

## An Approved Servant of Jesus

### 2 Timothy 2:14-18

In preparation for a more detailed examination of 2 Timothy 2:14-18, one should start with the immediate context because what is the first phrase of 2:14? “Remind them of these things.” The question naturally arises, “Remind them of what things, Paul?” I think the answer would go back to 2:1.

“You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. [We are going to see that when we get to verses 14-18, he is very concerned about us rightly dividing the word of truth, and so in 2:1-2, he challenges us to stand strong in God’s grace. He then says, “The things that you have heard,” that is, the clear teaching of the Apostle Paul. So Paul gives it to Timothy, Timothy gives it to others, and Paul wants to see the others give it to additional others. There is a four generational argument that Paul is arguing for and making in 2:1-2. Clearly the focus falls upon our being good, faithful, diligent teachers. Then verse three...] You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of *this* life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier. [And so verses 1-2 call us to have the perspective of a teacher, verses 3-4 call us to have the perspective of a soldier, and in particular, a soldier who has one interest in mind and that is this: how might I please my commander in chief who’s name is Jesus? So we are to be a teacher. We are to be a soldier, but thirdly we are to be a competitor or athlete. Verse five...] And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes

according to the rules. [In other words, it is possible for us to be disqualified and so, just as an athlete must train well, and just as an athlete must compete according to the rules, so we in ministry, those of us who wish to follow faithfully the Lord Jesus, must be well trained. How? In the Word of God, and we must also compete, if you like, according to rules. That is, according to standards of holiness and godliness so that we do not become disqualified. So, a teacher, a soldier, an athlete, but then a farmer. Verse six] The hardworking farmer must be first to partake of the crops. [Farming is not a job that draws much attention to itself. You show up day after day after day after day, and eventually the harvest comes, and when the harvest comes you should be in the front of the line in rejoicing and sharing in the good things that happens from that harvest. Again, I am reminded so well of what it means to show up day after day after day after day and not see anything happen immediately. The two great founding missionaries in the Baptist world, William Carey and Adoniram Judson, served seven years each in their particular fields of service before they saw even one, single convert. They kept showing up for duty. They kept plowing the field. They kept sowing the seed, and God brought a harvest. And so he says in verse seven...]

Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things. [So verse 1-7 clearly hangs together. Then he shifts in verses 8-10, and uses a word that is similar to what we read in verse 14, "Remember." So if you are to remind them in verse 14, already he is telling them to...]

Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead [That statement is going to be challenged by Hymaneaus and Philetus in verses 17-18. So the context is crucial here.] "Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David [that is, he is the Messiah] was raised from the dead according to my gospel [that is the gospel that I preach and teach], for which I suffer trouble as an evildoer, *even* to the point of chains; but [praise God!] the word of God is not chained. Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect that they also may obtain the

salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. *This is* a faithful saying: for if we died with *Him*, we shall also live with *Him*. [Although let me add parenthetically, we can't live with him if he's not living, so the idea of the resurrection that began in verse 8 continues on into what many Bible teachers believe was an early Christian hymn] if we endure [picking up on the idea in verse 10], we shall also reign with *Him*. [but] If we deny *Him*, [like Hymaneus and Philetus] He also will deny us. If we are faithless, [Well, we may be faithless. We may fall by the wayside, but he will not.] He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself. [Then] Remind *them* of these things [What things Paul? Be a teacher. Be a soldier. Be an athlete. Be a farmer in your mindset as you serve the Lord Jesus Christ. Don't you dare back up even one step from the reality and centrality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of David. And remember, though you may suffer hardship and difficulty like me even being chained, if we died with, we will live him. If we endure with him, we will also reign with him. He cannot deny himself. He will remain faithful, so remind them of these things...], charging *them* before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers. Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane *and* idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness. And their message will spread like cancer [or like gangrene]. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some. Nevertheless [context!] the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity."

