

The Ministry of the Unashamed Servant. 2 Timothy 2:14-26

Protocols – for Timothy and us

You trained for the job

You landed the job

And today is your first day in your new position

If your work place is half decent they will spend part of that first day inducting you into the company and your role by taking you through the operational manual, or the business or school or hospital protocols

The ‘what to do if’ scenarios, telling you how to respond to certain predictable events or challenges you will meet in your new role

The nuts and bolts instructions that will mean you can carry out your job effectively.

Timothy has been given a job, or more correctly, a responsibility, a very significant responsibility

2 Timothy 1: ¹³ Hold on to the pattern of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁴ Guard the good deposit through the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

To maintain the pattern of teaching received from Paul, and to guard the gospel message given to Paul by Jesus, and by Paul to Timothy.

It is an Awesome responsibility, for this is the life giving message for the world

And while Paul has spoken of the cost in vv. 3-7 he still hasn't given Timothy the how to

How to go about that ministry in the light of the predictable challenges he will face

That ‘how to’ is what we have here in vv. 14-26 – Paul introduces a number of the challenges Timothy will meet as he teaches what Paul has taught and seeks to preserve the gospel message uncorrupted.

The challenges of distraction, false teaching, complacent mediocrity, and of abusing power when facing opposition

And he gives him the how to

The how to respond to each so that he carries out his responsibility well and pleases His Master, the Lord Jesus

Timothy is to respond to distraction by being focused on the gospel vv. 14-15

To false teaching by being faithful to the gospel vv. 16-19

To the temptation to mediocrity by being ambitious to be useful to His Master vv. 20-23

To the temptations of position and power by loving even those who oppose him vv. 24-26

But this operational manual is not just for Timothy exclusively.

He has already been told that a core part of his ministry is to train others to teach and pass on the gospel

2 Timothy 2:² What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

And while some of what Paul says here is directed to Timothy a lot of it is expressed generally to include others to whom that responsibility is given

Remind them v. 14

If anyone v. 21

v. 24 The Lord's servant

So this instruction is for all who will share Timothy's role, who are responsible for passing on Paul's teaching and gospel in congregations

But it is not just for them

It is also God's word for all of us – for every believer should be ambitious, whatever our gifts, to be useful in our service of our Lord Jesus

And We can all be distracted

All be enticed by errors we want to believe

All be tempted to respond to those who oppose or irritate us harshly

This is a word for us.

So how is Timothy to go about his ministry in a Christian community where he will meet wrong pre-occupations, error and opposition?

How are we to go about our lives in a Christian community where we can get distracted, be enticed by error, and experience conflict with those who disagree with us?

2 Timothy 2:¹⁴ Remind them of these things, and charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers. ¹⁵ Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

Focused vv. 14-15

Remind them vv. 8-13 of these things – of what Paul has just reminded Timothy of in vv. 8-13

Of the Gospel content – Jesus Christ

Of the power of the unbound gospel

Of the wonderful Gospel promises

¹⁴ *Remind them of these things, and charge them before God not to quarrel about words,*

This is a very serious prohibition, with God as witness, but what is ‘quarrelling about words’

We know from 1 Timothy that in Ephesus where Timothy is ministering there were People trying to establish a reputation for themselves as teachers by paying attention to ‘myths and endless genealogies, things at the very margins of revelation.

1 Timothy 1:³ As I urged you when I went to Macedonia, remain in Ephesus so that you may instruct certain people not to teach false doctrine⁴ or to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies. ...⁷ They want to be teachers of the law, although they don't understand what they are saying or what they are insisting on.

We are not sure of the exact content of their pre-occupations but we do know in Jewish circles there was a lot of speculation about some more obscure parts of Scripture, like angels and the flood generation [cf. The Book of Enoch, and knowledge of it in Jude and 2 Peter]

1 Timothy 6:⁴ he is conceited and understands nothing, but has an unhealthy interest in disputes and arguments over words. From these come envy, quarreling, slander, evil suspicions,⁵ and constant disagreement among people whose minds are depraved and deprived of the truth, who imagine that godliness is a way to material gain.

