

Godly Passion

“And for this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands” (2 Tim 1:6).

“Kindle afresh” has the meaning of “fanning the flame.” Timothy’s passion for the imparted “gift of God” obviously had subsided into simmering coals, only a vestige of the flames of the past.

The special wave of miracles that came from the laying on of Paul’s work-apron now was only a dim memory. That special street where the citizens of Ephesus brought their books of magic and burned them in the sight of everyone, declaring their faith and commitment in Christ Jesus, was now only a hub of business activities. As ashes blow away in the wind, so was the memory of this spectacular event in the mind of Timothy. “Fan the flame,” comes the command from the aging Paul.

Over the years I have preached on Pressure, Pressing, Potential, Purpose and occasionally I have ministered on enthusiasm, zeal, fervency, but never on godly passion. To the younger set “passion” relates mostly to “sexual attraction”, to the religious set “passion” relates to Easter week, but in my emphasis “passion” describes the emotion of a sincere Christian that is zealously pursuing his personal gift of God, the will of God and the heart of God. Passion usually implies a strong emotion that has an overpowering or compelling effect. A cousin word is fervor, an intense flame-like emotion.

When passion subsides in a marriage, usually occurring after several years, the marriage relationship is in serious danger. If the “first-love” emotion is not fanned by the couple, divorce or separation is around the corner. This same situation can be applied to an organization or fellowship, such as the Full Gospel Fellowship. If the passion of the founding fathers subsides over the years in its pre- sent leadership and the zeal for the initial vision fades, the movement sinks into the muck and mire of religious self-perpetuation. The vehicle that carried the vision is then disabled and becomes useless in the purpose of God.

Because of trusting in its prosperity, the church in Laodicea had grown lukewarm, neither hot nor cold to the things of God. They had lost their “first love” like the Ephesians and their passion to pursue the heart of God had become simmering coals, only a trace of their fervor at the beginning.

Timothy, pastor of the Ephesus Church

When a pastor loses his passion for his special calling in God, ministry and for lost souls, the church loses its passion for the things of God. Paul commanded Timothy, “in accordance with the prophecies previously made” to him, “that by them”, or within their sphere of power, fight the good fight. 1. Tim. 1:18. Hymenaeus and Alexander experienced shipwreck because they lost their passion for “the Faith”, therefore commands Paul, “Timothy, my son (teknon-a word that expresses endearment)” guards your faith and conscience.

Again Paul urges Timothy to “discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness” or otherwise arouse your passion for godly character. 1 Tim. 4:7. The word “discipline” expresses the way that Greek athletes train themselves for the Olympic games. In verse twelve, Paul encourages Timothy to “show yourself as example of those who believe.” Paul reminded Timothy to arouse his passion to be an example to others.

It is so easy to be caught up in the “freedom-from-all-bondage” thing that the passion to go beyond the call of duty is forgotten. To be an example “in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity”, regardless of self-sacrifice, should be our passion.

Timothy “do not neglect the spiritual gift within you,” instructs Paul. 1 Tim. 4:14. The word “neglect” implies a continuing practice in the life of Timothy, otherwise Timothy do not keep on neglecting the gift of God in you that was imparted by the laying of hands of the elders. Timothy was exhorted to fan the flame, or arouse the passion for the spiritual gift within him. A passion for something is not automatic, but must be fanned into a burning consuming zeal.

Timothy was instructed to “take pains with these things, be absorbed in them... pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching...to fight the good fight of faith...suffer hardship with me as a good soldier...be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth...to flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace...be sober in all things...do the work of an evangelist and fulfill your ministry.

The choice is passion or passivity! It is critical to be “fervent in spirit”, (Ro. 12:11) or come to the boiling point in serving the Lord. Fan the flame of your enthusiasm in serving the Lord.

Epaphras was “always laboring earnestly” in prayer for the Colossian church that they might “stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God” (Col. 4:12). He was striving as in an athletic contest! He had passion for the local church body to succeed in pleasing God.

“Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months” (James 5:17). Elijah demonstrated a passion for righteousness.

“Keep fervent in your love for one another,” was the exhortation of Peter. (1 Pet. 4:8) We must arouse our passion for the love of God to be manifest in our lives.

The Passion of Paul to reach the world for Christ.

