

2 Timothy 2:14-26 - Living for God's Glory

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[0 : 00] Good morning, Church. We're going to read 2 Timothy 2, 14 to 26.

! Dealing with false teachers. Keep reminding God's people of these things. Warn them before going against correlling about words.

It is no value and only ruins those who listen. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handle the word of truth. Avoid godless chatter because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly. Their teaching will spread like a gangrene.

Among them are Imenus and Philetus, who have departed from the truth. They say that the resurrection has already taken place and they destroy the faith of some.

[1 : 07] Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription, The Lord knows who I is, and everyone who confess the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness.

In a large house, there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay. Some are for special purpose and some of common use.

Those who cleanse themselves from the letter will be instruments for special purpose, made holy, useful for the master, and prepared to do any good work.

Flee the evil desire of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome, but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful.

[2 : 18] Opponents must be gentle instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance, leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his evil.

Amen. Thanks so much, Alexandra. Do keep the passage open. If you've not got a Bible, try and shuffle along and find one if you can. We're going to be working our way through that passage. If you're here for the first time, then we have been working our way through the book of 2 Timothy, and we've arrived at these verses, so that's why we are in these verses this morning. Let me pray, ask for the Lord's help as we look at God's word together.

Let me pray. Father, we do recognise that what we're doing now is a spiritual battle. To listen to you and ignore the distractions around us and of the world is more difficult than it should be.

And so, Lord, we pray and ask for your help. Pray that your Holy Spirit, who inspired these words, might now be at work in our hearts, helping us to listen to them and respond in obedience and faith.

[3 : 37] Help me to speak truly and carefully and be at work in all of us, we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. Now, as you look down at the passage, I want you to notice that the heart of what's going on here is there in verse 19.

It's this solid foundation. Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription, the Lord knows those who are his, and everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness.

In all probability, those verses are a quote from Numbers chapter 16. In Numbers 16, you get the story of the Korahite rebellion.

The Korahite rebellion happened in the wilderness when the people of Israel are leaving slavery in Egypt and heading to the promised land, but are yet to arrive.

They had been promised to enter into a land flowing with milk and honey, but instead, they found themselves in the wilderness.

[4 : 46] And they were fed up. And more than just fed up, the Korahites were angry. Angry specifically with Moses and Aaron, and angry with them for presuming that they were the leaders of God's people.

How dare you do this, Moses and Aaron? Who do you think you are leading the people? How on earth do you expect us to follow you when you've not given us anything that we were promised? We're here in the wilderness. Where's the land flowing with milk and honey? And the story ends with a showdown. God summons the people before him and brings them in front of the tabernacle. And Moses asks people to stand away from Korah and his men and says, right, God is going to judge. God now is going to answer the Korahites' question.

Who has the right to lead God's people? And so as they stand back from the Korahites, the ground literally opens up and swallows Korah, his men, his family, and all their possessions and closes up over them.

[5 : 57] Buried alive. It's a dramatic story of God really proving that Moses and Aaron had the right to lead God's people. And Paul quotes it here in 2 Timothy 2, verse 19, because he wants to draw two lessons for Timothy from that story.

Two foundations, he calls them, sealed with inscriptions. And they are, look down at verse 19, number one, the Lord knows those who are his. And secondly, everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness.

Just as we start, think about those with me for a moment. Think about the first one, the Lord knows those who are his. This implies, doesn't it, says Paul, that you and I don't know who belongs to the Lord.

We cannot tell who belongs to God and who does not. God's people are to a certain degree invisible to us, but not to God. They are known to God.

In other words, Paul's point is to Timothy that the church now, just like Israel then, is in a sense a mix of people, a mix of genuine believers, and people who claim to be believers, but are not really.

[7 : 10] And largely speaking, that difference is invisible to us. It's not something that we can see. Being a Christian, belonging to God, is not about external behavior, but about an internal change of heart.

Being a Christian is about having our hearts changed and transformed, that we love God and trust him. And that internal change is not apparent to us.

People don't wear a badge. You can't see. So you could claim to be a Christian, and we wouldn't know whether it was true or not. But God does, right?

No one fools God. You might fool a church. You might fool yourself. You can never fool God, because God knows those who are his. Secondly then, everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness.

This is the second foundation, that the visible sign of invisible change is obedience. Obedience. In other words, while it's impossible for us to see the invisible change in human hearts, we are able to observe external obedience.