And we also know that the peddlers of these speculations had *an unhealthy interest in disputes and arguments over words.*, motivated by financial gain, because to get a following for your speculation you have to show you have special insight, are more knowledgeable and insightful than the others, and what better way to do that than through attacking their speculations

We are not sure of the exact nature of their quarrels, but we have no shortage of contemporary parallels, of people building great systems of speculation in which you can lose yourself on the slenderest of foundations – an obscure allusion here, a word there,

People pre-occupied with the flood generation and the sons of God in Genesis 6, or with great hierarchies of demons, or angels, or intricate descriptions of what will happen in the millennium, or explanations of their identification of the mark of the beast

Timothy has to oppose that – stop the truth being lost in a sea of irrelevance [Postman]

For they have literally lost the plot, the focus of Scripture and their quarrelling is

Useless and worse than useless – leading to the ruin of those caught up in it

And Timothy must instead be a model of someone who in his teaching is focused on what matters, on the gospel

¹⁵ Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

Conscious that he is accountable to God for his handling of God's gospel, what Paul calls here, as he does in Ephesians, the word of truth Col. 1:5, Eph 1:13

Ephesians 1:¹³ In him you also were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and when you believed.

He is to do his best, strive to be, put his energy into being, ‘approved’ – the sense is tried and tested and found genuine, a genuine gospel worker because he rightly handles the word of truth

The word translated rightly handling could be used of cutting a straight path that makes travel easy
 Timothy must teach the gospel in a way that is clear and accurate, that makes people's engagement with its content, their travelling along the path of its truth, easy and direct

This means teaching it in accordance with its character as the word of God, and in line with the purpose for which it is given – to save through faith in Christ, to make disciples through repentance and faith in Jesus and teaching them to do all that He has commanded.

Unlike those running after the obscure, fighting over words, who treat the Scripture as a launching pad for their speculations, a means of getting followers for themselves, the unashamed gospel minister, someone committed to holding on to the pattern of sound teaching, keeps Christ front and centre

Paul said of His gospel ministry –

2 Cor. 4:⁵ For we are not proclaiming ourselves but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus's sake. ⁶ For God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ.

Our Lord taught, Luke 24, that the Scriptures spoke of Him, and all our engagement with Scripture should be to meet Christ in Scripture, to hear it speak of Jesus

Lk 24:²⁷ Then beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted for them the things concerning himself in all the Scriptures. ⁴⁴ He told them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled."

For in Christ all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are found [Col. 2:3], He is the one in whom the purpose, plan and promise of God find their fulfilment

The goal of gospel ministry is to help hearers be disciples who know how to do all that Jesus has taught and that is much more healthy and satisfying than endless speculation.

You, like I, will meet those caught up in these speculations, they might even try and get you absorbed into them. Perhaps you are attracted to them yourself.

When you do ask – 'How much do they talk of Jesus, promote trust in and obedience to Jesus?' Does their teaching nurture a life of loving service, or is it practically useless?

And recognise, if you are going to wean someone off junk food, have to provide an alternate healthy diet

To stop them thinking about their speculations, need to give them truth to think about

And to do that you must strive to be someone who rightly handles the word of truth

Who themselves reads the Bible to learn of Jesus and God's great salvation in Him, and how to follow Him

Who gets the big picture, knows the Bible's story line

If you have never done it – read the Bible right through to see its preparation for Christ in the Old, and His fulfilment of God's promises in the new

Become someone – strive to be, do your best to be, make it matter to you to be someone who can read and teach God’s word well

The unashamed workman is focused on the gospel

Secondly he is to be faithful to the gospel message delivered to him and has nothing to do with the false teaching that corrupts the gospel message

2 Timothy 2:¹⁶ But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness,¹⁷ and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus,¹⁸ who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some.¹⁹ But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity."

Faithful vv. 16-19

He describes this false teaching as irreverent babble

It is profane, with no real fear of God as its practitioners pick and choose Scripture to suit their purposes

And it is babble, Empty talk – the hot air of corrupted imaginations

All it does is promotes godlessness – life lived apart from God, in defiance of God, subject to the judgment of God

And to bring home its serious danger Paul says it spreads Like gangrene. In those days the only way to stop the spread of gangrene was amputation. While it was part of the body its spread was unstoppable, and its effect was deadly.

