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The Dangers of Youthful Exuberance

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In Paul's first epistle to Timothy, the apostle alludes to his companion's youth (1 Tim. 4:12). The Greek term (*neotes*) is more elastic than when we moderns speak of youth. Timothy was no longer the youngster that Paul selected at Lystra (Acts 16:1-3).

In ancient times, a man was considered a youth until forty. Irenæus (ca. 180 A.D.) said that Jesus at thirty was "still a young man." He stated that the category of youth extended "onwards to the fortieth year" (22.5). Timothy's age at this point is speculation, but most likely he was in his thirties.

"Let No Man Despise Thy Youth"

Due to Timothy's youth, some (e.g., the false teachers in Ephesus or those influenced by them) might have been inclined to dismiss the young brother's **authoritative commands**. Such would be a grave mistake, for Timothy's commission was from God through an **inspired apostle!**

As an emissary for the Lord, Timothy was not to be "despised." The Greek term is interesting. It derives from kata ("down") and *phroneo* ("to think"), hence to "think down," to dismiss as unworthy of consideration (cf. Tit. 2:15).

The Keys to Godly Influence

Paul suggested that an antidote to criticism is example. The apostle frequently emphasizes the importance of our example (1 Tim. 4:12b; cf. 1 Thes. 1:6; 2 Thes. 3:7, 9; 1 Cor. 4:6; 11:1; Phil. 3:17; 2 Tim. 1:13). One may dispute a bogus or suspicious theological point, but no one can argue with a **godly example**.

Paul then lists five qualities that stand in glaring contrast to the traits of the false teachers troubling the saints in Ephesus. Thus, the young evangelist was to be an example to "them that believe" (fellow Christians). Various goals were to be achieved.

Example in Word

The expression "in word" probably is primarily a reference to Timothy's **communications** with people. The term "word" could also include his teaching, but that seems to be more prominently emphasized in verse 13.

How one talks with — and to — folks can be as important as **what he says**. Harsh, condescending, insulting words do not carry the day, though on some occasions, sharpness may be justified (Tit. 1:13).

Certainly, arrogant boasting is always out of place. Consider Matthew 23. Some preachers have mastered the art of being brutally cruel to those with whom they disagree. Others strut as if the sun rises and sets in them.

Example in Manner of Life

One's "manner of life" (*anastrophe*), an expression suggesting the idea of turning back, is emphasized as well. This term generally denotes a certain style of living, frequently determined by the context, either positively or negatively. The accompanying noble qualities attached to the word in this context clearly are illustrative.

From these admirable traits some of the saints in Ephesus apparently had slipped, and Timothy was instructed to encourage these careless folks to return to a nobler form of life.

Example in Love

The term "love" is derived from the word *agape*, i.e., the quality that always strives to conquer others through benevolent good will. *Agape* is the noblest word in the New Testament for the concept of sacrificial love. It expresses the very nature of God himself (1 Jn. 4:8).

In paganism it was out of the question that the gods should love anyone. Even the best of the philosophers believed God was self-sufficient, hence, could not be expected to love man. Their conclusion was false.

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The Dangers of Youthful Exuberance (continued from page 1)

Agape is a love of the will, a calculated disposition and pious inclination to love, to serve the Lord, and to act in the best interest of all those made in his image (Turner, 262–263). Love was to be an integral part of Timothy’s ministry. Possibly the best commentary on *agape* is set forth in 1 Corinthians 13:4–7.

Example in Faith

In what sense is faith (*pistis*) employed in this context? It may suggest a pristine trust in God, accompanied by a trustworthy course of life. Kelly described it as faithfulness or fidelity to the Lord (104; cf. Rom. 3:3; Gal. 5:22; Tit. 2:10).

Example in Purity

Additionally, there’s “purity” (*hagneia*), which suggests moral excellence (cf. 1 Tim. 5:2). The cognate form, *hagnos*, is used “always with a moral sense; not limited to sins of the flesh, but covering purity in motives as well as in acts” (Vincent, 1036). Jesus himself is the ultimate model of one who is pure (1 Jn. 3:3).

This list of five attributes, some suggest, are divided into two segments: two **external** expressions and three **internal** character traits.

Howbeit, the older generation is not totally inoculated against the warnings cataloged by the inspired apostle.

