



**Sunday School Lesson for February 12, 2006
Released on February 9, 2006**

"Develop Christian Character"

Printed Text: 2 Timothy 2:14-26

Background Scripture: 2 Timothy 2

Devotional Reading: Colossians 3:5-11

2 Timothy 2:14-26

14. Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers.

15. Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

16. But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness.

17. And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymeneus and Philetus;

18. Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some.

19. Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.

20. But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honor, and some to dishonor.

21. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work.

22. Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

23. But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes.

24. And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient;

25. In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;

26. And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

1. Summarize Paul's advice to Timothy about the development of Christian character.
2. Identify an example of ungodly behavior that is just as prevalent today as it was in the first century.
3. Identify one ungodly behavior in his or her life to modify or eliminate.

How to Say It

CORINTHIANS. Ko-*rin*-thee-unz (*th* as in *thin*).

EPHESIAN. Ee-*fee*-zhun.

EPHESUS. Ef-uh-sus.

HYMENEUS. Hi-meh-*nee*-us.

PHILETUS. Fuh-*lee*-tus.

Introduction

Privacy. It has been cherished by most people, even touted as a constitutional right in America and other countries. Yet technological advances and the pressure to thwart terrorists and criminals have eroded personal privacy enormously. We use the Internet, scarcely aware that every move we make is being tracked, often for commercial purposes. We send personal e-mails, usually forgetting that they all are preserved on a network server somewhere. We drive around town, oblivious to the intersection cameras that are capable of reading our license plates and tracking our movements.

We use our credit cards, disregarding the fact that this use provides a permanent record of our purchases. We talk on cell phones, failing to remember that these are open lines on the public airways, and anyone with the right equipment can listen. We make withdrawals at cash machines, unmindful that cameras are taping us during the transaction. We deposit our trash after eating at the fast food restaurant, unaware that the napkin bearing a trace of our saliva could be used to pinpoint us via DNA testing.

Our smallest actions seem to be noticed and recorded. Even so, we certainly are not to the extreme of George Orwell's book *1984*, which depicted government cameras

in citizens' houses to track them 24 hours per day. On the other hand, the Bible consistently presents God as one who *is* aware of everything we think, say, and do. Nothing is hidden from Him. As the psalmist wrote, "Thou understandest my thought afar off... and art acquainted with all my ways" (Psalm 139:2, 3).

So often we behave contrary to this reality, don't we? We do things that we know displease God and somehow believe that He doesn't notice or care. Today's lesson teaches us that there is no room for hidden evil in the life of a Christian disciple. While God is gracious to forgive our sins, He also expects our best efforts in the pursuit of godliness. God is not the only observer of our behavior. Particularly if we are teachers, our actions will teach as much as our words.

Lesson Background

This week we get a disturbing look at the troubles of the Ephesian church where Timothy ministered. It is disturbing because it seems too much like churches we have known. Teachers were leading believers astray with ridiculous, speculative doctrines. Most disturbing of these, for Paul, was a denial of future resurrection. Paul identifies the main perpetrators of this error by name: Hymeneus and Philetus. Hymeneus is known to us from 1 Timothy 1:19, 20, where he is described as having shipwrecked his faith, requiring that he be "delivered unto Satan" (that is, cut off from the church and its fellowship).

The church at Ephesus had its choice of many flavors of false doctrine (as do Christians today). First Timothy 1:3-7 does give us some of the elements of the particular false teaching at Ephesus. Paul indicated that it contained a Greek, pagan element because of its concern for mythology (v. 4). It also had Jewish elements because of its concern for genealogies and the Law (vv. 4, 7). The part that is repeated in today's Scripture, however, was its characteristic of speculation that led to endless, meaningless discussion (compare 1 Timothy 1:4, 6).

Staying in the Truth (2 Tim. 2:14-18)

1. What truths did Timothy need to remind the church of? (v. 14)

In Ephesus, people were departing from the faith. They were departing from sound doctrine and godly living. Paul gave Timothy both truth and practical advice to help people remain in the truth and remain in righteousness.

