

## ROAD TO REVIVAL

By

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and  
The Secret of Christian Joy"

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### "STIR UP THE GIFT OF GOD" (II Timothy 1:6)

BELIEVE that Timothy was afflicted with a constitutional timidity. Paul reminds him to let no man despise his youth, and to the Corinthians he wrote: "**Now if Timotheus come, see that he may be without you without fear**" (I Corinthians 16:10). He was a splendid young preacher, with good ancestry and in dead earnest, but he needed to be set on fire. I know a young preacher who reminds me of Timothy. He is a genuine and promising Christian, but, somehow, one wants to build a fire within him. If his faith and his facts had fire he would move mountains.

So Paul advises Timothy to kindle the sacred Flame within him. Modern Americans in steam-heated apartments miss the meaning here by not having to rise, as some of us country-bred mortals had to do, on cold winter mornings to shiver before an old-fashioned fire place while we uncovered leftover coals from the night before, applied kindling, and then blew hard until the flame appeared. Such is the picture here. There come times in our experiences when the fires of GOD burn low and we must stir up the heavenly flame within our hearts.

Timothy was not exhorted to stir up himself. It is not our fire but GOD's that we are to kindle.

The Nadabs and Abihus offer strange fire aplenty today and there are those who kindle a fire and compass themselves about with sparks and walk in their own light to their own sorrow (Isaiah 50:11). What was the "**gift of God**" in the mind of Paul? It was not Timothy's ability or his own enthusiasm. It is stated in another verse: "**Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery**" (I Timothy 4:14). It was the gift of the SPIRIT for his peculiar ministry, the supreme qualification for preaching and witnessing and service. And in application it represents the fire of the SPIRIT in each and all of us believers.

Timothy was exhorted to let no man despise his youth. As a rule, we do not expect much of young preachers. We say, "He'll be fine after he has finished school," or "After he has had experience he will be a power," and we forget that the main qualification for young or old, the HOLY SPIRIT, he may have now as much as he ever will. Without that no preacher can preach

whatever his age or training. And unless he have the Holy Fire, more experience will but confirm him in carnality. Many a preacher never preached better than when he began, for he began in the fire of his first love, before the world and even the church had time to temper his zeal and smother his flame until he became merely "among those present."

Paul recognized the value of training, because he exhorted Timothy to study to show himself approved unto GOD, a workman that needed not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. He knew the value of experience, for he would have no bishop be a novice. But, above all that, he would say, "Timothy, stir up the Fire, don't get in a rut and don't let them make an ordinary preacher out of you."

What Christians in general, preachers and churches need most today is to stir the embers of the Holy Fire until the heavenly zeal consumes them. Our Lord did not say He would spew us out of His mouth for being too hot but for being lukewarm!

Every believer has at least a few coals in his heart, but usually it is a bed of coals instead of a flame. When the Gospel is preached and the breath of the SPIRIT blows on the hearts you can tell where the fire is, for faces will light up and the glow will return. But the fire has died down. Iniquity abounds and the love of many has waxed cold; they have quenched the SPIRIT and left their first love. Wet blankets of various sorts have smothered the flame.

Many of them are hard put to it to keep themselves warm when they ought to be setting others afire! If for any reason the fire has become coals, stir up the gift of GOD! Keep aglow at any cost! No price is too great to pay to be a "**burning and a shining light**" for Him! Better go to lengths that may seem absurd to others to keep the fire blazing!

There are so many things that can smother the fire. Of course, willful sin will do it. Our Lord told us that the candle of testimony may be smothered by the bushel or the bed. The bushel stands for money-making, the cares of business, the temporal concerns of this life.

The bed stands for luxury, ease, worldly pleasure, the sloth that so enervates the soul. And most Christian lights are under either the bushel or the bed! Some are too busy to shine, others are too lazy. The test of any interest is this: What effect does it have on my fire? Does it tone down my zeal? Does it grieve the SPIRIT?

Neglect will smother the fire. Let the fire alone and it will burn low and the ashes will gather. If we neglect the means of grace, prayer, the Word and holy exercise, we shall soon need a stirring. And never was it easier to grow slothful and complacent than today. The spirit of the times is against the man on fire for GOD as never before. The very atmosphere is dull, the devil makes our eyelids heavy and fills our minds with cobwebs. The spirit may be willing but the flesh is weak. It is not easy to stir oneself to take hold of GOD. Drop into the average church service today and you realize the truth of those old lines:

"In vain we tune our formal songs;  
In vain we strive to rise;  
Hosannas languish on our tongues,  
And our devotion dies."

