



Gospel Truth

Summary and Goal

Paul urged Timothy to take the lead in resisting heresy by warning of the danger and exposing its error (2:14-19). Paul used an illustration to appeal for separation from false teachers and their teaching (2:20-21). He also outlined the proper response to the error Timothy faced (2:22-26).

Main Passages

2 Timothy 2:14-26

Session Outline

1. An Approved Workman (2 Tim. 2:14-15)
2. Empty Speech and Useful Vessels (2 Tim. 2:16-21)
3. Flee and Pursue (2 Tim. 2:22-26)

Theological Theme

The passage that we are considering today is both an exhortation and a prohibition. Paul urged Timothy to teach the Word of truth rightly as well as avoid and reject empty words and irreverent babble.

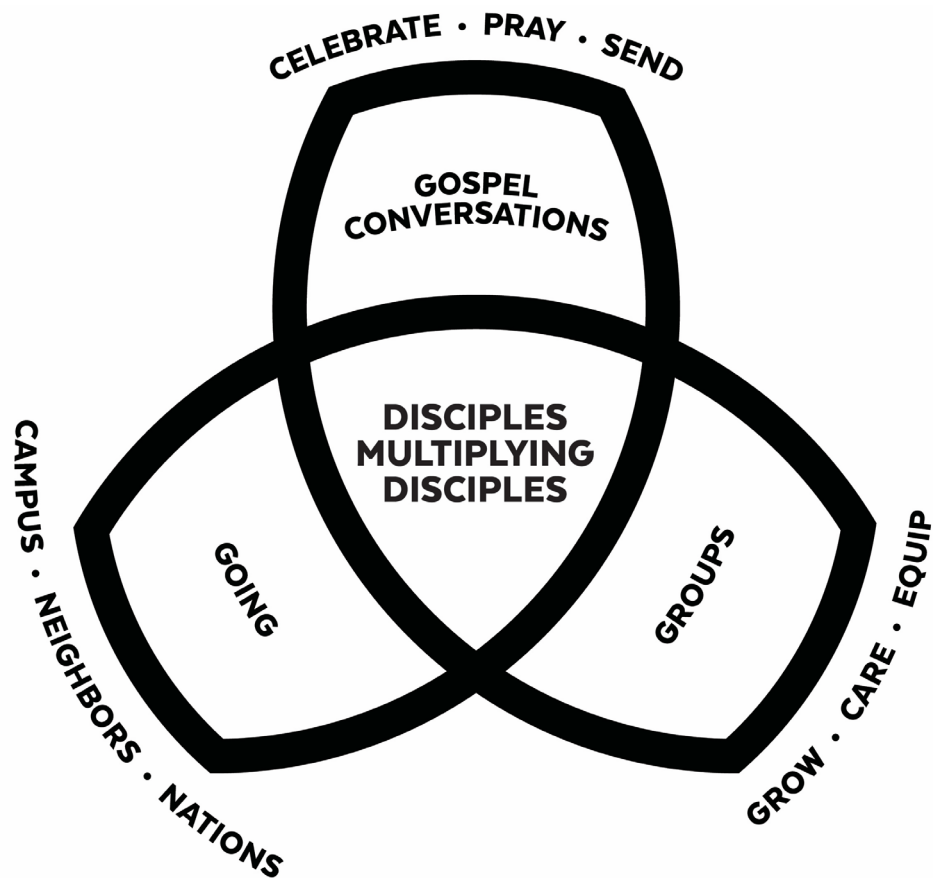
Christ Connection

The person and work of Jesus Christ is the message upon which all of the teachings of the Scriptures are based. If Timothy misrepresented or erred in his understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ, then his entire message and ministry would be invalid.

Missional Application

Since the beginning, God has taken the initiative to reach out in grace and mercy to His creation. God's primary work has been to tell people the truth about Himself and about their desperate situation. We are called to join Him in this work through right teaching of the truth of His Word.