After Paul had zig-zagged across Asia Minor and the Grecian world for almost twenty years preaching the word of God with a passion fanned by the words of Christ through Ananias, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake.” (Acts 9:15, 16) Read also Acts 26:15-18. Paul was driven by his passion to witness to his own countrymen and fulfill his ministry. His impassioned story unfolds in Acts 20-28. His loved ones attempted to convince Paul through prophetic utterance not to go back to Jerusalem. His response was: “And now, behold, bound in spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:22-24).

The respected prophet, Agabus, took Paul’s belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said,

“This is what the Holy Spirit says: In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles” (Acts 20:11). When the local believers heard this prophecy, they begged Paul not to go to Jerusalem. Paul said, “What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.” His passion to complete his mission was stronger than any other personal desire. Sometimes we must sort out personal prophecy in the light of our mission and purpose in God. Personal prophecy as given to Paul was understood by him as a warning of what was ahead, not to keep him from pursuing his mission. With determination and a burning passion in his heart, he continued on his journey to Jerusalem.

What expectant hardship or danger will we allow to stop our progress toward finishing our mission on this earth? For Demas it loved this present world that caused his passion to subside and he deserted his calling and mission for Christ. What type of retardant will cause any of us to desert our mission: Occupation? Family? Money? Popularity? Social status? Inconvenience? Danger? Terrorism?

With the entrance of the jail at his back, Paul boldly defended the gospel of Christ before an angry religious crowd. Acts 22:1-21. On the next day after his incarceration, he fearlessly defended the gospel before the chief priests and all the Council. Acts 23:1-10. And over the next two years he fervently defended the gospel before Felix, Festus and King Agrippa. The flame of his passion for Christ Jesus never subsided, but with each encounter with the religious and political world, the flame grew higher and hotter. After hearing the burning testimony of Paul, King Agrippa replied to Paul, “In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian” (Acts 26:28).

Paul’s treacherous voyage across the Mediterranean Sea to stand before Nero in Rome as a witness of the gospel did not cause his faith, zeal or fervency to lessen. A fierce and violent wind blew the ship off course, the cargo was tossed overboard, all hope for escape was abandoned and the ship ended up on a reef where two seas met. The ship broke up from the pounding of the waves, and one by one, the swimming men took hold of a floating plank and everyone reached the shore safely. None of these extreme difficulties caused the passion of Paul to die out. Even a snake bite could not keep him from his mission to testify before Nero. He cursed the poison, expounded the word, prayed for the sick and kept on believing.

Before the Damascus Road experience, Paul’s religious zeal and passion caused him to persecute the church. But after meeting the glorified Christ, his passion was changed into an intensity to know Christ, the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His suffering. Paul pressed tenaciously for his eternal destiny in Christ, forgetting the things behind him, and passionately reaching forward to the prize of the high calling of God

Paul had been driven by His godly passion for almost 20 years, from the road that led to Damascus to the highway to Rome, the capitol city of the world. Along the way, as recorded in the Book of the Acts, Paul was in fourteen major adversities and in all of those he took the opportunity to fan the adversity into a time of opportunity. Jesus: zeal driven

Jesus was driven by His zeal for the house of God. “Zeal for Your house will consume me” (St. Jn. 2:17). The prophet Isaiah wrote, “There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this” (Isa. 9:7). Jesus was consumed with fulfilling the will of God for His life!

The Last Days

The last days were described by Jesus as emotionally cold and evil, people possessing a seared conscience and the majority of the people pursuing selfish ambitions. “And because lawlessness is increased, most people’s love will grow cold” (Matthew 24:12). Paul prophesied that in the latter times some would fall away from the faith. 1 Tim. 4:1. Why? Because of the deception of the times instigated by deceitful spirits and teachings of demons. A deceived believer will gradually lose their passion for the truth of God’s word.

Mr. Fox, the author of a prestigious book entitled “Fox’s Book of Martyrs”, was so impassionedly charged with the truth about the crimes of the Roman Catholic Church, that he was willing to deny himself of financial security, and put his life on the line. With the accession of Elizabeth to the throne, Mr. Fox returned to England from exile to complete his book. This book took eleven years to write. For the sake of greater correctness, he wrote every line of this vast book with his own hand, and transcribed all the records and papers himself. Because of his passion to complete this book, his health failed from excessive work and his close friends had difficulty recognizing him. Even though he progressively became more exhausted from his labor, he continued his studies and writing as briskly as ever. This is what I define as godly passion to complete your ministry and service unto God.