We sleep in the garden while our Lord says in gentle irony, "**Sleep on now and take your rest,**" but He also adds, "**Rise, let us be going.**" We need to take ourselves by the back of the neck and shake ourselves out of our coma and lethargy, cocainized and chloroformed as we are by the spiritual climate of this ungodly age:

"Awake, my soul, stretch every nerve,  
And press with vigor on;  
A heavenly race demands thy zeal  
And an immortal crown."

Then, too, others can quench the SPIRIT and smother our fire.

Every Christian is a contradiction to this old world. He crosses it at every point. He goes against the grain from beginning to end. From the day that he is born again until the day that he goes on to be with the Lord, he must stand against the current of a world always going the other way. GOD expects him to be "beside himself," "a fool for CHRIST's sake," "drunk on new wine."

If he allows it, men will tone him down, steal the joy of his salvation, and reduce him to the dreary level of the general average. If the devil cannot keep us from being saved, he next endeavors to make average Christians of us, and in this he usually succeeds. He tames the holy recklessness of GOD's dare-saints until they sink into the drab pattern of most of us, "faultily faultless, icily regular, splendidly null." The devil does not mind our joining a church if we behave like most of those who are already inside.

But when a real, wide-awake Christian breezes along, taking the Gospel seriously, the devil grows alarmed and begins plotting his downfall. He gets plenty of assistance right in the church, for many church folk do not like to have their Laodicean complacency upset by these who turn the world upside down. So they conspire with Satan to turn the young Christian's fever into a chill. There are always plenty of human wet blankets to smother the zealot's flame, and they have put out more spiritual fires than have all the skeptics and infidels.

I remember well that when I, as a boy, started out to preach, those who discouraged me most were not the folk commonly called "sinners" but the smug circle of religionists at home in this world who cautioned me to take it easy, and reminded me that I should not be righteous overmuch!

Sometimes one encounters such discouragement most at home and finds his greatest foes in this matter in his own household. No wonder our Lord used the strong word "**hate**" to tell us how much higher should be our devotion to Him than to the dearest of earth! Throughout His life, whether saying as a boy in the temple, "**Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?**" or at Cana saying to His mother, "**Woman, what have I to do with thee?**" or when His relatives desired to speak to Him and He said, "**Whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother,**" He always made it clear that His first obligation was to GOD and He suffered not even the dearest of earth to hinder that devotion. Doubtless His relatives would have smothered His fire if He had allowed it, even as His friends thought He was beside Himself (Mark 3:21).

Certainly, fear can choke the fire.

Paul says to Timothy in the very word next to the passage we are considering, "**For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.**" The man who hid his talent said, "**I was afraid.**"

The fires that fear has smothered - fear of the past or present or future, fear of others, of failure, of sickness, of death! Whatever fear you may have, it is not of GOD, for He hath not given us such a Spirit. But He has given us power and love and a sound mind and these gifts we should stir up! We have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but the Spirit of adoption, and we ought to stir up that! We should stir up the spirit of power, for we have been promised power - "**Ye shall receive power.**" We should stir up love, for perfect love casts out fear. And we should stir up the spirit of discipline or of a sound mind, that which Matthew Henry called "a peaceable enjoyment of ourselves," for, said he, "We are oftentimes discouraged in our way and work by creatures of our own fancy and imagination which sober solid thinking would obviate and easily answer." We need to rout the spectres and hobgoblins of our minds by a sanctified common sense, without which all other sense is nonsense."

Let us remember that stirring up the gift of GOD is our business. GOD will not do it for us. We must rouse ourselves from our lethargy and get down to business in prayer and feeding upon the Word and holy exercise.

"O for a passionate passion for souls,  
O for a pity that yearns;  
O for a love that loves even to death,  
O for a fire that burns!"

It is related that in Scotland years ago, before the day of matches, the fires had gone out throughout a community. The people set out looking for someone who had a fire. At last, far up on a hillside, they found a humble home where the hearthstone glowed with cheery flame. Soon they were carrying coals here and there to replenish their own blackened fireplaces. Today there are weary hearts, discouraged souls, needy churches looking for a soul with a fire, someone who has kept aglow in spite of the world, the flesh and the devil.

What has smothered your fire? Renounce it, yield afresh to GOD and stir up His gift within you!

~ end of chapter 3 ~

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