

2 Timothy 2:14-19 | “The War of Words”
Preached on February 19, 2023 by Pastor Matt Brown

You can turn in your Bibles to 2 Timothy 2, verses 14-19. *[pause]*

Words have power. *[pause]*

Think about how words can break or create a friendship.

There are some prior friends who never talk to each other again because of something said.

There are family members who won't talk to each other for years upon years because of words spoken.

Some people to this day are still affected in their lives by words said to them in their childhood. *[pauseeee]*

To see the destructive power of words, just take a couple minutes on social media, and you will see it loud and clear. *[pauseeeee]*

Yet words can do great good in our relationships, too.

Have you ever been sad, but you end up talking to someone and your conversation with them just lifts your spirit? *[pauseeee]*

So our words can bring either healing or harm in relationships, but think also of how words can affect more than relationships.

Words have power to change the world. *[pause]*

Words can change people's beliefs, attitudes, and actions for good or evil.

Think of how the world was changed when Karl Marx put out his book, *The Communist Manifesto*.

Or think of how Hitler used words to stir up his country to go to war, which affected the whole world. *[pause]*

Books on psychology have influenced beliefs about us, which have led to changed actions.

Political speeches can powerfully cause division in a nation or they can unify. *[pause]*

This is because words have power to build up or tear down.

Words and ideas can lead to either some of the greatest good or the greatest evil, and they have the power to affect what is eternal, too. *[pause]*

If someone preaches something other than Christ, people are led on the path to Hell, instead of Heaven.

And so because of the power of words, Paul talks to Timothy about the war of words going on in his church. *[pauseeee]*

You see, there is a war of words going on in our world.

There are competing messages and teachings always bombarding us. *[pause]*

The media is trying to persuade us one way or the other.

Commercials are trying to convince us to buy things.

Politicians are seeking to change our minds about policies.

And thoughts about spirituality, life, and purpose are consistently being thrown at us. *[pause]*

Just walk through a bookstore with this on your mind, and you will see it everywhere.

And so because of the power of words, Paul wants Timothy to be the lookout and battle some of the false teaching going on. *[pause]*

Look what he says, starting in verse 14. *[READ VERSES 14-18]*

One thing that we see come out in this passage is...

I. The peril of godless, empty words.

Paul emphasizes to Timothy what to battle and what to avoid: godless, empty words.

He tells Timothy to “charge them before God not to quarrel about words” and to “avoid irreverent babble”. *[pause]*

Here Timothy is given a proactive command and a passive command.

Proactively, he must charge his church not to quarrel about words.

He is to assert himself and solemnly warn his church about this. *[pause]*

In fact, he is to charge them *before God* to not do this.

He is to remember that he himself does this task before God, but also reminding them that God is witness to the fact that he warned them.

This is a serious thing that should be heeded. *[pause]*

This shows us that a pastor has an important role in making sure that the church is in a healthy place.

If a church is caught up in quarrels about speculation, opinions, and trivial details - he must step in and put a stop to it.

He must charge them to no longer do this. *[pauseeee]*

This doesn't always go over well in our American culture.

One commentator made the point that trying to curb people's talk doesn't sit well with our society which prizes free speech.¹

But Paul makes it clear that a pastor has this responsibility and there is no place in the church for quarrels over things that are not based in the Word of God, no matter how much we prize free speech. *[pause]*

The reason is because, as Paul says, "[it] does no good, but only ruins the hearers." *[pause]*

Quarreling over trivial things is useless and brings no benefit at all, and not only that, but it's harmful.

It *ruins* people.

It brings harm and destruction in people's lives.

The reason is because these quarrels cause division and take people's view off of the Word of God. *[pause]*

Think of walking into a church that is constantly bickering over how many angels can stand on the head of a pin.

Think of a church that is arguing over hair-splitting details, and intellectual debates over obscure doctrinal points.

Think of what it would look like for a church to be constantly quibbling over controversies and disputed teaching. *[pause]*

I know some people who just obsess over small little details and make mountains out of molehills about things like the Nephilim in Genesis. *[pauseeee]*

What happens is people fight over small little things, and they aren't focused on the big, important things of Scripture.

They end up fighting over speculative details, and miss supreme truths. *[pauseeeee]*

This is dangerous and ought to be put a stop to, for it's harmful and destructive.

¹ Jon C. Laansma, "Commentary on 2 Timothy," in *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary: 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, and Hebrews*, vol. 17 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2009), 172.

It doesn't build up a church, but tears it down. *[pauseeee]*

So Timothy has a responsibility to proactively put a stop to quarreling about words, but he also has a role to avoid irreverent babble.

He is to steer clear of this stuff and keep away from it. *[pause]*

Irreverent is something that is godless and worldly - it's something not from God. *[pause]*

So these are things that are not according to the Word of God, and they are characterized as "babble".