So it must be kept out of the life of God’s people.

Paul gives an example of these empty talkers

Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus,¹⁸ who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some.

Hymenaeus we have met in 1 Tim. 1:20 who was described there as someone who had rejected faith and a good conscience v. 19

1 Timothy 1:¹⁹ having faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and have shipwrecked the faith.²⁰ Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered to Satan, so that they may be taught not to blaspheme.

Despite Paul’s discipline he had not mended his ways and has, with Philetus, swerved from, or fallen short of, or abandoned the truth by saying the resurrection has already happened

Pause and think about their teaching for it is an instructive example

They were most likely saying the resurrection is spiritual

Now that sounded like some things the apostle had taught about how we live now in newness of life by the power of God’s Spirit [Romans 6:1-14].

But they were saying the resurrection was only spiritual. There was no more, salvation is already complete.

So this was teaching that built on a selective misrepresentation of the apostle's teaching

That just happened to be in harmony with their society's world view, for it was a society that thought the body was the enemy of the soul and a bodily resurrection was absurd

And Being something people had to be talked into believing it would undoubtedly portray itself as elitist, for those genuinely spiritual

And in claiming salvation was already complete it seriously distorted the Christian life

Because what is not saved – the body – doesn't matter

So its adherents could either be very ascetic – denying the goodness of the body

OR be hedonistic – because what you do in the body couldn't touch your salvation

Such a teaching was very marketable

But it was also all empty talk, with its origin in their own minds. It is, as Paul had pointed out I 1 Corinthians 15, a complete departure from the gospel which has at its core Christ's bodily resurrection, and promises ours, and says what we do now in the body matters [1 Cor. 6].

But A lot of false teaching that we encounter is like this denial of the resurrection

It comes From the teachers own imagination, often built on a misrepresentation of a part of Scripture and ignoring all the rest

It is usually much more in harmony with the beliefs of surrounding society, saving its adherents any confrontation with the society

Always elitist – because it is based on having special knowledge, not grace

Marketable and malleable

And while it claims to links to the Christian faith, sometimes even claiming to rescue the Christian faith, it is another religion

Examples – liberalism of the early twentieth century, the health and wealth gospel, of the current post Christian movement

Such false teaching can Unsettle the faith of some – so much sounds familiar

And dealing with the confidence of the false teachers, and seeing people swayed by them, can be discouraging, can sometimes even make you anxious for the future of the church

So Paul gives Timothy, someone entrusted with God's message and leadership in the Christian community, encouragement from the account of those who opposed God's appointed leaders Moses and Aaron in Numbers 16

¹⁹ *But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity."*

Think, he says, of the church as house God is building

He is the one who has laid the foundation, determined how the building will be built

And He has placed His seal on the foundation

People in Paul's day would place their seal on the foundation when they were building a house or other building to indicate their ownership, and what God has written on His seal tells us what will mark His ownership of the church, how the building will be built

"The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity."

With these quotes Paul turns to the account of Korah's rebellion in Numbers 16 which you heard read this evening.

Korah and his colleagues challenged Moses and Aaron. They said they had improperly put themselves in the leadership of God's people and in mediating their relationship with God.

They said – they were as good as them, and could approach God themselves, on their terms. They were equal to Moses and Aaron in that.

The false teachers were like Korah, claiming their teaching was as much from God as Paul's and Timothy's. That the initiative was theirs and they could relate to God in the way they wanted. Timothy had no right to insist that his gospel was the only gospel.

Moses replied [Numbers 16:5] to Korah that it is God who gets to decide who can approach Him, who will lead God's people, who will mediate the people's relationship with God. And it is this verse Paul quotes from the Greek translation of the Old Testament

"The Lord knows those who are His."

Paul is reminding Timothy that God decides how people relate to Him. He is the one who gives the message and chooses the messengers, who has chosen the apostles as the bringers of His gospel. And just as the LORD vindicated His choice of Aaron through the destruction of Korah in his presumption, so the Lord will vindicate His gospel and His faithful messengers.

The Lord has decided to build His church through the gospel entrusted to the apostles, and He will vindicate its faithful messengers

And Paul stays in Numbers 16 to remind Timothy that the church will be made up of those who heed that gospel message.

