

A few years ago... a Portland man saw his opportunity to make a few bucks off the recent regional playoff win of the Portland Trailblazers over the Los Angeles Lakers. ... He was seen hanging around all of the fans at the Portland Airport about the time the Trailblazers were expected to return home from their surprise victory. ... He was trying to scalp a couple of tickets for the next playoff game. ... As he wandered through the crowd... he spotted his mark... a well-dressed man in a business suit.

*"How much?"* asked the man in the suit. *"...One hundred and fifty"* the scalper replied under his breath. *"And not a cent lower!"*

*"Do you realize that you are talking to an undercover police officer?"* his perspective customer asked. *"It looks like I am going to have to run you in."*

Suddenly the seller began to backpedal. He talked about how he was a family man...and his family needed him... and he would never do it again.

Looking both ways... the man who threatened the arrest said, *"Just hand over the tickets and we'll call it even...now get out of here and I better not catch you here again!"*

The irony to this story is... that the well-dressed man was not an undercover police officer. ... He was simply a quick-thinking fan who out-schemed the scalper.

When I hear stories like this... I immediately think of Satan (who is the master of all schemers.) ... His quick strategies are ingenious and effective. He and his cohorts hear what we hear and as quick as lightning... they plan their approach. Just one way that this happens... takes place every week - to each and every one of us. Sunday after Sunday.. Satan snatches away the Biblical insights that have just been deposited on our hearts.

- An immediate argument in the car arises over what to have for lunch.
- A worrisome, plaguing problem or thought just won't leave you alone during the service.
- An irritation over some other attender's behavior highlighted just before the service begins.
- Thoughts along the lines of "I'm so glad so-and-so is here this morning to hear this; boy do they ever need it."

Chuck Swindoll describes it this way:

*"Before the freshly baked cake is cool, he (Satan) comes and licks off all the frosting. Before the new bike is ridden, he sneaks up and lets all the air out of the tires. Before the new dress is worn, he slips up and jerks out the hem and jams the zipper. Before we crank up the car at 12:20, he's stolen the stuff we heard at 11:45."*

Satan uses many other schemes as well. ... In our study of 2nd Timothy... today we come to a major division of the epistle. ... Paul has been addressing the question of how to stand firm as a Christian (how to maintain the truth in a world that is falling apart.) ... That is a very relevant issue to our own times... and we have seen much of great help to us in this letter. ... But with today's verses... a new subject is introduced... because Paul is addressing a new tactic of the enemy. (The devil is very clever and very vicious... in his attack upon Christians.)

Joe Blinco (who used to be a member of the Billy Graham team... used to say, *"The devil is no mere pimple squeezer; he goes for the jugular vein."*

That is true. Living in a world that is under the control of the one whom Jesus Himself called *"the god of this world"* (in 2 Cor 4:4) is not a game.

The devil has many tactics. He may seek to destroy the truth by patronizing Christianity and Christians. ... He may try to do so by popularity — by diverting the attention of Christians away from why they are sent into the world. ... He has destroyed many a Christian witness that way. ... (Or)...he may... (as we have been seeing in this letter) bring about sharp persecution. He may try to paralyze us by fear... and by societal rejection. (And) we might see him use polarization (an attempt to divide the church.) That is what we find introduced in this section, where the apostle is dealing with the two-front war that these Ephesian Christians are facing — persecution from outside... and polarization from within the body.

## **2 Timothy 2:14-18**

I have entitled this message “*Avoiding Congregational Gangrene*” after the metaphor that we about to see Paul use in verse 17. Gangrene was nearly always a fatal disease. It was so dreaded that this was a vivid illustration to Paul’s original readers.

Gangrene begins in the body when tissue dies from obstructed circulation. It was the worst danger of ancient battlefield injuries. More soldiers died in the American Civil War from gangrene infection... then actual bullets... swords... and cannon explosions. ... It spreads so quickly and must be treated immediately... or else amputation becomes absolutely necessary. Cutting off an infected arm or leg is the only way to stop gangrene from spreading.

