



A Study of 1st & 2nd Timothy

Remind Them of These Things... 2 Timothy 2:14-26

I am reading from 2nd Timothy 2:14-26. If you're using a pew Bible, the passage is located on page 995. That's 2nd Timothy 2:14-26. Follow along then as I read God's holy, inerrant, infallible word.

^{ESV} **2 Timothy 2:14**...Remind them of these things, and charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers. ¹⁵ Do 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. ¹⁶ But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, ¹⁷ and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, ¹⁸ who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some. ¹⁹ But 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." ²⁰ Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. ²¹ Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work. ²² So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. ²³ Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. ²⁴ And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, ²⁵ correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, ²⁶ and they may come to their

senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

Father, we come to you this morning confessing to you our great need. Father we need and we desire that the Holy Spirit come now and take the things of Christ and make them real to our hearts...to come and take the written word and as its true author and therefore its infallible teacher to instruct us in the truth of your Son. Open the book we pray to see what you have accomplished on our behalf, in Christ, in whose name, we pray, Amen.

^{ESV} **2 Timothy 2:14**...Remind them of these things, and charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers.

Verse fourteen starts off with a command to Timothy to remind his hearers not to quarrel about words. The question that immediately comes to mind, of course, is **“Who is included in the word ‘them’?”** That is, who exactly is Timothy supposed to remind not to quarrel about words? I think the answer has to come from the immediately preceding context so I take it that to goes all the way back to the **“faithful men”** that Paul mentions back in verse 2.

^{ESV} **2 Timothy 2:1**...You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, ² and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

I think the point Paul is trying to make is that Timothy needs to ever vigilant in reminding the faithful men over whom he has responsibility not to get caught up in endless arguments with the enemies of the gospel there in Ephesus.

Although I suppose it would make almost as much sense to say Paul is talking about the **“elect”** when he refers to the **“them”** in verse 14 which, of course,

would be a much larger group than the faithful men of verse two.¹ Still, I think it more likely that Paul is referring to the faithful men of verse two simply because they are in authoritative teaching roles and most likely to be the ones combating the heretics face to face. Paul's concern is that they not get caught up in word skirmishes but rather keep the gospel and the inevitability of suffering for the sake of the gospel foremost in their thoughts and in their teaching.

The fact that the issue is important is demonstrated by the fact that the verb is a present tense durative verb which means that Paul wanted Timothy to keep on reminding his hearers about the things he has just covered in verse three through thirteen. The example I usually give when I am talking about a present tense durative is the example of the Lord Jesus on the cross where he kept on saying, **"Father forgive them they know not what they do."** That is the point Paul is making here. And the fact that Paul wants Timothy to keep these thoughts before the minds of the **"faithful men"** to whom he is entrusting the gospel is made even clearer by the fact that Paul tells Timothy not simply to remind his hearers but also to **"charge them before God"** not to quarrel about words.

If I were going to paraphrase Paul's **thought** it would go something like this, **"Keep on reminding them about this whole idea of suffering for the sake of the gospel...about the idea of working hard for the sake of the gospel and of the elect...and remember to charge them in the presence of God not to get caught up in endless word battles with the false teachers there in Ephesus. Do that because word battles simply do no good to anyone."**

I think we tend to press on right past the phrases like, **"Charge them in the presence of God not to quarrel about words"** without really giving them the

significance they ought to have. I think we tend to read past such phrases thinking of them as being more or less hyperbolic. But they aren't really. Paul really intends, I think, for Timothy to take this command quite literally.

The question is, **"Why does he do that?"**

I think he does that because there is something in the nature of words that can be so terribly destructive. And yet even though that is true, we all tend to want to have our say. We want to have our say no matter the cost. We all tend to think, **"I'm going to say what I think no matter what comes."** And when we do we are always shocked, I think, by what actually comes. Paul warns Timothy to charge the faithful men he is instructing not to fall prey to that...but rather to take what they say very seriously. He is so intent that they do that that he casts his admonition to them in terms of a charge before God.

I remember once doing a wedding in which I brought out the fact that the vows that were being spoken were being made in front of many witnesses. I made the point that the vows that were being said were being said in front of their family and friends and in front of Almighty God. I said something like, **"You are making these vows not just before one another and before your friends and family but also before Almighty God. That means that you are calling Him to bear witness of the very promises you are now making. In light of that do you promise?"** I remember the groom turned very pale and starting shaking and his eyes looked like saucers. After the wedding he asked me, **"Did you bring all that vow stuff up when we were meeting in our pre-marital counseling?"**

"I did," I answered. **"Why?"**

“Well I don’t know what I was thinking about before but it kind of dawned on me when you were talking that this whole thing about making a promise before God is kind of awesome...I mean in a terrifying sort of way.”

