

Passing The Torch "An Approved Workman" 2 Timothy 2:14-26

Introduction

2 Timothy is a letter written by Paul to his young son in the faith, Timothy. Paul appointed Timothy as the pastor in Ephesus and charged him with the task of grounding new Christians and strengthening the Church. In this letter, Paul writes to encourage Timothy not to give in or give up when the difficulties come.

He tells Timothy to remind the believers that God will be with them and strengthen them in every situation.

In verse 14, Paul writes, "Remind *them* of these things, charging *them* before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers. Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane *and* idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness. And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some." (2Ti 2: 14-18 NKJV)

Paul challenges Timothy to be an approved workman. In verse 15, he says, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

How do you become an approved worker? The King James Version says, "study to show yourself approved." Other translations say "be diligent" or "make every effort." The point is becoming an approved worker doesn't happen by accident. Paul says that an approved worker is one that researches, studies diligently, and prepares for the task and shows up ready to give his very best effort. When the apprentice has faced the scrutiny of other skilled workers, he is endorsed by them as an approved worker.

In Paul's day, the currency used was metal coins. But the process of making these coins could easily be counterfeited. At one time in Athens, they passed some eighty laws regulating the manufacturing of their coins in an attempt to curtail counterfeiting. Thankfully, most money changers would not accept any counterfeit money and would only put genuine full-weighted coins into circulation. These merchants were known as approved money changers. Those who came to Athens and needed to exchange their currency for Athenian coins would seek out these approved merchants to obtain authentic coins.

Paul wanted Timothy to be like these approved merchants when it came to the gospel. He wanted Timothy to be a reliable and approved worker who could be counted on to preach the truth. Paul highlights three characteristics of an approved workman.

An approved workman for Christ must demonstrate a thorough knowledge of the scriptures. In other words, know your Bible! The Greek phrase means to cut a straight path. Paul wants Timothy to stick to the strict interpretation of the scriptures. You can't use Scripture to support your own brand of theology or your own particular ideas and preferences. That's called proof-texting.

When it comes to the Bible, we must believe that God says what he means and means what he says! Paul calls out Timothy to properly handle the Word of God. Properly handling the Word of God involves several things.

1. We must know what the word of God says!
2. We must be able to apply the word of God to our own lives!
3. We must diligently seek out the meaning of Scripture.
4. We must understand and teach Scripture correctly so that others can embrace its truth!

These things are crucial to the forward progress of the gospel. Paul reminds Timothy three times not to get sidetracked. In verse 14, he says, "Remind *them* of these things, charging *them* before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers." (2Ti 2:14 NKJV)

In verse 16, he says, "But shun profane *and* idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness. And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some." (2Ti 2:16-18 NKJV)

And in verse 23, he says, "But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife." (2Ti 2:23 NKJV)

These are imperative commands, "remind, shun, and avoid."

I. Don't Argue About Faith

The first lesson for approved workers is to learn not to argue and strive about unprofitable words. Arguing over unimportant things only distracts and ruins the hearer's ability to hear and understand the important message.

Sometimes you see this happen between believers of different denomination backgrounds. They argue over doctrinal differences and lose their objectivity and ability to unify to proclaim the essential message of Christ's saving grace. Sometimes believers need to be reminded who is and who is not the real enemy. Paul says that striving about words is not only unprofitable but can even cause "ruin" or more literally a "disaster."

You should always be positive about your faith and refuse to get into meaningless arguments with others. Know and understand your beliefs and always be willing to

share your faith with others. However, you should never try to force your beliefs upon others. Each person must make their own choice about Jesus.

II. Avoid Godless Chatter

Secondly, Paul says to "shun profane and idle babblings." Why? Because they foster and increase ungodliness. In verse 17, Paul says the message of division spreads like cancer.

He says, "Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some." (2Ti 2:17-18 NKJV)

While it's important to be reminded of the effect of arguing and disagreeing over doctrines, Paul says we should remove ourselves from arguments that cause strife because they are like a cancer that spreads rapidly. Even when we're sharing the good news with others, we don't need to insist that they accept us or our witness for Christ.

I recently read that cancer is the second leading cause of death in the U.S. We have learned that cancer is the uncontrolled growth of abnormal cells in the body. It develops when the body's normal regulation of cells stops working properly. That causes the old cells to grow out of control, forming new, abnormal cells. Unfortunately, if cancer is left untreated, it will spread throughout the body, destroying many of the members of the body until it eventually causes death.

This is the example Paul uses when he talks about the ruin caused by godless chatter. Paul recognized that this godless chatter had taken root in Ephesus in the life of Hymenaeus and Philetus. Paul identifies their teaching about the resurrection of the dead as falsehood. In 1 Timothy, Hymenaeus is the person Paul delivered to Satan so he could learn not to blaspheme. Now it seems that Philetus has also been taken in by this error. Apparently, this message had become popular and was spreading quickly.