What an apt metaphor to describe Satan’s goal for the church. Folks(!) we are on a battlefield... and gangrene in our ever-present danger. ... Satanic lies and false doctrine spread rapidly through the church... often faster

than the truth... because the sinful human heart is more receptive to them. Gangrene is an infection of the bloodstream that not only spreads rapidly through the body... but smells horribly. Foul... oozing wounds... keep increasing in size... so that it becomes one of the most difficult problems to handle (medically.)

The Church is a battlefield where Satan's schemes effectively make church squabbles spread like gangrene. ... It smells bad... it spreads quickly... and a whole congregation can be infected by it in very little time. This is what happened in Ephesus (where Paul had left Timothy to minister.)

Our passage this morning instructs Timothy on how to deal with Congregational Gangrene. (And) we will see three clear principles for avoiding it. The first one is found in the first line of verse 14.

**“Remind them of these things.”** O.K. That is simple enough. Remind them of these things. But wait...What things...? The main point of the previous two passages that we have looked at in 2 Timothy.

To avoid Congregational Gangrene -Timothy... you are to keep reminding them to endure hardship as a soldier...as an athlete... and as a farmer.

The way Paul used the word “*remind*” in the New Testament's original language... carries the idea of persistence. ... **Keep on** reminding them!

Boy(!) I can't think of anything more relevant for Christians today (who keep getting pulled by society to believe that life is all about personal convenience.) ... Everywhere we look... and everywhere we go... we are taught to think about ourselves... (getting what we want...and pushing others aside in order to get it.) Anyone who gets in our way...anyone who makes it inconvenient for us...is set to be cast aside.

What a contrast the message of Christ shouts back at us. “*Wait a minute! Stop this! Be willing to suffer hardship. Be willing to be inconvenienced- especially for the sake of glorifying Christ.*”

Now... I know that I have spoken on this in the last two messages that I have given from this pulpit... but Paul says, “*Keep reminding them of this, in order to avoid congregational gangrene.*”

Satan wants to spread gangrene all over the battlefield. He is looking for willing hearts who are not willing to endure hardship. If he can... he would like to spread it through those who do not want to be inconvenienced. Our church has grown small over the years... and many of you have stepped up to the plate... in many ways that you did not expect. (May God bless you beyond any compensation I could ever give you!)

We are all to endure hardship as a soldier...as an athlete...and as a farmer.” ... Our passage today says: To avoid congregational gangrene - 1. Keep reminding to endure hardship. 2. Keep God’s Word preeminent.

(Now) let me give you verses 14-18 in a nutshell... and then we’ll take a closer look. ... These five verses present a contrast between mere words...and the Word of God. ... When the church gets sidetracked and wrangles over mere words... wisdom from the world... even the best it has to offer... it leads to destruction (verse 14)...and further ungodliness (verse 16)...and becomes like gangrene (verses 17 and 18). The key to avoid all this ( verse 15) is not to get sidetracked but to remain focused on the Word of God...with the right motive as you study it.

Paul tells Timothy in verse 14... to solemnly charge IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD those who are in the church at Ephesus: not to quarrel over

words. ... Being especially aware of God's presence... adds a measure of healthy fear of the Lord... and therefore an increased determination to obey such an admonition. ... This is such an important command! ... We in the church **are not** ( in any way, shape or form ) to wrangle over words. The very presence of God is behind this very stern warning. We cannot quickly slip by this. ... So... We had better (therefore) take great pains to understand what it means to quarrel over words..

Does this mean that we are not to debate doctrinal issues in the church...? If someone believes salvation is earned through works... we are to let them believe that... in order to avoid wrangling over words in the church...? ... No... of course not.

Most of our precious held doctrinal beliefs have come to us by way of open and sincere... (and even contentiously hot, at times, debate.) ... The early church used to form councils to settle disputes-from which we have our settled doctrines of the Trinity... the deity of Jesus Christ... the infallibility of the Scriptures... and many other precious doctrines. Quarreling over these issues were not useless - they have produced a **stronger** church.

