

A Call for Correctness (2 Timothy 2:14-26)

“Some would have moral virtue to be holiness, which (as they suppose) they can understand by their own reason and practice in their own strength . . . Gospel truth is the only root whereon Gospel holiness will grow.”
~ John Owen

I. The Call (2:1-13)

A. Overview

In this passage, Paul instructs Timothy on the following: (1) how to oppose the false teachers, (2) how to interact with those individuals who have been persuaded by the false teachers, and (3) how to understand the responsibilities and high stakes involved in relationship to this false teaching. Divided into two sections, each portion contains three imperatives in a negative/positive/negative pattern (cf. Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 743).

B. Addressing False Teachers (2:14-19)

Command #1: “Remind people of these things” (v. 14). This command is couched in teaching terminology. The “these things” would appear to refer back to the content of verse 8.

Timothy’s teaching must be done “before God” or “in God’s sight or presence” (cf. Gal 1:20; 1 Tim 5:21; 2 Tim 4:1). In other words, Timothy is accountable to the Lord for his words and actions.

The command states not to “wrangle over words.” Paul is referring “to the kind of serious dispute about the meaning and significance of words relating to the Christian faith that results, as this passage indicates, in straying from the truth and saying that the resurrection has not taken place” (Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 410). Paul then provides two reasons for not quarreling: (1) this rhetoric is of no value or useless; and (2) this rhetoric can ruin lives (The word for “ruin” is also used in the Greek translation of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Gen 19:29.).

Command #2: “Make every effort to present yourself before God as a proven worker” (v. 15). This action is accomplished through presenting or offering oneself as a sacrifice (cf. Rom 12:1; Col 1:22). The call to avoid shameful and inaccurate speech serves as a stark contrast with the false teachers. Their rhetoric was inadequate, deceptive, and destructive (vv. 17-18; *contra* Paul’s rhetoric in 2 Cor 2:17; 4:2).

Command #3: “Avoid profane chatter” (vv. 16-18). This type of speech is “secular” and “opposes” God (cf. 1 Tim 6:20-21). “The point is that the heretical nonsense threatens to bring the teaching of the church down to the level of base human teaching” (Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 523).

Paul provides the following reasons why they should avoid such talk: (1) it leads to ungodliness (cf. Jude 15-19); and (2) it spreads to the point of destroying the entire body.

The truth of this exhortation is then illustrated through Hymenaeus and Philetus.

Summary (v. 19) - Despite the inroads of these false teachers, Paul reminds Timothy of the surety of God's work—God knows His own, and His own abstain from evil (i.e., abstain from immorality and avoid anything the contradicts the truth).

C. Addressing Followers of Christ (2:20-26)

Introduction to this section (vv. 20-21) - The image of a "household" was used in 1 Timothy 3:15. The analogy demonstrates the variety of individuals in the Church (e.g., godly leaders, false teachers). "Usefulness" in accomplishing "good works" is expected of those within the house of God (e.g., 2 Tim 3:17; also, cf. Rom 9:21-23).

Command #1: "keep away from youthful passions" (v. 22a). Sexual lust does not seem to be the focus in this passage (noted by the contrast of these passions with the positive traits mentioned later in the verse). Based upon the context of verses 20-21 (i.e., the whole community's actions), these "youthful passions" pertain to temperament and judgment (e.g., impetuous or rash acts without thought to consequences, tendency to turn from tradition to the novel) (cf. Towner, 543-44).

Command #2: "pursue righteousness, faithfulness, love, and peace" (v. 22b). These four virtues were cited previously in 1 Timothy 6:11. Note that the "peaceful relationship" is between those who call upon the Lord with a pure heart; this "peaceful relationship is *not* associated with the false teachers!

Command #3: "reject controversies" (vv. 23-26). Paul exhorts Timothy to avoid frivolous and literally, stupid arguments (cf. 1 Tim 1:7 - "They understand neither what they are saying nor the matters about which they make confident assertions.").

Summary

vv. 24-25a - Contrary to the false teachers, a servant of the Lord is marked by the following: (1) not quarrelsome, (2) gentle and kind, (3) able to handle and convey truth, and (4) able to endure evil without resentment.

vv. 25b-26 - Not only are such traits required of God's servants, these characteristics can also be used to bring individuals to repentance, to an understanding of the truth and what is sensible, and help them to escape Satan's dominion over them. As noted by one commentator, "Timothy enters this struggle as an agent of Christ ('the Lord's servant') to face the agent of the devil (false teachers under his thrall, in his service) . . . 'knowledge of the truth' brings the sobriety necessary to escape enlistment in the devil's service" (Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 551).

II. Intersect

- A. As leaders in our homes, communities, and ministries, we need to be good “Bereans,” that is, students of the Word. We need to know our theology. After all, we fight a spiritual battle with Satan, who utilizes these false teachings to undermine the faith of those we serve.

Philippians 1:9-11 -

- B. Repentance, and coming back to one’s senses is possible, even for Hymenaeus and Philetus! As leaders, our demeanors and our rhetoric play key roles in this process of restoration.

1 Timothy 4:11-16 -

- C. As believers, we are called to be vessels for honorable use. What behavior in your life needs specific attention? Select one of the areas below and commit the corresponding verse to memory this week.

Righteousness: 1 Peter 2:24 -

Faithfulness: Psalm 119:30 -

Love: Hebrews 6:10 -

Peace: Hebrews 12:14 -

“There is little we touch, but we leave the print of our fingers behind.”

~ Richard Baxter