

We no doubt live in interesting and difficult times. It is actually quite exciting to see how much the Bible has to say about our day and how the instructions provided in the epistles to the early church still apply to us. I thank God every day for inspiring the Apostle Paul to write instructions for the church that transcend every generation yet speak directly to ours.

I am convinced we are living in the period Paul referenced in **2 Timothy 4:3**, where he warns Timothy that his teaching would come under attack as people desert the truth for ear-pleasing words:

3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers;

Paul had already warned Timothy earlier in **2 Timothy 3:1**, saying, “But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come.” If these words had bearing on Timothy in his day, they certainly have bearing on us now.

Paul was an experienced apostle, having established several churches by the time he wrote to the young Timothy, who was facing a heavy burden in leading the church at Ephesus. It was a weighty responsibility, as Paul not only appointed him as his representative but also charged him to lead and become their “spiritual father.”

This was not a new concept for Timothy. He knew what it meant because Paul had previously sent him to several churches to instruct and bring them back on course. Consider this passage from **1 Corinthians 4:14–17**:

- 14** I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you.
- 15** For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.
- 16** Therefore I urge you, imitate me.
- 17** For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church.

Isn't this a similar dilemma we face in the church today? “Though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers.” This is exactly what Paul was addressing with Timothy as he faced opposition in Ephesus. **1 Timothy 4:12–16**:

- 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.
- 13** Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.
- 14** Do 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.
- 15** Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all.

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

Here Paul gives Timothy vital direction on how to become a pattern for the believers within the structure of the church. “Do not neglect the gift that is in you” is a direct reference to his calling to lead. Paul exhorts him to “give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine,” so that he remains grounded in the Word. This continual grounding would ensure his spiritual growth—and that progress would be evident to everyone. In essence, Paul is encouraging Timothy to stand tall in his calling to pastor God’s people.

If we truly believe we are living in the end times, then Paul’s words to Timothy are especially relevant today. These epistles draw a direct parallel between Paul’s charge to Pastor Timothy and his message to all who would lead in the last days. In our time, there are many “instructors” within the body of Christ—but how many true “fathers”? With so much teaching available online, it’s easy to isolate ourselves from the body of Christ and listen to any voice that appeals to us. Often, we are drawn to “ear-itching” words—messages that comfort our preferences rather than challenge us with truth. This tendency affects us all: the temptation to drift from sound doctrine, which purifies and corrects us, toward messages that merely affirm what we want to hear. Paul warned Timothy of this very danger in the fuller context of **2 Timothy 4:1–5**, where he charges him directly:

- 1** I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom:
- 2** Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.
- 3** For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers;
- 4** and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.
- 5** But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

These words carry a profound charge for us. Time has marched on, but Paul’s counsel to Timothy remains as weighty as ever. Too many are being tossed to and fro, and this should not be.

For those reading this today—if you are attending or serving in a church in any capacity—settle yourself under your spiritual fathers, those who can lead you into the spiritual truths of God’s Word.

As Peter exhorted in **1 Peter 2:2**, like newborn infants (those newly born from the womb), desire the pure spiritual milk of the Word. The phrase “spiritual milk” is exactly what the Greek text says—and it’s an important distinction. Paul likewise made this distinction with Timothy in **1 Timothy 4:12**, saying, “Be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.”

This exhortation is just as vital for us today as it was for him: if we are going to lead others into spiritual living, we ourselves must first become spiritual. We will continue on this topic next month.

Blessings,

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