The key to understanding what Paul meant by "*quarrelling over words*" is found in the entire context. Paul is contrasting human words-with the Word of God.

(LISTEN!)... Anytime the church forsakes the Word of God in favor of entering the secular world to debate issues and ideas with them (having laid down the Word of God)... we set ourselves up for useless activity...

empty chatter... further ungodliness... and... **gangrene!** ... That is not the arena we are to enter as a church.

As a citizen of these free United States... if you wish to enter the arena of secular debate without your Bible - go right ahead! (Maybe you have a friend or family member who wants to argue with you at the Thanksgiving table.) Go argue abortion merely on the basis of human logic. This does not prohibit you from doing so. ... But it does prohibit the church from doing so.

The pulpit is no place to propose and argue philosophical systems... or human ideology. The church quickly dies from gangrene when it lays aside the Word of God to emphasize human systems and popular wisdom. It is useless and it leads to the death of its hearers.

For evidence that this is true, simply look to the Ivy League schools that started off as schools for training pastors. Harvard, Yale, Brown University, and others, all started off to spread the Word of God. But eventually they laid aside the Word of God in favor of man's words. Today... abortion... homosexuality... and evolution... are promoted by these institutions and the Word of God is regarded as useless. ... "Gangrene" very aptly describes what has infected these highly esteemed schools.

To avoid congregational gangrene: 1. Keep reminding them to endure hardship. 2. Keep God's Word preeminent. (Here is *MORE* of what Paul is saying to us)...

## **2 Tim 2:15**

Paul urged Timothy to present himself to God for continual examination... which is something Christian frauds avoid at all costs. They distance themselves from self-reflection and reject accountability... and they dare

not stand before God for inspection. But in contrast... God's approved workman **will!** What makes God's approved workman different from the false teacher? First of all... the approved workman's life and work is oriented toward God. ... Christian frauds look to people for approval... but God's servants seek it from God.

Each of us (as God's workman) will be either *approved* or *ashamed*. The word *approved* means "one who has been tested and found acceptable." And the word was used for testing and approving metals. (That is by intense heat... Folks!) ... .. Each trial that we go through forces us to study the Word to find God's will. ... Then as we rightly use the Word... we succeed in overcoming our trials... and we are approved by God

(Now) please notice the two words "*rightly handling*" (as in, "*rightly handling the Word of God...*") ... "*Rightly handling*" is only one word in the Greek - ορθοτομῶ (orthotomeo) which literally means "cut straight." But there is a much deeper meaning.

Interestingly... orthotomeo is not found anywhere else in the New Testament or ancient Greek literature – except for one! The Greek translation of the Old Testament called "the Septuagint." Here orthotomeo is used twice (both times in the book of Proverbs.)

**Proverbs 3:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> *In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.*

**Proverbs 11:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> *The righteousness of the blameless keeps his way straight, but the wicked falls by his own wickedness.*



In both proverbs... the verb takes as the direct object “*hodos*”... which means “road” or “way.” So the image is of clearing debris and then leveling out hills and valleys. It is about a construction crew that would “*cut a straight path*” from one place to another. So meaning of Paul’s metaphor (here in our passage)... I think is: that righteous behavior clears a road through life... allowing the righteous one to get where he wants to go.

Paul could have chosen any number of words or expressions... but he chose a verb unique to two proverbs - and given the context of Paul’s argument in this segment... I would understand the whole verse this way: “*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed - **practically living out the word of truth.***”

Timothy... in contrast to the false teachers... study Scripture... and then live out its principles (demonstrate them in your life)... (and here’s the kicker)... do this before God - allowing Him to examine you!

Verse 15 is so rich! It also includes several critically important insights about the way we are to study Scripture. First, we are to be **diligent**. Σπουδαζω carries the idea of having a zealous persistence. But perhaps even more important would be for us to recognize the purpose for that diligence.