Now Paul instructed Timothy to remind the people of certain truths that Paul had just discussed preceding this section. One such truth is that followers of Jesus need to think like soldiers. Soldiers in an army do not allow themselves to be distracted. They are constantly prepared, and they have a singular focus. Likewise, followers of Jesus need to stay constantly focused on God and His Word. In addition soldiers work together to accomplish a common objective. They do not focus on their personal agendas; otherwise, this would break their focus. Likewise, Christians must work as a team to accomplish God's goal of reaching out to lost souls. There is no room to put self first.

Another truth that is critical is that Christ was raised from the dead so that we who follow Him will also be raised. This certain hope of resurrection is a vital major and vital part of the Gospel message. Those who had died with Jesus, who suffer with Him, will be raised with Him. Those who deny Him, however, will not be raised to eternal life with God but will be denied by Jesus. Those who do not believe in Jesus can expect the same denial by Jesus, for Christ cannot deny Himself. If Christ allowed unbelievers to receive salvation, then it would invalidate the value of His sacrifice on the Cross. The church needed to remember that perseverance and faith in the risen Christ is the message that brings life and keeps people in the truth.

2. How should we study the Bible? (v. 15)

The word "study" in this verse does not mean to memorize concepts in order to prepare for an upcoming test. It means learning a particular skill to the point of application. Studying the Bible should be a lifelong journey to knowing God. The Word of God should become a part of us. It should be our livelihood. We will be held accountable to God for how we study scripture. It's never too late (or too early) to start studying scripture. You can consult your church leaders if you have questions on how to study scripture.

In light of the problem of people straying from the truth, the most important solution is to study truth, not error. Experts in detecting counterfeit money learn what real money looks like. Those experts can then identify the counterfeit because there is only one truth and so many counterfeits. Studying the Bible is the way to learn the truth that will conquer all doctrinal errors.

3. What is meant by "rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15)?

Timothy's focus while learning scripture would be to learn how to properly interpret scripture. It is very important to rightly divide the Word of God. There are many ways to misinterpret the Bible, such as taking verses out of context or allegorizing the words. In order to properly understand scripture, it must be revealed to the reader by God. The person then has to accept God's revelation and not rely on his or her fleshly mind to interpret scripture.

Sadly, many church leaders do not take the time to read the Word of God. Many believe that God will reveal what they need to say to the people they serve or teach. Yes, God will guide the leader to use the Word that he or she learned to give a message, but the leader must study the scripture. A person cannot teach what he or she does not know. Therefore, in order to teach others about scripture, a person must first learn the scripture and apply it in his or her life. Not only must leaders study the Word of God, but all Christians must study the Word as well.

4. What sort of talking or teaching did Paul refer to as vain babbling? (v. 16)

In contrast to the result of serious Bible study are vain babblings. Paul spoke of false ideas that spread like idle gossip.

Many Christians are not well rooted in the Gospel. It only takes a little time and energy to devise false doctrines. Simply saying that something is true is enough to

convince many. Vain babblings could be simple assertions that contradict scriptural truth. These assertions are vain because they are judged unfounded by the only standard that counts in doctrine: scriptural soundness. They are profane because they are unworthy of God.

Some people go from one unfounded doctrine to another. They desire to learn something new, to discover truth not previously known. The search for something new should be conducted by studying books and chapters of the Bible, not by listening to or reading speculations unfounded by Scripture. Although commentaries, dictionaries, and devotions can be helpful in understanding Scripture, they should be tested to make sure that they agree with the Word of God. The tendency to search for something new will lead to ungodliness. Straying from the path of truth will cause people to stray in their practice of godliness as well. Remember, the Word of God is the starting point for all Scriptural knowledge (old and new). Any knowledge that is not properly backed up by the Word is profane.

