

Gently Correct Those in Opposition

📖 2 Timothy 2:20-26

👤 Pastor Jeremy Thomas

📅 August 19, 2018

🌐 fbgbible.org

📍 Fredericksburg Bible Church

107 East Austin Street

Fredericksburg, Texas 78624

(830) 997-8834

Last time we studied 2 Timothy 2:14-19. In short, these verses set forth the standard for ministry as teaching the word of God. To be God-honoring a teaching ministry will emphasize the things that the word of God emphasizes and avoid getting sidetracked by things that are debatable or opinion. Such things tend to be divisive and unproductive in believer's lives. Unfortunately, in an age of novelty, everyone wants to hear something new, but the truth is what people need to hear. In verse 14, Timothy was to remind his congregation at Ephesus about the things in the previous verses, namely that if they endure they will enjoy the reward of reigning with Him, if they deny, they will be denied rewards, but even if they are faithless, He is faithful. He was also to authoritatively charge them in the presence of the mighty God not to argue about trifling things, tier two and tier three ideas, which have no benefit to others and lead to intellectual catastrophe for those who hear. Instead, as verse 15 says, Timothy should be diligent to present himself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, staying on task in teaching the core truths of the word of God rather than being distracted by mere trifles. In verse 16, also avoid worldly conversation that is accessible to anyone, for it is worthless and will cause progress toward greater ungodliness. In verse 17, if false teachers are permitted to continue to teach along these lines it will spread like cancer among the congregation. Among those false teachers were Hymenaeus and Philetus, men who had gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection was spiritual only, occurring at conversion or baptism, and there was no future resurrection. This had already upset the faith of some. But verse 19, despite these departures from the truth, the truth of God stands, having this seal; on one side, that the Lord knows who belong to Him, and on the other side, those who profess Him should abstain from wickedness.

Verses 20-21 continue with the need to abstain from wickedness. A believer can get pretty involved in wickedness. In verse 20 he uses an illustration of a big house that has many containers, some for honorable uses and others for dishonorable. Everyone of us are one of these two kinds of vessels. He says, **Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of clay, and some to honor and some to dishonor.** A large house was not common in the ancient world, but those that were large were wealthy and had many vessels. The Greek word **vessels** is σκευος and refers to "a container of any kind," usually

a “jar” or “dish.” Some of these jars were made of **gold and silver** and others were made of **wood and clay**. The **gold and silver** jars were used for honorable purposes, such as serving food and drink but the **wood and clay** jars were used for dishonorable purposes, such as waste and garbage.

In verse 21 he borrows part of this illustration and applies it to believers in the church, making one change to the picture. He says, **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.** In other words, a believer may be a gold jar or a clay jar, but what you are is not important, as long as you are clean. The phrase **if anyone cleanses himself from these things** is εαν with the subjunctive, a third class condition. The third class condition means that maybe the believer cleanses himself and maybe he doesn't, but if he does he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master. Ryrie said, “There will be some wicked persons (vessels of wood and of earthenware) in every church, but no one need remain wicked (v. 21).” The fact that **anyone** can cleanse himself from wickedness and become a useful vessel to the Lord is significant since some believers consider themselves nothing more than a wooden or clay pot, fit only for dishonorable purposes. But anyone who presents themselves to God as clean will instantly be a vessel of honor, sanctified, useful to the Master. Therefore, the issue is not what kind of jar you are, but whether you are a clean jar. J. Vernon McGee put it this way, “In these verses a believer is pictured as a vessel. If a vessel is to be usable, it must be clean. For example, imagine you are walking across a desert, and you come to an oasis. You are parched and almost dying of thirst. You find two cups there. One is made of gold and highly ornamented, but it's dirty. The other is an old cracked cup. It will just barely hold water because it is cracked, but it is clean. Which one would you use?...He too uses clean vessels; He does not use dirty vessels....And today God is looking for clean vessels to use—not beautiful, but clean.”

