

Message #9

II Timothy 2:14-19

There is a very famous story about a baseball player whose name was Hack Wilson. Hack Wilson was a great baseball player for several teams back in the 1930's. He played 12 seasons in the major leagues. Wilson had a fondness for the night life and there are many surviving stories about his exploits. He loved to go to bars and drink. It was not uncommon for him to stay out all night, get two hours sleep and then go to the ball park for the afternoon game.

The manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers was Max Carey and he decided to call a team meeting for the purpose of convincing Wilson to stop drinking alcohol. When all the players were there, he decided to give an illustration of the dangers of drinking. He took two glasses: One he filled with water and the other he filled with gin (Wilson's favorite drink). Then Carey took two worms and dropped them into each glass. The worm in the glass of water wriggled happily and started swimming. The worm in the glass of gin immediately stiffened and died.

All of the players watching the demonstration were impressed except Hack Wilson. He didn't even seem to be interested. So finally the manager said to him: "Do you follow my reasoning Wilson?" Wilson said, "Sure do skipper, if you drink gin you won't get worms." By the way, he died at age 48 and alcohol was a contributing factor.

It does not matter for some people how brilliant or good the illustration or warning; they just do not get it or apply it. But when it comes to the Word of God, one had better listen to it or one can end up eternally dead.

The greatest need for every human being is to accurately understand what is in the Bible. Interpret it wrong; learn it wrong and it can cost one eternity and eternal rewards. Now the job of a minister is to preach and teach the Scriptures. It is a daunting task. There is a lot on the line. Every minister should carefully study these verses because if any minister mishandles the Word and doctrines of God, he will be highly and eternally accountable. Thomas Constable said these verses challenge the minister to "Faithfulness in public ministry" (*Notes on II Timothy*, p. 20). The primary point is this:

AN AWARD-WINNING, HONORABLE MINISTER IS ONE WHO CAREFULLY GUARDS HIS VERBAL TEACHING AND HIS VERBAL DISCUSSIONS, KNOWING THEY MAKE A GREAT IMPACT ON PEOPLE AND IN PART DETERMINE ONE'S OUTCOME IN ETERNITY.

As I have been reading through the Bible this year, I have been struck by how many admonitions there are to carefully watch what we say. We are challenged to be swift to hear and slow to speak, but most people delight in speaking. In Galatians, Paul lists certain speaking as a flesh sin that can cost one an inheritance. He puts verbal wrangling in the same category with sexual immorality (Galatians 5:19-21). Wise people tend to be quiet people who are very careful about what he or she says. That is so clear from this text.

Frankly this passage scares me. This passage is about the use of one's speech, specifically as it relates to God and theological instruction. Notice the emphasis in this text: **2:14** - "words which are useless"; **2:15** - "accurately handling the word of truth"; **2:16** - "worldly and empty chatter"; **2:17** - "their talk will spread"; **2:18** - "gone astray from the truth saying." All of these things have to do with speech and what is said about God and His Word.

What we say, especially in the arena of doctrine and theology is very serious and very critical to the mind of God. Paul wanted Timothy to think very seriously about the precision in his Biblical knowledge and communication.

When Paul opens **verse 14**, he says "**remind them of these things.**" So part of Timothy's responsibility was to remind faithful people of God, faithful men of the responsibility they have to communicate Pauline grace doctrine and to develop in the award-winning qualities and to stay focused on the truth as it relates to Jesus Christ.

The following verses have to do with being very careful with one's speech when it comes to discussing things that pertain to God. Notice what Paul says in **verse 14**, this is a charge being made "**in the presence of God.**"

That word "charge" means that Timothy was to authoritatively and solemnly present these things about verbal communication into the minds of ministers and remind them this is in the presence of God (*Ibid.*, p. 109).

John Calvin said, "this charge is intended to strike terror into those who would wish to act differently." Alfred Plummer said, "God's eye is upon the preacher and the congregation." This is a very serious passage of Scripture and people who stand up in front of others to open their mouths had better think very seriously about this.

There are three main charges given in this text and we do not want to overlook any of them:

SOLEMN CHARGE #1 – The charge not to wrangle about words. **2:14**

The word "wrangle" is one that means to fight, to quarrel, to dispute. Now a good minister will stand strong in his fight for Pauline grace (2:1). A good minister will even speak out against any who preach "another gospel" (Gal. 1:6-9). However, **a good minister will not get into fights or verbal wrangling about things that cannot be settled by the Word of God.**

The specific context here has to do with quarrels in the arena of theology that are outside of the revealed Scriptures. Now wrangling about these things is negative and wrong for two reasons:

Reason #1 - It is useless for people. **2:14a**

Again we are to hold tight to and defend "the standard of sound words" (1:13).

