

## How to do gospel ministry. 2 Timothy 2:14-26

### How to?

Timothy, the recipient of this letter, has been given a job, or more correctly, a responsibility, a very significant responsibility

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

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

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, and to pass it on faithfully.

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

How to go about that ministry?

This is what Paul begins to teach Timothy, and us, in vv. 14-26, as he outlines the challenges he will face, the challenges of distraction, false teaching, complacent mediocrity, and of abusing power, and tells Timothy how to respond to them

By vv. 14-15 being focused on the gospel

vv. 16-19 by being faithful to the gospel

vv. 20-23 by being ambitious to be useful to His Master and then

vv, 24-26 by loving even those who oppose him

But this instruction is not just for Timothy exclusively.

It is for all, like ministers, who are responsible for passing on Paul's teaching and gospel in congregations

And not just for them

It is also God's word for all of us

We all have responsibility in varying capacities for preserving and passing on the truth

We all bear responsibility for choosing and encouraging godly Christian leadership amongst us

We should all be ambitious whatever our gifts, to be useful in our service of our Lord Jesus' gospel

And all of us can all be distracted, or enticed by errors we want to believe, or respond harshly to those who oppose or irritate us,

This is a word for us.

So how is Timothy to go about his ministry of preaching the gospel, preserving the gospel, and passing on the gospel? How are we to go about preserving and passing on the truth?

*2 Timothy 2: <sup>14</sup> Remind them of these things, and charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers. <sup>15</sup> 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 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

<sup>14</sup> *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: <sup>3</sup>As I urged you when I went to Macedonia, remain in Ephesus so that you may instruct certain people not to teach false doctrine <sup>4</sup> or to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies. ... <sup>7</sup>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: <sup>4</sup>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, <sup>5</sup>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.

We have no shortage of contemporary parallels, of people building great systems of speculation 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 arguing over 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

Timothy must instead be a model of someone who in his teaching is focused on what matters, on the gospel, what Paul calls here and in Ephesians, the word of truth. Col. 1:5, Eph 1:13

<sup>15</sup> *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, Timothy is to do his best, strive to be, ‘approved’ – a tested and found genuine gospel worker because he rightly handles the word of truth

The word translated rightly handling [or correctly teaching CSB] could be used of cutting a straight path through a forest that makes the journey easier

An unashamed workman teaches 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 and to bring about obedience to Christ.

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

Paul could say of his 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.*

And write that in Corinth

*1 Cor. 2: 2 I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.*

All our engagement with Scripture should be to meet Christ in Scripture, to hear it speak of Jesus [Luke 24:27, 44]

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

We do gospel ministry by helping hearers trust the Lord Jesus and be his disciples who know how to do all that Jesus has taught.

But you, like I, will meet those caught up in these speculations, who might even try to ensnare you in them.

When you meet them, ask yourself – ‘How much do they talk of Jesus, promote trust in and obedience to Jesus?’ Is Jesus their focus?

And ‘Does their teaching nurture the life of loving service Jesus calls us to, or is it practically useless?’

The best way to not get sucked into useless speculation is to have a good diet of the truth yourself, to be someone

Who 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

So if you have never done it – read the Bible right through on your own or in a group to see the preparation for Christ in the Old, and His fulfilment of God's promises in the new

And become someone who can rightly handle the word of truth, someone who can read and teach God's word well

Like Timothy we do gospel ministry by staying focused on the gospel of Jesus.

Secondly Timothy and we do gospel ministry by being faithful to the gospel message delivered to us and having 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.*

### **Faithful vv. 16-19**

He describes this false teaching v. 16 as irreverent babble

It is irreverent because its practitioners have no real fear of God, picking and choosing Scriptures to suit their purposes

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

All it does is promote 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 for while was in the body its spread was unstoppable, and its effect was deadly.

Irreverent babble 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,<sup>18</sup> who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some.*

Hymenaeus was described in 1 Timothy as someone who had rejected faith and a good conscience v. 19

*1 Timothy 1:<sup>19</sup> having faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and have shipwrecked the faith.*

*<sup>20</sup> 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, abandoned, the truth by saying the resurrection has already happened

Think about their error, for it is an instructive example of babble

They were most likely saying the resurrection is spiritual

which sounded like something the apostle had taught when he said 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

A misrepresentation 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 in claiming salvation was already complete it led to serious distortions of 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

But it was also all empty talk, with its origin in their own minds. It is, as Paul had pointed out in 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].

A lot of false teaching shares the features of this denial of the resurrection

It comes from the teachers own imagination, misrepresenting a part of Scripture and ignoring all the rest

Taking its credibility from the beliefs of surrounding society, and so lessening any offence and increasing its attraction

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

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

*<sup>19</sup> 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 a house God is building

God is the one who has laid the foundation, determined how the building will be built, and just as 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

God has placed His seal on the foundation

And God has written on His seal what will mark His ownership of the church and how He will give it shape

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

With these quotes from Numbers Paul directs Timothy and us to the account of Korah's rebellion in Numbers 16.

There we read Korah and his colleagues had challenged Moses and Aaron, God's appointed leaders of His people. They said Moses and Aaron had improperly put themselves in the leadership of God's people and in mediating their relationship with God.