We are not to have a zeal to know God’s Word so that we might impress others with our knowledge. Fixed foremost in our minds is that God is examining us. “To present yourself” ( παρισθαμι - paristhami ) literally means “*to stand along side of presenting yourself for inspection in order to be approved.*”

Do you have that as your mental picture whenever you invest yourself in knowing God's Word...to pass God's careful scrutiny ...or is it more to fill your head with knowledge... so that you can impress others with how well you know the Bible? ... or possibly to be able to win a debate...?

What we see in verse 15 is that a person can memorize the entire New Testament... and still have gangrene set in... because they did not have the right motive for studying it. They are workmen who have every reason to be ashamed.

Will you be ashamed...? Have a zealous persistence in getting to know God's Word- envisioning yourself before God ready to be inspected by Him as to your understanding - and obedience to it.

### **2 Tim 2:16-18**

With verse 16... we return to more of Paul's thoughts about the place of worldly wisdom in the church. ... Ahhh... we are to stick with God's Word. **PERIOD!** ... .. Emphasizing human wisdom... which can look so good at times... so very practical... leads to results that we don't want. Keep God's Word preeminent.

To avoid congregational gangrene: 1. Keep reminding them to endure hardship. 2. Keep God's Word preeminent. ... and now we are ready for 3. ... 3. Keep from panicking - even if falsehoods seem to rule the day.

### **2 Tim 2:19**

Is not the success of false teachers evidence that God's plan has failed? Unsettling questions like these occurred to Timothy... just as they may

occur to us. ... Paul therefore drops an anchor into this turbulent sea that holds the church in place.

Despite all the dangers of apostasy... despite the defection of influential leaders... despite their leading many souls astray... regardless of how much injury the church has suffered... nevertheless God's foundation of truth remains strong and sure. ... So don't panic. ... God is in control! Yes... there may be heresy in the congregation... there may be dissension and disputes among you... and you may have to do battle with it-but-never forget "*God's firm foundation stands.*"

Paul drew upon the familiar imagery of a building cornerstone bearing an official seal. A seal carved into the stone protected the building against intrusion or destruction. It communicated an implicit warning to any potential violator: "Harm this building and you'll answer to me!" ... Here... in the midst of false claims to truth and leadership in the church... Paul identifies the seal that guarantees that God's church is permanent.

Because this is the case... believers can be confident about the survival of the church throughout history... even when it is infiltrated by those who deny the truth on which it is founded. ... God's solid foundation will always stand firm.

God knows those that are His. ... He has a way of dealing with this. Even if those you love seem to be buying into the false systems of belief... which surround us... God has His seal on those who are truly His. Our faith can rest on this truth-that those who are truly His will ultimately see the error involved and leave it. There is not a "place of no return" for believers. False

teachers and world systems cannot frustrate the plans of God or keep any who belong to Him.

If we panic... it is quickly followed by despair... and then hopelessness... and then giving up. ... And you know what that is ... .. **gangrene!**

As we seek to impact our world for Christ - but see what looks like so many refuse what we offer and turn instead to falsehood... there is no reason to feel defeated. ... But... when it comes to false teaching and attacks upon the Church (from outside and within) which threaten to lead so many away – JUST think of it as you would the cross-eyed discus thrower. Know that is it highly unlikely that they will have much success to speak of – but (boy!) do they ever keep bystanders awake!

To avoid congregational gangrene: 1. Keep remind them to endure hardship. 2. Keep God's Word preeminent. 3. Keep from panicking-even if falsehoods seem to rule the day.

On Wednesday, October 11<sup>th</sup> 1994, NASA's Magellan Space Explorer was intentionally plunged into the planet Venus' atmosphere where it burned to a crisp, instantly. The space probe, Magellan had cost the US government more than 900 million dollars. Why would NASA intentionally change its course and send it veering off into oblivion...? Because on its previous experiment, the space probe had spent all of its batter energy. It was virtually out of power. It could no longer transmit data back to earth.

Without power... even the highest technology is worthless. A 900-million-dollar space craft is of no use. Without the power of God, even the busiest Christian can bear no fruit.

We must avoid congregational gangrene.