“Yes,” I said, “it is for a fact.”

So if Timothy is not to engage in arguments over words and the like what exactly is he supposed to do? Paul answers that question in verse fifteen.

^{ESV} **2 Timothy 2:15**...Do 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. ¹⁶ But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, ¹⁷ and their talk will spread like gangrene.

Paul wants Timothy to work at his craft...to be a faithful and careful workmen regarding his preaching and teaching of the Word. Paul wants Timothy to measure twice and cut once. He wants him to preach the word of truth, the gospel, in response to the many words that the false teachers want to use. He wants him to get his teaching and preaching right. He wants him to be a careful, faithful workman. He wants him to rightly divide the truth which means he wants him to correctly teach the Scripture. And along the way he wants him to avoid falling into the trap of engaging in their endless, speculative, philosophical arguments.

Now the reason he wants him to avoid falling in arguments over words is because that sort of speculative nonsense will spread throughout the congregation leading to more and more ungodliness. I think his point is that bad doctrine always leads to bad morality. Wrong doctrine leads to wrong living.

And that wrong living is never quite satisfied with reaping havoc in any sort of self-contained way. It is never quite satisfied to stay in one isolated spot. Not, it spreads, and the imagery that Paul uses here is particularly telling. He says that that sort of arguing over words and the meaning of words, all of which is associated with the false teachers, spreads like gangrene. Gangrene is, of course, a dreadful condition that occurs when a portion of the body is so injured that it loses blood flow and dies. When that happens it begins to spread slowly killing the adjoining tissue. Unless it is checked by amputation, it keeps spreading out farther and farther until it eventually kills the patient.

I have a cousin named Harold that fell out of a tree when he was a little boy and broke his arm. By the time his family found him gangrene had already set in and the doctor had to remove his arm to save his life. It was a dreadful life-changing event. Paul says loose talk, loose idle speculation does the very same thing.

You know, I think, how that works with words. Oftentimes we are not satisfied with our own unhappiness. We say something terrible and are not quite content to let it go. We are not content to sit and stew quietly. Instead we want to spread our unhappiness never taking into account the damage it does. So we tell someone else...sharing our feelings and poisoning someone else's mind against the person who has really done them no wrong. Paul is applying that sort of motive to the false teachers. Their words are like cancer. They are never content to simply stay in one spot but always looking for some new area to work their mischief.

At the end of verse seventeen on into verse eighteen Paul gives an example of the kind of thing he means.

^{ESV} **2 Timothy 2:17b**...Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, ¹⁸ who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some.

This Hymenaeus character has already been mentioned in 1st Timothy.

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 1:18**...This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, ¹⁹ holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, ²⁰ among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.

In 1st Timothy, Hymenaeus is described as a blasphemer. Here in 2nd Timothy he has moved on to denying the resurrection. And that seems to be the way of it. The one thing about false teachers is that are ever seeking to break new ground. They will pick a cause and run it till it runs dry and then move on to some new heresy.

Now in verse 19, Paul stops to quote from the Old Testament. He does that to encourage Timothy I think...to give him an encouragement to be brave, to be resolute in his opposition against the false teachers he faces. Look at verse 19.

^{ESV} **2 Timothy 2:19**...But 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.**"²

Now Paul's first point is that in spite of the false teachers and their unwillingness to quit Ephesus, God's sure foundation stands. This is, by the way, almost certainly where where we get the title for the great hymn, "**How Firm a**

Foundation.” The hymn also uses Isaiah 43 and Hebrews 13 extensively but it looks like the main theme comes from 2 Timothy 2:19.

The quote in 2nd Timothy 2:19 is taken from Numbers 16:5. What is remarkable about the quote is that the context from which it is taken parallels almost exactly what is going on here in 2nd Timothy. Numbers 16 has to do with the rebellion of the sons of Korah, who wanted Moses’ prestige and position. They wanted it without being called by God and without doing the work or enduring the suffering that Moses himself endured.

^{ESV} **Numbers 16:3...**They (the sons of Korah) assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron and said to them, **"You have gone too far! For all in the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?"** ⁴ When Moses heard it, he fell on his face, ⁵ and he said to Korah and all his company, **"In the morning the LORD will show who is his, and who is holy, and will bring him near to him. The one whom he chooses he will bring near to him. ⁶ Do this: take censers, Korah and all his company; ⁷ put fire in them and put incense on them before the LORD tomorrow, and the man whom the LORD chooses shall be the holy one. You have gone too far, sons of Levi!"**

You see what I mean. The sons of Korah wanted to argue over the meaning of the words **“holy unto the Lord.”** They wanted to argue that they were every bit as capable as Moses to be in charge of the ministry. They wanted to argue that what they said was every bit as authoritative as what Moses said. They were right about that, of course, except when Moses was speaking for God. Anyway, they want a face to face confrontation with Moses. But what they get instead is a face to face confrontation with Moses.

