

2 Timothy

Week 4

Lisa Scheffler, author

Day 1

Years ago, author Thom Rainer asked a simple question on Twitter, “what has caused conflicts, fights, and/or schisms in your church?” He said the post “blew up” with dozens of responses. He catalogues the most absurd in this [blog post](#). These include:

- A 45-minute heated argument over the type of filing cabinet to purchase: black or brown; 2, 3, or 4 drawers.
- A dispute in the church because the Lord’s Supper had cran/grape juice instead of grape juice.
- An argument on whether the church should allow deviled eggs at the church potluck.
- A fight over which picture of Jesus to put in the foyer.
- Two different churches reported fights over the type of coffee. In one of the churches, they moved from Folgers to a stronger Starbucks brand. In the other church, they simply moved to a stronger blend. Members left the church in the latter example.

In our passage from 2 Timothy for this week, Paul warns Timothy against engaging in “foolish and stupid arguments” because they produce quarrels. (I think we can all agree that the examples above are pretty foolish.) Yet he also warns him against allowing dangerous false teaching to spread like “gangrene.”

How can we tell the difference? And how should we treat people with whom we disagree? We will explore these issues this week.

Read

2 Timothy 2:14–26 (NIV)

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."

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.

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.

Reflect

- How would you summarize Paul's concerns in this passage?
- What are some modern controversies that result in quarrels? How do you decide when an idea is worth confronting, and when it's best to "agree to disagree"?
- Take some time to pray for peace and unity in your church.

Day 2

The topic in this week's passage is quarrels and fights in the church. How should we handle them, especially when they are over things that really matter?

Let's see what Paul says to Timothy.

Read

2 Timothy 2:14–19 (NIV)

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."

Think About

Paul warns against two people, by name, Hymenaeus and Philetus. We don't know anything more about them but can imagine they had enough influence to be causing problems with their false ideas. They were teaching an idea with unsettling implications: that "resurrection" refers to something that's already happened, rather than the glorious, future event that awaits all God's people. Imagine if you thought you'd missed the resurrection? Or that it was all just a metaphor, and we won't be raised bodily from the grave? That false idea could challenge your faith.

How did this idea take hold? N.T. Wright has a theory:

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."¹

Regardless of how this idea spread, it was leading to a "quarreling about words" that was worse than useless because it was damaging those who listened. False teachers are destructive, not just

¹ Tom Wright, [*Paul for Everyone: The Pastoral Letters: 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus*](#) (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 106–107.

in what they teach, but how they operate within the body of Christ. They are frequently arrogant, rigid, unkind, and divisive.

Paul advises Timothy to avoid the “godless chatter” but to be well-equipped to handle Scripture correctly. Some older translations say, “a workman rightly dividing the word of truth” (verse 15) because the Greek verb there is literally “to cut.” Wright suggests the image we should get from this verse is of someone carving out a straight path through the wilderness.²

As a pastor, Timothy should help lead the church to an understanding of truth. Yet, this is not a responsibility limited to pastors. We should all learn to handle God’s word with integrity, so we can help others find their way through.

The threat of false teaching is real, both then and today. In verse 19, Paul offers words of assurance. In the ancient world, a seal was a mark of authenticity and ownership. God’s foundation is secure. Because he is trustworthy and faithful, his church will endure.

Paul then combines two ideas that support the church’s permanence: God’s action, and human response. God will distinguish between his people and impostors.³ Even if we get lost or confused in our search for God’s truth, God never loses us when we seek him. The Lord knows who are his.

Reflect

- How do you feel about your ability to “correctly handle the word of truth”? How can you grow in this area?
- As you pray, ask for the Spirit’s help in discerning false ideas — those things that undermine belief in core Christian doctrine and can erode the faith of others.

Day 3.

When I was a little girl, I loved looking at the “fancy” dishes in my grandmother’s China cabinet. They were kept on display and hardly ever used. She had everyday dishes for everyday meals, but

² Tom Wright, 108.

³ Philip Towner, [*1–2 Timothy & Titus*](#), vol. 14, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 2 Ti 2:19.

once in a while, on very special occasions, we'd get to use the delicate China plates and crystal glasses.

Paul is going to make a similar distinction in today's verses between things in a home that are used for different purposes — some for special use, and some for common use. We'll consider he what he means by this metaphor.

Read

2 Timothy 2:20–21 (NIV)

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.

