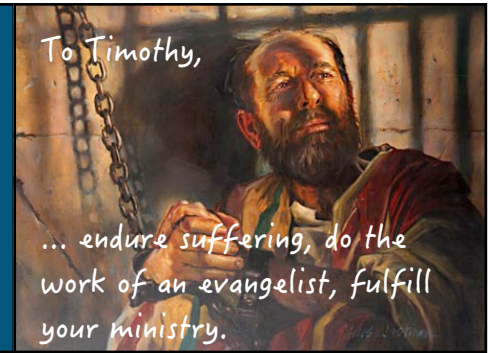


2 Timothy

Fulfill Your Ministry

Lesson 6



In lesson 5 Paul reminded Timothy that his ministry might be difficult, but that he should remember his hope and purpose. Paul urges Timothy to remember the resurrection and even if the messenger of the gospel is chained the word of God cannot be bound. Paul closes this section in 2:11-13 with what we believe to be an ancient hymn which was probably sung at baptisms.

Beginning in 2:14, Paul will continue his instructions to Timothy moving to some practical applications of what he has written and how Timothy is to handle false teachers who arise in the church.

False Teaching is Dangerous 2:14-19

In verse 14, Paul says to “remind them of these things.” The tense in the original language shows Timothy is to continually remind them of this teaching. The NIV is accurate when it says “keep reminding” God’s people of these things. Tell them over and over again. Warn them, and then warn them again.



Timothy was to continually point the church to the truth contained in Scripture and specifically the teaching found in the hymn in 2:11-13. The seriousness of Timothy’s task is seen in Paul’s call to “*charge them before God.*”

It is a sobering and important fact to consider that everything that is said and done is seen and heard by the Creator. Gareth Reese writes, “It is a very sobering thought to every public teacher like Timothy, that what he says to his listeners is also heard by the living God!”¹

We can’t be sure of everything the false teachers were saying, but it seems clear they had wandered from the truth of scripture to arguing about words and their meanings. Their wrangling seems to have been about non-essential or non-important matters.

1. How do we determine what is essential truth and what is non-essential or unimportant opinion?

¹ Reese, Gareth L. *The New Testament Epistles: Timothy and Titus*. Moberly, Missouri: Scripture Exposition Books, 1999. p. 472.

Whatever these false teachers were uttering, it was quite detrimental because, Paul says, it does no good and *“ruins the hearers.”* The word translated *“ruin”* is the Greek word *katastrophe* from which we get the English word *“catastrophe”* and which indicates destruction and ruin.

2. Define the word “catastrophe” and describe how quarreling about words or opinions can be catastrophic in the church.



There is a distinct difference between quarreling about words and rightly handling the word of truth. In no way does Paul encourage Timothy to “water down” truth or to overlook error. Quite the contrary, over and over again in both his first letter and this letter Paul instructs Timothy to confront false teaching. Paul himself opposed Peter to his face according to Galatians 2:11. However, meaninglessly arguing about words or teachings not found in scripture is counterproductive and ruinous.

Timothy is personally addressed in 2:15 and instructed to present his own life to God, *“as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.”*

The phrase translated as *“do your best”* in the ESV is rendered *“study to shew thyself”* in the KJV and *“be diligent to present yourself”* in the NASB. It can also be translated as: to hasten, to exert one’s self, or to endeavour.²

Timothy is called a *“worker”* indicating that great effort is required in completing his task as an evangelist. Timothy stands before the eyes of God as he teaches these people. The importance of his ministry cannot be overstated. So Paul instructs him *“do your best.”* The false teachers sought the approval of men while Paul tells Timothy to seek his approval from God.

3. What would Timothy need to do to be approved by God?

4. What types of words, actions, and attitudes would bring shame to an evangelist?

Seeking God’s approval does not mean that Timothy can be sinless, but it does mean he must constantly strive to be faithful. He is to work as diligently as he can to handle God’s word accurately. Some translations such as the KJV in 2:15 use the phrase *“rightly divide”* the word of truth. The Greek word can be used to mean to cut straightly along a line, or to plow a straight furrow, or to square and cut a stone to fit in its place.³

² <http://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Lexicon.show/ID/G4704/spoudazo.htm>

³ Smith, James E. Exhortation Epistles, p. 223.