As punishment, God decides to have the earth split open and swallow them alive. He does that, you see, because He knows those who are his.

Look at verse 27.

^{ESV} **Numbers 16:27**...So they got away from the dwelling of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. And Dathan and Abiram came out and stood at the door of their tents, together with their wives, their sons, and their little ones. ²⁸ And Moses said, **"Hereby you shall know that the LORD has sent me to do all these works, and that it has not been of my own accord. ²⁹ If these men die as all men die, or if they are visited by the fate of all mankind, then the LORD has not sent me. ³⁰ But if the LORD creates something new, and the ground opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into Sheol, then you shall know that these men have despised the LORD."** ³¹ And as soon as he had finished speaking all these words, the ground under them split apart. ³² And the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the people who belonged to Korah and all their goods. ³³ So they and all that belonged to them went down alive into Sheol, and the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly. ³⁴ And all Israel who were around them fled at their cry, for they said, **"Lest the earth swallow us up!"**

Now my point is that the quote in 2nd Timothy 2:19 is from this Numbers passage. It is taken from verse 5. Paul is implying that the situation with Timothy and the false teachers is analogous to that of Moses and the sons of Korah.³ Paul makes his point by saying that the firm foundation of the gospel still stands and will continue to stand. It is a firm foundation that won't open up and swallow those that rely on it. The reason that that is true is because the Lord knows who are his. The point, I think, is that Timothy will have to endure suffering as will the faithful to whom he entrusts the gospel but they are not to have doubts about whether the gospel will endure. It will endure. The Lord's foundation is firm. The Lord knows who are his...who is faithful and who is not and he will not forget.

I might add one other observation if you don't mind.

The Apostle Paul was not simply an apostle. He was also an excellent exegete using the Old Testament in a way that rightfully applied the original meaning and context of the passage quoted in a manner that had a wonderfully clear application in the present.

Now in verse twenty, Paul closes out his argument using another metaphor...the figure of honorable and dishonorable vessels. Obviously Paul wants Timothy to be an honorable vessel set apart for God's use in God's way. The reason Paul uses the metaphor is to explain exactly what he means in the last half of verse nineteen where he says, **"Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity."**

Let's see if we can discern the point he is making. Look at verse 20.

^{ESV} **2 Timothy 2:20**...Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. ²¹ Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.

Now the language is pretty simple. In a large house, or great house, there are lots of different kinds of pots and pans. Some of those pots and pans are used for honorable things...like serving up fine foods or storing medicine, or wine, or treasure and the like. Generally speaking these items are more expensive because by their very nature they bring honor to the master of the house. People see them and understand them to reflect well on the one that owns them. It appears that

the more expensive the item the more honorable it was. I take it that those things made out of gold and silver were unlikely to be used for anything unimportant. There were also other kinds of pots and pans...pots and pans made out of wood or clay. These less expensive pots and pans were used for less noble things like carrying water, holding trash, or food scraps, or the least noble of all...as chamber pots. Sometimes when they ceased to be useful they were thrown out with whatever they contained. That is, they were sometimes disposable.

Now I think in the analogy the great house is the church.⁴ There are those that think it represents society in general but the church has already been compared to a house in 1st Timothy 3:15.⁵

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 3:14**...I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, ¹⁵ if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.

I also think the idea of the house being the church ties back to the idea of the foundation mentioned in 2nd Timothy 2:19.

And Paul's point is that Timothy and the faithful men to whom he has committed the gospel are honorable vessels. But they need to make sure they maintain their usefulness. And they need to do that by paying close attention to both their life and doctrine. How? Verses twenty-two and twenty-four give the answer.

They are to flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness and they are to patiently endure evil. Look at verse twenty-two.

^{ESV} **2 Timothy 2:22**...*So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.* ²³ Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. ²⁴ And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, *patiently enduring evil,* ²⁵ correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, ²⁶ and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

Do you see the two imperatives? They are **“flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness”** and down at the end of verse twenty-four **“not being quarrelsome, but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil.”**

Paul's point is that Timothy must faithfully pursue the faithful proclamation of the gospel through hard work and suffering. He must not let his own sin get in the way of that. He has to simultaneously proclaim the gospel and pursue righteousness. And the righteousness that he is to pursue is to be characterized by faith, love and peace. Timothy is not to get caught up in arguing over unimportant things. For that matter he is not to get caught up in arguing over important things. Rather he is to stand for the truth of the gospel correcting his enemies with gentleness. Notice how the text puts it, **“not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, *patiently enduring evil,* correcting his opponents with gentleness.”**

Do you ever wonder why it is we feel so compelled to straighten people out? What I mean is this. Do you ever wonder why our face gets flush, our ears turn red, our heart starts to pound, and our temper and self-control go flying out the window when we argue? Isn't it because we are a lot less concerned about the

well-being of the other person with whom we are arguing and a lot more concerned about our own standing and vindication?