In Numbers 16:26 and 29 Moses tells the Assembly to separate themselves from Dathan and Abiram, to depart from their sin. Those who do live. It is those believers who keep listening to the apostle's gospel, who separate themselves from the sin of the false teachers, who will live.

Timothy need not be discouraged. It is God who builds His church, and He has decided it will be built through the gospel entrusted to the apostles, of those who listen to their word.

He just needs to keep on faithfully guarding the good deposit, the gospel, entrusted to Him.

But it can be such hard work that there is always a temptation to embrace a complacent mediocrity – that just wants a quiet life, that doesn't want to have to keep on with gospel focus that keeps others engaged with Christ and gospel faithfulness that exposes and confronts error

So Paul gives him, and all of us, encouragement to be ambitious, ambitious for service.

2 Timothy 2:²⁰ Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. ²¹ Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.

²² So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. ²³ Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels.

Ambitious vv. 20-23

Paul uses a picture from a large household. Such households have a range of containers of varying quality for a range of uses. Some are used to serve the owners food or entertain his valued guests, others for menial jobs, to collect scraps and rubbish. Whether they are honoured or dishonoured is known by the use to which they are put.

Paul applies this picture in v. 21. The point – if you get rid of engagement with what is dishonourable, you will be vessel that can be employed for honourable activities. ‘cleanses himself from what is dishonourable’ is literally ‘if anyone cleanses himself from ‘these things’ – Paul is referring to the ‘fighting about words’ v. 14 and ‘irreverent and empty speech’ v16 and the behaviour associated with their unhelpful preoccupations and errors.

If you get rid of those things, if you are focused and faithful, you will be – holy – set aside as precious to the master, useful to Him, ready for every good work, the good works Paul will say in Chapter 3 applying ourselves to God’s true word prepares us for [3:17].

That prospect should excite us

We should want to be set apart to the Lord, useful, ready to do good

Our Master is Holy, righteous, just

Good and gracious

Loves us

Keep us eternally

Being His is good, His will is good, and we owe Him everything

We should be ambitious for useful service, determined to have nothing to do with useless speculation and destructive false teaching.

But that usefulness is not just a matter of right doctrine as Paul makes clear in v. 22

²² So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. ²³ Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels.

He expresses that becoming useful to the Master as a double duty – flee, pursue – words that convey both the urgency and the commitment required

Flee youthful passions. In our sexualised culture we tend to think that Paul is talking about sexual passion, sexual desire. But that has not been raised in the context.

Paul has been talking about fighting over words and the empty chatter of new, false, teaching.

He has told Timothy in a picture to get rid of those things, and now he instructs him and us to run away from those things in our heart that make us susceptible to them, to flee from the desires that draw us to them.

We are to flee from the self assertion and self importance that we like to express in winning verbal confrontations, the self confidence in opinion that will batter away at an opponent until they concede your superiority and loves the opportunity to do so, the enthusiasm for the new thing and impatience with the old and the received that shows how much more insightful we are than those that went before us.

Perhaps you recognise those things in yourself?

Perhaps others might recognise them in you by your conversation, or your on line behaviour.

Paul calls them youthful passions, and others have seen those things in the young and the way they speak and argue, particularly young men. Bob Dylan has a famous song ‘My back pages’ reflecting on his confidence in his own opinions in his own youth – and his refrain was “Ah, but I was so much older then, I’m younger than that now.”

But Paul isn’t telling us and Timothy to grow up.

What Paul wants may not necessarily come with age

He says ‘flee’ that self importance, that love of a quarrel, that love of demonstrating your own superiority, that seeking the applause of others

And pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

Be determined to have not just doctrine but a life shaped by commitment to the gospel, the genuine Christian life that is the common goal of all the Lord’s people, all who call in the Lord from a sincere heart, all those who single-mindedly seek the Lord.

That life is characterised by

Righteousness – right conduct that conforms to the will of God and is pleasing to God. Righteousness embraces the way we conduct ourselves in business, in work, in expressing our sexual nature – all of life

Faith – I think here, as in the related term in 2:2, has the sense of faithfulness, reliability – being someone who keeps their word and the word entrusted to them.

