

The Servant's Personal Growth

1 Timothy 4:12-16

Introduction

In this chapter Paul exhorts Timothy about what it means to be a good minister (vv.1-6); a godly minister (vv.7-12); and now a growing minister (vv.13-16). It is the nature of living things to move from immaturity to maturity. The good servant or minister preaches the word; practices the word—and through preaching and practice finds himself or herself advancing or growing or maturing in that Word. Warren Wiersbe points out; “A growing pastor will produce a growing church, for a man cannot lead others where he has not been himself. How could Timothy, or any believer, for that matter, make progress in the Christian life?” (see *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines In the New Testament: p. 630*). That is a most excellent question! Let's ask the question a little differently: “Am I making fruitful faithful progress in my Christian walk?”

Paul gives Timothy an answer! We warn and instruct believers about false teachers (vv.1-5). We nourish ourselves in Christian faith and doctrine (v.6). We avoid foolish speculations (v.7). We exercise Christ like character (v.8). We exercise reason and understand our godly purposes (v.9). We suffer reproach, misunderstanding even criticism; we labor and command and teach these things (vv.10-11). Now Paul tells Timothy—model this behavior to others—be an example (v.12); devote yourself to public worship (v.13); don't neglect your spiritual gift (v.14); give yourself entirely to what the Scriptures say and tell others (v.15). Guard yourself and biblical teaching (v.16). In short Paul gives some rapid fire exhortations; preach the word (vv.1-6); practice the word (vv.7-12); avoid spiritual fast-food; be known for godliness (cultivate and reflect Christ's character); in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit (enthusiasm); in faith (faithfulness) and purity.

The Servant's Spiritual Disciplines (v.12)

1 Timothy 4:12 (NKJV) 12 Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.

In many ancient cultures age and maturity are honored. Age has advantages. I am not simply speaking about Senior discounts at popular restaurants. When Ronald Reagan campaigned during his second presidential bid against Walter Mondale; the questions from skeptics wondered if advanced age might prove a problem. Reagan's reply: “I want you to know that I will not make age an issue of this campaign. I am not going to exploit, for political purposes, my opponent's youth and inexperience.”

Paul encourages Timothy to not allow anyone to despise his youth. The word *despise* is graphic. It means “to look down the nose”.

The word for youth (*neotes*) can mean anyone under 40! How old was Timothy at the time of this writing? Perhaps in his 30's. We are not in control of other people's prejudices.

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Paul knew that age was not the issue but rather calling, character, gifting and maturity were the elements necessary to serve and lead. Paul wants to make sure that Timothy does not give the critics reason to stoke the fires of unjust criticism.

The servant leader is an example to believers. We know what example means. It is a pattern or a model. It is true “nobody’s perfect”—but the pastors and leaders must be examples to the believers in word, in conduct and love. The word *conduct means more than just your behavior at the moment; but rather your behavior throughout your whole life*. Here conduct more approximates our word *life-style or way of life*. These are resolutions; meant to be followed our whole Christian life.

Paul lists five things:

1. Be an example in speech.
2. Be an example in personal conduct.
3. Be an example in love.
4. Be an example in faith.
5. Be an example in purity.

Let’s take a brief look at our list:

Speech

Our words matter. Our speech can either complicate or facilitate communication. Speech is the tool that God has given to us for communication. My favorite two word definition for communication is shared understanding. Years ago Chuck Swindoll wrote a book entitled; “Saying It Well”. The subtitle was “Touching others with your words.” In the book Swindoll reminds us that learning to do things well takes time. He wrote; “I try not to exhaust the text. Because I do not want to exhaust the audience.” Choice words are always better than more words.

Paul has already told Timothy to exercise gentle authority (not iron fist but velvet glove). Avoid useless or argumentative conversation (4:11; 5:1; 6:3-4). Use speech that builds up rather than tears down. A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver.

Conduct

This is a reference to our life-style. It can refer to general behavior or specific behavior. We are to conduct ourselves as representatives of Jesus Christ. People are watching you and me. They judge Christ and the Christian message by what you say and do. You might think that’s grossly unfair. It may be. For some the only church they will ever attend is watching your life played out in the real world. When our actions do not reflect Christ or His character—it becomes very difficult to hear the Truth.

