

The Books of 1 and 2 Timothy

Lesson 10: An Approved Worker -- 2 Timothy 2:14-26

Imagine two craftsmen building the same wall. One measures twice, sets each brick true, and steps back at the end with quiet satisfaction, nothing to be ashamed of. The other rushes, eyeballs his lines, fills the gaps with talk, and leaves behind something that looks fine until the first storm reveals how crooked it really is. Paul has a picture like that in mind when he tells 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). The Christian, and especially the teacher, is a workman. And the material we work with is the most precious in the world: the word of truth itself.

Over against the approved worker, Paul sets a kind of talk that does real damage. He calls it “irreverent babble,” and warns that it “will lead people into more and more ungodliness” and that “their talk will spread like gangrene” (vv. 16-17). That is a startling image, gangrene, a rot that creeps quietly through healthy tissue until it kills. False teaching is not a harmless difference of opinion. It infects. Paul even names names: Hymenaeus and Philetus, who had “swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened,” and were “upsetting the faith of some” (vv. 17-18). Bad doctrine has a body count.

And yet, just when the danger feels overwhelming, Paul plants a rock under our feet: “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). Here is the steadying truth. God’s church is not at the mercy of every clever error. Its foundation stands firm. But notice the two-sided seal stamped on it. One side is God’s assurance, the Lord knows His own. The other side is our responsibility, everyone who names His name must turn from sin. Genuine belonging shows itself in holy living.

Then Paul turns intensely practical. In a great house there are vessels for honorable use and vessels for dishonorable use, and the call is to cleanse oneself, to become “a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work” (v. 21). Flee youthful passions. Pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace. And when you must correct those who oppose the truth, do it not with quarreling but with gentleness, hoping “God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth” (v. 25). As we study, ask the Lord to make you an approved worker, a clean vessel, and a gentle, truthful servant in His house.

Group Discussion: Paul warns that false teaching “will spread like gangrene” and names two men who upset people’s faith by saying “the resurrection has already happened” (vv. 17-18). Why do you think wrong teaching can be so quietly destructive, and how can a church take truth seriously without becoming suspicious and combative?

Personal Reflection: Paul calls each of us to be “a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work” (v. 21), which begins with cleansing ourselves from what is dishonorable. What is one thing in your life God may be asking you to clear out so He can use you more fully?

Read 2 Timothy 2:14-26

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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?

10. 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.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: 2 Timothy 3:16-17, all Scripture profitable and equipping us for every good work; 1 Corinthians 15:12-19, why denying the resurrection guts the gospel; Titus 3:9-11, avoiding foolish controversies and warning the divisive; 2 Peter 3:9, the Lord patient, not wishing any to perish; James 5:19-20, turning a wanderer back from error.