# **Timothy – Let No Man Despise Thy Youth (1 Timothy 4:12)**

Toney L. Smith

### Introduction

Timothy was one of the best known of Paul's companions and fellow-laborers. He was evidently one of Paul's own converts, as the apostle describes him as his beloved and faithful son in the Lord (1Corinthians 4:17); and in 1 Timothy 1:2 he writes to "my own son in the faith"; and in 2 Timothy 1:2 he addresses him as "my dearly beloved son." He was a resident, and apparently a native, either of Lystra or Derbe, cities which were visited and evangelized by Paul on his 1st missionary journey (Acts 14:6).

Timothy's father was a Greek (Act 16:1, 3). In the original text the word "Ellen" (hellen) means a Greek either by nationality, whether a native of the main land or of the Greek islands. Strong's Bible Dictionary defines the word, "a Greek speaking person, especially a non-Jew." Timothy's mother was a Jewess, but when Paul meets him he had not been circumcised, probably owing to objections made by his father. Timothy's mother was called Eunice, and his grandmother Lois. Paul mentions them by name in 2 Timothy 1:5 he there speaks of the unfeigned faith which was in Timothy, and which dwelt at the first in Eunice and Lois. It is evident that Eunice was converted to Christ on Paul's 1st missionary journey to Derbe and Lystra, because, when he next visited these cities, she is spoken of as "a Jewess who believed" (Acts 16:1).

He was well spoken of by the brethren at Lystra and Iconium, Paul desired that the young disciple travel with him and therefore had him circumcised to accommodate Jews they would seek to evangelize (Acts 16:3). This began a long and prosperous relationship of serving together in the work of the Lord, in which Timothy served Paul as a son would his father (Philippians 2:19-24).. Such service included not only traveling with Paul, but remaining with new congregations when Paul would leave returning to encourage such congregations (1 Thessalonians 3:1-3), and serving as a special minister to the missionary work (1 Corinthians 16:10-11; Philippians 2:19-24). He is named in the introduction of several epistles written by Paul (2 Corinthians 1:1; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1). From such letters we learn that Timothy had been with Paul during his confinement at Rome. This faithful service give a good insight into the dedication of this young preacher. We reefer to him as a young preacher even though we do not know his exact age.

There are three main points in 1 Timothy chapter four. Verses 1-6 warns against apostasy; verses 7-11 encourages faithfulness to the word, and verses 12-16 addresses personal conduct. In our study we will observe the section on personal conduct, especially dealing with the statement found in 1 Timothy 4:12; "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."

# Let No Man Despise Thy Youth

The phrase in 1 Timothy 4:12 "Let no man despise thy youth" indicates that Timothy was a young man. J. W. Shepherd stated that the "Romans divided life into childhood up to eighteen years, youth up to forty-four, and old age up to death. The statement by Paul indicates that he was of such age that he would be liable to youthful indiscretions and follies." (Shepherd) We can also make the assumption that some of the hearers of Timothy's preaching would think he was too young to be "giving them

"Mark Them Which Walk So" (Philippians 3:17) – 24th Annual Mid-West Lectures

instruction." When Paul told him to "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Timothy 4:2), we can imagine some who would not like to be "reproved or rebuked by such a young man. Therefore, the admonition from the apostle would be "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." By giving careful attention to these matters his work would be accepted.

The word despise (kataphroneo) means to contemn, disdain, think little or nothing of. Paul told Timothy to act so as to be respected in spite of his youth (1 Corinthians 16:11). In Titus 2 the same instruction is given "Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded. In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you" (Titus 2:6-8). The young man Timothy was to conduct his life in such a way so as to be effective in his preaching and correcting. A teacher must know WHAT to say and HOW it should be said. We can say the right things in the wrong way or have the wrong motive and if such is the case we will loose our influence and effectiveness (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