Love – the first fruit of the Spirit, a life where all our actions are guided by seeking the good of the other

Peace – being someone whose life is not marked by contentiousness, not war like and always looking for a fight – but marked by tranquility and stability, someone who can pursue what makes for peace.

Be ambitious to be useful by handling the word properly, by avoiding false teaching and preoccupations with what is marginal

But never think right doctrine, or the ability to teach the bible well is enough on its own

We need to hear that, especially in the anonymity of the internet, where you can be a warrior for orthodoxy on social media – but have a life that is self preoccupied and selfish, Where zeal for the truth – can just be a cover for those youthful passion, and get away with it, enjoying a false reputation for being a faithful believer

Someone who has fled and pursued will ²³ *Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels.*

There is a time for opposing false teaching and wrong behaviour – as Paul demonstrated when he had to rebuke Peter’s inconsistent behaviour in Antioch [Gal. 2], but you do have to pick your fights

Some are never worth getting involved with, such as controversies that are ignorant, uninformed, and undisciplined by the Scriptures, dealing with people’s speculations. These can never be resolved – for there is no authority that can resolve them

It will always be one opinion against another

They are good for nothing except breeding quarrels.

And that is not what the Lord’s servant should be engaged with

2 Timothy 2:²⁴ And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, ²⁵ correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, ²⁶ and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

Loving vv. 24-26

‘The Lord’s servant -

Romans 1: Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—

Paul is inviting us to have the same understanding of our ministry as he has of his. Every believer is the Lord’s servant, to be exclusively loyal and accountable to Jesus in all things

But here is a reminder to those who have teaching authority that– the gospel is His, the people are His, the effectiveness of our ministry is His, and we are accountable to Him

The Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome – but instead should be characterised by three other qualities

Kind to everyone – a kind person looks to the comfort of others. He or she is not pre-occupied with their own status or how others are thinking of them – they are thinking of the other person and their needs. A kind person doesn’t seek to embarrass or shame, is not overbearing or bullying.

[Genuine kindness is one of the few things that can disarm defensiveness and build trust

Our Lord was kind

He showed kindness to that young married couple in Cana who ran out of wine – He didn't draw attention to their lack, he just met their need.

He showed kindness to the leper who asked for cleansing. He didn't need to touch him – he could have healed with a word, but that touch affirmed

The widow of Nain did not ask for Jesus to raise her son – he had compassion and without being asked stopped the funeral procession and raised her son

Our Lord is kind and he expects His servants to be like Him

And here is the kicker – kind to everyone

Even those who oppose him or her

Easy to be kind to some – those who excite our sympathy, but other people are just difficult

Yet there are no exceptions – kind to everyone

And the Lord's servant must be Able to teach. Change in the hearts and lives of God's people comes from persuasion of the truth of God, from having the word opened, explained and applied

Paul models that – finished going through 1 Corinthians in the devotions. Paul doesn't come with a 'that's wrong, stop that, do that' – just orders depending on his naked authority as an apostle

He persuades – he shows how behaviour is inconsistent with the cross, inconsistent with love

Teaching is fundamental for the power, to give life and nurture life, is in the gospel word

Patiently enduring evil – bearing evil without resentment

The Lord's servant is to be ready to Endure the criticism, the consuming of their energy by opposition, the slowness to change or respond – without being embittered, without returning evil for evil, without becoming resentful

That doesn't mean there won't be times when it is right to act against a divisive person or a false teacher. We see Paul doing so in 1 Timothy, and instructing Titus to do so in Titus 2:9-10. But

Paul is calling for an internal quality here, not prescribing actions

A servant who is kind, able to teach, patient can do what needs to be done

'correcting his opponents with gentleness'

There is authority – to be exercised in both instruction and correction, an insistence on change

But even the false teachers, the sinful, those in error –

Are to be corrected with gentleness

Not harshly or rudely – their folly made plain to all. Not with bitter sarcasm, not with shouting, not by humiliating – which all create fear and resentment

But gently. That is hard.

Where can you get the confidence, the strength, to deal gently with those who oppose you and make life difficult for you?