This is a word emphasizing chatter that is empty and pointless. *[pauseeee]*

Have you ever been in a discussion, or reading something where at some point you think...

"Why am I even reading this or talking about this? It's pointless, it does no good, there's nothing good that comes out of this."

That's sort of what Paul is talking about: it's things that are not fruitful, but fruitless, and have no edifying nature to them.

It's the opposite of sound teaching. *[pause]*

So Timothy is not to get caught up in meaningless chatter, which is devoid of the Word of God.

And we must not get caught up in ungodly teaching that is void of truth and has no point to it. *[pause]*

This teaching is essentially false teaching, for Paul gives an example of this irreverent babble.

At the end of verse 17 into verse 18, he says, "Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened." *[pause]*

These two men were spreading around the false teaching that the end-time resurrection has already happened.

This was leading people astray, and upsetting the faith of some. *[pauseeee]*

Think of the danger of believing that the resurrection already happened.

You would think, "It doesn't matter what I do with my body, since I have already reached the glorified state." *[pause]*

This was dangerous, and it was overturning people's faith.

People were no longer persevering, but they were being led into more and more ungodliness. *[pauseeee]*

This is what we must remember: false teaching leads to more and more sin.

Instead of leading people to advance in godliness, they advance and progress in ungodliness.

[pause]

These two guys had deviated from the truth - they were missing the mark, and leading others to follow their wrong path. *[pauseeee]*

This teaching is so dangerous because it can spread like gangrene.

If you let this kind of stuff in a church, it will eat away at a church and its destruction will spread.

That's so dangerous! *[pause]*

False teaching is not just some innocent, minor difference in theology, but false teaching destroys!

It affects people's eternities!

No wonder Paul told Timothy to avoid it, and we must steer clear of it, too, for we must see it as it truly is: nasty gangrene. *[pauseeee]*

False beliefs and ideas are not harmless, but extremely harmful. *[pause]*

There are some people in churches across America who say, "Who needs doctrine?" and they let false teaching spread.

And the common thing to hear nowadays is, "Oh, that is true for you, but not true for me."

But Paul is taking a megaphone and making it loud and clear: "No, truth is truth, and falsehood kills and destroys!"

Don't mess around with godless, meaningless teaching that masquerades as truth, but it's just gangrene hidden underneath." *[pauseeee]*

This is an essential reminder for me as your pastor to put a stop to any kind of quarreling over small, trivial things.

And to also make sure that no false teaching is ever allowed to go on here. *[pause]*

Yet this is also important for each of you to heed.

Don't get caught up in small, trivial bickering over speculation and minor details.

Make sure to avoid any type of godless, empty falsehood. *[pause]*

Let's remember how destructive these things are: they are not only useless, but extremely harmful.

They are not innocent things, but cause spiritual ruination in people's lives.

Our faith and the faith of others are at stake, so let's not mess around with these gangrenous things. *[pauseee]*

So Paul has shown us the peril of godless, empty words, and how we are supposed to avoid them, but now he shows us...

II. The paramount importance of the Word.

Words are indispensable to the church and the Christian faith.

We don't come to church and just do activities all day long.

We come and hear preaching and teaching.

We come and encourage each other and exhort each other with words. *[pause]*

It is by words that we hear the gospel, and then are able to believe.

It is by words that we are able to grow in our faith.

That's why this battle of words going on must be fought, but we fight it with the "sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God".² *[pauseeee]*

So instead of quarreling over words and letting irreverent babble go on, Timothy must use the Word of God. *[pause]*

Look back at the beginning of verse 14, for Paul tells Timothy to, "Remind them of these things." *[pause]*

What things?

What Paul just said about the need for perseverance and the danger of denial in verses 11-13. *[pause]*

So basically, Paul is telling Timothy to remind the people of the Word of God.

Timothy isn't to make up some stuff, but he is to remind the people of the truth. *[pauseeee]*

You need to hear the Scriptures time and time again. *[pause]*

Many times in my teaching or preaching you will hear truths that you already know, but there's nothing wrong with that, for you need to be reminded of them.

So never shut off your brain and think, "Oh, I know this. I've heard it before," or "I've studied it before," or "I've heard it preached on before."

² Ephesians 6:17.

Instead, think: “Yes! I need a *reminder* of this truth!” *[pauseeee]*

We all need reminders, for how many times have you had to remind yourself of God’s great love for you?

How many times have you had to be reminded that God is in control? *[pauseeee]*

So Timothy must remind them of God’s Word, but also, rightly handle God’s Word. *[pause]*

Look at verse 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.” *[pause]*

This is talking about what a pastor must do.

He must take efforts and zealously present himself to God as one approved.