This means God can use any one of us, as long as we cleanse ourselves from wickedness. When we do Paul says we become a **vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work**. Four things here, first, **a vessel for honor**. This means a thing that God can use for a special purpose. Second, **sanctified**. The Greek word **sanctified** is *ηγιασμενον* and means “set aside” or “made suitable.” It's a passive voice, so the one who does the setting apart is God. The order is that we cleanse ourselves from wickedness and then He sets us apart. The verb is in the perfect tense meaning past completed action with ongoing results. It sometimes refers to a standing, as here. When the believer cleanses himself from wickedness the Lord sanctifies him, making him the third thing, **useful to the Master**. He can now be used by the Master for some good purpose. The word **Master** is *δεσποτη* and refers to the Lord, of course. The title *δεσποτη* refers to one who has control over a thing, and is therefore the owner. The Lord is our owner. He has rights over us. But we're only a vessel for honor, set apart for Him and useful if we have cleansed ourselves from wickedness. The fourth thing is that we are then **prepared for every good work**. The participle **prepared** is a perfect tense meaning that we have been prepared for every good work when we cleanse ourselves from wickedness. According to Paul in Eph 2:10 good works are what we have been created in Christ Jesus to do. In short, **good works** are the fruit of the Spirit produced through us and are rewardable at the judgment seat of Christ. The summary of this verse is that there

are believers who are walking in wickedness, they need to cleanse themselves so that they become vessels for a special purpose, set apart by God, useful to the Sovereign, prepared for good works.

In verse 22 Paul tells Timothy how he can cleanse himself. He says, **Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace.** There's a play on words with the contrast **flee** and **pursue**. **Flee** one thing, **pursue** four things. One commentator said, "It is not enough to run away from wrong; we must run after what is good." If we are doing what is good we can't be doing what is evil. Therefore, doing good is a bulwark against doing evil. What Timothy must flee is **youthful lusts**. There is much discussion of the word **lusts** in the commentaries. This word has a sexual connotation in our language, but it is much broader in the Greek. The word is ἐπιθυμία and refers to "a great desire for something, longing, craving, or a desire for something forbidden or simply inordinate, craving." It can really be anything that we have a great desire for, including power, pride, popularity, sex, money, etc.... These lusts stem from our sinful nature or disposition inherited from Adam. When we become believers this sinful nature is sometimes referred to as the old sin nature. What the sin nature is is a disposition toward evil. It is an inclination toward evil. The sin nature has almost a life of its own within us. And we therefore have lusts or cravings. What we have to learn to do is to say no to those cravings and yes to God. So the good news is that while we still do have the sinful nature, we are not slaves to it and we do not have to obey it. When we became believers the power of the sinful nature was broken and we were given a new nature that can be used to glorify God. Thus, we have two natures and one is what Paul also calls the flesh and the other is what is animated by the Spirit. We need to flee living by the flesh and pursue living by the Spirit.

The word **youthful**, that modifies **lusts** is the adjective νεωτερικασ. This word is used only once in the NT and is therefore known as a *hapax legomenon*. Probably the best way to translate it is "juvenile." Timothy was to **flee** juvenile **lusts**. Timothy was in his 30's at the time. Paul either considered him a juvenile at that age or he is characterizing certain lusts as juvenile. I think the latter is true. There are certain lusts that are troublesome especially when are younger. These are what Timothy needed to flee.

But just what are these **lusts**? Probably the best way to interpret them is by the contrasting things that he is to pursue; **righteousness, faith, love and peace**. In other words, if Timothy is to **pursue righteousness** then he is to flee "unrighteousness." If he is to pursue **faith**, he is to flee "doubt." If he is to pursue **love**, he is to flee fear and selfishness. And if he is to pursue **peace**, he is to flee "hostility." These are basically a contrast between what the flesh produces and what the Spirit produces. Timothy needed to flee juvenile lusts of the flesh and pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace that come from the Spirit. By righteousness is meant moral behavior that is in accordance with God's righteousness. By faith is meant having confidence in the word of God. By love is meant giving himself to others in service. By peace is meant living in harmony with others. These are all fruits of the Holy Spirit.