This text is driven by three imperatives. The first one is in verse 14, "Remind them..." It is a present imperative, word of command, continuous action. You continually remind them of these things. The second imperative is found in verse 15, "Be diligent..." Stay after it; be

diligent. The third imperative is found in verse 16, “But shun.” So two of the imperatives are positive, “Remind them,” “Be diligent,” But that is coupled with, or at least set in contrast to a negative imperative in verse 16, “But shun.” And so what we are going to see in this text is that Paul gives us some guidelines in terms of warning us about heresy and false teaching, and then he exposes the errors of false teaching that we might discern them and do so clearly. And so, an approved servant of Jesus will do three things. Number one...

**I. He will be careful with his words. 2:14**

Verse 14, “Remind them of these things charging them before the Lord not to strive [or to battle] about words to no profit to the ruin of the hearers.”

1) We have a charge from our Savior.

Interestingly, when Paul moved to conclude this letter in 4:1, he will say “I charge you, therefore, before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom, preach the word.” It’s very clear that throughout these four chapters that Paul is vitally concerned about the importance and the centrality in your life and my life of the word of God. And so he says, “Remind them of these things [of these good words that I have already laid out for you in chapter 1 and chapter 2] and charge them [it’s a solemn oath.] before the Lord [what?] not to strive [it means to battle] about words to no profit to the ruin of the hearers.”

2) We must be cautious in our speech.

There are eight different negatives that Paul notes in verse 14-18 that you and I have to be on guard against. There are words to no profit and words that ruin the hearers in verse 14. He then talks in verse 16 about profane talking and idle babbling that will lead to ungodliness. He talks about words or a message in verse 17 that will spread like cancer or like gangrene. He says

in verse 18 there is a teaching that strays from the truth and there is a teaching that overthrows the faith of some. That's powerful. Four verses, eight very strong words about the danger of teaching and listening and following the wrong thing. So he begins in verse 14, but doesn't really specify a specific doctrine. In fact, it almost seems to be the case that he is talking about people who are fussing and fighting and arguing and griping and disagreeing over things that when every thing is said and done, at this point in his argument, they really don't matter.

So charge them, not to wage a war with words. In fact one commentator said, "These are the word warriors," not the road warriors, the word warriors. They are just the kind of people who are looking for a theological fight. They want to have a doctrinal knock down. They just want to fuss and fight and fued and argue and gripe and complain, and they want to split hairs that really don't need to be split. Think about "last things." There are some things that are non-negotiable. There are some things that are not up for debate. The reality of the historical, bodily return of Jesus, that's not up for debate. The reality of heaven and hell as eternal destinies, that's not up for debate. The fact that we will all stand before God in judgment either at the judgment seat of Christ as believers having our works as believers judged or being at the Great White Throne judgment and being judged there as unbelievers out of the books of works and being cast into the lake of fire, that's not up for debate. Now, whether you're pre-millennial, post-millennial, or amillennial, pre-trib, mid-trib, post-trib, partial rapture, pre-wrath rapture, whether you think you know the antichrist or not, the false prophet or not, whether you think you've got figured out the seal judgments, the trumpet judgment, the bowl judgment... to fight over those things is silly, and to fight over those things will divide a fellowship needlessly and unnecessarily. And so Paul says, "Don't become a word warrior over these kinds of things." Why? It "leads to no profit and even the ruin of the hearers." And so, we have to be very careful

with our words. To say it another way, know what things are worth fighting over and what things are not. Know what hills are worth dying on and what hills are not. Secondly,

**II. He will rightly handle the Word of God. 2:15**

This is one of the most famous verses in all of the Bible. If you want a basis for why we have seminary, and you want a basis for why we have a teaching ministry in the local church, here it is: “Be diligent [it’s an imperative] to [what?] present yourself [wait, isn’t my pastor’s responsibility to present me approved to God? No, it’s your responsibility. It is the pastor’s responsibility, it is my responsibility, and it is every believer’s responsibility to accurately teach the Word of God. You are responsible yourself to be approved before God. All of us, every one of us is called by God to be a diligent student and workmen of the Word.] Present yourself approved to God [how?] a worker who does not need to be ashamed [mark that word. We saw it for the first time back in verse 8. We saw it again in 1:12. We saw it a third time 1:16. Now, for a fourth time Paul brings up this idea in a different context. Do not be ashamed before the Lord as a worker who is not approved. You rightly divide the word of truth. This is interesting how he stands in stark contrast to words that are of no profit and that lead to the ruin of the hearers. Here he talks about words that are words of truth that when embraced and when followed and when obeyed will allow us to present ourselves to God without any shame. Now, I want to remind you of some principles that will help us divide the word accurately.