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



DxD This Week

Before You Meet

Pre-enlist the group's Prayer Leader to have a special prayer time for the leader/co-leader/apprentice of this group in the application question of section one in today's lesson.

Ask the group's Missions Leader to share about the next six month's local mission opportunities for the group to consider.

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Session Plan

Gospel Truth

For the Leader

Whether meeting in person or by Zoom, pre-enlist someone to share their testimony/God story with the group.

Introduction/Ice Breaker

- ? What are some ways that a parent shows care to his or her child in discipline? How does this differ from the way a person might care for a piece of property or something else without eternal value (think of working a piece of land or caring for a temporary possession)?
- ? How does this difference help you to see the way God cares for Christians as His children? How does this help you see His patient guidance in a different light? Why is His Word important in this process?

In this passage, Paul continued his encouragement to Timothy to remain faithful to the good work to which he had been called. Timothy's call was to shepherd the blood-bought flock of God in Ephesus. Paul wrote from prison and with an urgency and focus that accompanied the recognition of his own pending death.

1. An Approved Workman (2 Tim. 2:14-15)

A controlling theme in Paul's writings to Timothy (indeed in his own life and ministry) was the importance of sound doctrine contrasted with the danger of false teaching. In this passage, Paul's argument and emphasis was centered upon the employment of words in the life of the church. He wasn't arguing for better felt needs ministries, and he wasn't concerned with the number of deacons. Those questions and many others are important for churches to consider, but Paul only had a few more chances to instruct Timothy and was intent upon getting straight to the heart of the matter.

- ? What was the first command Paul gave Timothy in this passage? Why might this be such an important message for Paul to communicate?
- ? What was Paul's second command to Timothy, found in verse 15? What characterizes an approved worker?

- Application: Take time to pray for your host/teacher/facilitator now.

2. Empty Speech and Useful Vessels (2 Tim. 2:16-21)

In the next section, Paul continued to expound upon the detriment incurred by false teaching and quarreling over words. He even went so far as to name names.

- What was the directive that Paul gave in verse 16? What is the danger of this type of behavior? How have you seen this personally?
- What was the meaning of Paul's metaphor here? What did he mean when he said, "if anyone purifies himself"?
- Application: Who are you discipling to be an approved worker in the church?

3. Flee and Pursue (2 Tim. 2:22-26)

This passage concludes with two more exhortations that provide further clarification on the illustration of the vessels.

- What did Paul's exhortation in these verses have to do with Timothy being an approved worker?
- How are all Christians called to these same standards?
- Application: How can each member of this group seek to "reject foolish and ignorant disputes"? What are some ways we are tempted to not do this?

Conclusion

- How are you seeking to live as an "approved worker" before God? Why is it important to remember that God does not accept us based on our works but on the work of Christ? How does this motivate us further to live rightly before God?
- What disagreement or difference of opinion over matters of faith or ministry have you been involved in recently? What will these verses lead you to say or do differently?
- What is your plan for growing as a student of God's Word? What are you doing on your own to root yourself in the Word and understand its truths?



Expanded Session Content

Gospel Truth

Introduction/Ice Breaker

How a person governs rocks and how he governs his children are two very different things. If a man is dealing with a pile of stones in his garden, then he will simply load them into the wagon, transport them to the location of his choosing, and dump them onto their new patch of land. However, if his mission is to deal with the behavior of his children, he will speak with them, teach them, exhort them, and discipline them.

God does not deal with His people as though they were rocks! C. H. Spurgeon said, “Men are free to will and to act—but God’s omnipotent wisdom rules over them, despite their free agency. God does not govern men as if they were logs and stones—but as rational, intelligent, free agents, He permits them to do their own will—and works His own purposes notwithstanding. This is a great marvel.”¹

One of God’s primary purposes for His children is to carry on to completion the good work that He started, until the day of Christ Jesus (Phil. 1:6) Christ has promised, “No one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all. No one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand” (John 10:28-29). It is a great joy and comfort to our souls to know and believe on good authority that we are secure in our position before the Father. But, remember, God deals with Christians as children, not as stones. How does He secure His people? What mechanism does He use to keep them in His hand?

