

The Empowerment of the Pastor as Teacher

Bible Study on 2 Timothy 1:6-14

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Are you proud to be a pastor of the Lutheran Church? A sense of shame and embarrassment at religious belief and practice pervades much of our public life in Australia and elsewhere in the western world. Consequently Christians are marginalised by the chattering classes and treated with polite contempt in our pluralist society, a society in which fashion and appearance are far more important than reality and truth, a society that tolerates all kinds of beliefs except the teaching of the church, a society in which those who hold power defend their position by ridiculing and shaming those who threaten their power. This sense of public disgrace has been aggravated by the scandal of sexual abuse within the church. The church, to be frank, is on the nose out there.

We Australian Lutherans bring to that our own inherited sense of shame as an ethnic minority that was identified in the public eye with the enemy in the two world wars, just as many Muslims are now regarded with suspicion. Our shrinking membership and a loss of confidence in the gospel to produce church growth add to that pervasive sense of shame. Add to that the perception that we are old-fashioned and out of touch with the modern world. No wonder then that some pastors are paralysed by a spirit of timidity that makes them feel frustrated and confused, demoralised and powerless.

So it may be good for us to consider what Paul has to say to young pastor Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:6-14 about God's antidote to his timidity, his fear of ridicule and public embarrassment.

Paul deals with Timothy's fear of embarrassment by reminding him of what he had received at his ordination. He says: **⁶For this reason (Timothy's faith) I remind you to rekindle the gift of grace**

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that is in you through the laying on of my hands;² ⁷for God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and sound-mindedness.

When Timothy was ordained by Paul and his colleagues, he was not just called to do the Lord's work; he was empowered for that work by the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit was his *charism*, a gift of grace from God the Father through Jesus. This gift was given to him when Paul laid his hands on Timothy and spoke the Spirit to him. When Paul ordained Timothy he may actually said to him: '**God the Father give you the Spirit of power and love and sound-mindedness.**' Yet the Holy Spirit was not given to him once and for all time on the day of his ordination for him to possess; it was made available to him as an ongoing gift that he could pray for and receive from God each day, without ever owning it and controlling it.

By receiving the Holy Spirit Timothy could overcome his chronic timidity and fear of embarrassment with three gifts for ministry. First, the Holy Spirit would give him **power** for his work as a pastor, the same death-destroying power that raised Jesus from the dead, the power to bring life and incorruptibility to light through the gospel, the power that makes for resilience in the face of the knock-backs and setbacks that come from people who reject the gospel. Second, the Holy Spirit would give Timothy the power to **love** his people with the love of Christ, lavishly and self-sacrificially. Third, the Holy Spirit would give the gift of *sōphronismos*, the gift of **sound-minded self-control**. In Greek this word, which shares the same root as the term for 'salvation', was a medical term. It was used for a sane, clear-minded person with sound mental health. Its opposite was mental insanity with its impulsiveness, confusion, delusions, and loss of physical and emotional self-control. Sound-minded person were not driven by disordered passions and desires but had a clear understanding of themselves and others. Paul uses root and its cognates frequently in the pastoral letters for that healthy spiritual common sense which

² See also Acts 8:18; 1 Tim 4:14; Heb 6:2.

enabled believers to think and feel and act as Christ did.³ The gift of sound-mindedness gives Timothy the ability to control his thoughts and feelings, so that he does not deal with abuse by becoming emotionally and spiritually abusive. Without this gift he will not be able to love properly and exercise spiritual power in a loving way.

Paul, surprisingly, does not speak of power and love and sound-mindedness as three separate charismata, but as one gift of grace, a single endowment. They belong together and work together in ministry. God the Father gives Timothy the power to love in a sound-minded way.

Paul uses a vivid picture to describe Timothy's daily empowerment for ministry. He tells Timothy to **rekindle**, *anazōpurein*, God's gift of grace that was placed in him at his ordination. This odd verb combines two graphic images: rekindling a fire on the kitchen hearth from the left-over coals in the morning before breakfast and the revival of a dead person.

Here Paul alludes to the rekindling of the holy fire on the altar at the temple. In the Old Testament the priests did not light the fire for the altar of burnt offering. It was lit by God himself. On the day that the divine service was inaugurated at the tabernacle, fire came from the Lord's presence in the Holy of Holies and kindled the wood on the altar (Lev 9:23-24). Each morning the priests on duty rekindled the fire with the coals from the previous day; each evening they covered them up with ashes to keep them alight overnight (Lev 6:8-13). Through that holy fire God manifested his life-giving, glorious presence to his people; through that perpetual fire he sanctified the altar and all the offerings that were placed on it. That fire, with its pillar of smoke, was his epiphany to his people, the manifestation of his glory.

