

The Books of 1 and 2 Timothy, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 10: An Approved Worker

2 Timothy 2:14-26

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This passage is about handling God's truth rightly, and the doctrinal heart of the lesson is found at its edges and its center: rightly handling the word of truth (v. 15), the deadly error of those who denied the future resurrection (v. 18), the seal that those who name Christ must depart from iniquity (v. 19), and the gentle correction that aims at repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth (v. 25). The lesson aims to give your class both a high reverence for accurate, careful teaching of Scripture and a sober awareness that false teaching genuinely destroys. The example of Hymenaeus and Philetus, who claimed the resurrection had already happened, lets you teach plainly that the believer's bodily resurrection is still future (1 Corinthians 15:12-19), and that this is not a minor point but one that, denied, guts the gospel and upsets people's faith.

A second doctrinal aim concerns assurance and holiness. The two-sided seal of verse 19 holds together God's sovereign knowledge of His own ("The Lord knows those who are his") and the human responsibility to live holy lives ("Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity"). Use this to teach against any presumptive security that claims salvation while excusing sin. Genuine faith shows itself in departing from iniquity; the one who truly belongs to the Lord is the one who turns from sin. Tie this to the vessel imagery: we must cleanse ourselves to be useful (v. 21), which means holiness is not optional for those who would be used by the Master.

A third aim is the heart and method of dealing with error. Paul does not want quarrelsome, combative defenders of truth, but servants who are kind, able to teach, patient, and gentle, correcting opponents in the hope that God may grant them repentance (vv. 24-25). This carries an important doctrinal note: the call to repentance is real and goes out genuinely to opponents, that they may come to a knowledge of the truth. People can truly respond; the gospel call is sincere and universal. Aim, then, to form workers who handle truth carefully, live holy lives, and correct others gently, longing not to win arguments but to win people.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul charges Timothy, "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" (v. 15). What does it mean to rightly handle the word of truth, and why does Paul treat careful, accurate teaching of Scripture as such serious work?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with the central command of the passage: “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” (v. 15). The word “approved” pictures something tested and found genuine, like metal proven in the fire. Timothy is to live and teach in such a way that, when his work is examined by God, it stands. The audience that matters is not the crowd but the Lord.

Unpack “rightly handling the word of truth.” The phrase literally means to cut straight, like a workman cutting a path straight, or a builder laying a line true. The point is accuracy and care, handling Scripture so as to deal it out rightly, neither twisting it, padding it, nor wandering from it. The opposite, just ahead in the text, is the babbler who veers off into speculation and does damage. To cut straight is to keep close to what God actually said and to apply it faithfully.

Stress why this is serious work. We are handling “the word of truth,” the very Scriptures God breathed out (2 Timothy 3:16). To handle them carelessly is not a small thing; people’s faith and even their salvation can hang on whether the truth is taught rightly. James warns that teachers will be judged more strictly (James 3:1). The approved worker therefore studies, checks the context, compares Scripture with Scripture, and refuses to make the Bible say what it does not.

Apply it to every Christian, not only preachers. We all handle God’s word in conversations, in classes, in raising children, in answering questions. Encourage your class to be workers who can be trusted with the truth, who take the time to get it right because they revere the One whose word it is. Better to say less and say it accurately than to say much and lead people astray.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The teacher as an approved workman, tested and found genuine before God (v. 15)
- “Rightly handling” the word as cutting it straight, with accuracy and care
- The seriousness of teaching Scripture, with stricter judgment for teachers (James 3:1)
- Scripture as the God-breathed word of truth to be handled reverently (2 Timothy 3:16)
- The duty of every Christian, not only preachers, to handle God’s word faithfully

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean to “cut straight” the word of truth, and what does it look like to cut it crooked?
- Why is careful, accurate teaching of Scripture such serious work?
- How can ordinary Christians handle God’s word more faithfully in everyday conversation?

Question 2

Student Question:

Paul warns Timothy to avoid “irreverent babble” that “will lead people into more and more ungodliness” (v. 16). What kinds of talk or controversy tend to pull you away from godliness rather than toward it, and how can you guard your own conversations?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul warns Timothy to “avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness” (v. 16). The phrase describes empty, profane chatter, talk that sounds religious or clever but is hollow and godless at its core. Paul is not against deep discussion; he is against the kind of talk that goes nowhere good and drags people down with it.