Think About

If you casually read through 2 Timothy 2, the verses we'll look at today might seem a bit out of place, but they fit in if you follow the train of Paul's thought. In 2 Timothy 2:19, Paul offers reassurance that despite the existence of false teachers, God's people will endure: *"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.'"*

Paul is further explaining his point with a metaphor using household items. The "article" (verse 20) is one who claims to be a believer. However, as evidenced by the false teachers causing trouble in the Ephesian church, some are false. Even though they confess the name of the Lord, they have not turned from wickedness. God knows who they are, and they must repent to be available "special purposes" the way gold and silver in a household might be used. They must be cleansed. These precious articles are set aside for the Master's use. They are devoted, "holy," and can be prepared for whatever good work the Master requires.

When God prepares us for "special purpose," that doesn't mean we'll be put up in a China cabinet and rarely brought out. It means we'll be used for eternal purposes as instruments of God's Kingdom. Our lives will have purpose beyond the mundane. Because when we share Christ's love with others and point them towards him with our words and actions, we are acting in ways that have eternal impact.

Reflect

- Reflect on Paul's household metaphor. Have you surrendered yourself for God's use? What does that look like in your life? Are you allowing the Holy Spirit to cleanse you? What sins are you repenting of? Are you devoted to Christ? How are you showing that devotion? Pray over your answers.

Day 4

In a playground squabble, kids who refuse to throw a punch and choose to walk away are usually taunted. They're called "chicken" or far worse. To the bullies (and their admirers), walking away is a sign of cowardice. To adults who know just how pointless and stupid these fights usually are, walking away is often a sign of developing wisdom.

In our passage for today, Paul makes a similar point to Timothy as he counsels him on how to engage with those who want to pick a fight with him in the church.

Read

2 Timothy 2:22–26 (NIV)

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.

Think About

During a recent national controversy, a friend and I were sharing how unhinged our social media feeds had become. From behind my computer, I watched people who were usually kind and level-headed get into vicious arguments with other people who were usually kind and level-headed. "What's the point?" she wondered, "Does anyone ever change their mind after a Facebook fight?" Good question. I don't know how many minds have been changed, but I do know some relationships never recovered.

When we care deeply about something, we can feel justified in aggressively defending it. And what could be more worth defending than Jesus and the gospel? Don't these battles have eternal significance? Shouldn't we try and win by any means necessary?

Paul helps us with the answer in his instructions to Timothy. First, we need to check ourselves. Are we pursuing Christlike character as Paul describes in verse 22? Righteousness, faith, love, and peace are key. Before we can act as defenders of the faith, we must be living it.

Paul calls the kind of arguments the Ephesian church was having, "foolish" and "stupid" and tells Timothy not to engage. He stresses the ability to instruct and the importance of kindness and gentleness. In essence, we are to imitate Jesus in the way he dealt with those who opposed him.

No argument, no matter how well executed can save, and no one has ever been badgered into the kingdom of heaven. Yet, when we calmly and clearly explain the truth of the gospel in the spirit of love, God may bring people to a fresh realization and guide them to himself.

God doesn't need us to defend him. He's quite capable of doing that himself. But he does offer us the opportunity to be witnesses to his truth and his character and to love people the way he loves them.

Reflect

- How do you feel when someone attacks Christianity, either on social media or in your presence? How can Paul's instructions to Timothy shape your response?
- Jesus says we are to pray for those who oppose us. If there is someone in your life who opposes your faith, take some time to pray for them now.

Day 5

Happy Friday! Spend some extended time in prayer today and consider the implications of the Scripture you read this week. How will you apply it to your life?

Reflect on what you've learned

Read through [1 Timothy 2:14–26](#) once more.

How have you been challenged or encouraged by Paul's words? What's your biggest takeaway from these verses?

Pray and Respond

This passage came up in one of my seminary classes. Several younger students were fired up about something they saw as dangerous to the church. It wasn't a core, gospel issue, but it was an idea that had the power to shape people in a negative way.

My professor nodded along with their concerns, but then interrupted them with a smile. Even though he has multiple degrees in biblical studies, he said that sometimes when he speaks in churches, people come up after to disagree with him. Sometime their ideas are just misinformed and misguided. Other times they are just plain wrong. He refuses to argue, but just smiles and thinks of 2 Timothy 2. He remembers that these are people God loves. So, he does his best to speak the truth as he understands it, and then leaves the rest up to love.

We might assume that someone who has studied the Bible thoroughly and for so many years might aggressively defend his ideas. After all, hasn't he earned the right? But it's because he knows the Bible that he chooses not to.

When we allow the word of God to form us by the power of the Holy Spirit, we will become more like Jesus. As we pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, God will grant us those attributes. We'll learn to love like Jesus loves and speak the truth, not for the truth's sake, but for the sake of someone he died for.

What's Your Next Step?

Two core ideas rise from our passage this week. One is that we need to grow in our understanding of God and his Word so that we can correctly handle the word of truth. The other is that we also need to be growing to be more like Jesus. Pray about how you can do both.

Pray and ask the Spirit to reveal what steps you need to take to take.