

February 26, 2017

## ***"...fan into flame the gift of God..."***

***"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. Do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord..."*** II Timothy 1:6-8

***"I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction..."*** II Timothy 4: 1-2

I've been in a number of settings where I have been asked to speak and as I start someone will call out, "***Preach the Word!***" My old friend, Mike Schrader, always used to do this. I have always appreciated this encouragement, but over the years I have also come to wonder what the encourager actually means. Do you want me to preach the truth even if it makes you uncomfortable? Or do you want me to preach what you already believe so that you can remain unchanged?

The Apostle writes to Timothy, "***For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear....But you, keep your head in all situations...***" (II Timothy 4:3-5)

When most of us read a passage like this we either think of someone else because it couldn't possibly describe us, or we get hostile because we are afraid it might. The key to understanding Paul's charge is to see it against the context of what he has already said.

The Word, Scripture, the Bible, was written through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to teach, rebuke, correct and train us in righteousness. It was written to prepare us for the good works that we were "***...created in Christ Jesus to do...***" (Ephesians 2:10) My point is this: when the Word is accurately preached we should experience conviction and encouragement. There are times when every one of us needs to be corrected or even rebuked. None of us wants to experience these things, but we need to.

As those who teach the Word it is hard to be the one who must do these uncomfortable things, and so we are in danger of telling those who listen to us what they want to hear. That's not our job. Neither is it our job to beat people over the head with the Word. Rebuking and correcting is not a license to attack the problems in the lives of people that we are trying to reach. Our task is to teach and preach with "***...great patience and careful instruction...***"

So, how do we avoid becoming people pleasers and people bashers at the same time? I am convinced that the real trap for anyone who tries to share the Word is found in the way we approach that Word. As we study God's Word we can do so from one of two directions. First, we can use it as a mirror to improve and correct our own reflected behaviors. If our hearts are open to God's Word to us, then we ought to constantly be challenged to grow and develop into better and better reflectors of his love. Sometimes the Father's Word is going to rebuke and correct us. It needs to. In this approach we start in God's Word and our goal is constantly to bend ourselves to his will letting ourselves be transformed by what he says.

The other approach to God's Word is just the opposite. We don't study to improve ourselves or to find personal transformation, but we study to destroy others. We understand our commission to "***Preach the Word!***" as a license to attack all that is broken in the lives of others without acknowledging that we are at least as broken. Our Lord would say, "***You hypocrite, first***

*take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."* (Matthew 7:2-5) The other mistake we make in this approach to the Word is that we start with our own behaviors and then search for justification in God's Word or in God himself for what we are already doing.

So, if I am prone to drunkenness I love Paul's direction to Timothy to *"...use a little wine..."* (I Timothy 5:23) If I am trying to force my wife to do something she doesn't want to I might quote *"Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord."* From Ephesians 5:22, ignoring the rest of the passage. Too often we start with our own sinful behaviors and beliefs and then try to find confirmation for them in God's Word.

The truth lies in the other approach. God's Word, the Word we are commanded to share with others, is designed to change who we are. Look to that Word, measure yourself and your behaviors against that Word, let it change who you are and how you act and then, and only then, use it to help others find transformation as well.