Notice the direction Paul names: “more and more ungodliness.” Bad talk is not static; it has momentum. One speculative argument leads to another, and the drift is always downward, away from godliness. This is why Paul says to avoid it rather than to dabble in it and feel superior. Some conversations are not worth entering, because the very entering pulls us off course.

Help students examine their own conversational diet. What talk leaves them more cynical, more prideful, more anxious, or more contentious, rather than more like Christ? It may be endless online arguments, gossip dressed up as concern, conspiracy speculation, or hair-splitting debates that produce heat and no holiness. The test is the fruit: does this talk make me more godly or less?

Offer a constructive path. Avoiding harmful talk is not the same as falling silent; it is redirecting our conversation toward what builds up (Ephesians 4:29). Encourage students to notice the topics and settings that pull them down and to set gentle boundaries, choosing instead conversations that feed faith, love, and peace.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- “Irreverent babble” as empty talk that erodes godliness (v. 16)
- The downward momentum of harmful speech toward ungodliness
- Discernment about which conversations to enter and which to avoid
- Speech meant to build others up rather than tear down (Ephesians 4:29)

Discussion Prompts

- What kinds of talk tend to pull you away from godliness rather than toward it?
- How can you tell the difference between healthy discussion and empty babble?
- What is one conversational habit you could change to guard your own walk?

Question 3

Student Question:

Hymenaeus and Philetus “swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened,” and were “upsetting the faith of some” (vv. 17-18). Why was this teaching so destructive, and what does it show us about the danger of denying the future bodily resurrection?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul names the rot specifically: “Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some” (vv. 17-18). The word “swerved” pictures missing the mark, veering off the road of truth. Their particular error was teaching that the resurrection was already past, probably by spiritualizing it into something purely inward that had already occurred at conversion.

Explain why this was so destructive. If the resurrection is only spiritual and already complete, then there is no future bodily resurrection to hope for, no day when Christ raises the dead and makes all things new. That hollows out the Christian hope. Paul elsewhere shows how much hangs on this: “if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised,” and “if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins” (1 Corinthians 15:13-17). Deny the future resurrection and the whole structure of the gospel sags.

Connect this to the previous lesson. In 2:8 Paul told Timothy to “remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead,” and he spoke of reigning with Christ as a future glory. Now we see why that emphasis mattered. The believer’s bodily resurrection is still future, the firstfruits being Christ’s own resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:20-23). Hymenaeus and Philetus had pulled that future hope into the past and so robbed people of it.

Draw the lesson about false teaching. Notice the effect: they “are upsetting the faith of some.” Doctrine is not abstract; wrong teaching wounds real people and topples real faith. This is why Paul takes it so seriously and why the church must hold the line on truths like the future resurrection. What we believe about the last things shapes how we live now, in hope rather than despair.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The believer’s bodily resurrection as a real, future event, not merely past or spiritual (v. 18)
- The resurrection of Christ as the firstfruits guaranteeing ours (1 Corinthians 15:20-23)
- The gospel undone if the resurrection is denied (1 Corinthians 15:13-17)
- False teaching as something that genuinely topples people’s faith (v. 18)
- The link to 2:8, remembering Christ risen as the ground of future hope

Discussion Prompts

- Why was teaching that “the resurrection has already happened” so damaging?
- How does denying the future bodily resurrection undercut the whole gospel?
- Why does what we believe about the last things matter for how we live now?

Question 4

Student Question:

Paul says false talk “will spread like gangrene” (v. 17), a rot that creeps through healthy tissue. Where have you seen wrong or careless ideas quietly spread and do harm, and what does this image stir up in you about the words you pass along?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question lingers on Paul’s vivid and alarming image: false talk “will spread like gangrene” (v. 17). Gangrene is the death of tissue that, untreated, creeps outward and consumes the healthy flesh around it. Paul could hardly have chosen a more sobering picture for the effect of error in the body of Christ.

Help students feel the realism of the image. Wrong ideas rarely announce themselves as deadly. They start small, sound reasonable, gain a hearing, and spread person to person, conversation to conversation, until they have done real harm. Like gangrene, the damage is often unnoticed until it is advanced. This is why Paul urges early, decisive attention rather than a casual shrug.

Turn the question toward their own speech. The image is not only about formal false teaching; it is a warning about the words we pass along. A rumor repeated, a cynical take shared, a half-truth forwarded, all can spread and infect. Invite honest reflection: have they been a carrier of ideas that quietly harmed others’ faith or peace, even without meaning to?