God has chosen that His children will be kept, comforted, convicted, and encouraged by the application of His Word to their lives. The teaching and preaching of God’s Word unto believers in the context of the local church, as well as in their households, is central to God’s good work that He started in His people and will bring to completion. This is why Paul was unrelentingly focused on teaching the Scriptures in his exhortations to Timothy (as well as in all his other letters).

Why did this matter? Studies have shown that daily engagement God's Word is the number one predictor of spiritual growth. In other words, if you want to be more like Jesus, read your Bible. This is why we have a devotional attached to the sermons and these lessons (to which you can subscribe; check it out here: <https://brentwoodbaptist.com/category/daily-devotional/>).

- ❓ What are some ways that a parent shows care to his or her child in discipline? How does this differ from the way a person might care for a piece of property or something else without eternal value (think of working a piece of land or caring for a temporary possession)?
- ❓ How does this difference help you to see the way God cares for Christians as His children? How does this help you see His patient guidance in a different light? Why is His Word important in this process?

For the Leader

Whether meeting in person or by Zoom, pre-enlist someone to share their testimony/God story with the group.

Session Summary


In this passage, Paul continued his encouragement to Timothy to remain faithful to the good work to which he had been called. Timothy's call was to shepherd the blood-bought flock of God in Ephesus. Paul wrote from prison and with an urgency and focus that accompanied the recognition of his own pending death. In our text today, we will explore three themes. First, we will consider what it means to be an approved workman. Next, we will try to understand what Paul meant by "empty speech" and "irreverent babble" and also explain Paul's illustration of the vessels. Finally, we will meditate on Paul's double command to "flee" and "pursue."

1. An Approved Workman (2 Tim. 2:14-15)

A controlling theme in Paul's writings to Timothy (indeed in his own life and ministry) was the importance of sound doctrine contrasted with the danger of false teaching. In this passage, Paul's argument and emphasis was centered upon the employment of words in the life of the church. He wasn't arguing for better felt needs ministries, and he wasn't concerned with the number of deacons. Those questions and many others are important for churches to consider, but Paul only had a few more chances to instruct Timothy and was intent upon getting straight to the heart of the matter.


- ❓ What was the first command Paul gave Timothy in this passage? Why might this be such an important message for Paul to communicate?

Paul told Timothy to “charge them before God not to fight about words.” He told Timothy to sternly warn against quarreling over words. It isn’t altogether clear who the “them” is. It may be that he was referring to the members of the church at Ephesus. He may have been referring to the unapproved workmen who were unsettling Christians with false teachings. It’s possible that he was referring to both groups and that there was actually some overlap between the two groups. Notice what Paul said about those who are involved in those sorts of controversies over words: “This is useless and leads to the ruin of those who listen.” Those are strong words from Paul about this issue.

 What was Paul’s second command to Timothy, found in verse 15? What characterizes an approved worker?


Paul told Timothy, “Be diligent to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who doesn’t need to be ashamed.” Here Paul laid out two options before Timothy. He may either be a worker who was approved or a workman who was ashamed. There was no third option. Of course, Timothy desired to be found faithful, but Paul knew all too well that suffering and opposition in the life of a minister could put so much pressure on him that his eternal perspective became eclipsed by temporal concerns.

Approved workers, according to Paul, are characterized by one thing. They must be faithful at “correctly teaching the word of truth.” This is in direct contrast to the “words” to which Paul referred in verse 14. Timothy was to reject fights about words and be diligent to correctly teach the word of truth. Anything less was shameful.

 Application: Take time to pray for your host/teacher/facilitator now.

2. Empty Speech and Useful Vessels (2 Tim. 2:16-21)

In the next section, Paul continued to expound upon the detriment incurred by false teaching and quarreling over words. He even went so far as to name names.