## Be Thou an Example of the Believer.

The word example is an important word in the work of an evangelist. The word example (toopos) means a stamp, scar, form, manner, pattern, a model after which a thing is to be patterned. This Greek word means to become a pattern (Titus 2:7). There are two lines of thinking concerning the phrase "be thou an example of the believer." Some translations say "TO the believer," others say "OF the believer." It is my understanding that this means to be an example of Christianity to the brethren. Of course this should be the case before ALL men. But in the context, the charge was to live the message which was being taught so as to encourage the brethren and to have effectiveness in his teaching and exhorting. Jesus taught the same thing in Matthew 5:16 "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Someone rightfully has said, "A light is lit to show the way of safety rather than to shine on oneself." Paul was not telling Timothy to do right so as to emphasize himself but rather to show his full belief in the message which he was preaching. There are six specific things which are mentioned in this regard. He was to be an example in:

1. WORD. The speech must be guarded in every aspect of our lives. Some folk are not concerned about their speech. We often hear profane words and of course this should never be the case. But what about idle words or words that are hurtful? God's people, who are to be an example to the believer as well as the unbeliever should be very carefully with how things are said. Paul wrote to the church at Colossae "Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man" (Colossians 4:6). Words are used to communicate feelings as well as information. Thus, we must take care just how we use them. Of course Timothy was to be careful how he handled the word of truth (1 Timothy 4:6-8; 2 Timothy 2:2). Yet he was to teach this truth as he instructed the women concerning modest attire (1 Timothy 2:9-10) and to be good wives and mothers (1 Timothy 5:14). He would give instruction concerning the qualifications of elders and deacons in 1 Timothy chapter 3. His message would be from God, but the manner and attitude would be from deep inside himself. His words were to edify the brethren, "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of

your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers" (Ephesians 4:29).

- 2. CONVERSATION. The word "conversation" as we use it in modern times almost exclusively applies to our oral discourse, or to audible utterances. But in the original language (Greek) it was not confined to that definition. This Greek word (politeuesthe) means conduct in general including, of course, our manner of speaking, but not limited to that and should be so understood in every place where it occurs in the Bible. (Thayer) The Christian's manner of living must coincide with the gospel of Christ. Paul wrote to the Philippians, "Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel" (Philippians 1:27). This same admonition is found in Galatians 1:13 and 1 Peter 3:1-2)
- 3. CHARITY. This word means love. It is the Greek word agape and carries the idea of doing what is best for the one upon whom we bestow this love. It is the affection we must have for our neighbors (Matthew 22:37-40), for our brethren (1 Peter 1:22) and even for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:34-35). Love for mankind will move us to do what is best for them. Love is an emotion that must be demonstrated before it can be realized. God gave His "only begotten Son" out of an unswerving, undying love for man's soul. This love will be understood due to the actions which the Christian demonstrates.
- 4. SPIRIT. Spirit is the disposition or influence which fills and governs the soul of any man. The inner need to do the Lord's will. This disposition of heart causes the servant to want to serve. This spirit will cause the servant to be gentle and act out of the right motive (2 Timothy 2L24-25). This attitude of heart seeks to save the souls of all men (1 Timothy 5:21). This is the inner spirit that will cause the soul-saver to act even when the audience want to be hurtful (Acts 7; 2 Timothy 2:10). Some translations omit the word spirit. Yet we know that there must be an inner determination for the saving of souls. This causes men to go onward even when the path becomes hard and troublesome.
- 5. FAITH. Faith is learning and executing the will of God (Hebrews 11:6; Romans 10:17). At all times, and in every trial show to those around you by your example that your confidence and belief is not shaken! Keep on doing that which you believe!
- 6. PURITY. The word for purity in this verse means cleanliness (the quality), that is chastity. It would be an encouragement to chastity of body. Adam Clark says this admonition to the young man Timothy would caution him to "Converse sparingly with women, and especially with young women," was the advice of a very holy and experienced minister of Christ. (Clark) W hatever the exact meaning of the admonition to purity was, Timothy understood the need for purity of heart (Matthew 5:8; Psalm 51:10). Purity of thought brings forth purity of action.

## **Exhortations**

In verses 13-16 Paul tell Timothy to "give attendance" to certain things. In 1 Timothy 3:14 we read, "These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly:" Now, in our text he says, "Till I come..." Paul exhorts Timothy to give "give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine." The word "attendance" means to turn the mind to, attend, to be attentive. The tense of the word carries

the idea of keep on paying attention to certain things. Paul is not saying that Timothy is neglecting the things needed, but is telling him to continue in them. Notice the three things mentioned.

