



How wonderful it is to know that God has not left us in the dark! His word illumines our path, showing us the dangers to avoid and the best way to move forward. That's why Scripture permeates every part of our worship service at Webster Bible Church. We recite God's word, read God's word, sing God's word, pray God's word, and preach God's word.

With that in mind, please turn in your Bibles 2 Timothy 2:14-19 (p. 935). This text teaches us that *for the church to be healthy, we must handle God's Word rightly.*

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In 2 Timothy 2:14-19, the apostle Paul writes to Pastor Timothy,

<sup>14</sup> Remind them of these things, and charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers. <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, <sup>17</sup> and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, <sup>18</sup> who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some. <sup>19</sup> 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."

Up to this point in the letter, Paul has reminded Timothy of his responsibility to proclaim the gospel, to protect the purity of its message, and to pass it on to trustworthy people "who will be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2).

The gospel is good news from God concerning his Son, Jesus Christ. He is the heaven-sent Hero who came to rescue lost humanity from our hopeless condition. Yes, that is our state, and here is why: The one and only God who is perfectly holy, created us in his image, in his likeness, so that we might know him and love him and rule creation as his representatives. But we rebelled against God's good authority and chose to live life our way instead of his way. Our sin separated us from him. We wrecked the relationship. Though God has every right to banish us from the joy of his presence for all eternity, he showed his love for us by sending his one and only Son to rescue us. The name *Jesus* means "the Lord saves." God the Son shares the same love for us as God the Father. So, he willingly left the glories of heaven to become a human being. He lived a life of perfect obedience on our behalf and then died on the cross, taking the punishment we deserved because of our sins. Three days later, Jesus rose again from the dead, proving that God the Father had accepted his sacrifice for all who would repent and trust in Christ alone to save them. Those who obey the gospel by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ are forgiven of their sins, reconciled to God, adopted into his family, and granted the gift of eternal life.

No wonder Paul tells Timothy in chapter 2, verse 8, “Remember Jesus Christ.” Paul then gives Timothy three reasons why: (1) God’s supreme power keeps the gospel advancing, (2) God’s sovereign election keeps his people persevering, and (3) God’s steadfast character keeps his word unchanging.

With that in mind, Paul shifts his focus in verses 14-19 to Timothy’s responsibility to remind God’s people of these realities in the face of false teachers and their destructive influence. *For the church to be healthy, we must handle God’s Word rightly.*

For this to happen, certain duties must be fulfilled, and certain dangers must be avoided. So, let’s consider first *the duties of faithful teachers.*

### **The Duties of Faithful Teachers (vv. 14-16a)**

#### ***Remind them . . .***

The first thing Paul tells Timothy in verse 14 is: “Remind them of these things.” Remind *whom* of *what*? Timothy is to remind the church to do what Paul has instructed him to do: to be unashamed of the gospel, to join in suffering for the gospel, to proclaim the gospel, to guard the gospel, to pass on the gospel to other trustworthy people by discipling them, and to **remember Jesus Christ**, keeping him at the forefront of Timothy’s mind.

What Paul instructed Timothy to do, Timothy is to remind the church to do. “Remind” is a present imperative. It means to “keep on reminding.” What’s good for the pastor is good for the people. The pastor is to be an example to the flock (1 Tim. 4:12; 1 Pet. 5:3), and the flock is to follow his example. The author of Hebrews wrote, “Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb. 13:7-8).

#### ***Charge them . . .***

Not only are faithful teachers to “remind [God’s people] of these things,” but they must also “charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers” (2 Tim. 2:14). The word “charge” looks like a second command, but it’s really an extension of the first command, “remind them of these things.” The best translation is: “Remind them of these things, charging them before God not to quarrel about words....”

This is like parents telling their children, “Clean your room. Pick up your clothes.” “Clean your room” is the main command, and it includes picking up your clothes. Cleaning your room involves more than picking up your clothes, but not less than that. In the same way, Paul tells Timothy that his duty to remind believers of biblical truth also includes warning them not to quarrel about words – words based on human speculation rather than divine revelation. “It is better to preach five words of God’s Word – than five million words of man’s wisdom!”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Pithy gems from Charles Spurgeon.” *Grace Gems* [online]. Retrieved on 25 May 2024 from [https://www.gracegems.org/30/short\\_pithy\\_gems\\_Spurgeon.htm](https://www.gracegems.org/30/short_pithy_gems_Spurgeon.htm).