 What was the directive that Paul gave in verse 16? What is the danger of this type of behavior? How have you seen this personally?

Paul returned to his directive to Timothy in verse 14, but this time he told Timothy himself to stay away from personal opinions, myths and legends, and unorthodox theology. The reason that Timothy should avoid this is because it would produce “even more godlessness” and would “spread like

gangrene.” The problem with the false teaching that Timothy was being directed to oppose and avoid was that it worked against the will of God in the lives of Christians, namely that they would become more godly and Christlike.

In verse 18, Paul gave a sampling of the “words” and “irreverent and empty speech” that he warned Timothy about. Apparently, Hymenaeus and Philetus were teaching that the resurrection of believers had already taken place, which was “ruining the faith of some.” These false teachers were leading people astray by twisting the promises and words of God, not unlike Satan in Genesis 3. Timothy was to be diligent to teach only the Word of Truth correctly and oppose those who twist it. In this way, he would be approved.

In verse 19, Paul did two things at once. First of all, he directly refuted the false teaching that claimed the resurrection had already passed. “The Lord knows those who are his,” he guaranteed Timothy. Christians have no reason to doubt the promises of the Lord because God is faithful and is true. An important part of the work of a shepherd is to comfort God’s people with the truth of God’s Word, especially when false teaching abounds (which it does in the U.S. today).

Secondly, Paul generally contrasted the bankruptcy of false teaching with the riches of “God’s solid foundation.” Why would Timothy (or anyone else for that matter) pursue old wives’ tales based on human wisdom and tradition—which may taste sweet going down but leave the soul empty—when he had the great and precious promises of God plainly laid out before him in the sacred writings?

Next, Paul employed a metaphor to further emphasize his point about a workman who would be approved and had no reason to be ashamed. He explained that there are two kinds of vessels in a large house. Some are for honorable use and some are for dishonorable use.




What was the meaning of Paul’s metaphor here? What did he mean when he said, “if anyone purifies himself”?

Remember the context of this metaphor and Paul’s primary emphasis just before (and, as we will see, after) he used this illustration. The vessel illustration was meant to drive home Paul’s argument that workers who are approved and have no reason to be ashamed are those who correctly use the Word of truth.


A vessel that is purified corresponds to Paul’s exhortations to “avoid irreverent and empty speech” (v. 16), “flee from youthful passions” (v. 22),


and “reject foolish and ignorant disputes” (v. 23). Moral purity is certainly implied here, but the thrust of the metaphor was doctrinal and instructive purity. In other words, a clean vessel that is useful to the Master is one that rightly divides the Word of God as well as avoids and rejects empty speech (and charges others to do the same).

 Application: Who are you discipling to be an approved worker in the church?

3. Flee and Pursue (2 Tim. 2:22-26)


This passage concludes with two more exhortations that provide further clarification on the illustration of the vessels.

 What did Paul’s exhortation in these verses have to do with Timothy being an approved worker?

 How are all Christians called to these same standards?

The first command was actually two commands that provided both sides to the same coin. Paul told Timothy to “flee from youthful passions, and pursue righteousness.” It is tempting to assume that Paul meant the same “youthful passions” that may be familiar to modern contexts, specifically sexual purity. But, Paul wasn’t talking about moral purity here. Remember the context. Paul wrote about the temptation for young Timothy to fall into foolish and ignorant disputes due to his youthful zeal and passion.

The second command, “but reject foolish and ignorant disputes,” gives us clarity about the command in verse 22. Those disputes, Paul said, produce fighting and the Lord’s servant (Timothy) must not quarrel, “but be gentle to everyone, able to teach, and patient, instructing his opponents with gentleness.” Why should Timothy seek to minister in this way? Because it was through this sort of ministry that “God will grant them repentance leading them to the knowledge of the truth.” Recall that an approved worker correctly handles the Word of Truth (v. 15). This is what would lead those who are deceived to the knowledge of the truth. The vessels through which the Lord has chosen to do this work are pastors who pursue righteousness and flee from and reject empty speech and foolish arguments.