- 1. READING. Vincent's Word Studies says of the word reading usually applied to the public reading. In post-classical Greek, sometimes of reading aloud with comments. Of course in the early stages of Christianity, when printed books were unknown, the knowledge of the Scriptures had to be communicated in this way. The New Testament Gospel and Epistles being recognized as inspired by those who had the gift of discerning spirits, were from the first, according as they were written, read along with the Old Testament in the Church (1 Thessalonians 5:27; Colossians 4:16), [JUSTIN MARTYR, Apology, 1.67] (Jamison) With that in mind we must also add that the private reading of Scripture was important. The Bible ought to be the most popular reading material in our homes (2 Timothy 2:15).
- 2. EXHORTING. Exhortation was a mark of Paul's works. Time and time again he would speak of exhorting the brethren. This word means admonition, to give encouragement, to give a stirring and persuasive speech. The emphasis behind this exhortation is to encourage the brethren to do the will of God. Exhorting, coupled with the reading and teaching of the word is the work of an evangelist. Paul told Timothy to , "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Timothy 4:2). Exhortations should be a part of our daily lives. We do not know what lies ahead as we face the trials and temptations from the world. We are tempted and we do fall prey to the devices of the world (Romans 3:23). We do need one another for encouragement and daily exhortations (Hebrews 3:13).
- 3. DOCTRINE. The word for doctrine is translated from a word which means teaching. The word is found in Acts 2:42, "And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." The apostles doctrine was not a doctrine of the apostles, but the teaching given by the apostles. Of course they spake by inspiration (2 Peter 1:21). In 1 Corinthians 14:26 Paul speaks of the proper use of spiritual gifts. He emphasizes that all these were for the purpose of edifying, "How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying." Teachers are to teach the truth because of their love for God and for mankind, "That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ" (Ephesians 4:14-15). There are some who are smooth in presentation and yet void of truth. Timothy was exhorted to "preach the word" (2 Timothy 4:2).

In verses 14-16 the apostle instructs Timothy, "Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee." The phrase, "the gift that is within thee" had reference to the miraculous gifts which were imparted by the laying on of the apostles hands. It seems there was a need to remind Timothy of this gift, 2 Timothy 1:6 Paul says, "Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands." Why he needed to be reminded I do not know for certain. However,

I do know that there was a need to be reminded. The Greek word here means to "kindle up" as a fire. The gift was given by prophecy. This seems to signify that the Holy Spirit, by means of a prophet chose Timothy to the evangelistic work in which he was involved. This is similar to the separation of Paul and Barnabas for their particular work (Acts 13:2-3).

Concerning the "laying on of the hands of the presbytery" we understand that "presbytery" refers to the elders of a congregation. Throughout the Bible this procedure was used to send forth men to a specific work (Numbers 27:22-23) This was not a designation in the miraculous sense, but was an ordination to a particular work, a work of vast importance, a missionary appointment by the church. Paul then says that Timothy was to give himself wholly to the things which had been previously discussed so "thy profiting may appear to all." Profiting refers to his progress or advancement in his evangelism and influence. The young preacher was to continue growing in knowledge, faith, purity and service. When this is evident the church would see his dedication and be encourage to work with him.

Finally Timothy is encouraged to "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee."

The importance of paying close attention to our lifestyles and practices cannot be overlooked. If the teacher does not live what they are teaching soon his effectiveness will be gone. Careful examination of self is crucial to soul-saving (2 Corinthians 13:5). James admonished us to look "into the perfect law of liberty" and make the necessary changes (James 1:22-25). Of course this can only be done when we give attention to the doctrine. Living and teaching only that which is sound. John said "ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). There is no substitute! The gospel of Christ is the only answer to living proper lives. The result of such is that souls will be saved (1 Timothy 4:16). This message is the only avenue by which souls will be saved (Romans 1:16-17; Ephesians 1:13; James 1:21).