Paul tells Timothy to simply not play the game.

He must accept his responsibility in faithfully passing on the deposit with which he has been entrusted. He must flee youthful passions and not get distracted by mindless arguments. He must patiently endure evil to the end that God's people will be faithfully taught and his elect will be saved. He must take his place in the fellowship of suffering.

But why, why must he do that?

Look at the end of verse twenty-five.

^{ESV} **2 Timothy 2:25**...God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth,²⁶ and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

Do you see? He must do that because in God's own good time he may very well use that soft answer to bring those opposed to the gospel to their senses. Look at the language Paul uses, **"It may help those escape from the snare of the devil after being captured by him to do his will."**

You see that is why it is worth suffering. That is why we don't have to win every argument. That is why we need to be gentle in our response.

I can't help but think that Paul may have had in mind Stephen here. You'll remember that Paul held the coats of those that stoned Stephen...that he was in a

sense a part of the very crowd that killed him. I can't help but think that Paul was unable to get Stephen's gentle manner out of his mind as he was being stoned.

Do you remember the Acts passage? Listen to this.

^{ESV} Acts 7:59...And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "**Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.**" ⁶⁰ And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "**Lord, do not hold this sin against them.**" And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

Even Stephen's death is gentle. He doesn't die in some sort of terrible agony. He simply falls asleep.

I can't prove that's what Paul was thinking when he wrote this. But I suspect that that Stephen's example was something he never quite forgot. I suspect it was branded upon his soul and that that is what he has in mind here both in terms of sufferings and gentleness.

Years ago now, really decades ago, I went to seminary at Dallas Theological Seminary. It was a bastion of dispensationalism. I knew that when I went. But I went just the same. I went there because that was where J.Vernon McGee went and I simply loved the way he loved the Bible. And I went because I didn't have a wife that would move and I didn't really have a car that would make the commute to Jackson or to Philadelphia.

Anyway, at the time I worked in a Reformed Christian Bookstore over in Ft. Worth. And I worked for a brother that loved to debate. We often debated while we worked, not just me and him, but the whole staff.

Anyway, one day this brother was letting me have it. He was ripping into me with every sinew and fiber of his being. He was letting me have it because I went to a dispensational seminary and somewhere in the course of our talk he pretty much went ballistic. He kept saying, **“Is that what they teach you over there? That’s what they teach you? Are you telling me that is the kind of thing they teach you over there? That’s what you are paying good money to learn? Is that what you’re telling me? That’s what they teach you?”**

He was just so overwrought and red in the face my only thought was to try to get him to stop yelling at me so I said, **“My brother. I know I don’t know very much, and I want to learn. In fact, I want to learn from you because I think you can teach me every bit as much as they do. But to answer your question not that is not what they have taught me so far. What they have taught me so far is that a soft answer turns away wrath and that whenever we argue with our Christian brothers we are first and foremost always to treat them like Christian gentlemen.”**

Well I can tell his shoulders just sagged and he turned away and slinked off to his office. But he then took it to heart and over the next couple of years taught me as much theology and Bible as anyone ever has. To this day, we are inseparable friends.

I know that is what Paul is calling Timothy to do. And I think, by extension, he is calling us to do the same.

Let's pray.

¹ **ESV 2 Timothy 2:10**...Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

² This is a reference to Numbers 16 and the whole affair of the sons of Korah.

³ George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles (NIGTC)* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1992), 416.

⁴ Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2006), 538.

⁵ John Calvin, *Commentary on 1st Timothy 3:20*. Calvin writes: "Commentators are not agreed, however, whether the "great house" means the Church alone, or the whole world. And, indeed, the context rather leads us to understand it as denoting the Church; for Paul is not now reasoning about strangers, but about God's own family. Yet what he says is true generally, and in another passage the same Apostle extends it to the whole world; that is, at Romans 9:21, where he includes all the reprobate under the same word that is here used. We need not greatly dispute, therefore, if any person shall apply it simply to the world. Yet there can be no doubt that Paul's object is to shew that we ought not to think it strange, that bad men are mixed with the good, which happens chiefly in the Church."