It comes from confidence in the God of the gospel, the gospel that tells you God does His work – His powerful saving work, His way, and that way is surprising. It is the way of the cross, the way that turns expectations of leadership and power on its head. [Mark 10:43-45]

Mark 10: ⁴³ But it is not so among you. On the contrary, whoever wants to become great among you will be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first among you will be a slave to all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Ministry has to be characterised by truth, by a commitment to the gospel handed down by the apostle.

But it also must be characterised by love, by obedience to the Lord revealed in the gospel

Who has loved, and who commands love, love even for our enemies

It is not just in the content but in the conduct of our ministry as well that we must 'remember Jesus Christ', Jesus Christ who humbles Himself to die on the cross and calls us to follow Him

This is so important

Some high profile ministries [e.g. Mark Driscoll] in recent years have come undone because of abuse by the senior pastor – of bullying – and you can see how easily it could happen

It is easy to become impatient and angry when you are tired

Easy to pressure people to perform and conform, to be abusive, and justify it by zeal for the truth, or the importance of the mission

Easy to see opposition as obstruction and an attack on your leadership, your God given leadership, vindicated by your success, and to be fierce in cutting people off

Easy, but never right

The Lord's servant must gently instruct his opponents

I stress that because you might be in charge one day – of a team at work, or a ministry team. You have to be aware of the need for gentleness and the possibility of abusing the power of your position.

And secondly, one day you might be looking for a pastor, and it is Important to know what to look. Gentleness, kindness to all are so important but – not often equated with success, and congregations, especially those who have a high view of their own importance, can look for success, someone who will enhance their reputation, to their own harm.

More importantly – these things – gentleness, persuasion by the word, patience – should characterise all of us

We are the Lord's servants – can't do his will in any but His way

And fruitfulness in our ministry doesn't depend on our power to bend others to our will

It depends on God

It must depend on God

. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth,²⁶ and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

Here is the goal of engaging gently with those who disagree with us

Repentance, that leads to them embracing the gospel, conforming their thinking to the revelation of Jesus

But it is God's gift

'I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth' 1 Cor. 3:6

1 Corinthians 3:6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.

A grasp of God's sovereignty in the work of the gospel will help you be gentle, patient, working for change through the teaching of Scripture

God does His work His way

You won't be able to do it your way

Your manipulation, your cajoling, your coercion – won't work God's will in someone's life. It might bring external conformity and agreement depending on your power, but it won't bring repentance

And knowing Repentance is God's gift will also encourage you when you remember what they are up against

Opponents of the gospel – have been intoxicated by the devil's lies, captured by Him

Ministry of the word goes on in the context of a spiritual battle, and the devil is always seeking to oppose the truth.

He is the one who sows the weeds in the Lord's wheatfield Matt. 13:39

It is the god of this world who has blinded the minds of unbelievers 2 Cor. 4:34. Behind the false teaching going on at Ephesus Paul wrote was 'deceitful spirits and the teaching of demons' 1 Tim. 4:1 [2 Cor. 11:14-15, 1 Pet. 5:8, Eph. 6:11-12, 1 John 4:1-4]

So often we go about ministry as if all the action is solely on the plane of this tangible world, what we can see and hear

And all our explanations of why people aren't changing or we are not getting through is given solely in terms of [background, personality]

Means we are often prayerless, and often tempted to look to means other than those God has given to do His work.

But it is the devil who is opposing the gospel

The devil who has seduced and ensnared its opponents

Only God can set them free, and God sets them free by the means He has provided

Patient preaching and teaching of the gospel

This is the picture of the work of an unashamed minister of the gospel

Characterised by a focus on the gospel, on the Lord Jesus revealed in all the Scriptures

By persevering faithfulness that has nothing to do with the corruptions of false teaching, confident that God will vindicate His message and call His people to Himself by the ministry of His faithful preachers

By an ambition to serve, that flees from argumentativeness and pursues righteousness, faithfulness, love and peace

And by love that is kind and patient even in dealing with opponents

So Pray for you Pastors and all who teach, that we would be unashamed ministers of the gospel, committed to doing God's work God's way. It is good for us and for you if we are sustained in faithfulness, kindness, and patience

Store this away for the time when you might be calling someone – you want to know their teaching and their life – it is important that they deal with you gently

Be ambitious yourself to be a useful servant, ready for any good work. The Lord Jesus whom we meet in the gospel is such a good Saviour