#### Responsibility to Our Youth

Our youth are the greatest resource that we have. They are vital to the furtherance of the gospel, to the continued existence of local congregations. Therefore, we would do well to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). I realize the context of this command is given to the fathers, the heads of the home. But it should be equally understood that members of congregations should be paying close attention to the youth in their midst. To clear the air at the outset, I am not in favor of hiring young men to be the guides of our youth. The "youth minister" syndrome has gotten way out of hand in the church today. We are not discussion the need for entertainment but to the training in spiritual matters. Many of the so called youth ministers today are in desperate need of spiritual training themselves. Today the church should take a strong interest in her youth.

God often used the young to accomplish His purpose and to be examples for all of us down through the ages. Long ago there was Daniel, Shadrach, Meshack and Abednego who refused to conform to the edicts of the Babylonian king (Daniel 3, 6). Joseph as a young man was sold into slavery and remained faithful to God even when tempted and persecuted (Genesis 39). People were brought to God through their faithfulness. God told Jeremiah that youth was not an excuse for not being active

and faithful to the Lord's bidding, "Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child. But the LORD said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak" (Jeremiah 1:6-7).

What can we do to help our young people be prepared for faithful service in the kingdom? The youth are not too young to involve in the work of the church. No they will not yet be leaders, but this is the time when they are learning the importance of this work. As they grow older and get to an age where they can lead in the Lord's work they will not be trying to learn something new. How do we train our youth in the work God intends for the church to be doing?

- 1. First we can be an example to them. They should see the mature Christian actively involved in evangelism. They should see that we enjoy our work in this area. Evangelism should not be a drudgery but an enjoyable experience. We are told to "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). Our youth should be seeing elders, preachers, deacons and every member involved in this work. In fact, this work is something they have ALWAYS seen from members of the church. Instill within them the urgency of saving souls that are lost (John 4:35). Young people should see enthusiasm from Bible class teachers. They should not learn to be late to class. They should not learn to be unprepared. They should SEE the joy and excitement of being in a good class. Not long ago I heard a four year old little boy ask where his Bible class teacher was.
- 2. Our young people need to understand the importance of benevolence. Do not let benevolence be only a word. Show the young people benevolence in action. Develop in them a heart that sees the need and a desire to help those who truly are in need (James 1:27). I have seen little faces beam with happiness when they took food and clothing to other children whose homes had burned. They should be able to keep that enthusiasm for helping the less fortunate. But it takes adults being involved in that training!
- 3. Edification should be something they continually see. Show them what it means to build up and encourage the brethren. Some children only hear how bad things and people are. Sometimes they are trained in the wrong way. They hear derogatory remarks about the song leader, the preacher, the eldership or others in the congregation. Turmoil is the product of that which we have just named. Peace comes when there is genuine edification; "Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another" (Romans 14:19). The word edify means to build up, to promote the growth of another. Edification is the art of helping others along the way to heaven. Malachi says that :...they that feared the LORD spake often one to another..." Through their mutual exhortation they strengthened each other's hands in the Lord.

Training of our youth is an essential part of our Christianity. Parents are given solemn charges concerning the teaching and training of their children. But every congregation should look at what is being done of prepare their youth for the world that lies before them. When they leave home they must have developed their own faith so as to overcome the pitfalls of life. Training them to be an active part of the congregation goes a long way in that preparation.

Solomon clearly challenged young people to begin at an early age in the service and dedication to the Lord. No young person should wait until they are older to get involved. "Remember now thy Creator

in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them" (Ecclesiastes 12:1). Most are content to wait until they are older and many are content to let them do so. Solomon says that youth is the best time to start serving the Lord before the evil days come upon them. When they grow older there is a great chance that "they will have no pleasure" in the thing of the Lord. Someone said it is out of place to give the strength of days to the devil and offer the Lord our tired years.

Dear young people make up your mind to get involved to the best of your ability in your youth. And those of us who are older take time to help, to encourage and to develop talents from our youth. Who knows, that sort of activity might just light a spark within us to do more in His service.

#### **Works Cited**

Clark, Adam. Clarke's Commentary. E-Sword version

Shepherd, J.W. (1942). New Testament Epistles, Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate

Thayers Greek-English Lexicon. E-Sword version

Jamison, Fausset and Brown Commentary. E-Sword version