Like that heavenly fire, God's gift of the Holy Spirit to Timothy needs to be rekindled each morning on the altar of his heart. By his use of that picture Paul encourage Timothy to keep the Spirit's fire alive by daily meditation and prayer. The kindling of that flame, the flame of

³ See 1 Tim 2:9,15; 3:2; Tit 1:8; 2:2, 4, 5, 6,12. Note how sound-mindedness is associated with prayerful sober-mindedness in 1 Pet 4:7.

devotion, is like a daily resurrection, empowerment for daily ministry by the daily reception of the Holy Spirit, daily sanctification for holy work, for as Paul says in 1 Timothy 4:5: **everything is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.**

After reminding Timothy of the need for the ongoing reception of the Spirit, Paul adds something unexpected about the use of Spirit's power: **So do not be ashamed of our Lord's testimony or of me, his prisoner, but suffer abuse⁴ together with (me/Christ) for the gospel according to the power of God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages of time began, and has now been manifested through the epiphany of our Saviour, Christ Jesus, who abolished death itself and shone out life and incorruptibility through the gospel, whose herald, apostle, and teacher I have been appointed.**

The Holy Spirit empowers Timothy in two ways. First, God's Spirit frees him from shame, the shame that comes from his identification with Jesus, the crucified Messiah and his association with Paul in his imprisonment by the Romans. That shame comes from the preaching of the gospel, the apostolic **testimony** that Jesus, a disgraced criminal, is their **Lord**. Second, God's Spirit empowers Timothy endure the inevitable abuse that comes to those who preach the gospel of Jesus. The Spirit gives courage to withstand antagonism and the power to endure opposition, because it unites Timothy with Jesus and Paul in the solidarity of suffering. They suffer for the gospel **according to God's power**, the power to endure abuse, graciously and confidently, without succumbing to a victimised sense of shame that lashes out in retaliation against those who set out to shame them. That supernatural power is needed to cushion and curtail the destructive impact of abuse, for as we all know those who have been

⁴ See also the use of the same verb in 2 Tim 2:3; cf. 2 Tim 2:9; 4:5; James 5:13.

abused physically or verbally or emotionally all too readily become abusive in turn.

The gospel gives the criterion for understanding how God exercises his power by repaying evil with good. Suffering abuse is not just the inevitable result of the faithful proclamation of the gospel; its endurance shows how God exercises the power of his Holy Spirit in a mysterious, paradoxical way. God uses his power to absorb the impact of evil and confront death head on. He does not exercise his power by promoting himself and disempowering others, but by disempowering death and honouring humanity. So the gracious endurance of abuse bears witness to God's grace which endures evil and brings good out of evil.

Paul mentions four aspects of this mysterious empowerment. First, God uses his power to **save** Paul and Timothy and us from eternal death and to **call** us to do his holy work together with Jesus. As pastors we have a **holy calling**; we share in his holiness and administer it to others through his holy word.

Second, God does not use his power to reward pastors for their service of him, but to honour them by giving them the grace, the privilege, of administering his grace here on earth.

Third, even though God's gracious purpose, his **purpose and grace**, is an eternal gift, a heavenly mystery, something that God had already provided in Christ before time began, God **now manifests** his gracious power in time and space through **the epiphany** of Jesus as the Messiah. In Greek epiphany was a pagan religious term for the visible appearance of a hidden god, an appearance that made his character and power known to people on earth. While Paul normally uses this term in the pastoral letters for the final revelation of Jesus as Judge and King on the Last Day (1 Tim 6:14; 2 Tim 3:1, 8; Tit 2:13), he uses it here for the present appearance of Jesus to the saints in the church.⁵ The present epiphany of Jesus as Saviour, through the proclamation of the gospel, anticipates his final epiphany in glory at the

⁵ See also the use of the verb 'appear' in Tit 3:4-7.

close of this age. So wherever the gospel is preaching we have an epiphany of the risen Lord Jesus.

Fourth, the power of God is evident in his abolition of **death** itself by Christ's death and resurrection and his delivery of **life and incorruptibility** through the gospel. Jesus, the Spirit-raised Christ, did not just preach the gospel directly to the apostles after his resurrection; he now preaches it through them and its heralds. Paul envisages its proclamation as a light that **shines out** into a dark place and lights it up, like the sun at the dawn of a new day. The gospel brings **life and incorruptibility** to light by disclosing the presence of Jesus and his life-giving, life-preserving light to those who hear it.

That's where Paul fits into the picture. As a **herald** he proclaims the good news of Christ; as an **apostle** he represents the risen Lord and bears witness to him and his grace; as a **teacher** he initiates people into the mystery of Christ by catechising them. Best of all, God has appointed him to do this together with Jesus.