Offer hope and responsibility together. If error spreads like gangrene, then truth, spoken in love, can heal. We are not helpless. By refusing to pass along what is false or corrosive, and by gently speaking what is true and good, each of us can be part of the body’s health rather than its sickness. Encourage one resolve about the words they will and will not pass along this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The spreading, destructive nature of false and corrosive speech (v. 17)
- The early, decisive attention error requires, like a disease
- Personal responsibility for the ideas and words we pass along
- The healing power of truth spoken in love within the body

Discussion Prompts

- Where have you seen wrong or careless ideas quietly spread and do harm?
- Have you ever unknowingly passed along something that hurt someone’s faith or peace?
- What words will you refuse to pass along, and what will you choose to speak instead?

Question 5

Student Question:

Paul declares, “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’” (v. 19). What do the two sides of this seal teach us about God’s assurance and our responsibility, and how do they belong together?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

After the unsettling talk of gangrene, Paul plants a rock: “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’” (v. 19). However much error spreads, God’s foundation, His true church and saving purpose, stands firm. That is the steadying assurance every anxious believer needs.

Examine the first side of the seal: “The Lord knows those who are his.” Like a signet pressed into a cornerstone marking ownership, this declares that God knows His own people with perfect certainty. We may be fooled by impostors and unsettled by false teachers, but God is not. Nothing can pluck His own from His hand of knowing. This is real comfort, especially when the church seems threatened by error.

Now the second side, which Paul will not let us skip: “Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.” The same seal that assures also obligates. To claim the name of the Lord is to be bound to turn from sin. This is the answer to all presumptuous security. We do not get to say, “The Lord knows I am His,” while clinging to iniquity. Genuine belonging shows itself in holy living; the proof we are His is that we depart from sin.

Hold the two together, because that is Paul’s point. God’s assurance and our responsibility are not rivals; they are two faces of the same seal. The Lord truly knows His own, and His own are known by their turning from evil. This guards us from both anxiety (God knows His own, the foundation stands) and presumption (so live like you are His). Help your class rest in the first and obey the second.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God’s church and saving purpose as a firm foundation that error cannot topple (v. 19)
- God’s certain knowledge of His own people, a source of real assurance
- The obligation, stamped on the same seal, to depart from iniquity
- Genuine belonging to the Lord shown by turning from sin, against presumptuous security
- Assurance and responsibility held together, not played against each other

Discussion Prompts

- What comfort is there in “the Lord knows those who are his”?
- Why does Paul refuse to let us claim that comfort while clinging to sin?
- How do God’s assurance and our responsibility belong together rather than compete?

Question 6

Student Question:

Paul calls Timothy to “flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace” (v. 22). Which passion most needs fleeing in your life right now, and which of these pursuits most needs your deliberate attention?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul moves from doctrine to the heart with a personal command: “Flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart” (v. 22). Notice the two verbs, flee and pursue. The Christian life has both a running from and a running toward. We are not only to resist sin but to chase after holiness.

Take “flee youthful passions” honestly. These are not only sexual temptations, though they include them, but the whole cluster of impulses that tend to grip the young and not only the young: lust, pride, impatience, the love of argument, the craving for approval, hot-tempered reactions. Paul says flee, not negotiate. Some temptations are not to be reasoned with but run from, like Joseph fleeing Potiphar’s wife (Genesis 39:12).

Then notice what fills the space left behind: “righteousness, faith, love, and peace.” Fleeing sin without pursuing godliness leaves an empty house that temptation will soon refill. The cure for sinful passion is not merely saying no but saying a bigger yes, devoting our energy to chasing the things of Christ. And we do it “along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart,” not alone but in the company of fellow believers.

Press for personal honesty. Ask each student to name the one passion most in need of fleeing and the one pursuit most in need of attention. Then help them see the link between the two: the surest way to flee a sin is to be wholeheartedly pursuing something better in the fellowship of God’s people.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Christian life as both fleeing sin and pursuing holiness (v. 22)
- Some temptations to be fled, not negotiated with (Genesis 39:12)
- Righteousness, faith, love, and peace as the godly pursuits that fill the space sin leaves
- The community of believers as the context for pursuing holiness

Discussion Prompts

- Which youthful passion most needs fleeing in your life right now?
- Which pursuit (righteousness, faith, love, peace) most needs your deliberate attention?
- How does pursuing something better help you flee a sin you keep struggling with?