5. Describe how one can be able to “rightly handle the word of truth.”

6. Why is truth, no longer truth if it is not rightly handled or rightly divided?

Along with rightly handling the Scripture, Timothy was to avoid “*irreverent babble*.” This kind of talk brings two serious consequences: 1) It leads people into more and more ungodliness and 2) The ungodly chatter can spread like gangrene. The “*irreverent babble*” of verse 16 is probably the same as the quarreling about words in verse 14.

Paul had previously instructed Timothy in 1 Timothy 6:20, “*Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called “knowledge.”*” These verses show that the arguments were not based in truth, and probably had elements of gnosticism in them, as seen in the phrase “*falsely called knowledge*” in 1 Timothy 6:20.

There are people who like to dispute, debate, and argue about non-essential matters relating to Scripture. These same people often have no interest in making any attempt to rightly handle the word of truth. The illustration of this false teaching spreading like gangrene depicts a horrible, disgusting, dangerous, and growing disease that will kill the body if it is not surgically removed.

7. What might be the goal of a teacher who wants to argue about words while remaining willfully ignorant about truth?

We should recognise that the effectiveness of a teacher is not the same as the faithfulness of a teacher. Apparently these false teachers were having some success in leading others to ruin, but we could never say they were faithful.

Paul names two false teachers: Hymenaeus and Philetus. Hymenaeus was mentioned previously in 1 Timothy 1:19-20 where Paul says this man had shipwrecked his faith. Because of this Paul had handed Hymenaeus “*over to Satan*” so that he might learn not to blaspheme. This terminology indicates that Hymenaeus had been put out of the church, but apparently this has not stopped him from trying to influence people within the church. The Scripture does not tell us anything further about Philetus.



Hymenaeus and Philetus “*swerved from the truth*.” This visibly illustrates that they no longer followed the straight path and were not dividing the word accurately. These men were teaching that the resurrection had already passed. Undoubtedly these men are influenced by gnosticism which sees the body as evil. The resurrection they denied was not that of Christ, but of Christians. For these teachers a Christian is raised from spiritual death in baptism, but since the body is evil there will be no bodily resurrection.

Paul teaches that belief in a Christian's bodily resurrection is a key part of the Christian faith in 1 Cor. 15. Some of the Corinthians were spreading the same false teaching that Timothy was now confronting. Paul says in 1 Cor. 15 that if there is no bodily resurrection then Christ has not been raised and if Christ has not been raised then you are still in your sins and your faith is useless. (See 1 Cor. 15:12-26).

8. Should we name false teachers as Paul did? Why or why not?

Hymenaeus and Philetus and others who taught the resurrection had already taken place were *"upsetting the faith of some."* This shows evidence that the false teaching was spreading like gangrene and destroying faith.

James Smith says, "When cardinal doctrines of the faith are denied or "spiritualized" many simple Christians lose confidence in all the teaching of the church."⁴ We see this today in the denial of a literal six day Creation, the rejection of the miracles of the Bible, and attacks on the infallibility and inerrancy of the Bible.



9. How do attacks on the key teachings of the Bible damage the faith of some?

Any attack on scripture or truth will ultimately fail because the foundation of God and his truth is firm, unshakable, and unalterable. Building on falsehood leads to disease and death while building on the firm foundation of the truth found in God's word leads to everlasting life.

False teachers could argue about words and deny the resurrection, but they could not damage God's firm foundation. The foundation of God has two seals: 1) *"The Lord knows those who are his,"* and 2) *"Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity."*

It was customary for inscriptions to be engraved on buildings to indicate their origin and purpose in ancient days. Such inscriptions have been found in Babylon and ancient Egypt. Almost certainly the word "seal" is used instead of "inscription" because Christians have been *"sealed"* by God to indicate they belong to him, are protected in him, and his Spirit lives in them (2 Cor. 1:20-22).

The words of first seal are found in Numbers 16:5 and they tell us that God knows who is true to him and who is not. The idea of the second seal is found in Numbers 16:26 and Isaiah 52:11. A person names the Lord by confessing Christ prior to his baptism. Those who name Christ as Lord have died to sin and must depart from iniquity.

10. Describe the hope and challenge for the Christian found in these seals.

⁴ Ibid. p. 225.