

2 Timothy, with love

- Paul wrote 2 Timothy from a Roman dungeon in AD 66. Two years earlier, Nero fiddled while Rome burned. Not a children's nursery rhyme, the destruction of Rome by Nero was a calculated and satanic crime. He had ordered the city burned, and it did for six days. Tacitus, the Roman historian wrote, "But all human efforts, all the lavish gifts of the emperor and the propitiations of the gods did not banish the sinister belief that the conflagration was the result of an order by Nero. Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace."
- You have heard the stories of Roman persecution. They are all true. Christians were boiled in oil. They were tied to stakes in the gladiatorial arenas and set on fire to provide lighting for the fights. They were fed to the lions. They were beheaded. Or they were thrown into dank dungeons while they awaited their final end. That's where we find Paul. The first time he was arrested, which we read about at the end of the book of Romans, Paul was under house arrest. Friends could come and go, and Paul was able to move about freely in the house, and live a fairly normal, but restricted, life. It is five or six years later, and Paul is in chains. He is now in a place where there is very little light, no sanitation, possibly chained to other prisoners or even to Roman guards, where there is no hope for escape except through death.
- John MacArthur says, "It is remarkable that, in addition to witnessing to his fellow inmates, (Paul) is able to write letters." But Paul does exactly that, as he writes this final letter to his beloved son in the faith, Timothy. And we discover, as we read it, that Paul has been deserted by most who once accompanied him in the ministry. He says in chapter 4, "At my first defense, no one stood with me." And he says, "Only Luke is with me." He tells Timothy right after he greets him in this letter that he longs to see him. Later on he asks Timothy to come quickly and to bring him some of his books and parchments, and he says, "bring the cloak that I left in Carpus." Why, Paul? Because winter is coming. "Do your best to come before winter," he says at the end of the letter. Winter meant no travel. It was also getting closer to his execution, and Paul wanted to see Timothy one last time before that. And it was cold in the dungeon. With that as a backdrop, let's now back up and look at 2 Timothy from 30,000 feet, as they say, to see what the big idea is. I have talked to you before about trying to find the "melodic line" of a text. What is the melodic line that runs all the way through a book of the Bible? If we get that, I believe we have a better understanding of what the Spirit is doing as He inspires the author to write the book. In the case of 2 Timothy, I believe the melodic line is most plainly expressed in chapter 1, verse 13: "Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and the love that are in Christ Jesus." Another way of saying this is, "Timothy, preserve and promote sound doctrine like your life depended on it." Why would Paul write this way? Because the church was in dire straits in AD 66. Bishop Hanly Moule writes, "Christianity trembled, humanly speaking, on the verge of annihilation." This was not a time of burgeoning growth and great prosperity in the church. The persecution was devastating. Paul is sitting in a dungeon awaiting his own execution, and he knows his time is short. He writes to Timothy to pass the baton to him and to encourage this young pastor to stand fast in the Gospel.
- There are no hard and fast divisions, but I like the way William Hendricksen describes the four chapters, if preserving and promoting sound doctrine is the melodic line:
Chapter 1: Hold onto sound doctrine.
Chapter 2: Teach sound doctrine.
Chapter 3: Abide in sound doctrine.
Chapter 4: Preach sound doctrine.
- Some of you will remember that I preached from this first chapter on Mother's day a few months ago, as we looked at the fact that it was the faith of a mother and grandmother that were instrumental in Timothy coming to faith himself. We see this in verse 5 where Paul commends

Timothy for his “sincere faith” that was in his mother and his grandmother first. Here’s an excerpt from that sermon: Paul had come to a town called Lystra on his second missionary journey and found a disciple there by the name of Timothy, and the implication is that Lois and Eunice had heard Paul and Barnabas preach the FIRST time through, heard the Gospel, and believed on Christ. Then perhaps they took Timothy to hear Paul preach, but clearly they were believers first. Timothy’s mother had a personal faith in Jesus that Timothy witnessed first hand. Her faith was instrumental in bringing Timothy to Christ. Question. How many people did Timothy end up leading to faith in Jesus? We don’t know, do we? The power of multi-generational faithfulness to the Gospel is unfathomable. Lois & Eunice heard the Gospel and believed. Their personal faith impacted Timothy and he heard the Gospel and believed. Then untold numbers heard the Gospel from Timothy and believed. And it marched on. But it would not have marched anywhere had it not been genuine faith, personal faith that was real.