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Love

Imagine we say the right thing (speech) and do the right thing (conduct) but we have less than noble motives. **Everything Jesus said and did was motivated by love. The love of Jesus is rooted and grounded in the love of the Father. It is because of love that God sends Jesus into the world to save sinners. God's love gave us God's revelation (Jesus and the Bible).**

Are we motivated by love? I want it to be true. Again in our world we must be clear and careful what we mean by love. Love means doing what is right toward the object of our love. Love is not legalism or license. Augustine wrote; "Where there is love, there is trinity: a lover, a beloved, and a spring." Someone said, "Love to God purifies and enables every taste and desire, intensifies every affection, and brightens every worthy pleasure." Martin Luther suggested "To Love God is to hate oneself and to know nothing apart from God."

In today's culture when some Christians say "God loves you"—they mean God affirms and supports your feelings and identity, even when those feelings and identity contradict the revelation of Scripture or what God has said on the subject. "Love your neighbor" now means affirm and support your neighbor absent Biblical truth.

But that isn't true. God doesn't affirm your sin or rebellion against Him.

Love in the Bible does not require us to misrepresent God or Jesus or the plan of salvation. Love does not require us to abandon the Bible's teachings on creation, the fall, gender, or sexuality or marriage.

Faith

Paul uses the term 'faith' in the context of speech, conduct (life-style) and love (motives). **Here faith might mean what God has told us through Jesus and the Bible.** In other words faith is believing what God has said about Himself and us and this gives us hope. It also provides the explanation for our speech (what we are saying) and our conduct (how we are living) and our motives (we are motivated by love). Speech, conduct, and love are what gives us the opportunity for a fair hearing about our faith (what God has said and done in Christ). Here faith also includes the idea of faithfulness.

Purity

The word Paul uses includes the elements of chastity and virtue. In the ancient world as well as the modern world it was an archaic word—seldom heard or spoken. It was a word that incorporated elements of honesty, integrity, consistency. It may well be that Paul also has in mind authenticity or transparency in mind (see Life Application Bible Commentary; 1&2 Timothy & Titus p. 89). Here purity must mean moral, clean, honest. The word purity invites us

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to walk away from a life of impurity. We walk away from greed, lust and sexual immorality. Our lives should reflect the presence of Jesus in our lives. “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8).

These are the things that mark our public lives and our private lives.

The Servant's Spiritual Maturity (vv.13-16)

13Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.

Paul's plan was to return to Ephesus (see 3:14-15). The expression “give attention to reading” most likely means the public reading of the Scriptures in the worship service (see MacArthur's Study Bible p. 1867). It may mean the public reading of the Old Testament scriptures but it might mean more. It might mean the kind of reading that involves detailed scholarship. The Pastor's focus must be on the study and public presentation of God's Word.

Exhortation is a reference to preaching. The word doctrine has fallen out of favor in contemporary Christian circles but is a reference to systematic teaching of the principles of Christianity. Doctrine simply means teachings; teachings about God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, Man, Salvation, the Church, the Scriptures; Angels, Demons, Satan and the Last Things.

Paul urges Timothy to perform three basic duties; the public reading of Scriptures; the exhortations to the people to live their lives in the light of God's Word; and to teach them what the Scriptures mean. Every Pastor is a Bible student and every Church is supposed to be a Bible Church. We are to teach and preach (exhortation) the Bible. In this context preaching and exhortation mean the same thing; teaching is imparting information—preaching is urging you to do what the information asks! We warn, we advise we urge people to apply the Word of God to their daily lives! This is the Pastor's job. What if I am not a Pastor? Then you should be able to use this information to know what constitutes a healthy Pastor and a healthy Church and healthy leadership. Does the Pastor or leaders or ruling elders love the Bible and teach the Bible and exhort others to live out its principles and instructions? Are they examples in speech, conduct, love faith and purity? What are the Pastor's gifts? What are your gifts? What evidence is there in your church that those gifts are being exercised?

14Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership.

Paul exhorts Timothy do not neglect (*amelo*) his spiritual gift. Did someone prophecy over Timothy and impart the gift or was Timothy's gift revealed by a prophetic word? The answer in part seems to lie in Paul's statement; “*with the laying on of the hands of the eldership (the Presbytery)—presbyterion—(elsewhere in the NT—occurs in Luke 22:66 and Acts 22:5—in both places a reference to the Jewish Sanhedrin).*”

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The gift was given by prophecy. The leaders acknowledged the gift. Some have interpreted this to mean ordination. The gifts of Timothy were evident and confirmed by the leaders within the congregation. Paul is in effect saying; "Don't be careless about the gift you received at your ordination, perhaps the gift pastor-teacher or prophecy and encouragement. Be constantly careful about these things (v.15). The laying on of hands was sometimes used for ordination but sometimes it was a cultural and physical way of demonstrating the transfer of authority or leadership. It was a physical gesture of empowerment.