Mr. Fox’s book was ordered by the Bishops to be placed in every cathedral church in England, where it was often found chained, as the Bible was in those days, to a lectern for the access of the people.

The unbelieving religious people in Jerusalem during the early years of the church rejected the fervency of the preaching of Stephen. “They were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking” (Acts 6:10). After his feverous defense of the gospel of Christ before the Council and the High Priest, the people cried out with a loud voice and drove him outside the city and stoned him to death. Paul was the legal witness of this execution.

James, the elder brother of John, ten years after the martyrdom of Steven, became the second apostle to lose his life for his undaunted and impassioned testimony. While Apostle James was being led to the place of his execution, his accuser was brought to repentance because of James’ extraordinary courage in the face of death. Both of them cheerfully presented themselves to their executioner. They were beheaded.

Progressively, the list of martyrs grows because they refused to love their lives even when faced with death. Philip was scourged, thrown into prison and afterwards crucified in 54 AD. Matthew, the tax man, was slain with a halberd, a battle-ax, in 60 AD. James, the elder at Jerusalem, at the age of ninety-four was beaten and stoned by the Jews, and finally had his brains dashed out with a fuller’s club. Matthias, the one chosen to replace the betrayer Judas, was stoned in Jerusalem and then beheaded. After preaching the gospel without compromise in many Asiatic nations, Andrew was taken and crucified on a cross, the two ends of which were fixed transversely in the ground. Andrew’s cross stands as a monument to his passion regarding the gospel of Jesus Christ. John Mark, the author of the Gospel of Mark, one who had deserted Paul and Barnabas, was given another chance to serve with passion the Lord. Because of his preaching, he was dragged to pieces by the people of Alexandria. Jerome reported that Peter was crucified upside down because of a personal request. He had a feeling unworthiness to be crucified in like manner as Jesus. Jude was also crucified. Bartholomew preached fervently in several countries, translated the Gospel of Matthew into the language of India was cruelly beaten and then crucified by idol worshipers.

Thomas, the Twin, excited the rage of pagan priests in India and pierced with a spear. Luke, a faithful companion of Paul, is reported to have been hanged on an olive tree by idol worshipers of Greece. Simon, who preached in Africa and Britain, was crucified. John, the beloved disciple of Christ, was thrown into a cauldron of boiling oil because of his passion for the Gospel. And finally, Barnabas was killed in Cyprus. All of these severe punishments against the leaders of the church only caused it to daily grow. The church was irrigated by the blood of passion of its martyrs.

It was the passion of the Reformers, such as John Wycliffe, John Huss, Martin Luther, and William Tyndale that provided the platform for a renewed and re-invigorated church of the last days.

May God give us an apostolic passion to reach the world with the gospel of the kingdom by penetrating all of the unreached people groups and planting churches.

May God give us a prophetic passion to bring forth the pure word of God that purifies and cleanses the body of Christ.

May God give us an evangelistic passion to get as many souls saved as possible.

May God give us a pastoral passion to have a growing, healthy church body that is serving God with determination and godly purpose.

May God give us a teacher's passion to equip the church with truth that sets people free from the bondage of sin.

Has your passion for living a dedicated life for Jesus evaporated over time?

Have you allowed unpleasant circumstances, problems, struggles and failing health to reduce the flame of your passion for God to a only a flicker.

Paul, in spite of the destructive winds of the sea, arrived in Rome on God's time table to passionately witness to the emperor of Rome.

King Jehu, one who drove his chariot furiously, left a legacy of his zeal for the Lord.

The exhortation of Paul to Timothy, who was allowing the "stuff in life" to reduce his passion for the things of the Lord to simmering coals, responded by becoming a martyr in Ephesus.

Has your passion for ministry lessened with the passing years? Has the heavy loads, nagging demands, unreasonable expectations of people, lack of finance, harsh criticisms, painful disappointments and missed opportunities waned your passion for ministry?

Has the aging process with its growing limitations cooled your passion for ministry?

Godly passion comes from out of the Spirit of God that dwells in you. God's Spirit is eternal, experiences absolutely no lack, is creative and burns with the purpose of God.

Right now, Jesus is standing at the door of your heart ready to renew your passion and zeal for His gift to you and His eternal purpose.

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