5. How could Hymenaeus and Philetus have persuaded people that the resurrection had already happened? (v. 17-18)

There was one particular vain babbling that Paul used as an example. Some men in Ephesus were teaching that the resurrection of believers had already happened. The only way they could have believed a profane doctrine like this was to have misunderstood the biblical concept of resurrection.

Biblically, resurrection is being raised from death. Daniel said, "Many of them awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Dan. 12:2). If the resurrection had already happened, as Hymenaeus and Philetus had claimed, graves would have been empty and people would have seen the resurrected saints.

Often, false doctrine spread by individuals who redefine Christian terms. For example, Hymenaeus and Philetus probably redefined resurrection to mean a heightened state of resurrection. If so, they probably claimed they had this heightened state and taught others that they should become resurrected too.

Any believer who studied the Bible should know that teachers like Hymenaeus and Philetus were wrong, but there were some whose faith was overthrown. That is, there were some who had declared faith in Jesus but now were living in doctrinal error and not following Jesus at all. Profane and unfounded doctrines are very dangerous and cause ungodliness.

Many believers are misled by leaders with high charisma. Charisma involves a leader making its followers enthusiastic and devoted. Christians should not follow leaders simply because their message sounds good or because their method of delivery excites them. All messages are to be tested with the Word of God. Christians should never follow a leader whose message does not line up with the Word of God. A true Christian leader's message will always be supported by scripture. That does not mean that this leader will not make mistakes, but it does mean that he or she will learn from them.

Staying Away from Iniquity (v. 19-22)

6. Why is it important for us to know that God's foundation is certain? (v. 19)

Paul must have seen that his readers would be concerned about the possibility of departing from the faith. In order to reassure them, he taught that God's foundation is certain. What God has founded endures. Our certain hope of persevering until the end lies in the fact that God has established us in our faith and knows who belongs to Him.

Yet Paul did not give his readers an easy assurance. Easy assurance can lead people to unrighteousness. People could think that they would not need to grow spiritually because God would keep them to the end. This mentality is completely false. The lifestyle of a believer is based on faith but results in deeds of righteousness. Our assurance is based on God's faithfulness, not our own; yet we will see growth in holiness since we belong to the Lord. Assurance and growth in holiness go hand in hand.

7. What is Paul's analogy of vessels about? (v. 20)

All of Paul's audience used vessels of various types in their homes. Wealthy homes might have some vessels of gold and silver. Even in ordinary houses, however, there were jars, bowls, and pots of varying degrees of quality. A follower of Jesus is like a vessel for God's power and love. God's power and love fill us, and we dispense that power and love to others through service and ministry.

Paul urges us to be vessels for honor, worthy instruments in God's hand. Just as some jars, bowls, and pots are more valuable to a homeowner than others, so we should strive to be honorable vessels, useful to God.

Vessels are not desirable unless they are clean. The best china will be repulsive if it is not cleaned. As Christians we should strive to live a life of holiness. We should allow God to clean us up when we sin. When we confess our sins, we receive forgiveness of our sins, and God cleanses us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). If we are filled with sin, then God cannot fill us with His Spirit. The sin has got to leave. Let's strive to live the life of holiness.

8. What are three qualities of a useful vessel for God? (v. 21)

There are three qualities of a believer who is an honorable vessel to God. The first is sanctification, which means living a life separated to God. This includes living a life of righteousness and holiness. The second is being useful to the Master, which means knowing and using the gifts God has given us to do the work of His church. Finally, we are to be prepared for ministry, knowledgeable, and experienced at doing the work God has called us to.

9. What are youthful lusts, and why should we avoid them? (v. 22)

Youthful lusts are best described as selfish desires for pleasure and worldly goods, often associated with young people. Not only does this include sexual lust, but lust for pleasure, money, and possessions as well. Paul saw a particular danger in youthful lusts drawing believers from an honorable calling.

