

A God-Approved Workman

Text: 2 Timothy 2:14-18

Introduction:

1. This section (2:14-4:8): Paul's focus turns to the need for doctrinal soundness in view of the heresies appearing in the church (Hiebert)
2. This lesson (Vs. 14-18): How Timothy is to respond to the heresies confronting him in the church at Ephesus. He is to be a diligent student of the Word of God, faithfully instructing those under his watch care in the truth. He is to both warn against error and separate from it.
3. The N.T. is replete with exhortations to faithfulness in doctrine. We need to make much of what God makes much of and value what He values.

I. Declaration of the Truth (Vs. 14)

There are two parts to declaring the truth; one positive and one negative:

A. Teaching (Vs. 14a)

1. "these things" = the things previously taught in the Epistle, particularly the immediate statements of Vs. 11-13 that impress upon us the gravity of our future in eternity
2. "put them in remembrance" = repetition is the key to learning! Much of our teaching involves this ministry of reminding God's people of things they already know to be true. 1 Tim. 4:6 *"If thou **put the brethren in remembrance of these things**, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained."*
3. A faithful teaching & preaching ministry is one of the best antidotes to doctrinal error. It helps vaccinate the believer against apostasy. Part of the Great Commission given by Christ is to teach "all things" Christ has commanded (Matt. 28:20).

B. Warning (Vs. 14b)

1. "charging them" = a solemn warning against error
2. "before the Lord" = 'before' means "in the presence of". The people of God are to sense their accountability to God in this matter.
3. 'strive' = contention; word-wars, word-fighting
4. "words to no profit" = error has no lasting value. See Titus 3:8-9
5. 'subverting' = to turn upside down. Greek word is καταστροφή from which or English word 'catastrophe' is derived. Same word is translated 'overthrow' in 2 Peter 2:6. False teaching has a destructive influence on people.
6. Note: The maintenance of doctrinal purity in the local church requires active oversight and monitoring by the man of God. False doctrine is not to be dealt with in a passive manner!

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II. Diligence with the Truth (Vs. 15)

Timothy is to be a personal example in his handling of the truth, in contrast to the false teachers:

A. The Responsibility to Study (15a)

1. 'study' = lit. means to give diligence, make haste, exert one's self. An accurate description of the discipline of study in the Word.
2. Note the word 'workman' in this verse. This denotes hard work and labor. We are to be laborers in the Word and doctrine (1 Tim. 5:17)
3. How much time do we give to the study of the Word of God in our lives?
4. What is our attitude towards preparation for the Gospel ministry?

B. The Reasons to Study (15b)

1. To be pleasing to God
 - a. "approved unto God" = we are to know and uphold the truth, seeking the approval of God, not men. Note: The preacher needs to be more concerned about his standing before God than his standing before men.
 - b. "needeth not to be ashamed" = a workman who has no cause for shame when his work is being inspected
2. To be accurate with the Word of God
 - a. "rightly dividing" = to cut evenly or in a straight line. Word was used in a number of ways:
 - i. To describe a stone mason cutting stones fair and straight to fit into their places in a building
 - ii. To describe the plowing of straight furrows in a field
 - iii. To describe cutting a line of road
 - iv. Means the word of God is to be handled accurately with precision, skill and care.
 - v. 2 Cor. 4:2 *"But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, **nor handling the word of God deceitfully**; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."*
 - b. "the word of truth" = in contrast to "unprofitable words" (Vs. 14) and "their word" (Vs. 17)

III. Defense of the Truth (Vs. 16-18)

In addition to warning against error (Vs. 14), Timothy was to defend the truth by separating from error.

A. The Instruction concerning Error (Vs. 16a)

1. 'shun' = to turn oneself around, as for the purpose of avoiding something (Wuest). The Bible uses strong language concerning our required response to doctrinal error. E.g. 'reject' (Titus 3:10); "purge

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himself from these” (Vs. 21); “from such turn away” (3:5); ‘mark’ & ‘avoid’ (Rom. 16:17). Strict separation required from false doctrine.

2. ‘profane’ = unhallowed, common, irreverent. Word made up of “to step” and “threshold”, thus signifying something lawful to be trodden, commonplace, secular. (Wuest)
3. “vain babblings” = empty sounds/voices. Highlights the worthless nature of false teaching.

B. The Influence of Error (Vs. 16b-17a)

1. It promotes ungodliness (16b)
 - a. ‘increase’ = to go forward, advance, proceed. This is progress but progress towards that which is unholy!
 - b. “more ungodliness” = unholy teachings produce unholy lives. Corrupt doctrine produces corrupt deeds. False beliefs produce false behavior.
2. It spreads its destructive influence (17a)
 - a. “word will eat” = it will continue to increase in its destructive progress (See also Gal. 5:9 “a little leaven”)
 - b. “as doth a canker” = picture is of an infected ulcer or sore. Greek word is γάγγραινα (gangrene in English derived from this word). False doctrine is like an infectious disease that damages the spiritual health of the one infected with it. Sound doctrine on the other hand boosts the believer’s spiritual immune system and is good for spiritual health (See 1:13).
 - c. Hiebert: “Error is a diffusive poison which, unless effectively checked, spreads rapidly through the whole body and leads to sure destruction.”
3. Illustration: My experience with a nasty sore in the tropics

C. The Illustrations of Error (Vs. 17b-18)

Two men are named by the Apostle as examples of those spreading pernicious, destructive error.

1. Their identities (17b)
 - a. Paul named names in his Epistles! In the Epistles of 1 & 2 Timothy alone, Paul names false teachers and compromises 10 times (Cloud). Warning needs to be specific if it is to be of value to the people of God.
 - b. ‘Hymenaeus’ = likely the Hymenaeus mentioned in 1 Tim. 1:20 who had made shipwreck of his faith and was subsequently put under church discipline by the Apostle. Sadly, this man had not responded to the discipline with repentance.
 - c. ‘Philetus’ = no other mention of him in Scripture except here. Obviously, he was a prominent leader amongst the false teachers.
2. Their heresy (18)

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- a. 'erred' = to deviate from, miss the mark. Translated 'swerved' in 1 Tim. 1:6. They had deviated from the path of truth.
- b. "saying" = the content of their false teaching
- c. "the resurrection is past already" = they denied the truth of a future, literal, bodily resurrection, interpreting it rather as a spiritual event in the heart.
 - i. The truth of a bodily resurrection was disagreeable to the Greek way of thinking. This is why the Apostle Paul encountered mockery when he preached the resurrection to the Athenians on Mars Hill (Acts 17:22-34). False doctrine that makes the Christian faith seem more agreeable to secular thinking will always gain rapid popularity (e.g. Theistic evolution; Hell is not living up to your potential in this life)
 - ii. The future resurrection of the believer is in the category of prophetic things. This area of the Word of God is often relegated to a "non-essential" position by much of modern Evangelicalism.
 - iii. In denying the future resurrection of believers, they also undermined the past resurrection of Christ which is foundational and essential to the Christian faith (1 Cor. 15).
- d. "overthrow the faith of some" = to turn upside down. Highlights the damaging effect of their teachings, illustrating the warnings of the previous verses – 'subverting' (Vs. 14); "increase unto ungodliness" (Vs. 16); "eat as a canker" (Vs. 17)

Conclusion:

1. What is our attitude towards a faithful declaration of doctrine and warning against error? Do we have a biblical attitude or have we been affected by the 21st century "judge not" mood?
2. What level of priority do we place upon educating ourselves in the Word of God? Is personal Bible study important to us? Do we come to church with a heart to be instructed, a heart to learn?