That demonstration of God's gracious power by appointing him as a minister of the gospel affects Paul in two ways. He says: **For this reason I too suffer these things, but I am not ashamed, for I know him whom I have trusted, and I am convinced that he has the power to guard my deposit until that day.** The abuse that Paul suffers as a teacher of the gospel does not have its desired effect on him. It is meant to shame him publicly and discredit his message. But the abuse is, in fact, counterproductive, because shows that the power of the gospel does depend on Paul and his own resources; it depends on Jesus and what Jesus has entrusted to Paul as his **deposit** with him. When Paul speaks about this **deposit**,⁶ he envisages Jesus as a wealthy benefactor who entrusts his own property to Paul as a steward for safe-keeping, a manager of it for delivery to others.⁷ That deposit is the gospel, the teaching of Jesus, the tradition that Paul has received from Jesus and now 'deposits' with students who are properly qualified to teach that heritage to others as well (2 Tim 2:2). There is, however,

⁶ See also 1 Tim 1:18; 6:20 and the use of the verb in Luke 12:18; 1 Tim 1:18; 2 Tim 2:2.

⁷ Paul may be influenced in this by teaching of Jesus in Luke 12:42-48; 16:1-12; 19:11-27.

a strange twist to Paul's use of this illustration. Paul does not have to guard Christ's investment in him; since it is Christ's investment, Christ himself guards it so securely that no one will ever be able to take it from him. That has been borne out by Paul's own experience. By the abuse that he has endured from his faithful stewardship of the gospel, Paul has learnt to trust Jesus more fully for his vindication; he has come to know him and his power better, the power that is made perfect in weakness. That sense of protection and empowerment produces conviction because it proves how trustworthy Christ is.

Paul then gives two pieces of advice to Timothy as a teacher to help him avoid spiritual disempowerment by holding on to those things that empower him in his teaching of the gospel. He says: **Hold onto the pattern of healthy words that you heard from me. By the faith and the love that are in Christ Jesus, guard the good deposit through the Holy Spirit who resides⁸ in you.**

Since success in ministry depends on the power of God's Spirit that is at work in the gospel, a good teacher needs to do two things. A good teacher needs to use the right words in the right way. The right words are the 'healthy teaching' of Jesus and the apostles.⁹ That apostolic teaching is now written down in the New Testament. Its Spirit-inspired, Spirit-inspiring words are 'healing words,' hygienic, wholesome words, 'the healthy words of our Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Tim 6:3), because they produce a 'healthy faith' (Tit 1:13) and make people 'healthy in faith and love and endurance' (Tit 2:2). The picture here is of the pastor as a doctor engaged in the cure of souls. While false teaching produces a sick conscience, healthy teaching, teaching that is consistent with the gospel, produces good conscience, a conscience that trusts in the gospel and expects good things from God (1 Tim 1:5-11).¹⁰ Yet these words cannot be used anyhow, but they must be used in the right way, the right pattern as is set out by the creed with the

⁸ See Rom 8:11. This residing of the Spirit is correlated with the residing of faith which is mentioned in 2 Tim 1:5.

⁹ See 1 Tim 1:10; 2 Tim 4:3; Tit 2:2.

¹⁰ See Acts 23:1; 1 Tim 1:19; 1 Pet 3:16, 21.

right distinction between law and gospel. That orthodox pattern of teaching the gospel comes to Timothy and us from Paul himself.

As well as that, the teacher must not just prize but must also **guard** the heritage of healing teaching that he has received from Christ. Yet even that is done in a strange way. The deposit of good teaching is not guarded best by a commendable zeal for pure doctrine; it is best guarded **by the faith and the love that are in Christ Jesus**. The use of the article here with faith and love indicates that they are given and available to every Christian; they are created and maintained by the Holy Spirit. **The faith** is what we believe in, our common faith in the triune God; **the love** is God's love, the love that is poured out on us by the Holy Spirit, the love that we, in turn, pass on to others. Satan attacks the deposit of teaching by attacking that faith and that love in those who are teachers. So that deposit is guarded and preserved for posterity by our reliance on the Holy Spirit to keep our faith and love alive. The fire of the Spirit is kept burning by daily meditation on God's word and daily prayer for the Holy Spirit to make his residence in us and to **reside** in us as his holy temple. That sanctifies us so that our bodies are temples of the living God.

Well what does all this have to do with us? I don't know about you, but it gives me great encouragement. It encourages me to seek daily empowerment for ministry from the Holy Spirit; it encourages me to endure opposition as a powerful affirmation of my work as a teacher of the gospel; it encourages me to rely on God's healing word to do its work through my teaching; it encourages me to rely on the Holy Spirit to guard the heritage of teaching in the church.

So I am proud to be a pastor, a minister of the gospel in a society that feels so threatened by Jesus that it resorts to abuse of its preachers. With Paul I say: **I am not ashamed, for I know him whom I have trusted, and I am convinced that he has the power to guard my deposit until that day.**