At the end of the verse Paul teaches that he should not do this alone. He should do this **with those who call on the Lord**, meaning in the company of committed believers. Those who **call on the Lord** are those who call upon

Him in prayer. Prayer is a sign of dependence. These are fellow believers who live in dependence upon God. Timothy needs to spend time in the company of fellow believers who live in dependence upon God. Together the individuals in the group will be able to resist temptation. This instruction is important because it points up the importance of surrounding ourselves with believers who depend on the Lord. If we don't do this, we will struggle in the Christian life. And finally, Timothy should do so **from a pure heart**, meaning with pure motives. Our motives must not be contaminated by wickedness. They must be **pure**. If so we will be useful to the Master. Wiersbe said, "In fact, God's man Paul commands us to fellowship "with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Tim. 2:22). After all, this is the purpose of the ministry of the Word (1 Tim. 1:5)." Ryrie summarized this verse saying, "Temptation is to be avoided by fleeing what hinders, by following what helps, and by seeking the company of spiritual people." Constable said, "Timothy should run toward the goals of right behavior, faith in God, love for all people, and peace with his fellow committed brethren."

In verse 23 Paul says, **But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels.** The Greek word translated **But** is δε and it is not a contrast with what came before. It should simply be translated "And." **And refuse foolish and ignorant speculations.** The key word here is **speculations**. This word is Ζητησις and refers to a debate over a controversial question. The two adjectives that characterize such debates are **foolish and ignorant**. The word **foolish** is μωρος, from which we get "moron" and it means "stupid." Don't get in stupid debates. The other word **ignorant** is Απαιδευτους and means uninstructed, uneducated. Wisdom says don't get into debates about such things.

The end of the verse tells us why, **knowing that they produce quarrels.** The Expositors Bible Commentary says, "Such questions will be brought before you: refuse to discuss them... Why? Because "they produce quarrels" (machas, "fights"). These tend to divide the church and so destroy it." It's not healthy for the members of the body of Christ to be fighting. Yet that happens all too often. Some silly thing is brought to attention and believers start arguing about them. The true minister of the word should not get involved in such debates. It is contrary to the characteristic of peace in verse 22. J. Vernon McGee said, "Some folk are continually wanting to argue with me about nonessentials. I don't have time for that. We are living in a world that is on fire! Let's get the Word of God to it before it is too late." I couldn't agree more. Sometimes an issue is very important to someone, and you can get sucked into it. If you detect it, get out, it's a waste of time. Consider how much the issue is discussed by the Bible, or if it even is and if there are legitimate disagreements about such things. If so, it's worth your time to understand the issues, but it's not worth your time to debate them. Constable said, "Timothy needed to refuse to participate in unwise and immature debates since these generate arguments that prove divisive (cf. 1 Tim. 1:7)....Those who participate in this activity as a type of sport are ignorant (apaidetous). The same Greek word means undisciplined, uneducated, or rude."

Verse 24, **The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance**

leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will. First, in verse 24, Timothy gives a negative, **The Lord's bond-servants must not be quarrelsome.** He already told us this essentially in the prior verse. Here he repeats it but uses the verb **must not**, which is from *δει*, a verb of necessity. He is by no means to **be quarrelsome.** The expression **bond servant** is *δουλος*, and a *δουλος* is a slave of God, a subject of God, a possession of God. When it is used in a positive sense, as here, it refers to one set free and therefore indebted to the one who set him free. The **Lord** is one who set us free from the penalty of sin and therefore we are indebted to the Lord. Therefore, we **must not be quarrelsome.** I find this almost comical since most of the time the pastor is at the center of the quarrel. Pastors have a hard time not being quarrelsome. **But** instead of getting involved in quarrels, Paul says, he **must...be kind to all.** He has to be kind, not to everybody who is kind to him, but to everybody period. If people are unkind to him he still has to be kind to them. It's just that way, if you want to have a ministry. And that's what always has to be kept in mind. This is ministry. Trust me when I tell you that you have no idea unless you have been a pastor for many years how bad you will be treated and how important it is to be kind to them anyway. That's what makes the difference. It is nothing to be kind to those who are kind to you. It is everything to be kind to those who are not kind to you. Further, Paul says he must be **able to teach.** I've thought about this word for years. This is the same word used in 1 Tim 3:2 where it gives the requirements for an elder. The word is *διδακτος* and it can mean "able to teach," emphasizing ability, which might point to the spiritual gift, or "apt to teach," meaning a proclivity or disposition toward teaching, or it has even been suggested that it refers to effectiveness in teaching, such that the effect of the teaching is felt on the audience. I think that probably what is in view here is the second idea, "apt to teach," in the sense of having a proclivity or tendency to teach. They probably do have the gift of teaching, but the real issue is desire to teach. The Lord's bond-servant must have a desire to teach, otherwise he's not going to do it well. And the last thing in verse 24, he must be **patient when wronged.** The word **patient** is *ανεξικακος*. It means "bearing evil without resentment." You can't be the type of person that holds it against other people. You have to forgive them and forgiveness doesn't necessarily mean forget, but it does mean you don't bring it up again, even in your own soul, so that eventually you do forget. So you need to be able to bear evil and not hold it against people. Because if you do you can't minister to them. I think this is a very important quality because in ministry people are going to do and say evil things to you. When it happens to me I usually end up self-evaluating, asking myself, where did this come from, is it something I have done or said? But the bottom line is I have to deal with people being evil toward me and I can't resent them. I just have to be patient with them, give them space to grow. Wiersbe said, "God's slave does not have an easy time teaching the Word. Satan opposes him and tries to trap his listeners (2 Tim. 2:26). Also, some people are just naturally difficult to teach. They enjoy "foolish and stupid arguments" (2 Tim. 2:23, niv) and have no desire to feed on the nourishing Word of God. Until you have experienced it, you have no idea how difficult it is to impart spiritual truth to some people."

