

**Bethel Christian Fellowship
Fair Lawn, NJ**

**The Message Of 2 Timothy (9): “Dealing With False Teachers”
2 Timothy 2:14-19**

June 11, 2023

Like the church in our world, the church in Paul’s day had been infiltrated by false teachers. Rather than rightly handling the word of truth, they were swerving from the truth. As in our day, the damage they were causing was catastrophic. Their teaching was not only leading people away from God, it was spreading like a poisonous infection within the Christian community.

In the verses before us today, Paul reiterates the harmful effects of this kind of teaching no less than three times: (a) *“it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen”* (v. 14b); (b) *“Their teachings are as dangerous as blood poisoning to the body and spread like sepsis from a wound”* (v. 17, JBP); (c) *“They are upsetting the faith of some”* (v. 18b).

That’s the reason Paul challenges Timothy with his “zero tolerance” approach to this insidious problem. His directives are clear and serve as an excellent model for every born-again Christian to follow. But a word of warning is in order; these directives are *not* for the fainthearted. We will need to *“be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus”* (2:1) if we are to carry them out consistently. There are three words of exhortation that surface within these verses.

A. The first directive sets the tone for the entire passage: *“Keep reminding God’s people of these things. Warn them before God against quarreling about words; it is of no value and only ruins those who listen”* (v. 14). This is the directive that will set Timothy apart from any and all false teachers. By reminding God’s people “of these things,” Timothy himself is being called upon to remember all of the previous teaching that Paul has written in this letter. The significance of this should be obvious: reflecting on the truths of Scripture is *always* the first remedy that we use to counteract the effects of poisonous false teaching. The more we know the truth, the easier it becomes to spot those whose teaching is contrary to the truth.

The fact that Paul is treating this matter very seriously is evident when he says, *“Warn them before God against quarreling about words . . .”* He knows that meaningless talk and trivial debates are not only a waste of time; they are no substitute for focusing on the word of truth. That’s why he emphasizes its disastrous effect on others; it is of no value, and *“only ruins those who listen.”*

B. The second directive is “a gem of positive advice to the person of God” (Guthrie): *“Do your best 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”* (v. 15). Clearly, Paul’s goal for Timothy (and for us as well) is to be an *approved* workman (meaning, approved by God).

This requires effort: *“Do your best”* is literally *“be zealous”* to present yourself approved unto God. The task in view is *“rightly explaining the word of truth”* (NRSV) or handling the Word of truth *“correctly”* (NIV), or *“rightly”* (ESV), or *“accurately”* (NASB). The NEB says, *“Be straightforward in your proclamation of the truth.”* The word literally means “to cut straight.”

It's an unusual word, and only occurs three times in biblical Greek; once in the New Testament (in this verse) and twice in the book of Proverbs. In Proverbs 3:6 we read, "*He will make straight your paths;*" and in 11:5 we read, "*The righteousness of the blameless makes a straight way for them.*"

Here, "the word of truth," is pictured as a path or road that needs to be "cut straight" through a countryside. **Q.** How, then, is Timothy to "cut it straight" or "make it a *straight* path?" **A.** By being true to the Word. Any approved workman, when teaching God's Word, keeps to the highway and avoids the byways, and makes it easy for others to follow. The goal is to be accurate on the one hand, and plain on the other, whenever we are handling the Word of truth. As a result, when the Lord inspects our work, we'll have no fear of shame because of faulty workmanship. Think of a seasoned contractor meeting the code enforcement official for the homeowners final C of O inspection. He's confident in the quality of his work, and has no fear of the "day of reckoning."

C. The third directive involves shunning the corrupting influence of false teaching: "*Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly. Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have wandered away from the truth*" or, "*have shot wide of the truth*" (NEB). *They say that the resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some*" (vv. 16-18).

Here we learn something of the *nature* of this false teaching – it is "godless chatter," or "profane and vain babblings" (KJV). It is empty words with no biblical substance at all. The word from Paul is to avoid this quibbling at all costs – going around it is better by far than being drawn into it.