By saying, “charge them *before God* not to quarrel about words,” Paul is emphasizing that this is a serious matter. “Quarrel about words” (*logomacheó*), literally means “word-fight.” It made me think of *food fights*. Have you ever been in one? Apparently, it’s a big problem in some schools. A student journalist at the State College Area High School in Pennsylvania interviewed some of her peers, including a fellow senior, who said,

People are throwing things at you, and I don’t think you should have to be on the lookout for projectiles when you’re eating your lunch. It’s a time to replenish your body and talk with friends, and not be harassed.... [P]eople have half-bitten food thrown at them, ... and I think it just makes unnecessary stress for people.<sup>2</sup>

As I read these comments, it occurred to me that there are some parallels between *food fights* at school and *word fights* in the church. People come to church to receive spiritual food, replenish their souls, and enjoy Christian fellowship, not to have “half-bitten food thrown at them.” In the church, “half-bitten food” is biblical truth that remains uneaten and is then balled up in the hands of human speculation and thrown at people irresponsibly, stressing them instead of blessing them.

The ones flinging this food, starting word-fights in the church, are false teachers. Paul had already warned Timothy about them in his first letter, saying,

<sup>3</sup> If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, <sup>4</sup> he 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, <sup>5</sup> and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth....

- 1 Timothy 6:3-5

*Instead of producing a healthy church, word-fights produce a sick one. That’s why faithful teachers are to “charge [believers] before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers.”*

Paul will say more about the dangers of false teaching in verses 16-18, but for now he directs Timothy’s attention to his third duty as a faithful teacher:

### ***Do your best....***

In verse 15, Paul says, “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.” This is the picture of a person who has done his work well and can therefore submit it to his superior without hesitation or embarrassment. I think of a student who has done her work thoroughly. Through her diligent efforts, she has mastered the material, fulfilled the assignment, is proud of her work, and is eager to submit it to her teacher. The same can be said in the business world when someone shows up well prepared for a meeting. It’s a great feeling when his boss says to him, “You’ve done your homework.”

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<sup>2</sup> Waverly Huang, “The Core of Food Fights.” *Lions’ Digest*, 05 May 2022 [online]. Retrieved on 23 May 2024 from <https://lionsdigest1.com/11416/news/the-core-of-food-fights/>.

How much more should we want our Savior to say, “Well done, good and faithful servant!” Paul said in Romans 15:17, “In Christ Jesus, then, I have every reason to be proud of my work for God.” *For the church to be healthy, we must handle God’s Word rightly.*

The word “rightly” in verse 15 is based on the Greek word “orthos” which means “straight.” It appears in our English words *orthopedic*, getting your bones straight; *orthodontist*, getting your teeth straight; and *orthodoxy*, getting your doctrine straight! An approved worker doesn’t quarrel about words, flinging half-bitten biblical truth at people. He doesn’t handle God’s word recklessly and irresponsibly, but carefully and correctly. He gives it to them straight.

This reminds me of an article Tim Challies wrote years ago titled, “Drinking It Straight.” He says that for years he hated coffee and couldn’t figure out what everybody loved about it. Then one day it dawned on him that he had never tried drinking it straight. His friends had always tried to make it more palatable by mixing a little coffee with a lot of cream and sugar and other stuff. So, Tim poured himself a cup of straight-up coffee and from the first sip found that he loved it, the full-out flavor, bitterness and all.

Tim says a similar sensation happened to him spiritually the first time that he and his wife walked into a church where God’s word was given to him straight and undiluted. Tim says,

The pastor simply preached a text. He opened the Bible, he told us what it said, and he told us why it mattered. It was a tough text, but he did not water it down or run from it. He felt no need to add to it or adapt it. He just preached it. And it was amazing. Once we had tasted that undiluted Word, we realized how delicious it really was. ...

It has been many years since that first cup of coffee and I love it more than ever. I still drink it straight-up black. And more than ever I am committed to the straight-up Word of God, to never diluting it, and to never adding anything to it. It’s absolutely perfect and downright delicious just the way it is.<sup>3</sup>

A faithful teacher knows this, which is why he does his best to be an approved worker who “rightly handles the word of truth.” He works hard to *get it right* and *give it straight*.

