Lord.*"
  - What is crystal clear though is that the flame of Timothy's gift is in danger of dwindling because Timothy is being tempted to back off from it. You will notice that in verse 7 that Timothy is exhorted not to be timid in fanning his gift into flame. This word "timid" refers to one who flees from battle because they lack courage. The same idea is in verse 8 where Paul calls him not to be ashamed.
    - So putting it all together we see that Timothy is facing opposition for speaking about Jesus. Paul knows that when this happens he will be tempted to back off and retreat. But Paul does not want Timothy let his flame dwindle and so he exhorts him to fan it into flame his gift of unashamedly speaking about Jesus.
  - Every Christian can relate to Timothy here. Let me further define what it means to be ashamed of Jesus and then show two ways this problem shows up in our lives. **(SHOW SLIDE)** Shame is the negative feeling that you get about yourself when you do something that is considered unacceptable by society.
    - At a very basic level you know the feeling. You feel shame in that recurring dream where you are suddenly standing naked in front of people you know. You feel it when you are not rightly dressed for a certain

situation. You feel it when you realize you just said something inappropriate.

- Shame is that negative feeling that you get about yourself when you do something that is considered unacceptable by society. In these verses Paul describes two areas where we, like Timothy, are tempted to feel ashamed of Jesus.
- **(SHOW SLIDE)** First, we are ashamed of Jesus when we avoid speaking about him.
  - I see this in verse 8. **READ 8a** – *“So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord.”* Paul does not mean that unless you are always speaking about Jesus you are ashamed of him. He means that when you avoid an obvious opportunity to speak about him because it will make you look bad in front of others then you are ashamed of him.
    - Listen, **(SHOW SLIDE)** shame shows itself in silence.
- **(SHOW SLIDE)** Second, we are ashamed of Jesus when we avoid being identified with his people.
  - I see this in verse 8 as well. **READ 8** – *“So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel.”*
    - People love to associate themselves with the rich, famous, and powerful. Why? Because if you are associated with someone who everyone respects then people will think more highly of you. On the opposite side, people avoid others who might make them look bad. Shame shows itself in silence. **(SHOW SLIDE)** But shame also shows itself in disassociating from those who make us look bad.
- Timothy is being tempted to disassociate from Paul. Paul is not a popular guy right now. Remember he is a prisoner in Rome and this is during the reign of the Emperor Nero. You know that name. Nero falsely accused Christians of setting fire to Rome and sought to destroy them. **(SHOW SLIDE)** The ancient Roman historian Tacitus tells us that Nero would have parties in his garden where he would tie Christians to poles, wrap their bodies in flammable materials, and set them on fire as torches to light up his parties.
  - So you can see how Timothy might be tempted to say, *“Paul? No, I am not friends with him anymore.”* It would be so easy to avoid Paul because association with him will bring shame. But to be ashamed of God’s people is to be ashamed of Christ for if we belong to Christ we belong to his people. **(SHOW SLIDE)**
    - We can easily do this. You are with a new group of people and they say, *“What did you do last weekend?”* You know you went to church but you also know these people will think less of you if they know you go to church. They might brand you as a religious nut. So you just avoid saying you went to church and say, *“I took my mom out for lunch and hung out with some friends.”*

- If you avoid being known as a Christian or avoid being known as one who is part of a church because others will think less of you then you are ashamed of Christ.
- So you see Paul knows how Christians are often tempted to be ashamed of testifying to Christ and identifying with his people. He must have felt the temptation because in Romans 1:16 he emphatically states, ***“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.”*** Jesus clearly views it as a problem for us because he gives the solemn warning in Mark 8:38 that ***“If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.”***
  - Some of the most iron-willed heroes of the Christian faith let their fire dwindle. Think of Peter. **(SHOW SLIDE)** He declares to Jesus in Luke 22:33, ***“Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death”*** but only a short time later he denies Jesus three times. He cannot even brave the negative opinions of a servant girl and a few guards. He flees in shame.
- Oh how grieved I am when I look back at my life to see how many times I cared more about the opinions of others than to be named with Christ and his people. How many times have I hid my Christianity so others would think well of me? How many times did say I only went to church because my parents made me?
  - Even now, I often feel the pressure to care more about fitting in than gladly being known as a Christian. I sometimes think that is why God made me a pastor. It is pretty hard to avoid being known as a Christian when the second question people ask you after your name is what you do.
    - Like Peter and Paul my heart wants to say, ***“I am not ashamed and will gladly bear any suffering and shame for Christ.”*** But in reality I sometimes wimp out. Sometimes I am a chicken. If we are honest we are more sensitive to public opinion than we would like to admit. This is the problem of the dwindling flame.

