

MBC – 2/7/2020 Pastor Doug Thompson preaching
 2 TIMOTHY – THE LAST WORDS OF PAUL
 “A-W-A-N-A”
 2 Timothy 2:14-19

If you were at our baptism last Sunday evening, I invite you to turn with me in your Holly Bible – to 2 Timothy 2, beginning in v.14. This is Paul’s last letter to Timothy and I’m sure you noticed that it’s very intense, emotional, and personal. Paul vacillates between gloom and glory: he’s facing eminent death, he’s alone and abandoned in his dungeon cell, but he is soon going to be with Christ – and that is gain! In several places we see his confidence in God’s sovereign control, but you can also practically see him wringing his hands, so concerned that the church in Ephesus won’t drift from Christ after he is gone. Listen to how serious he is with Timothy here—

- 2 Timothy 2:14–19 ¹⁴Remind them of these things, and charge them *before God* not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers. ¹⁵Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. ¹⁶But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, ¹⁷and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, ¹⁸who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some. ¹⁹But God’s firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: “The Lord knows those who are his,” and, “Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.”

Intro: Remembering and Reminding.

Last week, in v.8, Paul commands Timothy to “Remember Jesus Christ.” Here in v.14 he commands him to “Remind the church” of what he just said in vv.8-13. These are both present tense imperatives: “Keep on remembering Jesus and keep on reminding the people.” “Keep on remembering Jesus and keep on reminding the people.”

- And, I repeat myself – but that’s what I am supposed to do, right? Go over and over the same biblical truths, until this church family is grounded in God’s Word. It’s not my job to be innovative, or to try to give you something new and fresh every Sunday morning. I’m commanded by this Scripture to pound the *same* truths into your hearts and minds that produce faith, love, and good works. Now hopefully I repeat the same truths in fresh ways, and I don’t need to repeat my corny jokes and stale old stories – but you folks are very gracious!

When Peter was an older man, he had the very same burden that Paul did, to make sure the faith “once delivered to the saints” went on after he was gone—

- 2 Peter 1:12–15 ¹²Therefore I intend always to *remind* you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have. ¹³I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of *reminder*, ¹⁴since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me. ¹⁵And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to *recall* these things.
- 2 Peter 3:1–2 ¹This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of *reminder*, ²that you should *remember* the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles,

Beloved, we learn by repetition! We don't get things the first time around – I sure don't! But repetition isn't just for the purpose of memorization, it's for the purpose of savoring and applying the same truths as we face new situations. Listen—

- Philippians 3:1 ¹Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.

How many times do you need to hear: “Rejoice in the Lord!”? Beloved, the way we grow in God's grace is to re-trace the old paths. Sing the same old hymns. Re-read the same church confessions. Repeat the same prayers. Come to the same Lord's Table. Our daughter Rachel recently wrote something really beautiful—

- It is the psalms we have memorized and the prayers we recite at church and scribble into our journals, the books of liturgy spread throughout our homes, that will be there when words fail us. When we wonder if God has failed us. When we know we need to pray but can't do so on our own. Liturgy can train the muscle memory of our hearts.

Back to our text –

I. Warning over word-wars.

- ¹⁴Remind them of these things, and charge them before God not to quarrel about words, (that's one word in the Gk. = “word battles”) which does no good, but only ruins the hearers.

And even *this* is a reminder, because Paul warned about “battling over words” in his first letter to Timothy—

- 1 Timothy 1:3–4 ³As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may *charge* (order, command) certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, ⁴nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith.

You say, “Myths and genealogies – what is he talking about?” Let me give you an example—

- Did you know that Adam and Eve had 9 sons, and that Cain married one of his sisters named Awan, and Seth married another sister named Azura? Well you wouldn't know that unless you read the Book of Jubilees which was written about 100 years before Jesus was born by a Pharisee who filled in the gaps in the genealogies in the Bible. And this became a very popular pastime—to go beyond the Scriptures and speculate about the genealogies of Old Testament saints. But it's a waste of time and it distracts from the Gospel.
- 1 Timothy 4:7 ⁷Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths (lit. “*old wives tales.*”)
- 1 Timothy 6:3–5 ³If anyone teaches a different doctrine (heterodoxy) and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, ⁴he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, ⁵and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain. (These false teachers were arrogant and ignorant – that's a bad combination.)

