

394 Stirring up and holding fast

In our previous Weekly Reflection we learned afresh that by God's grace, all of Christ's disciples, who are termed "saints" right now, are already clothed with "the fine linen of righteousness" of Revelation 19.8, our sins having been forgiven and washed away by the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God.

Our daily lives are now spent in God's service, being sanctified all the while by the indwelling Holy Spirit who moves us towards the final goal so wonderfully described for us in Ephesians 4.13, "Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (KJV). Along the way the Lord is faithful in playing His part (eg., Philippians 1.6), and of course He expects us to be faithful in playing our own God-given part. Thus for example, "... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you ..." (Philippians 2.12b-13).

Throughout the New Testament Epistles this interweaving in practice of present and future blessings, and of God's part and our part, is fully explained, and we can look at II Timothy Chapter One this time as our example. We know from Paul's two epistles to Timothy that this young man was special to Paul. Paul was fond of him, ("[my] dearly beloved son" 1.2a, KJV), he prayed constantly for him (v.3b), and felt confident for him (v.5). Above all Paul felt responsible for Timothy's spiritual well-being and practical effectiveness in the ministry entrusted to him.

Paul urges Timothy to "stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands" (v.6). Here then is a God-given authority, conferred by Paul the apostle, that has been entrusted to Timothy. This "gift of God", as with all God's gifts to His saints, is a present blessing for Timothy which brings an ongoing responsibility for him to put it to good use in the Lord's service (egs., I Corinthians 12.25-28 / Ephesians 4.11-16).

Perhaps Timothy, who was coming across "afflictions of the gospel" in his work (v.8), was overcome at that time by a "spirit of fear" (v.7a) – fear possibly of opposition, ridicule, unpopularity, arrest or even death ("afflictions" which so many of our Christian brothers and sisters in different parts of the world are all too familiar with these days). But any such "spirit of fear" has been more than cancelled out by God's further

gifts to His saints, gifts of power, love and “a sound mind” (the Greek word there implies our keeping steady whatever the circumstances, v.7).

Hence Timothy need not be “ashamed of the testimony of our Lord” (v.8a), that is, by “keeping his head down” instead of holding forth the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Nor need Timothy distance himself from Paul who was so derided and had been abandoned by many (v.15, that scene of Peter warming himself round that “fire of coals” comes to mind, John 18.18), and who even now was in prison for the sake of Christ.

But why should anyone follow such a path of faith in Christ in their lives? Here is the Holy Spirit’s wonderful answer: God has saved us, and has called us “with an holy calling ... according to His own purpose and grace, which was given in Christ Jesus before the world began” (Greek, “before eternal times”, v.9). All these blessings - put in place even before Time existed! - are now “made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death (Greek: “making death of no effect”), and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (v.10).

This is the Gospel for which Paul is appointed as a preacher, apostle and teacher of the Gentiles, and for which he is currently suffering. But he is not ashamed! – because he knows beyond all doubt that God in Christ is true and faithful (vv.11-12).

So the Holy Spirit’s message through Paul to Timothy, and to the rest of us, is straightforward - “Buck up; remember your blessings and responsibilities; don’t sit back, don’t cower, don’t be ashamed of Jesus Christ; realise that afflictions are a normal part of Christian life; and (v.13) hold fast to the doctrinal truths of the Christian Gospel”. Timothy had learned these doctrines from Paul, and we today learn them from God’s Word, through faithful fellow-Christians in our families and fellowships, and through our personal Bible reading and prayers when alone with the Lord.

Our times are becoming increasingly hostile to the Christian Gospel, which need not surprise us. By God’s grace in Christ, along with Paul and Timothy and all others who have gone before, we too are well-equipped with solid, present blessings; and we too are following the path ahead to the equally-solid, future blessings which, thanks be to God, are yet to come in Christ.