In fact, Paul actually told Titus that he was to be so well-grounded in truth that he could shut the mouths of those who don't know what they are talking about (Titus 1:9-11). Peter said we must always be ready to give a defense of truth (I Pet. 3:15).

But things that are not sound and speculative have no place being communicated or argued with the people of God. Such fighting is useless and of no value.

Years ago there were some ministers who wanted to argue about versions of the Bible. I actually personally talked to one of the leaders of this movement that was hurting God's people. He had actually taken a Bible into his pulpit that was not what he preferred and burned it. At the time I met the man I was well along the way in the study of Greek language so one day when he came into Kregel, I asked him what he knew about manuscripts and if he had actually studied Greek. He said no. Now here was a guy arguing and fighting and he didn't even know the issues. I took him to the Textus Receptus Greek Text and showed him from an English Bible where they had missed the word. I then showed him how other English Bibles didn't miss it. It didn't matter, he still wanted to argue.

What a useless argument. Instead of encouraging God's people to read a good English translation of God's precious Word, he is fighting against them doing that. He spent his entire life wrangling about a cause.

Reason #2 - It ruins people. **2:14b**

The fact is when a minister argues over words that are of no consequence, he is not seeking a victory for truth; but a victory for himself. This does not strengthen people, it ruins them.

Arguing about ridiculous things "ruins" and disturbs and can overthrow the faith of the hearers. When you open your mouth and argue about things not worth arguing about, it does not strengthen the faith of the hearers; it ruins their faith.

There are many theological institutions that are ruining their students and the faith of their students. They go to school and sit in classrooms with theological professors who may be brilliant in their field; but they have no spirituality to go with it. I knew of one such person who went to school and left totally disillusioned because the teachers didn't even know what they believed. Their concept of God was warped and their belief in the Bible was skeptical. They ruined him. They wrangled their words in the classroom hour after hour and they ruined a man. I had one man who was no longer in ministry say to me—"I wish I would have gone to the school you did."

SOLEMN CHARGE #2 – The charge to carefully study to accurately teach. **2:15**

The words "be diligent" (some translate "study") are words that literally mean to give zeal and diligence to something.

The admonition is to give great zeal and diligence to be approved by God as a workman who will not end up being ashamed. **Now the issue at stake in being a workman who does not end up ashamed is “accurately handling the word of truth.”**

The implication of this is that in order to accurately handle the Word of truth, one must work. The word translated “workman” is one that refers to working in order to bring or make something. In fact, this particular word has to do with undertaking an employment task in order to produce something (*Ibid.*, pp. 178-179). This word “workman” emphasizes “the laborious nature of the task.”

So the minister must be very diligent to work hard in order to produce for people an “accurately handling of the Word of truth.” If one is not to be ashamed before God, one must work hard to do this.

Now the words “accurately handling” literally mean to cut something open in a straight way. (*Ibid.*, p. 322). This particular word was used of a tentmaker who made cuts in material that were straight as opposed to curvy. **So the job of a minister is to work very hard at carefully and accurately expounding the Word of God to the people.** Careful, prayerful preparation and study is needed to do this.

One commentator said this charge calls for serious “straight forward exegesis.” John Calvin said in his life he discovered that when it came to this charge to ministers, most didn’t do it. In fact, he said, “most mutilate it, tear it, torture it or break it in pieces, but few rightly divide it.” Now the solemn charge issue at stake is not being ashamed as a minister when the minister gets before God. A non-ashamed minister will have spent hours studying the Scriptures so that on Sunday he can accurately lay it open for the people.

Part of the process demands literal interpretation. Award-winning ministers will carefully dissect what is actually written in a text and will work hard to bring that to life for the people.

SOLEMN CHARGE #3 – The charge to avoid certain chatter. 2:16-18

Notice that **verse 16** begins with a sharp contrasting conjunction “but.” In sharp contrast to pursuing a careful and accurate communication of God’s Word, there must be a careful avoiding of other words.

That word “avoid” (**verse 16**) means to turn away from something in a sense of avoiding it. There is to be a separation. Doctrinal and Ecclesiastical separation is very Biblical and it is necessary if we are to finish an award-winner.