Again, the context rules when interpreting the text. We don’t want a text out of its context. It then becomes a pretext, and so often the Bible is badly, badly mishandled and abused by people ripping it out of context and making it say something that it does not say or mean at all.

Secondly, the text must be interpreted in light of all Scripture. One of the great principles of the Reformation is Scripture is its best interpreter. The fact is you cannot begin to build any doctrine, whether it is the doctrine of God or the Bible or humanity or Christ or salvation until you look at everything the Bible has to say about that particular doctrine.

Number three: Scripture will never contradict itself. Why? Because ultimately, it is the Word of God, and God is a God of truth. God, therefore, cannot speak error. God cannot contradict himself, and therefore, the Bible does not contradict itself. If you think it does, the problem is not with the Bible; the problem is with you. You're reading it wrongly. You're not understanding it correctly. Granted, it is written in the words of men, but ultimately it is the Word of God, and so we operate from the presupposition that it is completely true and completely trustworthy. We use the word inerrant and infallible.

Number four: Scripture should be interpreted literally, or naturally. In other words, we interpret the Bible according to its plain, normal, natural sense. If a preacher stands up and preaches, and someone after the service says to him, "You know, you saw things in that text I've never seen before," that's not necessarily a compliment, and in fact, it may actually be an indictment that you have again, mishandled the Bible by reading into it a meaning that is not there. To teach you a couple of important words, we believe in what is called exegesis, drawing out of the text the meaning that is there. We do not believe in eisegesis, reading into the text a meaning that is not there. That's one of the great benefits, by the way, brothers and sisters, of teaching straight through the Bible, chapter by chapter and verse by verse, and phrase by phrase and word by word, because then it is much more difficult for you to bring your agenda to the Bible and read into it something that is just not in that text.

Number five: do not develop doctrine from obscure or difficult passages. In other words, the clearer meaning texts always take precedence over the less clear texts in terms of their meaning.

Number six: we seek to discover the author's original intended meaning. In the context of 2 Timothy, the question we are asking is: how would Timothy understand this letter when he received it? That's our first question. Then once we discern that, then we can begin to ask the question: okay, how does this same letter being the eternal, ever abiding word of God, how does it speak to my life? Now keep in mind, the meaning does not change. There's only one meaning of a text, but the applications do change depending on circumstances and time and all sorts of other things. Again, as we teach at the seminary and as we teach here: a text has one meaning but a massive number of applications, but the question we ask first is not how does it apply. No, you've got to establish the meaning before you can ask the question, how does it apply?

Then finally, check your conclusions using reliable resources such as dictionaries, encyclopedias, and commentaries. Personally and almost without exception, I have never in my life taught from a text that I did not use at least six to eight resources. If I have time, I'll use twelve to fifteen resources. One person asked, "How many commentaries do you have on certain books of the Bible?" Well, I have no less than seven or eight on every book, and some books I have between ten and fifteen. Now do I read them all? No, that would take a long time, more than I have. But I always read 6-8. Teaching on 2 Timothy, I have on my desk and on my shelf about twelve commentaries that I get through as many as I can until time runs out. The idea or thought of ever getting up here and teaching you without reading some other good, godly men would never enter my mind. You say, "Why?" Because I don't see everything. I have blind spots. I'm not all that smart. So what I want to do is let good, godly men come alongside of me.



Having their books is like sitting down with Don Carson, F.F. Bruce, I. Howard Marshall, Grant Osbourne, Douglas Moo, Walt Kaiser, and saying, “Hey guys, tell me what you think about this particular text!” And there they are in their books to help me. You see: if you are the only person to understand a text in a particular way, you may be right, but you are probably not. In fact, I’d say the odds that you are right are about one out of a million, because basically what you are saying is all these good, brilliant, godly students of the Bible for two thousand years got it wrong, but here I am, and I’m the first one to ever get it right! Highly, highly, highly unlikely. And so, reading these men gives you a way of checking your own conclusions about the Bible, so that you will rightly divide the Word of truth. So what does it involve? Two things...

