

THE GIFT OF GOD

Ted Schroder, April 18, 2010

What do you want most for your children, your grandchildren, or your friends: prosperity, good health, success in their careers, common sense, integrity, wisdom, or faith? As far as we are aware St. Paul did not have any biological children, but he had many spiritual children. All those who came to faith in Christ through him, he called his children. He regarded Timothy as his dear son. He first met Timothy and his family on his visit to Lystra in Galatia (modern day central Turkey). Timothy must have been a teenager at the time. His mother, Eunice, and grandmother, Lois, became believers and members of the church in Lystra. They were Jewish, but his father was a Greek, and was probably deceased when Paul returned five years later, and recruited Timothy to join his missionary team.

What did Paul want for Timothy? First of all, he wanted him to have “grace, mercy and peace, from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.” (2 Timothy 1:2) Think of these three blessings in terms of their value. Grace simply means gift, an undeserved gift, freely given. Just think of the greatest gift that you have ever received, or could ever receive. Is it the gift of life, or the gift of love, or the gift of opportunity, or the gift of education? If you had the power to give someone you love the gift they most wanted, you would give it. “If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Luke 11:13) God has given us the greatest gift of himself in his Son, through the indwelling of his Spirit. The person who knows and values that gift will always be grateful for it. “Because of the surpassing grace God has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift.” (2 Corinthians 9:15) I want my children and grandchildren to experience this grace.

Second, he wanted him to have mercy. To value mercy is to realize how needy we and our children all are. We are dependent creatures, fragile in the face of the onslaughts of the world, the flesh, and the devil; ill-health, accidents, and circumstances beyond our control. The traveler on the road to Jericho who was beset by thieves, and left for dead, was shown mercy by the Good Samaritan. The king showed mercy on his servant who was so deeply in debt to him that he could not repay him. We all need mercy, we all need forgiveness, not only for that which we have done that we ought not to have done, but also for the good that we have failed to do.

“The quality of mercy is not strain’d,” says Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*.

It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath: it is twice blessed;
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes....
It is enthroned in the heart of kings,
It is an attribute of God himself....”

We and our children would want to be shown mercy and to be able to show mercy or compassion to others.

Third, he wanted Timothy to have peace. To value peace is to value harmony, shalom. We spend our lifetime seeking peace within ourselves: peace with our past, peace with our loved ones, peace with our environment, and peace with our fears. Paul mentions that he served God with a clear conscience. (2 Timothy 1:3) How does one achieve such peace? “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:6,7) Peace comes through a life lived

prayerfully seeking the will of God. The life that is at peace is lived seeking first the will and purpose of God. That is why Paul constantly remembered Timothy in his prayers night and day. That is why we pray for our children and grandchildren, that they may find this peace in their lives through seeking the will of God for themselves.

It is helpful, when praying for our children, to remember our forefathers and mothers, as Paul did. They prayed for us as we pray for our children. Paul is reminded of Timothy's sincere faith which first lived in his grandmother and his mother. I am afraid his father is not mentioned. We don't even know his name. He was a zero as far as faith is concerned. My own parents were inarticulate about their faith. They saw that I went to Sunday school and confirmation classes, and I am grateful for that, because it gave me the grounding in the faith, and a relationship with the clergy and the church, that opened the door for me to believe, when the gift of God was given to me, as it was to Timothy. It was Timothy's mother and grandmother who had the greater influence upon him spiritually. His lack of a father's guidance may have contributed to a certain shyness or timidity in his character.

Paul stepped into the role of a father figure and urged him to fan into flame the gift of God which was in him through the laying on of his hands. This gift was probably the empowering gift of the Holy Spirit. "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity (fear, cowardice), but a spirit of power, of love, and of self-discipline." (2 Timothy 1:7) The gift of the Holy Spirit can be either quenched in us, or fanned into flame. We can either welcome the Spirit or resist the Spirit. Our attitude to the Spirit can decide what sort of person we will become. I pray that my children will welcome the Holy Spirit, will fan his presence into flame, and not quench him, nor resist his presence. For the Spirit can give us power, love and self-discipline, the keys to a successful and happy life.

In this, his last message to Timothy, Paul is exhorting him to become an excellent leader, a man of courage, who would exercise power, love and self-discipline in the face of criticism, persecution and discouragement.

"Courage is the willingness to risk. To lead is to act. To have courage is to take charge, first of one's life, for the true hero is not the person who conquers others but the one who conquers himself or herself. Courage is the ability to exhibit personal autonomy and independence of thought, to take the initiative, to be a self-starter. Courage means that you are willing to stand alone. You define yourself. You invent who you are. You are responsible for who you are. Courage is the free decision to tolerate maximum amounts of anxiety, to manage your anxiety constructively, to understand that being anxious is what it feels like to grow. The courageous leader claims the power, at all times, to initiate, act, and risk. Courage means acting with sustained initiative." (Peter Koestenbaum, *Leadership: the inner side of greatness, a philosophy for leaders*, 49-52)

Each generation is in the business of reproduction. We are created to replace ourselves. We are meant to reproduce sons and daughters of God. We are called to bequeath to our spiritual children the gift of God – to give them a legacy of sincere faith and a clear conscience. That is what we are commissioned by Christ to do – to build the family of God, to extend the kingdom of God one soul at a time. Such gifts as grace, mercy and peace, the spirit of power, love and self-control, are priceless. They should be valued and gratefully used every day of our lives.

Follow my blog on www.ameliachapel.com/blog