Korah claimed he and his companions were as good as Moses and Aaron, their equals, and could approach God themselves, on their terms.

The false teachers Timothy was facing were like Korah, claiming their teaching is as much from God, had as much authority, as Paul's and Timothy's teaching. They claimed they could believe about and relate to God in the way they wanted, and Timothy had no right to insist that the gospel given to Paul was only gospel.

In Numbers Moses responded [Numbers 16:5] to Korah's claims by saying that it is God who gets to decide who can approach Him, who will lead God's people, and mediate the people's relationship with God. And he said to Korah the words Paul quotes here 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 and whose teaching has authority amongst His people. He is the one who gives the message and chooses the messengers, and He 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, who has decided to build His church through the gospel entrusted to the apostles, will vindicate His gospel and His 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.

*"Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity."*

In Numbers 16:26 and 29 Moses told the people to separate themselves from Dathan and Abiram, to depart from their sin. Those who heeded Moses' word lived, were not swallowed up when the ground opened to swallow Dathan, Abiram and their households.

In Timothy's day and ours those believers who keep listening to the apostle's gospel, who separate themselves from the sin of the false teachers, will live.

Timothy and we need not be discouraged by false teaching. 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.

To do gospel ministry we need to keep on faithfully guarding and sharing the good deposit, the gospel, entrusted to the apostles.

But that 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 Timothy, and all of us, encouragement to be ambitious, ambitious for service.

*2 Timothy 2:*<sup>20</sup> *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.* <sup>21</sup> *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.*

### **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.

Paul applies this picture in v. 21. The point – if you get rid of engagement with what is dishonourable, you will be a vessel that can be employed for honourable activities. ‘cleanses himself from what is dishonourable’ is literally ‘if anyone cleanses himself from ‘these things’.

What is dishonourable is ‘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,

That prospect should excite us

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

For 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

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

Paul expresses becoming useful to the Master as a double duty – flee, pursue – words that convey urgency and determination

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 the desires of our heart, the passions, that make us susceptible to them.

We are to flee from the self-importance we like to nurture by winning verbal confrontations, the opinionated self confidence that loves to batter away at an opponent until they concede our superiority, from the vanity that loves to demonstrate its insight by embracing the novel.

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, the passions of the immature,

But whatever our age we are called to '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.*

To be determined to have a life shaped by commitment to the gospel, the genuine Christian life that is the common goal of all the Lord's people.

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 –faithfulness [as in 2:2], 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, by always looking for a fight – but marked by contentment and stability, someone who can pursue what makes for peace.

To be gospel ministers we must handle the word properly, avoid false teaching and preoccupation with what is marginal

But we must 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, not marked by righteousness, faithfulness, love and peace.

Someone who has fled and pursued will <sup>23</sup> *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, controversies that are ignorant, uninformed, and undisciplined by the Scriptures, dealing with people's speculations for these can never be resolved. When opinion is made equal to Scripture there is no authority that can resolve them

These are not the quarrels the Lord's servant should be engaged with

*2 Timothy 2: <sup>24</sup> And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, <sup>25</sup> correcting his opponents with gentleness.*

### **Loving vv. 24-26**

'The Lord's servant or slave -

*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 share his understanding of what it is to be a follower of Jesus. Every believer is the Lord's servant, exclusively loyal and accountable to Jesus in all things

But in that name 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, He is the boss and we are accountable to Him

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

Kind or gentle 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 His acceptance

The Lord was kind to anxious parents seeking the best for their children. Despite the objections of His disciples He took them in His arms and blessed them

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 modelled that. Read his letters and you see even when opposed, like in Corinth

He persuades by teaching what is consistent with the cross and a life of love

Kind, able to teach and

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 – 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.

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 in congregations – 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. 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, where the great are those who serve for [Mark 10:43-45]

*Mark 10: <sup>43</sup> But it is not so among you. On the contrary, whoever wants to become great among you will be your servant, <sup>44</sup> and whoever wants to be first among you will be a slave to all. <sup>45</sup> 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."*

Gospel 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 and conformity to the example of 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. Many of you already have authority in your families. You have to be aware of the need for gentleness and the possibility of abusing the power of your position.

And you are looking for a pastor, and it's important to know what to look for

Gentleness, kindness to all is 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.

Gentleness, persuasion by the word, patience – should characterise all of us

For we are all the Lord's servants and can't do his will in any but His way

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

It depends on God

It must depend on God when we see the goal

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

The goal of engaging gently with those who disagree with us is

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

That is God's gift

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

For God does His work His way, including in our families

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 you are up against

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

All our 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

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

Which 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 how to do gospel ministry, to preserve and pass on God's live saving, life changing, gospel

Focusing on the gospel, on the Lord Jesus revealed in all the Scriptures

Persevering in faithfulness, having nothing to do with the corruptions of false teaching, confident that God will vindicate the message and ministry of His apostles

Ambitious for service, fleeing argumentativeness and pursuing righteousness, faithfulness, love and peace

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

So Pray for your Pastors and all who teach, that we would be unashamed workers, 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

Pray that this is the ministry and character of the person the Lord calls to replace me

Be ambitious yourself to be an approved worker and useful servant of our faithful, kind and patient Saviour, who has risen from the dead and will raise us too.