Paul begins and ends 1 Timothy with the same warning—

- 1 Timothy 6:20 ²⁰O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you – (the Gospel.) Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called “knowledge.”

Can you tell that Paul was really annoyed by these false teachings – I mean really annoyed? It distracted believers from the truth of God’s Word. These arrogant blow-hard teachers were majoring on minors, and it was causing division in the church, evil suspicions – everyone was in their corners, whispering about others: “Well did you know that so-and-so actually believes that stuff? Oh my!”

- But it didn’t go away. Whatever Timothy did after receiving Paul’s first letter, it wasn’t enough because when Paul writes 2 Timothy, it hadn’t stopped. I have to think that Timothy was too soft on these troublemakers. He didn’t take it seriously enough. Look at v.14: all of this quarreling over words “*does no good, but only ruins the hearers.*” “Ruin” is *katastrophe*. When useless speculations and controversies take the place of God’s Word, the result is spiritual catastrophe!

So charge them to stop. “I mean it Timothy: solemnly, before God, order them to stop. Don’t tolerate it the way you have done up to now.” He says in v.17, if you don’t cut it out of the body, it spreads like gangrene – like a flesh-eating bacteria. Paul had to be disappointed that this stuff was still going on.

We don’t know specifically what Paul was so worked up about: But some of it was the extra-biblical stories and speculations; some of it was legalistic arguments by so-called experts on the OT Law who were just trying to put Christians under the Law of Moses again. And maybe some of it started out as valid discussions over God’s Word, but it had turned into prideful arguing, with people taking sides and calling the other side heretics—

- That happens in the church today! Some of our church family went to a conference awhile back where it happened: the topic was valid, but the tone was arrogant and harsh: the speakers labelled those who didn’t agree with their view, heretics, and warned people about their pastors if they didn’t agree with them! (I didn’t agree with them!)
- Paul said this is divisive and *catastrophic* to the church. You see this all over the internet: especially in the so-called “*Discernment Ministries*” – their “ministry” is pointing out all the heresies in pastors and church leaders. Believe me, there is a place for knowledgeable people to point out error and false teachers. But some of these sites crucify everyone: John Piper, R.C. Sproul, John MacArthur – all false teachers! *I’ve* been called a false teacher, and MBC has been called a *cult!* And some of the *worst* of these websites claim to be Reformed. Jude nailed these people:
- Jude 16 ¹⁶These are grumblers, malcontents, following their own sinful desires; they are loud-mouthed boasters, showing favoritism to gain advantage.

I warn you as my church family – beware of those teachers who label anyone who doesn’t agree with them a false teacher.

*And beware of new truths that no one saw before in the Bible: like a secret Bible code; a new way to pray or hear God’s voice (like Jesus Calling); Bible diets! (Seriously, there is no such thing!) Beware of books that claim to connect biblical prophecies with current events – folks, going back to Hal Lindsey’s “*Late Great Planet Earth,*” they’ve all been wrong! Beware of anything that goes beyond the Scriptures.

- And while we're on the topic of discernment: Beware of all the whacky conspiracy stuff – even when it comes from so-called Christians. “Well no one else is reporting this. . .” Yeah because it's not true. It tarnishes our witness when Christians spread falsehoods: The Pope was not arrested for child molestation, Barack Obama wasn't arrested for espionage, and Keanu Reeves is not Sandra Bullock's son! At least we still have the *Babylon Bee* to report the truth. . .

And there is another application to what Paul says here: when Christians major on minors – insignificant, petty issues – it can spread like gangrene, and split churches. I've seen it happen. This is a true story from a Presbyterian pastor in Washington D.C.—

“Last spring the hospitality committee put a little coffee stand in the narthex. The next day the head usher of twenty-five years quit in protest, saying this was a sacrilege to the church sanctuary. All the ushers quickly became upset. Since a committee had put the coffee there, the Elder Board had to decide on the issue, so they set up a task force that met for eight weeks to listen to the ushers and the hospitality committee.