We have a saying: "Use it or lose it!" Paul may have had some concern that Timothy might be tempted to ignore or neglect this gift. Paul does not define the gift specifically.

15Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all.

What things? Be a good minister (vv.1-6); a godly minister (vv.7-12); a growing minister (vv. 13-16). Be an example in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity. **Focus on the Bible. Know it. Love it. Live it. Now encourage others to do the same. Do not neglect your gift.** We might include **be a Spirit-led leader.** "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Romans 8:14).

What is your spiritual gift and unique spiritual calling? How is it being used in the Church and in Christ's service? Have you neglected your gift? Have you ignored and ran from your calling? Have you identified and cultivated those gifts? Why not use them? Has apathy or neglect caused your giftedness to atrophy, shrivel, shrink? Read my notes or listen to my sermon on Spiritual Gifts from Romans 12:1-8 and 1 Corinthians 12 and 14. What are your God given abilities and your supernatural gifting? Paul tells Timothy **meditate on these things (or care or consider—pay attention—attend).** The expression 'give yourself entirely to them' literally means '**be in these things**'. We have an expression; "I am into. . .fill in the blank. The word *progress* means cut forward, move ahead, blaze the way, or to make a kind of pioneer advance; boldly go where no one has gone before (or at least where you have never been before).

The progress Timothy makes was to be evident to all. Keep growing. Keep maturing. Timothy's progress was never meant to simply benefit Timothy. It was meant to benefit everyone around him. My progress is not simply for my benefit but for your benefit. Your progress is meant to benefit everyone God has placed in your life.

What is it that dominates your life? What is the one thing that will not get done unless you do it?

16Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.

Now Paul warns Timothy. Examine yourself. Take heed (*epheche*) means keep a strict eye—pay close attention to oneself and one's teaching. Continue in them. Don't stop. Stick with it. See it

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through. Paul told the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 9:27); “But I keep my body under control, and bring it into subjection: lest by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself be castaway”. Jude 21; “keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.” Keep yourself—in the place of constant access to the love of God. **Evaluate your progress. Examine and evaluate the doctrine (essential Christianity).** Pay close attention to your private life and public ministry. Remain above reproach (no basis of accusation). Continue in them. Don't stop. The salvation Paul references here is not salvation from sin (which is by grace through faith); but rather the deliverance from the accusations and dangers that plague every believer in the **real world and the spirit world.** Here **‘save yourself and those who hear you’** means persevere—grow—mature—and keep growing.

Conclusion

Let me help you think a little harder. Paul's exhortations to young Timothy center's around the Church and the Word of God. The way to build the church and equip the Saints is to focus on God's Word “to preach it, teach it and practice it (Wiersbe's Expository Outlines Of The New Testament p. 631). Are you making progress? Are you growing or shrinking? What significant spiritual lessons are you learning and living? What spiritual friendships are you growing and nurturing? What special projects are you thinking about, launching or completing? Are you an example of God's grace and mercy and love? Are your growing and maturing in faith? How are you exercising your spiritual gifts? We are growing and expanding CSD groups! Most spiritual gifts are exercised in community! There are some that take place in solitude (prayer, study, preparation). We are for the most part given gifts to fulfill the spiritual obligations of one-anothering! I know its not a real word—but it is a real Biblical concept.

What is the key to personal growth? The Word of God. We can think of this in two ways; personal and pastoral growth.

How can the Pastors help you grow?

How can you help the Pastors grow?

Every good Pastor wants to be available in times of need. And no Pastor can afford to waste time. What constitutes a waste of time? GOOD QUESTION.

The Pastor cannot afford to neglect the the Church or himself. Spurgeon reminded his students that the minister of Jesus is always the minister of Jesus.

Be sensitive to the Pastor's time. Pray for your Pastors. And pay attention to what he preaches. Few things are more discouraging to a Pastor when the saints fail to listen or understand.