

February 19, 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

***"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly..."***

II Timothy 2:14-16

***"But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them."***

II Timothy 3:1-5

A part of continuing in our faith when our world is literally falling apart around us must be our focus on mission: To share the gospel of Jesus with those who will hear it. As we noted last week, our task is not to police the world. Instead, we are to bring the gospel to the lost.

In doing this we must constantly challenge our own thinking. In one of the most terrifying descriptions of the ***"last days"*** the Apostle rattles off a horrible list of the characteristics of those who pretend to be believers, but are not. This list is the cascading effect of turning back to self-love.

Jesus calls us to die to ourselves and as disciples that is what we must do, but the temptation is always to return to what we know; to return to loving ourselves. The Apostle Peter references a proverb when he writes of those who do this, ***"A dog returns to its vomit,' and 'A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud."*** (II Peter 2:22)

If we are not careful we can be enticed by the world to return to our old ways and to pull down destruction on ourselves when we do. To protect against this we must constantly seek to measure ourselves against Scripture. The world calls us to join in their moral collapse. Our guard against that is to constantly check our own behaviors against the standard of Scripture.

Living in a country such as ours is a great blessing, but it is also a great challenge. Because we are free to share our opinions openly on every issue, it is easy to be drawn into what the Apostle would call ***"mindless chatter..."*** which is the trap that pulls us into ungodliness.

As a believer my task is to police myself by constantly measuring my actions and attitudes, not against worldly standards, but against Scripture. So, if Jesus commands me to love my enemies and pray for those who persecute me (Matthew 5:44) then that is what I must do if I would continue to follow him. If my Master calls me to do to others what I would have them do to me (Matthew 7:12) then that must become the constant measure of my attitude and my actions. What my country calls me to do can never outway what my God calls me to do.

When Paul writes to Timothy about becoming an approved workman this constant return to the standard of Scripture is what he is calling him and us to do. Paul would conclude this portion of

his instruction to his young apprentice with a reminder about what Scripture is. He writes, "*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*" (II Timothy 3:16-17)

God has called me to do good works which he has prepared in advance for me to do. (Ephesians 2:10) To be his disciple I must focus my energies on those opportunities to minister that he constantly places before me. I cannot allow myself to be distracted by the things of this world that constantly demand my attention. I serve a risen Savior and his command requires all of my attention, all my energy, all my obedience.