## THE CALL TO KINDLE THE FLAME

- Having identified the problem let’s now come to the second part: **(SHOW SLIDE)** the call to kindle the flame.
  - There is really one call here but it has three parts. In a sentence, the call is to keep on kindling the flame of unashamedly speaking about Jesus by testifying to him, identifying with his people, and being willing to suffer.
- **(SHOW SLIDE)** First, kindle the flame by unashamedly speaking about Jesus.
  - Look again at verse 6. **READ 6a** – ***“I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God.”*** Do not let your faith go cold. Do not chicken out of speaking for Jesus. Fan it into flame. Kindle it. Just like you get down and breathe on a fire that is dwindling, go about using your gifts for Christ. The verb “to fan” is in a continuous sense. Keep on fanning.
    - Or look at verse 8. **READ 8a** – ***“So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord.”*** Now Timothy may have had special gifts to testify to Christ but all Christians are testify to him. So how do you do that? I think the second point helps.

- **(SHOW SLIDE)** Second, kindle the flame by gladly identifying with the people of God.
  - The reason why most Christians are scared to talk about Jesus is that they feel like they have to have the perfect words and give a full gospel presentation. Don't begin there. Begin with just two things.
    - First, in a natural way just let other people know you go to church. When someone asks what you did on the weekend just say you went to church. They may pick up on it and talk about it or they may not but identify yourself with Christ's people.
    - Second, in a natural way just let other people know you are a Christian and that it means something to you. You can never testify to Christ if people have no idea you are a Christian. I am amazed how once people know you are a Christian they start to ask your opinion on different questions which then opens further doors to testify to Christ.
      - The easiest ways to start testifying to Christ is simply to self-identify as a Christian or one who goes to church.
- **(SHOW SLIDE)** Finally, kindle the flame by suffering for Christ.
  - **READ 8** – *“So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel.”* Where did we ever get this ridiculous idea that becoming a Christian means having all your problems solved, getting rich, or making Jesus the key to a successful career?
    - Jesus himself said, *“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember the words I spoke to you: ‘No servant is greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.”*
- Paul knows that when Timothy, and when we, face this kind of hardship we will be tempted to pull back and chicken out. That is why Paul writes this letter. The whole letter is a reality check that living for Jesus will mean hardship and so we are called to endure and persevere. Listen to these verses.
  - In 1:16 Paul gives the example of Onesiphorus *“because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains.”*
  - 2:3 – *“Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus.”*
  - 2:9 – *“I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal.”*
  - 2:10 – *“I endure everything for the sake of the elect.”*
  - 2:12 – *“if we endure, we will also reign with him.”*
  - 2:15 – *“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed.”*
  - 3:1 – *“But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days.”*
  - 3:10 – *“You, however, know all about my...endurance, persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured.”*

- 3:12 – *“everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”*
- 4:5 – *“endure hardship.”*
- 4:6 – *“For I am already being poured out like a drink offering.”*
- 4:7 – *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”*
- 4:16 – *“At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me.”*
- So do you see it? Paul assumes that being a Christian will be hard. He assumes you will be tempted to be ashamed.
  - But he says, *“Don’t let it happen. Don’t chicken out. Breathe on the fire. Stoke the coals of living for Christ. Testify about him. Identify yourself as a Christian and be willing to suffer.”*