The opposite of lust, which is a desire to possess, is charity, a righteous desire to give away. Charity is the kind of love that wants to do for others without regard to a person's worthiness. Paul told Timothy to avoid lust by pursuing righteousness. Doing good deeds and growing in faith means that we are doing the opposite of lusting. This is the way to live in order to be honorable vessels for God.

Bringing others to the Truth (v. 23-26)

10. Why should we avoid quarrels about doctrine? (v. 23)

When it comes to the Gospel message, God wants us to know how to bring others to Christ. He also desires us to know how to strengthen another believer's faith.

Paul's first argument is that arguments about foolish questions have no value. Unbelievers and weak believers often ask foolish questions. They are not concerned with knowing God's answers but are looking for every possible loophole in order to keep not believing.

While it is tempting to answer such questions, since we want people to know God has the answers, there is a need to get to the real issue. Many questions are smoke screens. A wise teacher knows how to stay on the subject. The real issues are God's kingdom, His Messiah, His salvation, and His way of living.

Paul was not forbidding all speculation and questioning in general. He was giving Timothy wisdom. You do not help someone know or practice the truth by engaging in speculation about questions unrelated to the real issues.

11. Why is genuine teaching important? (v. 25-26)

Instead of striving, which causes people to close their minds to the truth, the wise teacher is gentle. Gentleness helps people respect a teacher and shuts down resistance to receiving the truth.

A person who wants to help new or confused Christians or who wants to bring unbelievers to know the truth should be "apt to teach." Teaching requires patience and empathy with the student. Teaching involves explaining things so that people can understand them. It also involves learning what points are central and what points are extraneous.

We cannot force people to believe the truth, but we can patiently give reasons and let them be convicted. We should not argue with those who oppose sound doctrine or those who oppose the faith altogether. We must give reasons why we believe. In addition, we should have a testimony that demonstrates why we believe. People may not always listen to scriptural facts, but they will almost always listen to a story.

The most strident unbeliever just might repent and come to acknowledge the truth. Everyone has hope of being saved, so we should strive to teach lost souls with gentleness. Gentle, patient instruction is the method God called us to use if we want to be instruments in seeing people saved.

People who are unsaved are trapped by Satan (2 Cor. 4:4). They may not realize it, but they are slaves to him. When people acknowledge that Jesus is Lord, they escape from the trap. Paul showed Timothy how to help this church that was losing people to false doctrine and false lifestyles. We must be willing to follow Paul's teaching to Timothy so that more lost souls can be won for Christ and so that existing Christians can remain strong in the faith.

Conclusion

The list of controversies that has caused church quarrels is endless: One cup for Communion or separate cups? Immerse once for baptism or three times? Sing praise choruses or hymns? Red carpet or blue? One church I served actually had a major tiff over whether they should buy a Kirby® vacuum cleaner or a Hoover®!

But every church quarrel has casualties. Young people in particular are often spiritually scarred when church leaders quarrel. Fighting churches are not growing churches. They are not involved in evangelism. How could they be? They are too busy bickering.

We must remember that fighting in the church is a manifestation of Satan's power, not God's grace. We must strive to live in peace (Romans 12:18) and to follow truth (3 John 3, 4). Sometimes people have to be disfellowshipped because of divisiveness (Titus 3:10). More often we must have patience with those with whom we disagree. Part of our patience is based on the realization that we are all fallible. As such, we are open to correction from God's Word. Even in our own lives, let us pray that "truth will rise above falsehood as oil above water" (Miguel de Cervantes, 1547-1616).

Prayer

God of truth, may You guide us in our pursuit of truth and righteousness. May we avoid quarreling and quarrelsome people. If we have been guilty of quarreling, forgive us and give us a new heart for truth. We pray in the name of Jesus, who has freed us by the truth, amen.

Thought to Remember

Christian teachers communicate the truth by words and by actions.

Anticipating Next Week's Lesson

Following the right mentor is vitally important for potential Christian leaders. Read 2 Timothy 3:1 through 4:22.

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