The *result* of this false teaching is the growth and spread of ungodliness; those who indulge in it "will become more and more ungodly." When Paul wrote this letter, the influence of Dr. Luke no doubt impacted his thinking. In the words of one commentator, "Perhaps Luke said, 'Paul, your description of the spreading influence of wrong teaching is like the growth of gangrene in the human body once it gains an entrance.' Gangrene is a disease in which bacteria enters a wound or injury and destroys the flesh. So if false teachers were allowed to enter, their corrupting doctrine will spread from that opening, finding pasturage amid the unspiritual and the unsuspecting in the congregation. The contamination which had infected the teachers would spread to others" (Homer Kent, [The Pastoral Epistles](#)).

Two examples of these false teachers are Hymenaeus and Philetus. Hymenaeus is probably the same man Paul had already excommunicated (1 Tim. 1:20). Philetus appears only here. They were teaching that the future resurrection of the body had already taken place, which indicates this was an early form of the heresy known as Gnosticism. They apparently taught that a spiritual resurrection (from death to life) is the only resurrection which occurs. Like present day liberals, they would never be caught saying, "There is no resurrection." Instead, they were corrupting the true teaching of the resurrection by interpreting it allegorically, not literally.

This false teaching, if allowed to go unchecked, would spread to a denial of Christ's bodily resurrection and thus destroy the hope of His Second Coming, the meeting of our loved ones who have died, and the prospect of our reigning with Christ in the age to come. Small wonder that the faith of some professing Christians was being destroyed.

The last verse is a reassuring word for any genuine believer; “*Nevertheless*” (in spite of some whose faith has been destroyed), “*God’s solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription ‘The Lord knows who are his,’ and ‘everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness’*” (v. 19).

Various interpretations have been suggested for the identity of God’s “solid foundation:” Christ and His apostles (Cf. Eph. 2:19ff); the church as a whole (Cf. 1 Tim. 3:15), or the unshakeable core of the elect members of the Ephesian church (Cf. 2:10). It almost certainly stands for last, as Paul is contrasting the “solid foundation” with some whose faith has been “upset” (NASB), or turned upside down and “overthrown” (KJV), or “destroyed” (NIV).

The two inscriptions engraved on the seal of the solid foundation will confirm its identity. Both refer to the faithful within the church, namely, the elect (2:10). The seal itself is a mark of ownership and security (Cf. Rev. 7:1-8); and the two-fold inscription emphasizes two mutually complementary truths: (a) God’s sovereignty in *preserving the true church*; “The Lord knows who are His,” and (b) human responsibility in *persevering* in the faith; “*Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness.*” The point is that those who claim to be the Lord’s will distance themselves from those who persist in their wicked rebellion against His Word.

When Paul writes, “The Lord knows who are His,” he is quoting the Greek translation (LXX) of Numbers 16:5. These are the words of stern rebuke spoken by Moses during the rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (Num. 16:1-50). As we know from the book of Jude (v. 11), Korah’s rebellion became an example of apostates who reject God’s authority exercised through His appointed leaders. Korah and his followers met with the most severe judgment; and Paul no doubt is suggesting that men like Hymenaeus and Philetus will meet a similar fate. But God knows who are His and will preserve them to the end – because “God’s solid foundation stands firm.”

Jesus said that false prophets shall lead many astray (Matt. 24:11). In fact, if it were possible, they would deceive even the elect (Matt. 24:24). But the Good Shepherd *knows* His sheep, and gives everlasting life to *them*, and *they* shall never perish, and no one shall snatch *them* out of His hands (John 10:14, 28). His kingdom cannot be shaken (Heb. 12:28), and His solid foundation continues to stand firm. We can rejoice that He knows those who are His, and that He will hold us fast!

“His oath, His covenant, His blood
Support me in the whelming flood;
When all around my soul gives way,
He then is all my hope and stay.”
(Edward Mote, 1834)