There are two types of speech or chatter that an award-winning minister will avoid:

Type #1 - Worldly words. 2:16a

The word “worldly” refers to words that are unhallowed and not sacred. These are words that are profane and have no business being in the vocabulary of a minister.

If a sacred text uses a word, then most assuredly we have a right to use it. However, we do not have any right to use words that are crude and worldly.

There are some ministers who think it is cute to use curse words in the pulpit for some startle effect. They view themselves as sophisticated progressives. Frankly, the only thing they are progressing in is “ungodliness.” There is no place for this.

Type #2 - Empty words. 2:16b

Empty words are words that are fruitless. They are not theologically accurate. The speech has no sacred quality or substance to it. These are words that are meaningless.

Ministers who use these kinds of words view themselves culturally relevant. These kinds of verbal wrangling have no place in church.

Paul gives two reasons why:

(Reason #1) - Because these kinds of discussions advance ungodliness. 2:16b

Unsound words do not produce sound lives, they promote godlessness. The word “ungodly” means that worldly and empty words end up producing a godless, impious, lack of reverence and even excessive licentiousness in the lives of people (*Ibid.*, p. 63).

Churches that do not focus on careful teaching and preaching of God’s Word will never produce godliness, they will actually promote ungodliness.

(Reason #2) - Because these kinds of discussions spread like a disease. 2:17-18

Empty preaching and teaching and inaccurate expositions will poison a church and kill its life and it can do this quickly and rapidly, just like the spread of gangrene. Such discussions will poison the body of Jesus Christ.

Gangrene is a disease that destroys living tissue by an infection which obstructs the blood supply and therefore obstructs the oxygen from getting to certain parts of the body. Gangrene cuts off the life support system of blood and oxygen.

Faulty teaching or empty teaching is like that. It can stop the growth of a body and kill its life. Therefore Paul says you avoid worldly and empty words.

Now Paul was not opposed to naming some guys who had apparently done this (v. 17). They were in the church and they had messed it up through their quirky theological views. The two men he names known for not studying but were known for a lot of verbal spouting were Hymenaeus and Philetus.

Philetus we know nothing about, but Hymenaeus we met in I Tim. 1:20. He was some type of self-exalted teacher who Paul publicly exposed and delivered over to Satan.

What Hymenaeus and Philetus did was to allegorically interpret the Scriptures. They allegorized the resurrection. Now Paul taught that there was a spiritual resurrection in Spirit baptism in which we are actually joined to Jesus Christ and he also taught that there would be a physical resurrection one day at the Rapture of the Church.

Apparently, what these two did was to spiritualize and allegorize Paul's teaching and say that the resurrection was already past. This error ruined some people. They were getting doctrinally fuzzy and shaken (II Thess. 2:2). They thought they had missed the resurrection and were in the day of the Lord.

We aren't so much up against this faulty doctrine today; but we are up against a heretical prosperity gospel being propagated by many in the Charismatic movement. They are preaching a wealth and health gospel that is not in the Word of God. One guy recently told his congregation that if they would give him money to buy a 60 million dollar jet, God would prosper them.

Paul said in this very chapter I am suffering for the Gospel (2:8-9), not prospering for the Gospel. Paul taught a hardship endurance Gospel, not a prosperity gospel. Our faithfulness does not give us great treasures on earth; it lays them up in heaven. These false preachers need to be exposed. They are like Hymenaeus and Philetus.

We are also up against a "love gospel" in which God loves everybody just the way they are. They go to church and hear how much God loves them and never hear about the wrath of God that will catapult them into hell unless they believe on Jesus Christ. These are Hymenaeus and Philetus-types today.

John Calvin said it is the duty of a Pauline award-winning minister to expose those whose teachings are false because if we don't, we, to some extent, give them the power to injure our people.

If you hold a glass of water next to a glass of certain poisons, by initial sight they both look like water. But if you drink the poison, no matter how much you want it to be water, no matter how you feel about it, the result is it will kill you.

Let me give a warning to all— if you shipwreck the faith of someone through your vain unbiblical ideas and you do not study to rightly divide the Word of truth, you will answer to Almighty God.

Verse 19 closes the section by saying "nevertheless" the Lord "knows those who are His." Even faulty doctrine cannot pull one out of the family of God. God knows everyone in His family intimately.

Our job is to faithfully and accurately communicate the truth about God. The whole truth and nothing but the truth.