

The Gospel of Paul

2 Timothy 1:1-13; Galatians 5:16-26; Ephesians 4:1-7

Spirit, grace, faith, love ... 4 very significant theological words. This entire series about the Body of Christ and the Gifts of the Spirit relies heavily upon these 4 little words. But the intention and purpose of this series is not simply to become more familiar with these 4 words. The intention is to integrate these words, and their intention into our daily living. The intention is to help us impact the lives of others for good. And the reason for all of that is so that you and I might become the people that God is calling us to be.

The apostle Paul writes a letter to his dear friend Timothy, longing to encourage him in his journey of faith. Paul says that he always keeps Timothy in his prayers. Paul acknowledges that he is aware of the difficult times Timothy has suffered and that he longs to be with him to celebrate in joy.

But then Paul says something very interesting. In verse 3 he says that he worships God with a clear conscience, as his ancestors did. Well if you know your Bible well, you will recognize this as a very curious sentiment! His ancestors were hardly a people with no stains on their consciences. They lost faith when faced with danger ... the Red Sea for example. They grumbled against Moses and God. They married foreign women and worshiped foreign gods. David, their most famous king, murdered his faithful servant, Uriah, in order to cover up his affair with Bathsheba, Uriah's wife. So much for his ancestors, worshiping God with a clear conscience.

And as for Paul himself, he had built his reputation on the persecution of Christians until his Damascus road conversion.

So neither the Israelites, his ancestors, nor Paul, were without blemish. Even so, God forgives, and they go on to do invaluable work for the kingdom!

Paul urges Timothy to remember that it was from his grandmother, to his mother, to Timothy that his faith in God came, passed down from one generation to the next. Paul wants him to remember and honour that gift by showing confidence and hope and power and love and self discipline. Do you ever consider where your faith comes from ... who was instrumental in encouraging or nurturing your faith?

Paul was writing this letter to Timothy from prison where he was locked up for practicing his faith. He writes to Timothy about maintaining the grace and truth of Jesus Christ, even through the difficult times. Paul is in the process of passing the torch of leadership to Timothy. Then Paul writes these oft-quoted words, "But I am not ashamed, for I know the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that day what I have entrusted to him."

It is what we might call an exhortation, when Paul encourages Timothy to hold strong to the teaching he has received, and hold strong in his faith in and love for Jesus Christ. Do not be ashamed.

Does that seem perhaps like an odd thing for Paul to say ... do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me, his prisoner? Even when being known as a Christian was held to be virtuous in this country, people found it difficult to bear witness to their faith. For many people today ... some people are reluctant to share with others, how important their church and their faith is to them. For some, it is even more difficult, wanting to be politically correct and sensitive to the reality of our multi-cultural society. Paul says, do not be ashamed, hold strong in your faith.

In this passage from 2 Timothy, Paul is calling Timothy and all whom he leads, to live by the Spirit of God, in faith and in grace, knowing you are not without sin, but longing to do God's work and to grow more and more into the likeness of Christ himself – growing in grace all the time. That same call is for you and for me.

When we get to the reading from Galatians 5, Paul wants to call Christians to faith and freedom in Christ. Starting in verse 16 Paul is

warning not to be governed by the flesh, but rather by the spirit. I think we take a much more wholistic approach to the mind/ body dichotomy these days and do not see the body as such an enemy of the faith as in Paul's day. But what Paul is trying to do here, is to get the people of Galatia, the place where he took his first missionary trip, to focus on the fruit of the Spirit. For those of you who are interested, it would be worth your while to go online and see how theologians are differentiating between Gifts of the Spirit and Fruit of the Spirit. In a nutshell, gifts are abilities and qualities God has given to us. Fruits are godly aspects of our lives that we can grow and cultivate as a result of our desire to live lives that reflect the love of God. Listen to the words Paul uses when he refers to Fruits of the Spirit ... what pictures do they stir in your mind – joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, gentleness, love, self-control. Paul's point here is, if we are guided by these things, if these principles rule our hearts and minds, we will serve Christ and his mission and in so doing, we will glorify God.

While still in prison, Paul writes to the people of Ephesus, trying to encourage them in their faith by reminding them of their role as members of the Body of Christ.

We have just been reminded about living our lives in joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, gentleness, love and self-control.

Apparently Paul did not think that list was long enough. He adds humility, bearing with one another in love, and making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace to the list. There is one Body, one Spirit, one Lord, to which we are all called.

So the question is now, from these writings of Paul in 2nd Timothy, Galatians and Ephesians, what do we do now? How does any of this affect you or me? What has any of this got to do with our day-to-day living?

I think it has EVERYTHING to do with us and the choices we make daily!

Living as the Body of Christ ... as a family, as a congregation, as a community, as a country, and as a global community. Living with

humility, bearing one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of love. Living our lives out of a place of joy, and patience, peace, kindness, generosity, gentleness and self-control. Using the God-given gifts which each of us have, in ways that are pleasing to God. Can we strive to do these things just in our relationship with our partner or with our children or with our parents and siblings? Can we strive to live like this with our neighbours? How about with members of our congregation, or in our community, or beyond?

Neither Paul nor his ancestors lived a life of perfection. This is difficult work to which we are called. Of course it is not always tough ... it is easier for us to be joyful, and kind and patient, generous and loving with some than it is with others. But nevertheless, this is the way of living to which God calls you and me. Living daily by the Fruit of the Spirit. Living faithfully with the gifts God has given us as members of

the Body of Christ. The choice is yours. The challenge is yours. And the blessings are yours!

Amen