

2 Timothy 2:14-26, God hates when His Word is mishandled

God hates it when we misuse His Word. He will discipline those who appoint themselves as arbiters of His Word. God wants us to rebuke and not engage with such individuals. But if we have others who oppose God's Word but still have ears to hear God's convicting truth, then God wants us to be patient and loving so that He can free them from Satan's grip.

2:14, God tells Timothy to remind them of "these things." Rather than just referring to 2:11-13, "these things" refers to everything He's told Timothy thus far:

My Son holds the promise of life (1:1). Your faith in Me hasn't wavered; it's still there inside you (1:5) and so is My gift (1:6). I didn't give you a Spirit of cowardice but of power, love, and a disciplined mind (1:7). Therefore, don't be ashamed of My Son's testimony nor of My servant Paul; be willing to suffer alongside him for the Gospel's sake; I'll give you the power to do it (1:8). I saved and called you, not based on your merit, but My purpose and grace, which I showed you in My Son (1:9). I revealed that grace when My Son, your Savior, appeared; He abolished death and made His promise of life-eternal available to all through that same Gospel I'm asking you to preach (1:10). You know yourself why Paul isn't ashamed or afraid to suffer; he knows that My Son will protect what he put in His trust: his life and future (1:12). I want you to cling to the sound method of teaching and discipling which Paul taught you (1:13). I need you to protect the good thing I gave you by the power of My Holy Spirit who dwells in you (1:14). You're well aware that everyone in Asia abandoned Paul, like Phygellus and Hermogenes (1:15). Don't be like them. Instead, be like Onesiphorus: he wasn't ashamed of Paul but went out of his way to visit him in that Roman dungeon and provided for his necessities. That's why My Son is going to reward him when He returns (1:16-17). Therefore, I need you to be strong by means of the support My Son will give you (2:1). I need you to show the sound method of teaching and discipling you learned from Paul to other faithful men who will repeat the process with the next generation and so on (2:2). This means that you must endure like a focused soldier, a disciplined athlete, and a diligent farmer (2:3-7). Remember, I rewarded My Son with resurrection because He endured, just like the Gospel says (2:8). You and Paul may suffer and be imprisoned for preaching this Gospel, but no one can chain My Word (2:9). Therefore, I need you to endure everything—Nero's threats of death, persecution, etc. Do it for the elect so that they too can experience salvation from cowardice, a salvation which can only be found in My Son and which has an eternal reward connected to it (2:10). That is, there's no doubt that if you've been identified with My Son's death, then you will live with Him forever. And if you endure, then you'll reign with Him. But if you deny My Son your endurance, then He'll deny you reigning with Him. But have no fear, if you are completely faithless, My Son will remain faithful because He cannot deny Himself (2:11-13).

God wants Timothy to remind everyone in Ephesus about these things, especially the erroneous/false teachers. He also wants Timothy to command them not to fight over words, which is unprofitable and ruins the listener. If you recall, the false teachers in Ephesus were causing a myriad of problems by doing exactly this, arguing and fighting over words. Their erroneous teaching led to every problem in Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3-7; 2:1-15; 4:7; 6:3-5). They're the kind of individuals who love to argue over words, not to win a brother to Christ and His teaching, but to win for their own glory.

2:15, instead of mishandling God's Word this way, Timothy must study diligently. The picture God paints here is of someone studying God's Word thoroughly and carefully, who doesn't allow himself to be distracted by false and erroneous arguments, but instead goes down the Word's true and straight path. And after he's finished, he brings his work before God for His approval. In other words, those of us who preach and teach God's Word have a serious commission, which is why we'll get a stricter judgment from God (James 3:1).

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2:16-18, Timothy must shun worthless chatter; all it does is increase ungodliness. This type of teaching spreads like cancer; it comes from teachers like Hymenaeus and Philetus,¹ who have strayed from God's truth and are now telling the Ephesians that the resurrection has already happened. Those who believe them, have their faith overthrown, i.e., they may walk away from the faith altogether or start to fear that God left them behind.

2:19, however, God knows those who are His, i.e., like a father on a camping trip who does a headcount before heading home, if two of his kids were missing, he wouldn't drive off and forget them. Instead, he'd turn the campsite upside down until he found them. Paul quotes Numbers 16:5 to drive this point home for both the false teachers and the flock at Ephesus. That is, the false teachers need to know that the Lord appoints the shepherds who will oversee His flock (e.g., Acts 20:28) and the flock needs to know that God doesn't forget or abandon His children. Numbers 16 contains the story of individuals who wanted positions of authority for themselves so they disparaged and rebelled against God's appointed leaders, Moses and Aaron. For this rebellion, God made the earth swallow them up and all who rebelled with them (Numbers 16:1-35). Likewise, God is not happy with individuals like Hymenaeus and Philetus; they will be disciplined severely for taking positions of authority that didn't belong to them and for injuring God's flock with their false and erroneous teaching. And God wants the flock to know that the resurrection has not happened yet because if it had, He would have taken them with Him instead of leaving them behind. Finally, God ends this verse with an admonition to the teachers and the flock: everyone who claims the name of Christ must depart from iniquity.

2:20-21, in a grand house there are various kinds of dishware and containers. Some are super-fancy, like fine china, others are common and used for dirty jobs, perhaps even as chamber pots. Thus, those in God's house can be dirty vessels or they can be sanctified and useful for the Master to do His good work. Therefore, God urges them—the false teachers and everyone else—to cleanse themselves from their dirty wickedness so that He can use them for His good purpose. Some think that this is talking about salvation and who is really saved: the vessels of honor are saved and represent true believers; the vessels of dishonor are unbelievers who are not saved. But this can't be since it would make eternal salvation a product of one's works, i.e., the unbeliever has to cleanse himself, make himself a vessel of honor by his good works. But we know that salvation is by faith alone not of works, period (Ephesians 2:4-9).

2:22-26, God continues encouraging Timothy by telling him to run away from something and to run to something: he must flee youthful lusts. It's unlikely that He means sexual lust, since He hasn't mentioned this as a concern regarding Timothy. God is likely talking about another youthful temptation facing Timothy that has to do with the false teachers. By this time Timothy is around 35-40 years old.² And when you're young and well-trained in a subject and someone who knows next to nothing challenges you, you're going to be tempted to humiliate them by revealing their ignorance, preferably in public. Instead of giving in to this youthful temptation, Timothy must run towards righteousness, faith, love, and peace. He must avoid foolish and ignorant arguments, knowing that they only lead to more fighting. Instead, the Lord's servants must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to show those who oppose the error of their ways with patience and humility. If Timothy does this with those who oppose him, then God will bring them to repentance. They will come to their senses and return to God's truth, thereby escaping the Devil's snare, who currently has them as captives to do his bidding. If they have ears to hear, God wants us to be patient; if they don't, then we can reject them like Hymenaeus and Philetus.

¹ Paul had previously handed Hymenaeus over to Satan for this very reason, 1 Timothy 1:20.

² Paul met Timothy around A. D. 50; he wrote 1 Timothy around A. D. 62 and 2 Timothy around A. D. 67. If Timothy was 17 years old when they met, he's now 34 years old; if he was 20, he's now 37 years old.