

June 21, 2020

Fan into flame the gift of God

"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

FOR **GOD**
has not given us
a Spirit of fear
but of
POWER
LOVE
& self-discipline.
2 Timothy 1:7

We live in "**terrible times**". That is, I think, a given. Paul's description of these "**terrible times**" in his second letter to Timothy fits our present age very well. We need to understand however, that there have always been and, I believe, always will be "**terrible times**".

I am convinced that the real challenge for believers in "**terrible times**" is to hold on to and protect the purity of our faith. It is so hard for believers not to buckle under the pressure to conform in a society that has, at best, accepted a "**form of godliness**" but denied its power.

As the Apostle Paul is languishing in prison in Rome his 'son in the faith', Timothy, is struggling with the desire that all of us have in "**terrible times**". Like us, Timothy has apparently gone to ground. He has pulled back from his ministry and is, in a very real way, hiding his

light. So in this last letter to Timothy the Apostle addresses the things that are necessary for both preserving and living a true faith.

Paul will tell Timothy to "**...fan into flame the gift of God...**" and remind his young friend that "**...God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love, and of self-discipline.**"

It is so important in these "**terrible times**" to remember who and whose we are. As we noted last week, we are not our own. We were purchased with a unmeasureable price. We belong to God and we must live that reality before this chaotic and troubled world.

Paul will teach that the spirit that God has given us is not a spirit of timidity. We are not, nor will we ever be, a people who need to hide our faith. Instead we have a "**...spirit of power, of love, and of self-discipline.**"

We are empowered to be bold in our faith and we need refuse to hide our faith before a faithless world. Boldness does not mean that we use our faith as a platform from which to condemn others. Instead our bold faith must be lived before this often faithless world. We can, I think, hide our faith in a number of ways. Most often I think we do this when we 'go along to get along' and/or when we 'hide our light under a bowl'.

This is no time for true believers to do either. But neither is it time for true believers to self-righteously condemn others whose faith is failing. Instead our bold faith must be lived out before the world through our love of others. That love must be practically applied in all of our interactions with those around us.

When Paul talks about love he is, I am convinced, always thinking about his definition of practical love in I Corinthians 13:4-7. "**Love is patient, love is kind, it does not envy, it does not**

boast, it is not proud, it is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres." Our bold spirit demands that we live love.

In maintaining and growing our faith in "*terrible times*" like these the Apostle will teach us that self-discipline is the key. Like any resolve, our desire to live a bold faith is the product of our own choices. When my world demands that I love myself, that I love my money, that I be brutal, unforgiving, and faithless it is up to me to discipline myself to remain faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ which has saved me. My bold faith is mine to live before a faithless world, and ultimately, it is mine alone.

SELF
discipline