1) It involves hard work in the Word.

“Be diligent” It is a phrase that means to strive. It carries the idea of toil and effort. “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God a worker who does not need to be ashamed.” Let’s be honest, it requires hard work in the word to rightly handle the word of God. If you are a Sunday School teacher, a Bible teacher, you can’t put thirty minutes into it and get it done. I don’t even think you can put a couple of hours into it and get it done. You say, “Well, I’m just teaching children.” Well, then you have the most important job of all. I’ve said this before. Adults are stiff necked and uncircumcised of heart, and you can barely get them to listen or do anything, but children are malleable. Children can be influenced. Children listen. They actually believe what you tell them. You tell them God can do something great in their lives, and they ought to give their lives, and they’ll actually consider that. You need to, likewise, rightly handle the word that you might teach those little ones correctly and accurately, as well as in a way that draws them to the wonderful truths of God’s Word. It does involve hard work in the word, and secondly...

2) It leads to accurate interpretation of the Word.

“That you might rightly divide the word of truth.” So, we must be careful with our words.

No need to fight about things that really don't matter. Secondly, rightly handle the word. You need to be sure about the things really do matter, and then number three...

### **III. He will oppose the destroyers of the faith. 2:16-18**

1) We will avoid them. 2:16

Paul says there in verse 16, “Shun.” It has the idea of putting away. Shun. Avoid. *The Message* by Eugene Peterson says, “Just stay clear [of what?] those who are profane and [those that he describes as] idle babblers.” The marginal reading in the *NKJV* says “empty chatterers.” Bryan Chappell said it this way, “Empty chatterers come from godless chatter boxes.” I like that. “Empty chatterers come from godless chatter boxes.” You say, “How do you know they are godless?” Because of what the last phrase in verse 16 says, “They will increase to [what?] more ungodliness.” He knew exactly what he was saying. So there are certain kinds of people that the Bible says we need to shun, the Bible says that we need to avoid, the Bible says you just need to stay clear of certain kinds of teachers. They are profane. They question the sacred. They are empty chatterers, and what they do simply increases or leads to more ungodliness. You say, “Paul, can you give me an example?” And he says, “I'm glad you asked.”

2) We will expose them. 2:17-18

Verse 17, “Their message will spread like...” And it's debated. We can't be clear. Some translations say the best way to go is “cancer.” Others say the best way to go is “gangrene,” and the ancient word can go either way. It clearly is talking about something that spreads rapidly throughout a body and kills it. So their message, that is these profane, idle babblers, these profane, godless chatter boxes, their message will spread like cancer or gangrene. Hymanaeus,

who was already mentioned in chapter one, and Philetus are of this sort, and so he then describes them in terms of what they have done. They went astray concerning the truth. How? Well, they said the resurrection is already past, and by this they have overthrown the faith of some. In my notes, I have pointed out that in the ancient world it is probably the Platonists that were denying the resurrection, but in our world it is the liberals who deny the resurrection. You say, “What do you mean by the Platonists?” Well, in the ancient world you know the great teachers were Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle in that order. Plato, in particular, had a certain way of looking at life, and to use an analogy that will help you get where he was coming from, Plato said the body is the prison house of the soul. In other words, Plato had a very negative view about the body as did most all of Greek philosophy. So the body is, at best, inferior. At worst, it is bad. So for them, salvation or deliverance would be separation from and deliverance from your body. Well, evidently these two men by the name of Hymenaeus and Philetus bought into that, and so what they did was, they denied the physical resurrection, and they created a theology or a doctrine of a spiritual resurrection.