One Sunday a bunch of ushers decided not to show up to usher because we hadn't brought back the head usher yet. So then the elders were ticked off at the ushers.

In the middle of that, I'm not talking about Jesus to anybody, I'm not making hospital calls, or shepherding people through grief. I'm trying to figure out whether we should serve coffee in the narthex.”

How does this happen? I'll tell you how that happens: it happens when the church doesn't “Remember Jesus Christ” – and His Gospel! When Jesus isn't preeminent, front and center – when missions isn't the heartbeat of the church, when the sermons are short and sappy, and the pastor is running around trying to be a people-pleaser instead of spending most of his time in the Word to feed the sheep. When the flock is consumed with Jesus and His Gospel, they don't care what color the carpet is.

So now Paul exhorts Timothy to be this kind of shepherd—

II. The unashamed workman.

- 2 Timothy 2:15 ¹⁵Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

This is the positive, proactive way to keep down the silly, superficial quarrels and controversies: Feed the sheep, Timothy. *Don't* entertain the goats. *Don't* give the people what they want – give the people God's Word until *that's all* they want!

Now many of you memorized this verse, many years ago. It's the AWANA theme verse, isn't it? But you probably memorized it from the old KJV—

- 2 Timothy 2:15 ¹⁵Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

AWANA comes from “Approved Workmen Are Not Ashamed!” “We are Sparks for Jesus. . .”

And how do get to be an approved workman? “Study to shew thyself approved unto God – rightly divide God’s Word.” That is true, but the Gk. word for *study* in the KJV has nothing to do with studying. It’s *spoudazo*, and let me show you how it’s translated in the ESV in the Pastoral Epistles—

- 2 Timothy 4:9 ⁹*Do your best (spoudazo) to come to me soon.*
- 2 Timothy 4:21 ²¹*Do your best to come before winter.*
- Titus 3:12 ¹²*When I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis,*

So the ESV gets it right. It means to “exert yourself,” “strive,” “be diligent, eager.” Nothing close to “study,” BUT . . . how do you *do your best* and exert yourself to rightly handle the word of truth? You *study!* There is no substitute. It takes time and hard work. The Holy Spirit doesn’t whisper the meaning of the Bible in your ear. Angels don’t hand deliver a heavenly commentary. You have to work hard and study to rightly handle God’s Word—

- “Rightly handling” is a word that literally means to “cut straight.” And because Paul was a tent-maker, he was thinking of the skill and patience it took to cut a straight line in the leather or heavy canvas that he worked with.

****How to rightly handle God’s Word—***

So how do you study God’s Word to cut it straight, to be a workman approved by God?

Long term: Read the whole Bible. If you’ve never done that, do it. Then do it again, over and over— and that’s because Scripture interprets Scripture, so the more you know the entire Bible, the better you are equipped to understand a particular passage—

- In order to understand Hebrews, you have to understand Leviticus—
- To understand some important passages Galatians, you have to understand Genesis—
- To understand one of the key verses in Romans, you have to understand Habakkuk!

You say, “Okay, I’ll work on that, but how do I study to understand a particular passage?” There are 3 steps—

1.) Observe the text. Stare at it, and keep staring at it: This is the first thing I do when I work on a sermon – I print out the passage and all week long I’m reading and re-reading it, circling, underlining, highlighting and making notes. (This is just what we do every Saturday morning with our men, and what we are doing for the next few weeks with John Piper in Sunday School). During observation, you are answering the question: “*What does it say?*” You’re looking for the Who, What, Where, When, Why? You are looking for comparisons and contrasts, you might circle the verbs – are they past, present, future tense? You observe the context of the passage What are the commands? – you jot out your questions.

2.) Interpret the text. You are answering the question, “*What does it mean by what it says?*” More specifically you’re asking: “What did this mean to the person who wrote it and the person who read it?” Timothy didn’t have to answer that question, but you and I do!

We have to bridge some gaps: 1.) **The history and culture gap** – which is from 2,000-4,000 years! So we need to ask: What was the historical and cultural context for this passage? You have to dig into some other sources to put yourself in the sandals of the readers. And you also have to bridge 2.) **the linguistic**

gap – the original Scriptures were written in Hebrew, a little bit of Aramaic, and Greek. Now most of the translations we have are pretty good, but there are resources that take you right to the original languages.

