

FOR THE TIME WILL COME – An Updated Study of 2 Timothy 4:1-5 (Part Two of Four)

The Change (2 Timothy 4:3-4)

In v3 of 2 Timothy 4, Paul describes a specific generation of Christians who would fail in fulfilling the central priority mentioned in v2. They would not be willing to learn and then live out sound doctrine. The key word in understanding their failure is the verb “endure.” It speaks of the ability, the inner strength of an individual, to successfully face a difficult challenge. Paul uses it positively in regard to himself in 1 Corinthians 4:12, and of the Thessalonians in 2 Thessalonians 1:4. But here, in 2 Timothy 4:3, he is using it very negatively. He is describing a generation of Christians who lack that inner spiritual strength to face up to and overcome the challenge of learning and living sound doctrine. Why? Because learning sound doctrine isn’t easy. And living it out is even more difficult. Any Christian who is committed to this process of spiritual growth, commonly referred to as progressive sanctification, soon realizes how difficult it can be. The victorious Christian life is not one of achieving sinless perfection, but involves an ongoing struggle with the sin which is within each of us. And there will be a generation of Christians who become tired of that struggle, who no longer want to face the difficulty of it all, and opt out.

What would they choose instead? Teachers who will tickle their ears by telling them what they *want* to hear instead of what they *need* to hear. The Word of God doesn’t tickle our ears, it pierces our hearts with truth that is designed to change us for the better (Hebrews 4:12-13); in a life-long process that is anything but easy. But Paul is warning Timothy and all of us, that there will be a generation of Christians who would abandon this responsibility in favor of something far less demanding. The shameful self-centeredness of this generation’s behavior is revealed at the end of v3, where Paul accuses them of accumulating these teachers “*for themselves,*” and not in harmony with God’s will for their lives, but “*in accordance to their own desires.*”

The tragic end-result is described in v4, with two verbs giving us insight into the dynamics of what will occur within this generation of Christians. The verb “turn away” is in the active voice, while the verb “turn aside” is in the passive voice. The fact that the verb rendered “turn away” is in the active voice means that the guilt of this generation’s spiritual failure rests squarely upon them. They alone would make the decision to no longer endure sound doctrine, without anyone forcing them into it. On the other hand, the fact that the verb “turn aside” is in the passive voice, indicates that there would be an outside influence moving them in that direction.

Here’s how they are related, how vv3-4 are inter-connected. When this generation steps away from the challenge of learning and living sound doctrine, there will be a void in their lives that will need to be filled. Along come these so-called teachers who fill that void and meet that need. How? By telling them what they want to hear rather than what they need to hear; anything and everything BUT sound doctrine. This generation will eagerly gravitate to such teachers. I call them Evangelical Pied Pipers, tickling ears with “teaching” that insidiously leads an individual away from God, rather than drawing one nearer to God. This generation will surround themselves with as many of these Pied Pipers as possible, so that their ears can be tickled with myths and fables, with falsehoods and fabrications, rather than being challenged and changed by God’s truth.

Having given this warning to Timothy, Paul puts him on notice, regarding the responsibility that he would need to fulfill. We will elaborate upon the apostle’s admonition in v5, next.