A Trend Among Some Modern Youths

A while back someone directed my attention to a small collection of young men who are promoting a relatively new movement in which the devotees proudly characterize themselves as the Millennials.

Generically, this is a societal group, sometimes categorized as those born from the early 1980s to the early 2000s, or variously dated by differing speculators. This conglomerate within the church of today is young enough to still be relatively green and, to some extent, is lacking in both wisdom and knowledge, though gushing with ambition and self-adulation.

My knowledge of certain evolving Millennials — as such are found in the church at large — is somewhat limited. No one should be criticized merely on the basis of age or, perhaps, even his borderline unusual ways. That is not the focus of this discussion.

However, I have become exposed to a miniature movement within the church on the West Coast. Recently I was provided with a visual episode where several young men before a small group were intoning one by one: “I am a Millennial.” There was almost a cultic ring within the group.

Apparently the self-elected leader of this specialized group encouraged others to respond to a survey he constructed. Here it is:

Millennials fill in the blank: As a Millennial my biggest frustration with the older generation is _____?

In response, one of his fellow Millennials wrote, regarding the older generation:

[They consider] work ethic important in business, but not working in the church (or showing up more than they “have to”). Not everyone of course, but it does seem like that generation exhibits that characteristic

more than the generation before. And has set a bad example.

This was posted on the internet for public display. Clearly it reflects a call for criticism of the older generations.

Question: Just what do some of these critical, youthful Millennials know about the habits of earlier generations?

Those of former generations labored from dawn to dusk to put food on their family’s table and clothing on their backs. They rode miles at times with poor transportation to attend prayer-meetings — just to worship and learn from the Word of God. Their Bibles were ragged with use, and they encouraged their youngsters to love the Lord, to study his Word, and to live godly lives!

From this noble ancestry, the older generation now is encouraged to sit at the feet of a few arrogant young Millennials to be taught the ABCs of biblical truth!

There **have always been** shirkers who fail to do their share of spiritual labor — and that embraces youth as well as some of the older generation. The lazy do-littles were present in Paul’s day, compelling him to write (under the guidance of the Spirit), this rebuke:

For we hear of some that walk among you disorderly, that work not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread (2 Thes. 3:11–12).

This sort of attitude or lack of action is present in our day as well — and they are not necessarily of the more-aged segment! If some critical Millennials were bound by Paul’s censure — no work, no eat (2 Thes. 3:10) — so far as real church activity is concerned, they would border on starvation!

In contrast to the workers of the past, some of the Millennials of the modern church sit cross-legged on the floor, dress like slouchy bums, while swapping wisdom with their brilliant young buddies.

Rational Christians truly appreciate the younger generation — at least those who are humble enough to recognize their relative immaturity and who value the wisdom of the foregoing generations. But there is an old saying that some of our young Millennials would do well to ingest.

He who knows not, and knows that he knows not, is wise — teach him. He who knows not, and knows not that he knows not, is an egotistical amateur — pity him!

In some cases, simply ignore him.

Irenaeus. *Against Heresies*.

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Turner, Nigel. 1982. *Christian Words*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

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(from *Christian Courier*, January 2017)

FOREST HILL: PLAN TO ATTEND THE LECTURESHIP

The biggest event of each year at Forest Hill is almost here and great things are planned for this year's lectureship entitled: "Build Your Hopes on Things Eternal." There will be two great dinners, Monday honoring Irene Taylor, Jean Taylor, Garland Elkins, and Annette Cates and Tuesday, there will be the annual Alumni-Friend's dinner. There are always wonderful displays in the fellowship hall and on Tuesday at 2:30 PM in Cates Chapel there will be a time for prospective students and supporters to meet and ask questions and receive packets of information about the school. There are daily classes for children and special child-care arrangements during the lectures and there are two classes daily, upstairs in the balcony, which classes are especially designed for young people.

In fifty-two years of preaching I have never been privileged to see or know of a congregation of the Lord's people, one-hundred percent of whom attended a gospel meeting or lecture series. I would be thrilled to know that the interest from Forest Hill was such that all of you came for at least one lecture during the week. By the way, the song leaders this year are outstanding with Keith Mosher, Jr. on Sunday, Stephen Sutton on Monday and Thursday, Pat Philips on Tuesday, and Barry Grider on Wednesday. With all of the great preaching, fellowship, singing and the joy of being around so many Christians, how would anyone not want to attend? See you at the lectures.

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