

“Let No Man Despise Thy Youth”

Introduction. If you ask someone who is older what they think about younger people, they might say that younger people have no respect for each other or anyone else, they are bullies, they have no moral values, they feel entitled, they are disconnected from society, they have no manners or discipline, they have no respect for their elders, and they can't read, write, and are uneducated. But are younger people really that bad?

In 1 Timothy 4, Paul uses this chapter to instruct Timothy to counter false doctrine. In v. 12, he is given two commands that are packed with incredible wisdom for righteous living.

I. What Is “Despise Thy Youth”?

- A. The word “despise” means to disdain, think little or nothing of, to think that something has no value, or to reckon something as being worthless.
 - 1. While people may try to disparage or underrate you, you are valuable to the cause of Christ (Matthew 18:10).
 - 2. Timothy himself proves it (1 Corinthians 4:17; 16:10; Philippians 2:19; 1 Thessalonians 3:2). Because he had no long record to establish credibility, he would have to earn the respect of the people with whom he labored.
- B. Paul refers to Timothy as a “youth”. In the ancient world a person between 30 and 40 years old could be considered a youth. It was about 15 years since they had met on his first preaching trip (Acts 16:1-5). He was probably 30 years younger than Paul, which made him about 30 years old at this time.

II. “But Be Thou An Example Of The Believers, In ...”

- A. Timothy is to present the proper image of a Christian and to be a pattern for other believers to follow. This is an awesome responsibility.
 - 1. “Example” is variously translated as “print” (John 20:25), “figure” (Romans 5:14), “fashion” (Acts 7:44), “manner” (Acts 23:25), “form” (Romans 6:17), and “pattern” (Titus 2:7).
 - 2. In one sense, being an example takes on the role of a father. Paul used the same word for his own ethical example (Philippians 3:17; 4:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:9).
- B. A Christian sets an example in what they say, in how they live, and in what they believe. The six nouns used at the end of this verse are vital components of faithfulness in Christ. The first two (speech and life) apply to Timothy’s public life, while the other four are concerned with inner qualities (love, spirit, faith, and purity) which will have a public manifestation. Carelessness in any one of these areas can spell failure and even disaster.
 - 1. Word.
 - a) The words of a Christian must be exemplary (Matthew 12:34-37). A person’s speech reflects what is in their heart (Mark 7:20-23).
 - b) All types of sinful speech must be avoided by the faithful Christian (Ephesians 4:25-26, 29, 31).

2. Conversation.
 - a) This is behavior or conduct. A faithful Christian is required to be a model of righteous living who manifests his biblical convictions in every area of life.
 - b) A biblical message paired with an ungodly lifestyle is nothing but blatant hypocrisy (Matthew 16:1-4). Worse yet, people will tend to follow how the person lives, not what they teach. On the other hand, a godly life brings power and authority to a Christian's message (James 3:13; 1 Peter 1:15; 2:12; 3:16).
3. Charity.
 - a) Love in the Bible is different from the emotion our culture calls love. It involves self-sacrificing service on behalf of others regardless of how one feels (John 15:13; 1 John 3:16-19).
 - b) The excellent Christian gives his time and energy to the people he is called to serve, devoting his whole life to seeing them strengthened and built up in the Lord. No sacrifice was too great for Paul (2 Corinthians 12:15; Philippians 2:17; Colossians 1:24).
4. Spirit.
 - a) Only the KJV and NKJV include this noun. "Spirit" means the inner character of man, and therefore the management of his desires.
 - b) A spiritual Christian is not going to have a harsh, fault-finding spirit (cp. 1 Samuel 1:12-18; Mark 2:7). In contrast, Christ possessed, and therefore so should we, a meek and forgiving spirit (Matthew 7:12; John 8:10-11).
5. Faith.
 - a) Faith here does not refer to belief, but to faithfulness or unwavering commitment. An excellent Christian is consistently faithful.
 - b) They do not deviate from the course (1 Corinthians 4:2; Colossians 4:7-17). This essential virtue of loyalty separates those who succeed in having a powerful influence from those who do not.
6. Purity.
 - a) The word covers not only self-denial in matters of sexual relations, but also the innocence and integrity of heart in act and thought denoted by the related noun in 2 Corinthians 6:6 ("pureness").
 - b) This is sadly such a common avenue of attack by Satan (Hebrews 3:13; 11:25). An excellent Christian has to heed Paul's admonition to "flee youthful lusts" (2 Timothy 2:22; cp. Romans 13:14; 1 Peter 2:11).

Conclusion. The qualities in which Timothy is to excel are those in which youth is so often deficient. Yet for that reason they would stand out the more strikingly. It would become evident to believers that authority in a congregation or community is contingent on character, not on age.

Let no one despise your youth, but make sure you do not despise or defile yourself (Hebrews 12:15-17). Do not sell your soul to Satan in the time that you could have been an example.