- Vance Havner said, “To some, Christianity is an argument. To many, it is a performance. To a few, it is an experience.” Genuine faith is the gift Christ gives to all who truly meet Him.
- Now let’s unpack the text for today, verses 6 and 7.
- Fan into flame the gift of God. (verse 6)
- We learned as we studied 1 Timothy that the young pastor was troubled by a few things that are common to man. He was timid. Paul starts the first letter right off the bat, right after the greeting with “I urged you...to remain in Ephesus.” Don’t give in to your timidity. Stay there! (Maybe Timothy, like many pastors, was greatly tempted to leave when things got hot. The average man who enters the ministry in the U.S. is out of the ministry within 5 years.) Timothy, Paul was saying, the flames all around you are not the problem. They will always be there. The flame that needs attention is the one that is about to go out in your heart! Fan it into flame. Not only was he timid, but he was insecure about his age. So Paul addressed that as well, remember? “Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity.” Third, Timothy was plagued with stomach troubles, so Paul told him to use some wine as a medicine for that. Now he opens his second letter to Timothy, 5 or 6 years later, and again he is urging the young pastor, prodding him to stand tall. You know this is Paul’s last letter. Has Paul mellowed in his old age like many tend to do, to the point that Paul is less passionate, less engaged with what is most important? Has Paul retired at all from the ministry even though he is in chains in a Roman dungeon? Not at all. Quite the opposite. In fact, there are twenty-five imperatives in this short letter. 25 commands in just 83 verses! And here is the first one: fan into flame the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.
- If Paul had stopped with the first phrase, fan into flame the gift of God, then I think you could make an argument that he was talking about the spiritual gift that Timothy received upon salvation, just like all of the rest of us received a spiritual gift when we were saved by grace. “As each one has received a gift,” Peter said, “minister it to one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” (1 Peter 4:10). We could certainly apply what Paul says to Timothy as an encouragement to use our gifts. If you are not serving the body of Christ with your gift, then what should be a flame may just be a spark, or even a dimly burning wick. Fan it into flame. Take action to make what is smoldering into a raging fire. But I don’t think that is the primary meaning here. If the melodic line of this letter is “preserve and promote sound doctrine,” then I believe Paul is saying, “Timothy, you are called by God to leadership and preaching and shepherding that will protect the flock of God and help it grow up in Christ. Fan that gift into flame.” That’s the reference, I believe, to the second part of the imperative: “which (gift) is in you through the laying on of my hands.” Timothy has been called to the ministry, the full-time commitment of preaching and teaching and leading a church. Not only that, but I believe Paul sees Timothy as a young Elisha to whom the mantle of responsibility is going to fall when Paul leaves the world through martyrdom. That’s why this message is so urgent. That’s why this letter is so personal. It really is Paul’s last will and testament, and he wrote it to a man. A man who

struggled with fear and timidity and apparently was often defeated. So, Paul gives Timothy a command. An imperative. But then as Paul often does, he offers an indicative, a truth that is firmly planted in the Word of God and in the character of God, as help and hope. Paul says, Timothy DO THIS, but then he says, Timothy, here's how GOD has already supplied you with everything you need so you CAN do this!

- God gave us a spirit of power and love and self-control. (verse 7)
- I like the wording of the ESV. It tells us that God gave us a spirit. Or, as William Hendricksen translates it, God gave us a Spirit. Capital "S". He writes, "My dear child Timothy, fight that tendency of yours toward fearfulness. The Holy Spirit, given to you and me and every believer, is not the Spirit of timidity but of power and love and self-discipline. Avail yourself of that limitless, never-failing power (dunamis/dynamite) and you will proclaim God's truth; of that intelligent, purposeful love, and you will comfort God's children; and of that ever-necessary self-discipline, and you will wage God's battle against cowardice."
- How many of us need to fight a tendency toward fearfulness? Most of us. I know I do. I am fearful sometimes to say no to one of my children. I am fearful to speak out in a public place when I have an opportunity to give testimony for Christ. I am fearful to call someone who needs a word of correction. We talked last Sunday about the tendency many have in the church towards fear when it comes to finances, and giving. Many do not give simply because of fear. Some will not go to the mission field, whether it is on the other side of the world or across the street because of fear. Some will not get married or even put themselves in a place where that can happen because of fear: they are afraid of making that commitment. Some will not put themselves in any position where they are not sure of every little detail ahead of time because they are afraid they will not be in control. What's the answer?
- The Spirit. He is power, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead. He is love. The same love that brought Jesus here to die for sinners. He is self-control. The same self-control that allowed Jesus to be persecuted and mocked and spit on and not return evil for evil.