### ***Avoid irreverent babble....***

The fourth duty of a faithful teacher, and really any faithful Christian, is issued in verse 16: “Avoid irreverent babble.” The Greek word for “avoid” means to turn oneself around, to do an about-face. Paul had issued a similar warning at the end of his previous letter, saying,

“O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called “knowledge,” for by professing it some have swerved from the faith.”

- 1 Timothy 6:20-21a

False teaching perverts the truth and pulls people down. For this reason, Paul transitions in verse 16 from the duties of faithful teachers to the dangers of false teaching.

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<sup>3</sup> Tim Challies, “Drinking It Straight.” Challies.com, 12 May 2015 [online]. Retrieved on 23 May 2024 from <https://www.challies.com/articles/drinking-it-straight/>.

## **The Dangers of False Teaching (vv. 16b-19)**

Why should we avoid “irreverent babble,” worldly chatter that mixes human speculation with divine revelation? Because “it will lead people into more and more ungodliness.”

### **1. It leads to ungodliness.**

In their commentary on this text, Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell make an excellent point of application, saying, “An un failing test for what takes place in our Bible studies and small groups and the times we characteristically call ‘fellowship’ is: Has it moved us closer to God and elevated our conversation and conduct?”<sup>4</sup>

Last Sunday evening I met with our Gospel Leadership Cohort, a group of six young men who are reading through the Bible and memorizing Scripture together, praying together, encouraging and building up one another in the Lord, reading and discussing Christian books that point us to Jesus Christ and the wonder of our salvation and the significance of God’s Word to our daily lives. On Monday morning one of the guys sent a text to the group, saying, “I left yesterday feeling particularly refreshed in the Gospel. Thankful for all of you.”

Can you say that about your small group, the folks that you get together with? Does your time of fellowship move you closer to God and elevate your conversation and conduct? Or does it “lead ... into more and more ungodliness”? If that’s the case, do an about-face. Turn away from such talk and go find a group that is tethered to “the word of truth.” That is how you grow and flourish in your walk with Christ.

### **2. It spreads like gangrene.**

At the beginning of verse 17, Paul says, “and their talk will spread like gangrene,” a deadly disease that spreads rapidly throughout the body. The Greek word for gangrene was also used for cancer.

Cancer is such a dreaded disease. We have folks in our church right now who are undergoing treatment for cancer or are awaiting test results to see if they have cancer. To say that cancer is a cause for concern is an understatement. Anyone who has it wants to get rid of it – every last trace of it – because their life depends on it.

Do we show this same level of concern, this level of alarm, this level of distress over the spread of false doctrine in the church? Imagine a doctor telling a patient, “You’ve got an aggressive, cancerous tumor in your lung, but we’re just going to let it alone. Otherwise, we’d have to cut into you.” The patient would probably say, “Are you crazy? Cut that cancer out of me! Do surgery and whatever else is necessary to save my life!”

Paul then cites a specific heresy that was eating away at the church in Ephesus. Paul identifies not only the false teaching but also the names of the men who were perpetrating

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<sup>4</sup> R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell, *1-2 Timothy and Titus: To Guard the Deposit*. Preaching the Word, edited by R. Kent Hughes (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 229.

it. In verses 17-18 he says, “And their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some.”

Paul mentioned Hymenaeus in his first letter to Timothy, saying that Hymenaeus and Alexander had suffered shipwreck with regard to the faith. Paul himself had put them out of the church (apparently while Paul was still in Ephesus), having handed them over to Satan so that they would be taught not to blaspheme (i.e., say false things about God and the gospel). Although Hymenaeus had been put out of the church, he was still persistent in his efforts to mislead believers there. Another false teacher named Philetus was helping to spread the heresy.

They were saying that the resurrection had already taken place, meaning the resurrection of believers. “The false teachers viewed ‘resurrection’ as a new spiritual awareness or state of the soul that had already taken place. They did not think that Christians would receive new bodies after death like Jesus did. This contradicted the teachings of both Jesus (Matt. 23-33) and Paul (1 Cor. 15).”<sup>5</sup>

While it is true that God has already made believers spiritually alive in Christ, it is also true that the physical bodies of believers will be raised when Christ returns. Our bodies will be transformed into bodies that will never die. This transformation will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye. And that’s when the saying that is written will come true: “Death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Cor. 15:54b; cf. Isa. 25:8). “Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!” (1 Cor. 15:57).