He must remember that he does his ministry with God as witness, who will either approve of his work, or if it is poor-quality work, it will be burnt up, as 1 Corinthians 3 talks about.³ *[pauseeee]*

This is a good reminder that I ought not to do my ministry for the approval of people, but for the approval of God. *[pause]*

You see, Paul is reminding us that it takes effort, diligence, and zeal to be a sound preacher.

He must work hard to present himself to God as one who is approved, that is, who is tested and proven as a faithful, good worker.

He must put in effort so as to be a good worker, who is unashamed of his work.

And this work is rightly handling the word of God. *[pauseeee]*

The truth is, it takes hard work and effort to accurately proclaim the Bible.

One pastor said that it only takes him an hour or two to prepare for a sermon, but that is not good, for it will lead to work that he will be ashamed of. *[pause]*

Many people don’t realize how much time a pastor puts into a sermon.

I put in around 15-20 hours for one sermon, and that’s not unique to me.

Many others say the same thing, with some saying that they put in even 30 to 35 hours.⁴ *[pause]*

Many might be shocked at how long it takes, but you have to in order to accurately understand it, be able to communicate it, and apply it. *[pause]*

³ See 1 Cor. 3:12ff.

⁴<https://www.pastoralized.com/2013/09/26/the-number-of-hours-keller-piper-driscoll-and-5-others-spend-on-sermon-prep/>.

It takes effort to be able to rightly handle the word, but it's worth it because you want to be an unashamed, approved workman of God.

Handling the word of God cannot be done lazily or in mediocrity.

I don't want to be ashamed of the work that I do, so I strive to rightly handle the word of truth, always seeking to get better and better. *[pauseeee]*

In fact, that "rightly handling" is literally "cutting it straight."

It points to cutting a straight line or path.

Not deviating from the truth, but accurately and rightly handling the truth, like following a straight line.

So a pastor who "cuts it straight" is the preacher who isn't turned aside by wordy debates or empty talk. *[pauseee]*

So many pastors get caught up in fads, news, and politics, and go on and on about those things in their sermons.

But that's not their role, instead, they are to cut it straight and stay on point.

I am not to be driven by speculation, hot takes, and controversy, but I am to simply, yet accurately speak the Word of God. *[pauseeee]*

I ask that you would pray for me regularly that I would always rightly handle the word of truth.

Pastors have a high responsibility, as we see in this passage, for our tasks have eternal consequences.

People can be built up through the Word, or we could lead people into sin and the ruin of their faith. *[pauseeeee]*

Now although these commands are given primarily to pastors, how can it apply to you?

How about this: do you desire that whoever preaches or teaches rightly handles the Scriptures?

Is that what you look for?

So many people go to churches where the Bible isn't rightly handled, or when they go looking for a church to attend, they aren't looking for the Bible to be accurately proclaimed.

But what about you?

Do you see the paramount importance of the Word of God for your life, and desire to follow it?

Or are you led astray by empty, false teaching? *[pause]*

Are you more interested in hearing about controversy, speculation, and politics, or are you longing for the Word of God!?

The Bible is certainly relevant at times for some of those things, but those things do not drive what we talk about, but we preach the Word, which may touch on those things. *[pauseeee]*

Let's all desire to hear from the word of truth, for it gives life and builds up.

But irreverent babble and quibbling over words tears down and destroys. *[pauseeee]*

Now where does verse 19 fit into all of this?

Verse 19 says, "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.'" *[pause]*

It seems somewhat random at first, but it actually fits very well with what Paul is saying. *[pause]*

In verse 18, Paul mentioned how these two false teachers were overturning the faith of some people.

And that fact could easily lead to discouragement and despair, couldn't it? *[pause]*

Like how can I be hopeful, when this wrong teaching is spreading like gangrene, and people are falling away from the faith, left and right? *[pause]*

Couldn't we easily feel that way when we look around at the state of Christianity in America?

There are so many false teachings out there, and people are just rolling in shallow, empty teaching. *[pause]*

You look at some of the biggest, most popular churches in America, and you see their teaching, and it's not good.

People aren't being faithful, but turning away from the truth. *[pause]*

So where is our confidence amidst all of the prevalence of unbiblical teaching?

Is the gangrene going to spread so much that it just kills the whole body?

Is it going to topple the church and the faith once and for all?

That's where verse 19 comes in, for Paul says, "BUT God's firm foundation stands!" *[pause]*

And so we see...

III. The permanence of God's foundation.

Paul is encouraging Timothy to not despair, for the true church will never be toppled.

Though the faith of some is overturned, the church of God will never be overturned. *[pause]*

Christian, we need to avoid false teaching, but we don't need to fear the outcome.

There is certainly a battle raging with competing messages, but the result is sure! *[pause]*

Jesus told us that the gates of hell would not prevail against the church,⁵ and that means that no false teaching or apostasy will prevail, either. *[pause]*

We aren't in a battle that will lose, but God's firm foundation stands and will always stand.