### THE FUEL TO INGITE THE FLAME

- So far then we have identified the problem of the dwindling flame – when we face opposition for being a Christian we are often tempted to back off and retreat. But then we saw the call to kindle the fire. We are to use our gifts, we are to speak, we are to self-identify as Christians even if it means we have to suffer.
  - But we need more than this. What we need is the courage to actually do it. And so in the third and final place Paul talks about **(SHOW SLIDE)** the fuel to ignite the flame.
    - Paul talks about two things we are to remember that will fill us with courage to speak and be willing to suffer for Christ.
- **(SHOW SLIDE)** First, remember the Holy Spirit who dwells in you.
  - Look at verse 7 again. **READ 7** – *“For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.”* The word “spirit” can refer to our inner attitude or to the Holy Spirit. The vast majority of commentators think this is a reference to the Holy Spirit.
    - So this verse is saying, *“For when God gave us his Spirit, it was not timidity that we received, but power, love, and self-discipline.”*
- Christian, the Holy Spirit you have is not a cowardly Spirit. He is the Spirit who gives power. This word “power” refers to spiritual strength that enables us to speak and remain faithful. What good news for those of us who don’t feel like we are anyone special but who want to testify to Christ. As Oswald Sanders writes,
  - *“God can achieve his purpose either through the absence of human power and resources, or the abandonment of reliance on them. All through history God has chosen and used nobodies, because their unusual dependence on him made possible the unique display of his power and grace. He chose and used somebodies only when they renounced dependence on their natural abilities and resources.”*<sup>1</sup>
- Christian, you have the Spirit of power. You also have the Spirit of love who enables you to serve others, warn others, speak to others, and care for others no matter what they do in return. And finally you have the Spirit of self-discipline,

<sup>1</sup> “Man’s Weakness—God’s Strength,” *Missionary Crusader* (December 1964), p. 7.

which refers to level headedness and calm thinking. The Spirit enables you to think clearly despite the opposition.

- Christians, we must stop this defeatist mentality. The Spirit of God who dwells in you is no coward. He is the Spirit who at creation turned chaos into order. He is the Spirit who empowered Jesus to battle the devil's temptation in the desert. He is the Spirit who killed death when he raised Jesus from the dead.
  - So use your gifts, testify to Jesus, step out and serve knowing that the Spirit in you is not a Spirit of timidity but of power, love, and self-discipline. Remember the Holy Spirit who dwells in you.
- **(SHOW SLIDE)** Remember the grace given to you in Jesus Christ.
  - Look at the end of verse 8. **READ 8** – ***“But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God.”*** What is this power? It is the Holy Spirit. But Paul defines it another way in 2:1. **READ 1** – ***“You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.”***
    - How does God's grace in Jesus strengthen us? Because we know that in Jesus we have God's full approval. Jesus faced the ultimate shame of the cross in order that we might be accepted by God. So you strengthen yourself by continually remembering this. You have to get it down deep. The opinions of others and the shame we feel when we go against them is broken when we know that in Christ we are fully accepted by God.
- Jesus bore the shame of the cross in order that we would know full acceptance. Jesus' death was not only brutal it was also shameful, disgraceful, and embarrassing. Cicero, who was a Roman philosopher, asked that Roman citizens not even speak about crucifixion because it was a disgraceful subject for the ears of decent people.<sup>2</sup> You see crucifixion was reserved only for the vilest of criminals. It was so disgraceful that even the worst Roman citizens were beheaded rather than crucified.
  - To add to the shame, the entire thing was done publicly. There was no suffering in dignified privacy. Jesus was displayed for all to see and mock. Sometimes men were crucified at eye level so that people could look them in the eye and make fun of them. In the rare event of a woman's crucifixion she was made to face the cross because not even a barbarous culture like this one was willing to watch the face of a woman in such agony.
    - Isaiah reflects the shame of Jesus by saying, ***“He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.”***
- Why did Jesus do this? In the words of Isaiah 26, he did this so that ***“the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.”*** Do you see it then? Your great problem and mine is that we are far too concerned about gaining the approval of others. We are willing to avoid Christ to get this approval. We are approval junkies. But the good news of Christianity is that in Jesus we are fully approved

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<sup>2</sup> Cicero, *Pro Rabirio*, 5.16.

- of by God. One of my favourite verses is in Hebrews where it says of Jesus that ***“He is not ashamed to call us brothers.”*** We have full approval.
- Knowing this grace changes everything. You are freed from the fear of being ridiculed or mocked because you have the full approval of God. It also makes us deeply humble. We don’t talk to others as if we are superior to them because as Paul says in verse 9 you are saved ***“not because of anything [you] have done but because of his own purpose and grace.”***
    - When this grace fills you it makes you courteous and kind to people. You don’t jam Jesus down their throat. You don’t coerce them. You trust that God’s grace is what opens their hearts not your great words.
  - Ignite the flame by remember the Spirit who dwells in you. Ignite the flame by remembering the grace that has been given to you in Christ Jesus.
    - This week pray for opportunities to testify to Jesus. And then step forward in courage.

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