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15 that to deny the bodily resurrection of believers is to deny the gospel itself. It’s to say that our faith is futile. Beth Felker Jones wrote, “to claim that the present – with all of its pain – is all that God has in store for us is to drain life of meaning and hope. It is to believe that this broken life is all there is, to believe that sin and death have the final word.”<sup>6</sup>

“An understanding of the resurrection this twisted is tantamount to a denial of it.”<sup>7</sup> And what is the effect of such teaching?

### 3. It upsets the faith of some.

The Greek word for “upset” (v. 18, *anatrepō*) is also used in Titus 1:11, where Paul says that false teachers “must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families.” The only other NT occurrence of this word *anatrepō* is in John 2:15, when Jesus “overturns” the tables of the money-changers. Robert Yarbrough writes, “Hymenaeus and Philetus were not just misdirected doctrinally but were functioning like a two-man wrecking crew....”<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Robert W. Yarbrough, “2 Timothy.” *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, gen. ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 2475.

<sup>6</sup> Beth Felker Jones, *Practicing Christian Doctrine: An Introduction to Thinking and Living Theologically* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 222. Cited in Daniel M. Doriani and Richard D. Phillips, *2 Timothy & Titus*. Reformed Expository Commentary, edited by Richard D. Phillips and Philip Graham Ryken (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2020), 50.

<sup>7</sup> Robert W. Yarbrough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary, gen. ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 389.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

Do you see why false doctrine is so dangerous? Tolerate a heretic or two, and their teaching will spread like gangrene, overthrowing people's faith. Yet churches are filled with many professing believers who would tolerate such heresy, saying, "Hymenaeus and Philetus believe in the resurrection, they just believe a different version of it than we do. Who are we to judge them? Let's just all get along and love one another as Christians."

That kind of mentality should deeply concern us. But in verse 19, the Holy Spirit through Paul provides a word of comfort to faithful teachers who worry about whether people will listen to them: "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.'"

In this context, "God's firm foundation," is most likely the church. In Paul's first letter to Timothy, Paul refers to the church as "the pillar and support of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). As destructive as false teaching is, it can never destroy the true church, because God is sovereign, not Satan. The church will not crumble because Christ is in control (Matt. 16:18).

To prove his point, Paul cites two Scriptures from Numbers 16, where Korah led a rebellion against Moses, the man of God. Moses fell facedown before God. "And he said to Korah and all his company, 'In the morning the LORD will show who is his.'" The Greek translation of that verse literally says, "the LORD knows those who are his," and that's what Paul says in 2 Timothy 2:19. God destroyed Korah and delivered Moses. Paul quotes this verse to comfort Timothy as he and other faithful believers confront false teachers in the church.

This word of *reassurance* if followed by a word of *responsibility*: "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity" (2 Tim. 2:19). This quotation may be adapted from the same chapter in Numbers, in which Moses warned the congregation saying, "Get away now from the tents of these wicked men, and do not touch anything that belongs to them, or you will be swept away in all their sin!" (Num. 16:26 NASV). The text goes on to say that those who did not separate themselves from the wicked rebels were destroyed with them when "the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up" (Num. 16:32).

The bottom line is that Korah did not destroy Israel, and false teachers cannot destroy the church. Nevertheless, God's people have a responsibility to reject false teaching. Avoid it. Turn from it. Have nothing to do with it.

We should note that Paul is not telling us to avoid unbelievers outside the church. Jesus regularly engaged sinners and wants us to do the same as his representatives. But texts like 2 Timothy 2:19 warn us to separate from people who profess faith but promote false doctrine. If we encounter them, we're to confront them. We're not to treat them as fellow Christians. If they embrace God's truth, then we can enjoy them as God's people. But if they reject the truth of Scripture, then we are to separate ourselves from them, lest we be judged along with them. Remember:

***For the church to be healthy,  
we must handle God's Word rightly.***

God help us to speak the truth in a spirit of love so that we might truly glorify God by making disciples who *embrace God's truth, enjoy his people, and extend his glory.*