

<b>SCRIPTURE FOCUS</b>	<b>2 TIMOTHY 2:14-26</b>	<b>DATE</b>	<b>07.28.19</b>
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<b>LESSON SUMMARY</b>	Believers should handle scripture well and remain pure as they deal with the messes life brings.		

*all scripture from NIV unless otherwise noted*

## ENCOUNTER THE TEXT

**14 Keep reminding God's people of these things. Warn them before God against quarreling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen. 15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. 16 Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly. 17 Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, 18 who have departed from the truth. They say that the resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some. 19 Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness."**

This part of chapter 2 addresses the particular situation at Corinth. To begin, Timothy should remind the Ephesian congregation of the same things Paul is reminding him. The need for such a ministry stems from "quarreling about words" (v14) and "godless chatter" (v16) that are shaking some church members' faith. Two of the culprits of these chattering quarrels are Hymenaeus and Philetus, "who have departed from the truth." (v17) Biblical Scholar NT Wright offers a possible take on just what might be going on:

*We can see, perhaps, how this happened. Paul himself spoke of Christians, in baptism, 'dying and rising with Christ' (Romans 6). He declared boldly that there is a sense in which Christ's people have already been raised with him, and have indeed taken their seat with him in the heavenly places (Colossians 3:1-4). But, as Romans and Colossians both insist (not to mention Paul's other letters), this does not mean there isn't still a future, bodily resurrection. What happens is that through baptism and faith the Christian anticipates that final event, and must learn to live by faith and hope in the present on the basis of what's promised in the future. But then, it seems, some Christians began to wonder. Could they really believe in a bodily resurrection—either for themselves or even for Jesus? Surely that was taking things a bit too far? Didn't it fly in the face of all scientific evidence? (They knew plenty about that then; we didn't have to wait for the eighteenth century to discover that dead people stay dead!) So they tried to adjust the Christian message. It wasn't, they suggested, really about anything so crude as an actual resurrection in the future. It was about a spiritual experience in the present, leading to a disembodied eternal bliss. Nothing more.*

While we can't be sure, Wright's picture is compelling, as it shows how people could have played with words to espouse a radically different idea of hope for the future. "How can we be resurrected in the future if we've already been resurrected through baptism?" people may have asked. And these musings threw people into confusion and even loss of faith. (vv14, 18) I'm reminded of once hearing a man argue that we should interpret God's name in

Exodus 3, “I AM THAT I AM,” as “I am that. I am.” According to this rendering of the words, the man said, we can conclude that all things are God. It is as if God is saying, “I am that and that and that. . .” Of course, the surrounding narrative shows this interpretation to be wildly off base and even contrary to the true meaning of the phrase. By playing with words, the man was able to warp the true meaning of scripture. Though such people may have good intentions, Paul only sees them as devolving into further and further ungodliness.

Timothy, on the other hand, is to be directly opposite of the Hymenaeus/Philetus crew. Rather than playing with words, he is to “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.” (v 15) Timothy is to handle not just words but the Word with care as he presents it faithfully to the people.

The last verse in this section calls attention to the truth standing in the face of the false teachings of those like Hymenaeus and Philetus. Despite the destructiveness of that teaching, God’s foundation (the true gospel) stands firm, and that foundation is inscribed with two phrases – one that refers to God and the other to God’s people. First, “The Lord knows those who are his,” is a reference to Numbers 16, which recounts the story of a challenge to Moses’ leadership. In response, Moses says that the Lord knows those who are his, referring to the true leaders. That context applies well to the Ephesus situation, where there are rival teachers. Paul seems to be saying, “God knows who the chosen and faithful leaders are.” Second, “Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness,” refers to the responsibility of all believers. False teachers who engage in the wickedness of false teaching are especially in view, though. God’s foundation – the true gospel – carries an inscription that promises God knows his chosen and faithful leaders and calls leaders (and all Christians) to depart from wickedness. Both of these sentiments speak directly against the false teachers.

**20 In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for special purposes and some for common use. 21 Those who cleanse themselves from the latter will be instruments for special purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.**

This metaphor is notoriously difficult to interpret because it seems that Paul changes trajectory midway through. Especially because of our familiarity with 1 Corinthians 12’s body of Christ imagery (where all parts of the body, whether honorable or dishonorable, are necessary), we expect Paul to talk about how all the household articles, whether gold, silver, wood, or clay, are all necessary to the work of the house. Here, however, Paul chooses one type of household article over another. Articles made of precious metals, which are for “special purposes,” are superior to those made from baser materials, which are for “common use.” Moreover, it seems that Christians should try to cleanse themselves from common use! The metaphor seems clumsy when viewed from this angle. Here, a more literal translation is helpful:

*20 Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. 21 Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work. (NASB)*

Note how the NASB speaks of “honor and dishonor” rather than special and common uses. While both uses are fair translations, the interpretation of Paul’s imagery relies on the former. Here, Paul is focusing on the initiative of the individual believer in his/her usefulness to God, and everything hinges on abstaining from “dishonorable” things. When this is done, the disciple becomes an article for honor, made holy, useful, and ready (v 21). The question is not, which kind of article are you? Instead, it is, which kind of article will you be? Those who cleanse themselves

from dishonorable things are set aside by God for honorable purposes and are ready for any task set before them.