In verse 25 he continues, **with gentleness correcting those in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth.** The goal here is to restore people to the truth. Note that you will have people in **opposition**. The important thing is to know that they are not in opposition to you, but to the truth. You have the opportunity to be a useful vessel of God and gently correct them. The word translated **correcting** is *παιδευοντα*, a word that refers to “child training.” It can be remedial, but that doesn’t seem to fit the context. It’s a gentler procedure. Paul says, **with gentleness correct** them. This is his biggest concern, how we do it. We don’t just slam the truth on them. We gently correct them.

The goal is that **God may grant them repentance**. Maybe He will, maybe He won’t, perhaps they are not too far gone into error, but perhaps **God may grant** them repentance. Part of what you are doing when you are working with this person is praying that God would grant them repentance. The word **repentance** refers to a “change of mind.” What they need to have a change of mind about is the false teaching they endorse. They are believing something incorrect, or may teach things that are incorrect, they need to have a change of mind. If they do Paul says this will **lead to the knowledge of the truth**. The goal of the minister is to lead the believer back to the truth. Note that these are believers. Ryrie said, “The purpose of gentle and patient correction is remedial: (1) to bring repentance; (2) to acknowledge the truth; and (3) to release from Satan’s trap.”

Which brings us to verse 26. **and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.** The word **come to** refer to a man coming out of a drunken stupor. A believer who has gone astray from the truth has fallen into a drunken stupor. When he repents and is led to the knowledge of the truth he is coming out of that stupor. As he comes to his senses he **escapes from the snare of the devil**. The word **snare** refers to a trap that is laid to catch the foot of prey. Satan lays snares to catch us. When we’re caught we’re at his beck and call to do his bidding. The word **captive** is *ζωγρεω* and means captured alive. In the perfect tense it means “having been captured alive” or “being in a state of captivity” *υπ αυτου* - under him, to do the will of him. This is not a good situation for a believer to be in, but it can and does happen. Ministry is about helping people come to their senses and escape him. The primary means of doing this is teaching the word. Wiersbe said, “A servant’s purpose is not to win arguments but...to see deceived persons brought to repentance (“I was wrong—I have changed my mind”) and the acknowledging of the truth.” “Thayer says that this passage indicates “to be set free from the snare of the devil and to return to a sound mind [one’s sober senses].”

Knight had this excellent summary, “This remarkable and helpful section [vv. 24–26] sets forth the duty of the Lord’s servant and the attitude with which he should conduct himself. The central focus of this duty is teaching and correcting those in opposition so that they may repent and learn the truth (vv. 24–25). The Lord’s servant must seek to communicate this truth in such a way that opponents embrace it and abandon their error with proper remorse. God’s servant thus seeks to be the instrument through whose efforts God brings them to himself.”