Question 7

Student Question:

Paul pictures a great house with vessels for honorable and dishonorable use, and says that whoever “cleanses himself” will be “a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master” (vv. 20-21). What does this teach about holiness and usefulness, and what part do we play in becoming the kind of vessel God can use?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul illustrates with a household: “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” (v. 20). Every large house has its fine serving dishes and its common pots for waste and dirty work. Paul then makes the application: “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” (v. 21).

Draw out the key move: “if anyone cleanses himself.” There is something we are called to do. The vessel does not simply wait to be used; it is to be cleansed. This is the language of personal holiness and repentance, turning away from what is dishonorable so as to be fit for the Master’s hand. Usefulness to God is tied to cleanness before God.

Note the rich result of cleansing: the vessel becomes useful, holy, and “ready for every good work.” Holiness here is not joyless rule-keeping; it is preparation for usefulness. God uses clean vessels. A life cluttered with unconfessed sin and worldly entanglement is like a serving dish caked with grime, still a vessel, but not one the Master reaches for. Cleansing makes us available for His best work.

Apply it personally and hopefully. The wonderful thing about this picture is that the kind of vessel we become is not fixed; it depends in part on us. Whatever someone has been, by cleansing himself through repentance and turning from sin, he can become a vessel for honorable use. Ask your class what dishonorable thing God may be asking them to clear out, and assure them that the Master delights to use a cleansed vessel.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The call to cleanse oneself from what is dishonorable (v. 21)
- Holiness as preparation for usefulness in the Master’s house
- Our real participation in becoming fit vessels through repentance
- Hope that anyone, by cleansing, can become useful to God
- Holiness as readiness for “every good work,” not mere rule-keeping

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that we must “cleanse” ourselves to become useful to God?
- Why does God’s use of us seem tied to our cleanness before Him?

- What is one dishonorable thing God may be asking you to clear out?

Question 8

Student Question:

Paul says the Lord's servant must correct opponents "with gentleness," not quarreling, but "kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil" (vv. 24-25). When you encounter someone who is wrong about something important, what is your instinct, and how might gentleness make you more effective, not less?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul describes how the Lord's servant must handle those who oppose the truth: "The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness" (vv. 24-25). This question presses the student to examine his own instincts when he meets someone who is wrong about something important.

Be honest about the natural instinct. When someone is wrong, especially about something we care about, the flesh wants to win: to argue, to score points, to put them in their place. Paul calls this "quarrelsome" and rules it out for the Lord's servant. Not because truth does not matter, it matters intensely, but because quarreling rarely changes anyone and usually hardens them.

Walk through Paul's alternative. The servant is to be kind, able to teach, patient, and gentle in correcting. Notice this is not weakness or compromise; the servant still corrects, still teaches, still confronts error. But the manner is gentle. Gentleness disarms; it keeps the focus on the truth rather than on a clash of egos, and it leaves the door open for the other person to reconsider without having to lose face.

Explain why gentleness is more effective, not less. A person backed into a corner defends himself; a person treated with kindness may actually listen. Paul's aim, as the next verse shows, is repentance, not victory. We are not trying to win the argument; we are trying to win the person. Help your class see that gentleness is not the opposite of conviction but the wise servant of it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Lord's servant marked by kindness, patience, and gentleness, not quarreling (vv. 24-25)
- Gentle correction as a means of truth, not a compromise of it
- The goal of correction as winning the person, not the argument
- Patient endurance of evil as part of faithful service

Discussion Prompts

- When someone is wrong about something important, what is your instinct?

- How can gentleness make you more effective in correcting error, not less?
- What is the difference between conviction and quarrelsomeness?

Question 9

Student Question:

Paul ties together rightly handling the word (v. 15), the danger of those who deny the future resurrection (v. 18), the seal that those who name Christ must depart from iniquity (v. 19), and correcting opponents so that "God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth" (v. 25). What do these teach us about guarding the truth, the necessity of holy living, and the real, universal call to repentance?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal high point of the lesson, gathering several threads Paul has woven through the passage. Lay them side by side: rightly handling the word of truth (v. 15), the deadly error of those who denied the future resurrection (v. 18), the seal that those who name Christ must depart from iniquity (v. 19), and gentle correction so that "God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth" (v. 25). Together they teach us how to guard the truth, why holy living is necessary, and how real the call to repentance is.