***22 Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. 23 Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. 24 And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. 25 Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, 26 and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.***

In order to cleanse himself from dishonorable things, Timothy needs to (1) flee from the evil desires of youth, (2) refrain from foolish and stupid arguments, and (3) reject the temptation to dress down the upstart false teachers, though he does need to address them. If we apply this section back to the household articles, Timothy's situation presents him with a crossroads decision. Generally, he can give in to the evil desires of youth. Specifically, he can play the same game that the upstarts are playing. The goal is to remain an article for noble use through this messy process.

## TEACH THE TEXT

2 Timothy 2:13-26 moves in two directions, both of which are fruitful for teaching. First, the passage deals with appropriate handling of scripture. Second, it deals with how a Christian should conduct him/herself in the messiness of life. We'll explore both below.

### **Proper Handling of Scripture**

Beginning with the appropriate handling of scripture, Paul speaks of the false teachers quarrelling about words (v 14) and engaging in "godless chatter" (v 16). While these descriptors seem tame (after all, we're just quarrelling and chattering!), Paul believes these activities are toxic in the extreme. Quarreling leads to ruin (v 14), while godless chatter can lead to untruths that spread like gangrene (v 17). The teaching of two false teachers, Hymenaeus and Philetus have destroyed some people's faith!

While these issues aren't directly applied to scripture, their thrust does concern proper teaching, which in Paul's day would have dealt with the Old Testament and gospel proclamation (NT documents were in circulation, but they wouldn't be officially named as scripture until the 4th century). In our day, this boils down to the Old and New Testaments of the Bible, and a stark warning accompanies our use of these holy texts.

Like Hymenaeus and Philetus, it is possible to engage with scripture in improper and even destructive ways. No doubt these two were smart men whose grasp of the gospel message was sufficient to fuel their arguments for new, unorthodox views. Being smart and having a good grasp of scripture does not a saint make, though. Indeed, when our use of scripture devolves into quarrelling about words and engaging in godless chatter, we can be sure that we have missed the point!

Of course, a certain amount of discussion is needed if we are to interpret scripture correctly. Thus, all argument is not profane. At the same time, teaching that deviates from historic orthodoxy is dangerous, as are theological frameworks that make minor points into majors and major points into minors. In the end, we must, as Paul called

Timothy to do earlier in chapter 2, remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is the center, and we must keep it as such. Looking forward to 3:16, we can also say that handling scripture in such a way that it is not applied to the believer's life is moving in the wrong direction.

### **Dealing with the Messiness of Life**

Hymenaeus, Philetus, and those like them certainly seem to have made a mess of things in Ephesus, and it is Timothy's job to clean up their mess. To do so, he must wade into the mess to recover order. This will be a hard process that puts Timothy in the cross-hairs of suffering and temptation. Paul has already dealt with suffering in the first half of chapter 2. Here, he moves to issues of temptation.

To speak of temptation, Paul paints the picture of household objects for honorable and dishonorable purposes. As noted in the "Encounter the Text" section, the key here is that Timothy gets to decide which kind of object he will be. To be set aside for honor, he must cleanse himself from dishonorable things. In particular, Timothy must (1) "flee the evil desires of youth," (2) avoid "foolish and stupid arguments," and (3) refrain from brow-beating the false teachers. Numbers 2 and 3 are obviously directly attached to the situation in Ephesus. When faced with the false teachers and their message, Timothy will be tempted to devolve to their level by engaging in their arguments and dressing them down. If he is to remain an object for honor, Timothy must avoid these dishonorable courses of action. Though 1 is not as obviously tied to the Ephesus situation as 2 and 3, it can still be interpreted in this manner. When we deal with difficult situations, there exists a temptation to retreat to worldly comforts rather than addressing the situation. Timothy must also avoid this course of action.

Moving now to modern application, we all must deal with messes in life. Sometimes those messes are of our own making. Sometimes, as in Timothy's case, they are created by others. In the messiness of these situations, special care is needed to act well. After all, when we wade into a mess, we are in danger of slipping and becoming a mess ourselves. Or, we may be tempted to hide away from the situation and take comfort in unholy things. As was the case for Timothy, we must enter these messes with the clear purpose of remaining an object of honorable use. This will mean avoiding certain courses of action, as we have already discussed. Taking the second half of v 22 into account, we must also actively pursue the right way forward. If chapter 1 let us know that we are responsible for using our spiritual gifts, this passage informs us that we are responsible for our continued usefulness to God.

## **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

### **Vv 14-19**

1. What do you think Paul means when he talks about quarrelling about words and godless chatter?
2. When it comes to our handling of scripture, how do we know when we are drifting in the direction of quarrels and chatter?
3. What are good rules for handling scripture correctly?

### **Vv 20-21**

1. How do you think we should understand Paul's image of household objects?

2. What are dishonorable things that we should cleanse ourselves from?

**Vv 22-26**

1. What specific temptations did Timothy need to steer clear of?

2. Why does Paul talk about the “evil desires of youth” here?

3. What kind of messes do we deal with in life today?

4. When we deal with messes in our own lives, what are good guidelines for moving forward?

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