

"HEAR YE HIM"

A Devotional Series For Radio

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The Sermon: NEGLECT NOT THE GIFT THAT IS IN THEE

Scripture: I Timothy 4:12-16

Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity. Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of hands by the presbytery. Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed to thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.

Neglect not the gift that is in thee.

In years past the United States and its people have been guilty of almost criminal waste of our natural resources -- soil, forests, water, minerals, gas, oil, fish, game and wildlife of all kinds. Yet this has not been, and is not now the greatest waste of which we are guilty. The greatest waste in the world today is the waste of human resources-- gifts, talents, abilities, and capacities that are allowed to lie dormant, undeveloped, and unused.

The capacities of the human mind and body are almost infinite, compared to the actual use we make of them. Very few of us use more than a small fraction of our potential brain power or of our physical strength. Handicapped persons frequently develop some special ability to compensate for their handicap. People who have lost their sight learn to read Braille with their fingers. People who have lost their hearing learn to read lips. People who have lost both arms learn to hold a pen, to write, or even to draw or paint with their toes. Almost anybody could develop a similar skill, but because we have no handicap and are confronted by no emergency, we don't try.

Grandma Moses started a rewarding and profitable career as a painter at a time of life when most people are ready to sit down and loaf while waiting for death. Most of us can't remember four items we want to buy at the super market without writing them down, and we forget a name as soon as we have been introduced to a stranger; but there are men with no more brain power than you and me who can remember the names of 150 or 200 guests at

a banquet or party after one introduction, because they make a serious business of it and have conscientiously and painstakingly developed that capacity. There are millions of people who could be playing a musical instrument, learning a language, studying the world's best literature, art, or music -- learning to write or build furniture or indulge in some other creative hobby. But most of them are content to waste their spare time watching the rather vapid antics of T.V. comedians, or following the hackneyed plot of a favorite comic strip or soap opera.

Then too, there are untold millions in the uncivilized and unenlightened areas of earth who perhaps have great untapped and unrecognized abilities, talents, and capacities, but who lack education, money, or opportunity -- who necessarily spend all their lives in grubbing out a precarious and meager living. Who knows how many potential Beethovens or Shakespeares or Einsteins or Edisons there may be wasting undiscovered and unknown in the jungles of darkest Africa, or among the teeming hungry millions or benighted Asia?

When Paul wrote, "Neglect not the gift that is in thee...." he was no doubt referring specifically to the gift of priesthood authority and responsibility given to Timothy by the laying on of hands in ordination. Truly this is a great gift, bearing great opportunity and responsibility. Paul says that it was given to Timothy by prophecy. Men are called to priesthood responsibility by the Spirit of prophecy, which is the Spirit of God. They must be called of

God and commissioned by him if they are to represent and commit him. After this calling, the one called must be ordained by the laying on of the hands of the presbyters or elders who have already been authorized to transmit this power and authority in the church. Therefore, the gift of priesthood is two-fold the gift of God. In the first place, God is the giver of the natural talents and aptitudes which help to fit a man for such responsibility; and in the second place, the call from God by the Spirit of prophecy, and the ordination conferring authority, are both God's gifts of grace.

The ministry, therefore, have a particular responsibility to cultivate, develop, and perfect their gifts from God. To neglect them is to deprive others of a necessary and needful ministry which God has specifically called and commissioned them to give. To misuse or abuse such gifts is to mislead or deceive, or even to exploit others, and to prostitute the gifts of God. Ministers of God are sent to be an example of all believers in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity. They cannot lead where they have not gone themselves. Therefore they must study and learn and improve their own gifts and talents, if they would be an example to others.

As Paul counsels Timothy, ministers must give attendance to reading, to exhortation, and to doctrine. "Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them." Be single minded in your purpose. Men who are called and commissioned of God should have no time for trifles, for things that merely kill time, for things that do not profit either themselves or those whom they have been called to lead. "Take heed to thyself and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt save both thyself, and them that hear thee."

In another sense, Paul's admonition to "Neglect not the gift that is in thee" applies to all members of Christ's church as well as to its priesthood. Every man has some gift which in some way is special and peculiar to himself. "Every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that," says

Paul in I Corinthians 7:7. "The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal," he repeats in I Corinthians 12:7. Peter says (4:10) "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."

There are many spiritual gifts in the body of Christ -- yes, perhaps as many gifts as there are members, for every man has a gift, and no two men are exactly alike. The body of Christ can prosper and grow and be in good spiritual health only if every member cultivates, stirs up, and exercises his gift for the benefit and edification of the body. All gifts exercised in the body of Christ and in the Spirit of Christ are spiritual gifts.

As stewards over the manifold grace of God, we are all responsible and accountable for the use we make of God's gifts to us. If we neglect or abuse the gift that is in us, we may not only be condemned ourselves because of our lethargy and neglect, but inevitably we also cause others to suffer loss for the lack of that which we might have given to them and to the body of Christ.

In his second letter to Timothy Paul admonishes his son in the gospel to "stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands." The gift lies dormant in each of us, like a smouldering coal on a blacksmith's forge, waiting for a little poking and stirring up, and the draft of the bellows to make it burst into living flame. Many people allow their gift to lie dormant through fear. They are too timid to face the public, to bear witness for Christ, to offer a moral opinion, to share their knowledge, to contribute their peculiar and distinctive services. For them Paul continues, "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."

"Neglect not the gift that is in thee." "Stir it up; develop it; expand it; perfect it by use. Only thus can you keep yourself and your gift alive, and help to edify and bless and save others in the body of Christ.