Start with guarding the truth. The approved worker cuts the word of truth straight (v. 15), and the example of Hymenaeus and Philetus shows what is at stake when someone cuts it crooked. By spiritualizing the resurrection into something already past, they denied the future bodily resurrection and "upset the faith of some" (v. 18). Rightly handling Scripture is not pedantry; it protects people from soul-destroying error. This is why we labor to interpret the Bible carefully, in context, comparing Scripture with Scripture, refusing to make it say what it does not. The complete, God-breathed New Testament is our standard (2 Timothy 3:16-17), and faithfulness means teaching it accurately.

Next, holy living as the mark of genuine faith. The seal of verse 19 has two sides: "The Lord knows those who are his," and "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity." This rules out any presumptive security that claims salvation while excusing sin. The one who truly belongs to the Lord is the one who turns from iniquity; genuine faith shows itself in a holy life. Paul reinforces this with the vessel imagery: we must cleanse ourselves to be useful and holy (v. 21). So we resist any teaching that promises heaven while ignoring how a person lives. Faith that does not depart from sin is not the faith that saves.

Now the heart of the matter, the call to repentance. Paul tells Timothy to correct opponents gently, "God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will" (vv. 25-26). Notice how genuine and hopeful this is. Even those ensnared in error and opposition can repent and come to a knowledge of the truth. The call goes out to them

sincerely; they are not written off as beyond reach. God may grant repentance, and they may come to their senses, real people genuinely turning. This is the gospel call at work: real, hopeful, extended even to opponents, never a closed door. We do not treat anyone as hopelessly fixed in error; we correct them gently, precisely because they may yet repent and be saved.

Marvel at how it all fits together. We handle the word carefully because truth saves and error destroys. We insist on holy living because the Lord's own are known by their turning from sin. And we correct even our opponents with gentleness because the goal is never to win an argument but to see a person repent and come to the knowledge of the truth, escaping the snare of the devil. Guard the truth, live it, and lovingly call others to it. That is the work of the approved servant.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Rightly handling Scripture as protection against soul-destroying error (vv. 15, 18)
- The future bodily resurrection upheld against those who said it was already past (v. 18; 1 Corinthians 15)
- The complete, God-breathed New Testament as our standard for sound teaching (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
- Genuine faith shown by departing from iniquity, against presumptive security (v. 19)
- Holiness and cleansing as necessary to be useful to the Master (v. 21)
- The real, sincere, and universal call to repentance, even for opponents (vv. 25-26)
- Correction aimed at repentance and a knowledge of the truth, not at winning arguments

Discussion Prompts

- How does rightly handling Scripture protect people from destructive error?
- Why does the seal of verse 19 rule out claiming salvation while excusing sin?
- What does it mean that God "may grant repentance" even to opponents, and how should that shape how we treat them?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across this whole passage, from the approved worker to the clean vessel to the gentle servant who leads others to repentance. Name one specific way Jesus is using this passage to form you, and one concrete step you will take because of it.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone draws the whole passage together. Paul has moved from the approved worker who cuts the word straight (v. 15), to the warning against babble and gangrene-like error (vv. 16-18), to the firm foundation with its two-sided seal (v. 19), to the clean vessel ready for every good work (vv. 20-21), to fleeing passions and pursuing holiness (v. 22), to the gentle servant

who corrects opponents in hope of their repentance (vv. 24-26). The single thread is a servant who handles truth rightly, lives it cleanly, and shares it gently.

Invite students to look back and name what God has stirred. Perhaps it is a resolve to handle Scripture more carefully, a sin to cleanse out so they can be useful, a quarrelsome habit to lay down, or a person they will now correct with gentleness rather than argument, or simply pray toward repentance. The aim is one specific takeaway, not a vague intention.

Press toward one concrete step. Becoming an approved worker and a clean vessel happens in particulars: a passage to study more carefully before teaching it, a dishonorable thing to clear out this week, a relationship where they will trade quarreling for gentleness, a person they will gently and patiently point toward the truth. Help each student turn this rich passage into a single act of obedience, trusting the Master to make them a vessel He delights to use.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The approved servant who handles truth rightly, lives it cleanly, and shares it gently
- Holiness as the path to usefulness in the Master's house
- Gentle, patient correction aimed at others' repentance and salvation
- Spiritual formation worked out in concrete, daily steps of obedience

Discussion Prompts

- What is the single most important thing God has shown you in this passage?
- What is one concrete step you will take this week because of it?
- Who is one person you could gently and patiently point toward the truth?