The true church of God will not be toppled, for God has set the foundation firm with Christ as the cornerstone.⁶

And if God lays a foundation, then you can rely upon it, for He is no inept building builder. *[pauseeee]*

He has not only laid the foundation, but he has put his seal of ownership on it. *[pause]*

In that day, the owner of a building that was being built would put an inscription on it, indicating ownership of it.

So God has put his seals of ownership on the church.

It is His, and it has a firm foundation that will stand no matter what happens in the world. *[pause]*

No matter what false teaching comes down the pike.

No matter if people keep deconstructing and leaving the faith.

No matter if the powers of darkness put up a fierce fight.

The foundation of God will stand, and God has put his seal on it, so we do not need to despair at what we see.

We aren't in a losing battle, for if God has put His seal on something, then it is guaranteed. *[pauseeee]*

The first seal is that God knows who are His. *[pause]*

We don't have to worry, for the Lord isn't fooled by appearances.

God is not tricked by false teaching, but knows who belongs to Him and who doesn't. *[pause]*

⁵ Matthew 16:18.

⁶ See Ephesians 2:19-21.

The quote comes from Numbers 16, where Korah and his gang go up against Moses, saying that he shouldn't be the leader.

But Moses says, "In the morning the Lord will show who is his."⁷ *[pause]*

Moses was confident that God knew the truth of who belonged to Him and who was rebelling against Him.

So even in the midst of false teachers so prevalent, we can be confident that God knows the truth.

He knows who are His, and who isn't.

He won't be fooled, no matter how many people they can fool. *[pauseeee]*

The second quote says, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity." *[pause]*

This is emphasizing that God's true people will seek to keep away from sin.

True believers won't continue in deeper and deeper ungodliness, but true believers strive to move away from iniquity. *[pause]*

The implication is that these false teachers were showing themselves to not be true people of God, who depart from iniquity.

Anyone who names the name, meaning, anyone who says that they belong to Christ should be seeking to stay away from sin.

They won't do this perfectly, but they desire to depart from iniquity. *[pauseeee]*

God knows who His people are, and His people will persevere, so don't worry, for you aren't serving a lost cause.

God's firm foundation won't be overturned, but there *will* be people who seek after godliness, and who God knows. *[pause]*

The true church will always exist and will always persist.

Justice and truth will prevail in the end.

The true believers will be displayed, and the pretenders will be unmasked.

Only the Lord truly knows who is genuinely a believer in Him, yet we get a glimpse of who are His by seeing their lives, and if they seek to avoid sin. *[pauseeee]*

⁷ Numbers 16:5.

God has given us two seals to remind us that there will always be true believers, and the church won't ever be destroyed.

So don't fret, God is in control! *[pause]*

No matter how many people we see walking away, God has a people, who He has graciously saved for eternal glory.

For He has sent Jesus Christ, His only unique Son, to come to this world and die for us. *[pause]*

He died, taking the punishment that we deserved on Himself, and bearing it.

He then rose again, so that we could have forgiveness and life.

And all those who place their faith in Jesus Christ are saved! *[pause]*

Have you trusted in Christ alone as the way to be forgiven and given eternal life? *[pause]*

All those that believe in Him will not be put to shame, but are living stones of God's house, with Christ as the cornerstone.⁸

And what a stable, firm foundation that God has laid! *[pauseeee]*

This text teaches us that we need to...

Avoid harmful teachings and cling to the truth, remembering that the truth will prevail!

There is a war of words going on in this world.

Quarrels over small, trivial things are trying to suck us in, and false teaching is trying to penetrate into our midst, so that our focus is off of the Word of God. *[pause]*

This isn't an inconsequential battle, but it's a battle for people's souls, for these things bring ruin and destruction in people's lives.

It can spread like gangrene, eating away and overturning the faith of many. *[pauseeee]*

We don't jump into small, trivial word battles, but we do go to battle against anything devoid of the Word of God.

So let's fight back with the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God.

But let's remember that we aren't in a losing battle. *[pause]*

God's firm foundation will always stand, for He has put his seals on it.

The true church of God will always exist and persist. *[pause]*

⁸ A reference to 1 Peter 2:4-6.

So we look to Him and trust His control, as we put a stop to quarreling over words and we avoid irreverent babble.

We work hard to proclaim and rightly handle the Word of God, for we remember that it is truly “the word of truth”. *[pauseee]*

So what do you focus on?

Do you let yourself be pulled into fights over trivial speculation?

Do you give ear to teachings that sound good, but are empty and devoid of the Word of God?
[pause]

Those things are dangerous and bring great ruin to your faith.

Instead, hold fast and cling to the Word of God.

Be in it everyday, desire to sit under it being rightly handled, and be encouraged that God’s true church will prevail.