

How Shall the Young Secure Their Hearts?

A number of years ago, while I was preaching in Walnut Springs, I was given the opportunity to speak to the graduating seniors from Walnut Springs High School. It was a baccalaureate service, something that few high schools have anymore. I was asked to use the scripture to deliver an encouraging message to those young men and women. Since the speakers were rotated among the three ministers and also among the church buildings, I was able to preach the truth to all those assembled in the First Methodist Church in Walnut Springs.

I chose as my topic words from an old hymn that evidently was familiar to all the people there: "How Shall the Young Secure Their Hearts." I opened with these words that Isaac Watts wrote in 1719:

***How shall the young secure their hearts and guard their lives from sin?
Thy Word the choicest rules imparts to keep the conscience clean.
'Tis, like the sun, a heav'nly light that guides us all the day,
And through the dangers of the night, a lamp to lead our way.
Thy Word is everlasting truth; how pure is every page!
That holy Book shall guide our youth and well support our age.***

That's the answer! That is how young people and us older people alike can "secure our hearts and guard our lives from sin"—know the word of God. In a day and age when young people are falling away from what they call "organized religion" and living their lives the way they want to live them, their interest in the precepts of the "holy book divine" is disappearing. It is up to all of us to encourage them to return to God and learn from His word what he expects of them. Young people (and many older people) see the Bible as a book of "don'ts" and really are not encouraged by it.

Paul told the young preacher Timothy these things in his letters to him:

"Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity." (1 Timothy 4:12)

"Do your best (KJV – "Study") to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth." (2 Timothy 2:15)

"Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart." (2 Timothy 2:22)

"But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching,

rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:14-17)

All of us, young and old, will do well to learn the lesson Paul taught to Timothy. Don't be afraid to be different. Study God's inspired word and put it into practice. Be a good example to others. Do good to everyone you meet. Solid advice for all of us.

---Johnny Stephens