

Guarding Sound Teaching **(2 Timothy 1:13-18)**

Truth is always changing, or so our world would tell us. Truth is subjective. What's true today may not be true tomorrow. Certainly human philosophy changes with each generation. Scientific knowledge increases and evolves. However, there are absolute, unchanging truths. These truths rest not in human minds but in the mind of our Creator God. God is unchanging. His truth is unchanging. His Word is unchanging. The unchanging truth of God as revealed in His Word forms the body of what Paul refers to as "sound teaching." In the changing atmosphere of the Roman Empire in the first century, Paul knew that God's truth was secure. He encouraged his protégé Timothy to continue to guard sound teaching—the truth about the gospel of Jesus Christ and the teachings of scripture. We, too, have a responsibility to guard sound teaching as followers of Jesus Christ. It's worth standing up for sound teaching, the truth of God's Word. After all, sound teaching provides spiritual stability in a world of chaotic change.

**Stand up for the truth—
we have received a rich body of sound doctrine (1:13-14).**

It's right and necessary for God's people to stand up for the truth of God's Word. But in order to stand up for sound teaching, we must know what God's word teaches. We need to become saturated with scripture.

We must preserve the standard of sound teaching passed on to us, demonstrating faith and love (1:13).

Paul instructed Timothy to "keep" the "pattern" of "healthy words" which he had passed on to his younger friend. The verb "keep" is an imperative, a command or expectation, and means to hold on to tightly or preserve. "Pattern" is a term that can mean an example, a model, or a standard. Paul had modeled truth for Timothy, setting the standard for sound teaching. "Healthy words" or "sound teaching" implies that which is wholesome and true in contrast to that which is sickly and riddled with error. Paul had taught Timothy the truth, a wholesome standard of dependable truth. Because Paul was an apostle, sent with the authority of Jesus Christ, his writings and teachings bore divine authority. Today we have Paul's writings along with the rest of the Old and New Testaments as the authoritative basis of our faith, the standard of sound teaching. It's this standard, God's Word, which we're to guard from generation to generation. But we're to guard it, not antagonistically, but in faith and love. Faith inspires us to trust this body of sound teaching. Love tempers the way in which we guard God's truth. In fact, this love is the kind of love that we see in Christ Jesus Himself. We must preserve the standard of sound teaching passed on to us, demonstrating faith and the love of Jesus Christ.

We must guard the sound teaching entrusted to us, relying on the indwelling Holy Spirit (1:14).

Again Paul exhorts Timothy to stand up for sound teaching. This time the imperative verb is “guard” and the object is “the good deposit.” Paul was in prison, surrounded by guards. It may be that his situation prompted him to tell Timothy to act as a guard of the truth. In verse 12 Paul had declared his confidence in Jesus Christ to guard him, specifically to guard the deposit he had placed in the hands of the Lord—his eternal salvation. Now Paul instructs Timothy to guard another deposit, the good deposit, paralleling the concept of sound teaching in verse 13. Paul had entrusted the gospel message and the truth of God’s Word to Timothy. Since Paul was anticipating martyrdom, he wanted Timothy to carry on the Lord’s work. He needed Timothy to guard the deposit of truth. However, to guard sound teaching would require more than human effort. Timothy would need to rely on the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, Paul reminds us, lives within us as believers. We can depend on the very presence and power of God the Holy Spirit to sustain us as we stand up for God’s truth. Like Timothy, we too have the responsibility of guarding sound teaching.

In order to guard sound teaching we must know sound teaching. Too many Christians are doctrinally undernourished. We must be disciplined in our study of God’s Word, dedicated to grasping divine truth. Minimally we must be able to support such basic doctrines as the inerrancy of the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16), the iniquity of humanity and the need for salvation (Romans 3:23), the incarnation of Jesus Christ including His virgin birth and sacrificial death (Galatians 4:4-5), the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as a source of strength for living the Christian life (Romans 8:9), and the imminent return of the resurrected Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). These most basic truths are the starting place for our guarding of sound teaching.

**Stand up for one another—
we have a responsibility to encourage each other (1:15-18).**

We must stand up not only for sound teaching but also for one another in the increasing resistance to the Christian faith. We have a responsibility to encourage each other.

Those who guard sound teaching may at times stand alone (1:15).

It’s true that there may be times when we stand alone for our faith. In a given setting we might be the only Christian present to speak up for Jesus. But there may also be times when others abandon us in a time of need. Paul experienced this painful reality. He mentions by name two individuals who had deeply disappointed him by their defection—Phygelus and Hermogenes, otherwise unmentioned and unknown individuals. In fact, “everyone in the

province of Asia” had deserted Paul, presumably at the time of his arrest. Apparently all those who might have had some influence in that dire moment fled in fear. They “turned away,” a term that carries the concept of a significant repudiation and departure. A significant number of potentially influential people had balked at Paul’s arrest and turned their backs on both him and, apparently, the Lord. In that moment of trial Paul must have felt lonely indeed. However, even if we stand alone for the truth of God, we must stand.

God blesses those who stand with others in guarding sound teaching (1:16-18).

Thankfully there were still some shining examples of friendship and commitment in Paul’s life. A man from Ephesus, the capital of the province of Asia, had been faithful to Paul. This man, Onesiphorus, hadn’t abandoned Paul or the Christian faith. Paul expressed his desire for the Lord’s mercy to rest on Onesiphorus’ household, possibly a house church, back in Ephesus. After all, Onesiphorus had often “refreshed” Paul, giving him spiritual and emotional support. Paul says that this man wasn’t ashamed of Paul’s chain, the chain that bound him as a criminal because of his Christian testimony. Onesiphorus had traveled to Rome and “sought diligently” for Paul. Being a prisoner in Rome, Paul would not have been readily easy to find. Onesiphorus was determined to track him down in prison and eventually found Paul. What a delight it must have been for Paul to see a familiar, friendly face while chained in that dark, damp cell. Paul expressed his deep desire that the Lord would give Onesiphorus “mercy from the Lord” in that day, presumably the day of final judgment. It’s interesting that Paul twice used the word “Lord” in this expression of good will: “May the Lord . . . from the Lord.” It may be that the first use of “Lord” refers to Jesus and the second to the Father, or it may simply be an emphatic expression. Onesiphorus had blessed Paul in Rome just as he had served him back in Ephesus, a fact which Timothy knew very well according to Paul.

What a blessing it is when others stand with us in our faith and in our moments of trial. God blesses those who bless others. We can expect to receive God’s mercy when we’re merciful to others. We can expect God to help us stand firm when we stand up for others. Standing up for God’s truth includes standing up for God’s people. It’s worth standing up for sound teaching, the truth of God’s Word because sound teaching provides spiritual stability in a world of chaotic change.