But Paul says they had strayed from the truth of Christ's teachings. They may have started out correctly, but somehow they got off the path and into false teaching. They began to teach that the resurrection was already past and that believers were now living in God's millennial Kingdom, and there was no future resurrection. Their teaching sabotaged the blessed hope that Jesus would return for his followers, and those who died in faith would experience a resurrection.

If you stick with what the Bible says and let the Holy Spirit reveal its truth to you, you won't go down the wrong path. That's the good news!

III. Live A Clean Life

In verse 20, Paul adds that an approved worker must live a clean life. "But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay,

some for honor and some for dishonor. Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work." (2Ti 2:20-21 NKJV)

Cleansing can never be a matter of just avoiding bad things. It must also be the pursuit of replacing those bad habits with good ones. Cleansing extends to how we treat others. Living a clean life means we do everything we can to be right with others. Living a clean life also means staying clear of the downward pull of the world. And it also means avoiding getting sucked into meaningless debates. Of course, Timothy should defend the faith and stand up for the truth of Scripture. Paul urges him to do that. Paul, himself, is a model of that kind of defense of the truth.

Paul also warns against the pride that refuses to listen to anyone else and emphatically concludes that everyone who disagrees with them is wrong. Sometimes it's the argument that is ignorant, not the questions. Paul uses the words "foolish" and "ignorant." The word "foolish" comes from the Greek word that means "moronic." You can spend a lot of time on trivial matters and never advance the cause of Christ.

Paul uses the home to illustrate this point. In any household, there are different kinds of vessels with different functions. Most of you have fine china that you use for special occasions. But you also have dishes that you use every day. You'll find pots and pans and cooking utensils in the kitchen as well, but they serve a different function. God has different functions for different Christians. Some serve behind the scenes, and others serve in more visible capacities. But one thing is required of any item to be used, and that is it be clean. Would you drink water from a dirty glass?

Certainly, living a clean life means that we flee sensual lust like Joseph did when he fled from the sexual advances of Potiphar's wife. (Genesis 39:11-18). But the Greek literally reads "flee youthful desires." Paul isn't referring so much to fleshly desires as to the temptations of pride, conceit, selfishness, arrogance, or trying to promote your own wisdom.

IV. Pursue Righteousness

Those who live a clean life pursue righteousness. In verse 22, Paul says, "Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife." (2Ti 2:22-23 NKJV)

Youthful lusts are desires and temptations that are especially prominent among adolescents and young adults. They include sexual temptation, the forbidden pleasures of the flesh, and a longing for fame and glory, among other things that often plague a person's youth. Sadly, many people never conquer these desires and find themselves ruining their relationships with others.

Paul's command is simple, flee youthful lusts! Don't challenge them, and don't flirt with them. The idea that you can handle life's temptations has been the downfall of many who have fallen into sin. An approved worker can't really say "yes" to God until they are ready to say "no" to some other things.

Paul cautions Timothy to guard against the errors of the intellect. In his letter to the Romans, he says, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. (Rom 1:18-25 NKJV)

Paul tells Timothy to pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace. Honorable people are committed to doing honorable things. They pursue righteousness (which means right behavior), and faith, and love, and peace. Righteous people don't need to go around shaming people because they don't think and act like they do. Paul tells Timothy to purge himself and separate himself from the things and people who belittle and dishonor others but to associate with those who encourage and honor people.

Conclusion

An approved workman does not argue over faith issues. Approved workers avoid godless chatter, live a clean life, and pursue righteousness. Approved workers, who know how to handle the scriptures correctly deal gently with those who oppose them. In verse 24 Paul writes that "A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and *that* they may come to their senses *and escape* the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to *do* his will." (2Ti 2:24-26 NKJV)

One of the very challenging things about being a servant of the Lord is that we must live a life that is worthy of Christlikeness. Paul says that gentleness should be shown even to those who least deserve it. Even if there is no apparent hope of progress, we must still accept the challenge.

Seasoned Christian servants must not quarrel but be gentle to everyone. Approved Christian workers don't pick fights or look for conflict. Some feel energized and motivated when they find an issue they can fight against.

But, Paul wanted Timothy to be different. He wanted Timothy to be humble even if he had to correct those who opposed the gospel. That doesn't mean we should never confront those who oppose the truth. But when we do, we must do it with humility. Paul specifically told Timothy how to correct these opposing ones.

An approved worker can introduce a person to Jesus so they can repent of their sins and experience Christ's forgiveness. The hope is those who fight against God will come to their senses and open their eyes to the deception and lies of Satan. God wants all those who are captive to escape the snare of the devil. There are so many who need to escape the snare of the devil, and the good news is that God is ready to set them free. But each person must make their own choice who they will serve.

Our choice is to study and learn the scriptures and make ourselves available to the Lord. Paul wanted to make sure Timothy would make it all the way to the end and one day join Paul when he had fought the good fight and finished his course. That is Paul's desire for each of us.