 Application: How can each member of this group seek to “reject foolish and ignorant disputes”? What are some ways we are tempted to not do this?

Youthful Passions

In the first century, the term youth was not confined to the teenage years. In fact, only two phases of life were recognized—youth and old age. Many interpreters believe Timothy was in his late thirties or even in his forties when Paul wrote to him. Perhaps “young” people experience greater temptations toward certain sins which diminish with age, such as haughty independence and selfish ambition. Those seriously committed to Christ must flee anything that smacks of evil or anything that would interfere with faithfulness to God.

Conclusion

Words matter. Moreover, our representing Jesus well in speech and action is often how the Spirit brings people to faith. Paul explicitly taught Timothy that in order to be a pure vessel, an approved worker, he must rightly handle God's Word and reject foolish discussions and empty speech. If he would teach the Word of God with gentleness and patience, then he would have no reason to be ashamed.

- ❓ How are you seeking to live as an “approved worker” before God? Why is it important to remember that God does not accept us based on our works but on the work of Christ? How does this motivate you further to live rightly before God?
- ❓ What disagreement or difference of opinion over matters of faith or ministry have you been involved in recently? What will these verses lead you to say or do differently?
- ❓ What is your plan for growing as a student of God's Word? What are you doing on your own to root yourself in the Word and understand its truths?

Prayer of Response

Pray now for your pastors and teachers. Pray that they would be approved workmen who correctly teach the Word of life. Pray for the congregation to have a hunger and thirst for God's Word and a desire to encourage and support those leading the church.

Additional Resources

- *1 & 2 Timothy for You* by Phillip Jensen
- *Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus* by David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, Tony Merida
- *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus: To Guard the Deposit* by R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell

For Next Week

Session Title

- Gospel Difficulty

Main Passages

- 2 Timothy 3:1-9

Session Outline

1. Detailed Description and Clear Instruction (2 Timothy 3:1-5)
2. Tactical Advances (2 Timothy 3:6-8)
3. Folly Revealed (2 Timothy 3:9)

Memorize

²⁴ The Lord's servant must not quarrel, but must be gentle to everyone, able to teach, and patient, ²⁵ instructing his opponents with gentleness.
- 2 Timothy 2:24-25a

Daily Readings

- Monday - 2 Timothy 2:14-26
- Tuesday - 2 Peter 3:14
- Wednesday - Proverbs 4:23
- Thursday - 1 John 4:1
- Friday - Romans 16:17
- Saturday - Colossians 2:8

2 Timothy

Purpose

In 1 Timothy Paul directed Timothy to actively oppose false teaching. He also gave instruction on the type of behavior that should characterize those in the church. The letter to Titus shows a similar purpose, albeit briefer in scope. As Paul addressed the character of church members, he presented it in light of the work of Christ. The message in 2 Timothy, Paul's final letter, is quite different. It is much more personal, a letter from one friend to another. Paul was preparing Timothy to carry on the work of ministry after he was gone.

Author

As stated in the opening of each letter, these letters were written by Paul (1Tm 1:1; 2Tm 1:1; Ti 1:1). However, many scholars today assume that Paul did not write them. This opinion is based on the differences from his other letters in vocabulary and style, alleged differences in theology, and uncertainties about where these letters fit chronologically in the life of the apostle. But the differences in style and vocabulary are not troublesome when one considers that authors often use different vocabulary when addressing different groups and situations. Rather than addressing churches in these letters, Paul was writing to coworkers who were in unique ministry settings. Hence we would expect different vocabulary. Also, the traditional view of the historical situation in which Paul wrote these letters is reasonable and defensible. Therefore, in spite of significant opposition by some scholars, there is a solid basis for accepting the Pastoral Epistles as Pauline.