*This is where I spend most of my study time: I read books, commentaries, systematic theologies, and language studies. I look up cross-references, I read other men’s sermons. I read until my eyeballs ache! And you can do so much of this online now, and with software programs - BUT you have to be aware of the theological slant of whatever you are reading. If you’re in doubt, you can always ask me. . .

- The best place to begin is to get a good study Bible. I recommend the ESV Study Bible – followed by the John MacArthur Study Bible which comes in several different translations.

3.) Apply the text. This is where you finally ask the question, “In light of what it says, and what it means, what does it say to me?” Let me give you 4 questions to ask after you have read and studied a passage—

1. What does God want me to think and believe?
2. What does God want me to desire and feel?
3. What does God want me to do?

So this is basically the story of the last 40 years of my life! In addition to my own personal study and Bible reading, I spend about 20 hours a week working through these 3 steps to prepare our weekly meal in God’s Word. And if it’s any encouragement: it has *never* been easy for me! It’s always a spiritual and mental struggle, but I believe that is God’s way of keeping me humble, prayerful, and dependent on Him every step of the way. It’s intense and it’s emotional. But I can’t imagine doing anything else.

- Back to our passage: This is how Timothy will combat the word wars and irreverent babble in the church. When people know God’s Word they have a healthy spiritual immune system against false teaching. And when the people love the God’s Word they have no appetite for petty squabbles and internet hoaxes.

Then Paul talks goes back to the *bad workmen* – Those who *should* be ashamed—

III. The ashamed workmen.

- 2 Timothy 2:16–17 ¹⁶But avoid irreverent (unholy) babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, ¹⁷and their talk will spread like gangrene.

“Stay away from all of that Timothy – don’t get sucked into it. It’s so tempting, but don’t go there - Because, it leads people into ungodliness, and it spreads like an infection, like a flesh-eating bacteria.”

The application to this is so simple – but how do so many, many Christians miss this? *Stay away from churches that don’t preach and teach the Word of God!* It will inevitably lead to ungodliness—

Honestly, I can’t explain how so many so-called Christians fill up huge churches, to adoringly listen to men (and women) who don’t teach the Bible!

- I was curious, so I listened to a bit of a recent sermon by Carl Lentz, ex-pastor of Hillsong Church, NYC. He’s strutting around the stage, tight t-shirt, tattoos, water bottle – with the lights on him – total rock star. He carries a Bible, but he’s not opening it. The audience is looking at the man, not the Word. Jesus said about false teachers, “You will know them by their fruits:” He was recently

kicked out of his church due to multiple affairs; Hillsong is now being sued for using tithe money for the lavish lifestyles of their staff. Total hypocrisy.

And I have to wonder what ungodliness is going on in the people who listen to this irreverent babble? They aren't being taught, they aren't being given an example – so as Hosea 4:9 says, “Like people, like priest.”

- I could go on and on giving examples of bad workmen – who *should* be ashamed because they are unfaithful stewards who preach their own words instead of God's Words. Beloved, wherever God leads you, you go to a church where the man (and make sure it's a man!) where the *man* behind the pulpit keeps bringing you back to the Word, back to the Word. You should be looking *down* at your Bible, not *up* at his chiseled abs and pearly teeth.

Paul gives an example of two of these imposters and the result of their false teaching—

- 2 Timothy 2:17–18 . . . Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, ¹⁸who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some.

This is the same Hymenaeus he mentions in—

- 1 Timothy 1:19–20 . . . some have made shipwreck of their faith, ²⁰among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.

Whatever these men were teaching it was serious enough that Paul ordered them to be put out of the church – but apparently they kept deceiving from outside the church! Paul says that they had “swerved from the truth,” by teaching that “*the resurrection has already happened.*”

I'll tell the Scriptures they were twisting—

- Ephesians 2:6 ⁶God . . . raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,
- Romans 6:4 ⁴We were raised up with Jesus, so that “we too might walk in newness of life.”
- Colossians 3:1 ¹If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

In union with Christ, we died with Him in His death, and we have been raised up with Him in His resurrection, amen? But Hymenaeus and his buddy said “That's all there is – there is no future bodily resurrection.” Why would they teach this? Because they were infected with Greek thinking that said “spirit is good, matter is bad.” The idea of a physical resurrection was abhorrent to the Greeks. They wanted to escape these bodies and become pure spirit.