What did they think happened to the body of Jesus?” And the answer is they would say the body of Jesus is rotting somewhere in a Judean tomb. He was not bodily raised from the dead. You say, “Maybe their spiritual resurrection theology is okay.” Take your Bible very quickly and turn to 1 Corinthians 15, the great resurrection chapter of the Bible. 1 Cor 15:12-20, Paul has just made a very strong apologetic for the bodily resurrection of Jesus grounded in the prophetic promises of the Old Testament, but then he says there is a problem. 1 Cor 15:12 “Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?” [In other words, how is it that some of you are saying that the doctrine of bodily resurrection is not true? And so Paul says, “I’m going to take up your

argument, but let me show you the logic of where your argument will go if you deny the doctrine of bodily resurrection.” Verse 13...] But if there is no resurrection of the dead [number one], then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then [number two] our preaching *is* empty and [number three] your faith *is* also empty. Yes, and [number four] we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise. For if *the* dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith [number five] *is* futile; [number six] you are still in your sins! Then [number seven] also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. [number eight] If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. But now Christ is risen from the dead, *and* has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” Paul says, the bodily resurrection is not up for debate, the bodily resurrection is not negotiable, and the kind of teaching that spreads like gangrene and will destroy a fellowship is that kind of teaching.

I hold in my hand tonight what is called *The Interpreter’s Bible Commentary*. This is a very famous commentary series. It was done all by Ph.D.s, almost all of whom have an anti-supernatural approach to the Bible.

Several years ago I was working through Acts 1, the ascension passage where Jesus goes back to heaven and the angels say, “You men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up into heaven. This Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.” Now listen to what *The Interpreter’s Bible Commentary* says about the ascension of Jesus and the promise that he will come again. Quote: “At the very moment we want Jesus to be most vivid, something obscures him. Indeed, this verse would suggest a good sermon would be the absence of Jesus. You see, all things come and go in life, and the heavens also fascinate people and as the early Christians looked toward heaven they believed Jesus was

there. Though their sight may have been inaccurate [according to our standards because we are so much more enlightened and sophisticated and noble than those of the first century] their insight was indubitably sound. They knew where Jesus was, why, [This is so tragic and hilarious at the same time.] because they knew all good things go up. They never go down. Jesus was good, radically and wonderfully good, and when he no longer went about his accustomed ways, they knew that he had gone up, that he had ascended because he was supremely good, and these men were right in knowing that Jesus would come back. “This Jesus who has been taken from you into heaven will come back.” They knew he would come back because he told them he would. They believed what he said because truth always comes back. In fact, truth never goes away. It is men who forsake the truth, and so from the cross through the campaigns of modern barbarism, men have tried to subtract Christ from human existence, yet in some unexpected and some undreamt way, Christ always comes back. [Now, listen carefully.] One mistake, however, these early Christian men made. They thought he would come back the same way he went... so they watched the skies for his return. They forgot, or perhaps, they never knew that things seldom come back the way they go. History never repeats itself twice. You see the people we love always come back to us, but seldom do they come back in exactly the same way that they left us. In the glance of a young daughter’s eyes, a wife lost early may come back to her husband across a page of poetry, years later a friend comes back to his comrades. Those, therefore, who have watched the sky for Jesus have been disappointed and so will they always be.” Can I read that one more time? “Those, therefore, who have watched the sky for Jesus have been disappointed and so will they always be. He will never come that way.”

This was the most popular commentary among liberals. It sold thousands of copies among those who were in Presbyterian and Lutheran and Episcopalian churches. You say,

“Where did you get this?” I bought this years ago at a Southern Baptist seminary because during the days of theological liberalism in our convention this was held up as one of the standards for the students who were coming out of our six seminaries. What does this lead to? Cancer. Spiritual-theological gangrene that the Bible says has caused some to stray and will overthrow the faith of some. When I taught at Criswell College, I remember a young man coming to our school named Gary. He had come from a Baptist college. I’ll not name the state or the college, but he had transferred out of that college because as he said, “I nearly lost my faith. The liberal department of religion just about killed me.” And he said, “You know, Dr. Akin, there were about forty of us who entered into that college as freshman into the religious studies program preparing to go into ministry.” He said, “After one year, only five were still pursuing and preparing for ministry.” Words cannot capture the tragedy he describes. There are some words worth fighting over. There are some truths that we dare not negotiate. If we do, it will be of no profit. It will be to our ruin. We will stray from the truth, and we will overthrow the faith of some. In fact, it could be tragically the faith of your children or grandchildren who you thought you were entrusting to people who are reliable but in actuality, were peddling a theology that is like cancer or gangrene. It really does matter, brothers and sisters, that we rightly divide the word of truth.