Setting

Paul most likely wrote these letters after the time covered in the book of Acts. Acts closes with Paul in prison. Traditionally it has been believed that Paul was released from this imprisonment, then continued his work around the Mediterranean, perhaps even reaching Spain (Rm 15:22-29). During this time, he visited Crete and other places. First Timothy and Titus were written during this period of further mission work. Timothy had been left in Ephesus to handle some problems with false teaching there (1Tm 1:3-4). Titus had been left in Crete after the initial work to set up the church there (Ti 1:5). Eventually Paul was imprisoned again, and this led to his execution. During this final imprisonment, Paul wrote 2 Timothy to request another visit from Timothy and to give final exhortations as he anticipated his martyrdom.

Special Features

First Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus have been referred to as the "Pastoral Epistles" since the eighteenth century. It is reasonable to consider these letters together since they have striking similarities in style, vocabulary, and setting. These letters stand apart from the other Pauline letters because they were the only ones written to Paul's gospel coworkers. The Pastoral Epistles deal with church structure issues and, unlike Paul's other letters, were addressed to men serving in pastoral roles rather than to churches. But we must also recognize these are separate letters with their own distinctives. They were not written primarily to describe church structure or pastoral ministry (contrary to popular opinion), but to teach Christian living in response to the gospel.

Extended Commentary

2 Timothy 2:14-26

2:14 It is clear that Paul was willing to confront people when the gospel was at stake. For example, he opposed Peter to his face (Gl 2:11). What he had in mind here was meaningless argument.

2:15 Be diligent could also be translated, “Be zealous.” Paul had in mind a zealous pursuit of God’s approval. One way to do this is to make sure we handle Scripture correctly.

2:17 Hymenaeus was mentioned as a false teacher previously in 1Tm 1:20, but Philetus is not mentioned elsewhere.

2:18 The idea that the resurrection has already taken place is similar to what Paul discussed in 1Co 15. Apparently some people were teaching that believers had already entered the glorified post-resurrection state. We do not know much about this heresy.

2:19 In spite of the work of these evildoers and evil teachers, God’s church still stands firm. The inscription emphasizes both divine sovereignty (preserving) and human responsibility (persevering).

2:20-21 The analogy in these verses connects to the end of v. 19: “turn away from wickedness.” The large house represents the Christian community; the vessels for dishonorable use represents the false teachers. The point of v. 21 is that one should try to be an honorable vessel, useful to the Master.

2:22 The word passions in this context refers to sinful desires in general. The desires that are particularly characteristic of youth could include sexual desires, the longing for novelty, or perhaps even impulsiveness (v. 24). It is significant that fleeing wrong is combined with pursuing right. Also, the pursuit of right is not to be done alone but along with other believers.

2:23 On ignorant disputes, see note at v. 14.

2:24-25 The Lord’s servant must be qualified both in ability (able to teach) and in character (not quarrelsome, gentle . . . patient). The knowledge of the truth is salvation.

2:26 Paul often described humanity as enslaved by the devil and in need of rescue (2Co 4:4).²

References

1. Spurgeon, C. H., and Thomas Manton. *Flowers from a Puritans Garden: Illustrations and Meditations*. Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2017.
2. *CSB Study Bible: Christian Standard Bible*. Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017.

Author Bio

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Phillip Jensen was the Dean of Sydneys St Andrews Cathedral, and remains an influential evangelical leader. He is married to Helen.

David Platt (Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus)

David Platt is the author of three New York Times bestsellers, including *Radical*. He is lead pastor at McLean Bible Church in metro Washington, D.C., the former president of the IMB (International Mission Board), and founder of Radical Inc., a global center for the unreached that serves churches in accomplishing the mission of Christ. Platt received his master of divinity (MDiv), master of theology (ThM), and doctor of philosophy (PhD) from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. He lives in Virginia with his wife and their children.

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Charles Spurgeon (Flowers from a Puritan's Garden)

A prolific author and pastor, Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892) remains a respected and influential source of inspiration and study. His classic collection of devotions for morning and evening remain a beloved treasure of wisdom and teaching for Christians.