But that's a false Gospel. You mess with the resurrection of believers, and you mess with Jesus' resurrection. Paul dealt with this in 1 Cor.15. Listen to what he said there—

- 1 Corinthians 15:13–18 ¹³But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. ¹⁵We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. ¹⁶For if the dead are

not raised, not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁷And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. ¹⁸Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

- 1 Corinthians 15:20 ²⁰But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. (I.e., there *is* more to come – our resurrection!)

This is critical truth, isn't it? But some believers were being upset and led astray by these heretics. And how many people sitting in churches today could be led astray by the same lies because all they hear about is self-improvement, and miracles, and how God wants to bless your bank account?

Until Jesus comes back there will be false teachers. Many so-called Christians will be misled and fall away, but take heart—

IV. God's firm foundation stands!

- 2 Timothy 2:19 ¹⁹But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity."

"Don't panic Timothy! Even though many will be misled, God is on His throne and His firm foundation stands." Paul is talking about God's church—

- 1 Timothy 3:15 (NIV84) he calls it. . . God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth. And Jesus said, "The gates of Hades shall not overpower it."

And His seal is on His people who make up His church – they are locked in, they will never drift away. No one can snatch them from His hand. And two unshakable, immovable truths written on this seal about God's people—

1.) The first one is secret and invisible: "The Lord knows those who are His." He has known from all eternity those whom He chose to receive salvation in Christ. No one will ever lure them away from Christ. Their faith can never be overthrown – they have a stamp on them that says, "Personal property of God Most High!" What a comfort for the Christian: "The Lord knows those who are His!" But the second truth is the way we experience this comfort—

2.) The second truth written on this seal is public and visible for all to see: "*Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.*" That is the public evidence that they belong to God. We can't see God's secret, eternal call of election – but we can see the effects and the fruit in the lives of His people.

So on this seal over the people of God we see God's sovereignty and man's duty: security and purity. And both are true: I don't want you to think that the first statement is a promise, and the second is wishful thinking! If God knows that you are His, you will depart from iniquity. Look with me at Titus 2:14, and we'll close with this—

- Titus 2:14 (our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ) ¹⁴who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

Now look at this carefully – be an approved workman here: Jesus gave Himself for us for what purpose? "*to redeem us from all lawlessness.*" – to purchase our salvation, forgiveness from sins. He died to save. Does this sound hypothetical: He gave Himself but it might not happen? Maybe He redeemed you, but

you never get saved? No. If Jesus died for you, that death is *effectual*, your sins will be forgiven. We call this definite atonement, particular redemption. All for whom Jesus died will certainly be saved. But that's not all—

- “. . . *and* to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.”

That was also His purpose in dying for His people – that they would “depart from iniquity and do good works.” And if His death is effectual for our salvation, then it's also effectual for our sanctification. Are you hearing me? If Jesus saved you, you *will* be a different person. You will not continue to sin the way you used to – that's not a maybe, that's a promise from God!

Until our Lord Jesus returns there will be many false teachers, and many false believers. But I want you to leave with this great promise and great exhortation—

- “The Lord knows those who are his,” and, “Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.”

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**The Church's one foundation, is Jesus Christ her Lord,
She is His new creation, by water and the Word.
From heaven He came and sought her, to be His holy bride;
With His own blood He bought her, and for her life He died.**

**Elect from every nation, yet one o'er all the earth;
Her charter of salvation: One Lord, one faith, one birth;
One holy Name she blesses, partakes one holy food,
And to one hope she presses, with every grace endued.**

**Tho' with a scornful wonder, men see her sore oppressed,
by schisms rent asunder, by heresies distressed,
yet saints their watch are keeping, their cry goes up, "How long?"
And soon the night of weeping shall be the morn of song.**