[8 : 23] External obedience is not an infallible sign of genuine faith, but it is a sign of genuine faith. So if you claim to be a Christian, but you don't live as one, you don't obey the Lord, well, then you're almost certainly not a Christian.

If you call yourself a Christian, but you have no desire to please God, to live his way, to submit to his word, then in all probability, you're lying to yourself about being a Christian. Not, I hasten to add, not because obedience saves you.

Obedience does not save you, but obedience is the mark of having received salvation from the Lord Jesus Christ. His obedience saves us. Our obedience is a sign that we have received his salvation.

A desire to follow God and to live his ways and to please him is a sign of true faith. It's why if you belong to this church as a church member, we ask not only do you believe the gospel of Jesus Christ, but we also look at your life to see whether you are living in a way that backs that up.

It's why baptism is really the entry point into the life of the church because it is a first act of step of obedience to Jesus' command. Believe and be baptized, he says.

[9 : 37] So there you have it, two foundations. The Lord knows those who are his. They're invisible to us. And everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness. Now, what I want you to see this morning is that really the rest of the passage works out in the light of those two foundations.

Essentially, the rest of the passages, you know, if those are the solid truths, then what should church be like? You know, what's Timothy's job in church to be if these are the solid foundations? How should he go about his ministry in a visible church, which is a mix of the genuine and the fake? Well, basically, Paul says two things, one before verse 19 and one after, and each of them have their own illustration.

So the first is about a road builder and the second is about a housekeeper. And for the rest of our time, we're going to talk about road building and housekeeping, as Paul does here. So firstly, the road builder, verses 14 to 18.

Look down at verse 15. This is the instruction that Paul gives to Timothy. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

[10:48] Here you go. This is Timothy's task in a mixed church, in a church of invisible faith, made visible by external obedience. What are you to do in that mixed church?

Well, says Paul, you need to make sure that you correctly handle the word of truth. Literally here to guide a straight path, go in a straight line, not to cut corners or to deviate to one side or the other. Apparently, the word here is the word from road building, correctly handling the word of truth is cutting a straight path, as in road building.

It's not hard to think, why is it? If you've been in Britain any length of time or even in any other country that was at one point occupied by the Romans, you will know they love to build straight roads, right?

Cutting through the countryside without twisting and turning. And that, says Paul, is to be Timothy's approach to the Bible. Cut a straight line. Don't twist, don't turn. Cut a straight line right through it.

[11:50] Be honest and straightforward as a Roman road builder is committed to cutting a straight line through the countryside. And in doing that, Timothy then is to be an approved worker, notice.

Approved, though, notice, not by the church, but by God. That is who Timothy is presenting himself to in verse 15. That word implies that he is tested or examined. He is someone who God is holding to account.

And so Timothy, in pleasing God, can be unashamed if he is not twisting God's word to his own ends or seeking to win personal vendettas or arguments, but clearly working hard to cut a straight road.

I guess it's not really that hard to imagine, is it? Paul and Timothy in their time together as friends have probably walked down a lot of Roman roads. And the difference between an approved worker and an unapproved worker would have been obvious to them, right?

You can imagine their conversation as they're walking down the road. Wow. Perhaps the guy went on holiday today, right? Notice the bump and the curve in the road, Timothy? You know, perhaps the guy, you know, fell asleep.

[12:55] Perhaps he was drunk, but he has not cut a straight road. Timothy, don't be that guy. Make sure that you work hard. Study hard. Train properly for ministry.

Don't cut corners. Don't make assumptions, Timothy. Don't rely on chat GPT. Don't rely on Google searches. Don't stand there and waffle through your own good ideas. Don't stand there just relying on your own story or your own testimony.

Don't rely on telling emotional stories, but cut a straight road. Let your teaching of the Bible be on point, direct, focus, clear. In the verses that follow, Paul articulates the distractions to this kind of straight shooting Bible ministry.

Look down at verse 14. Quarrels about words. These seem to be the same as the foolish and stupid arguments in verse 23. Silly side pursuits and blind alleys that Christians love to debate, but end up nowhere.

More seriously, there's the godless chatter of verse 16. Literally, the words there are, a cacophony of Babel that leads away from the Lord. Hymenus and Philetus in verse 18 have said that the resurrection has already taken place.

[14:02] It's like an ancient prosperity gospel that says, hey, you Christian, you've got everything you're going to get. It's brilliant now. You don't need to wait for the glory to come. Paul says they're wrong.

This is Paul's point, isn't it? If you know the foundations that the Lord knows those who are his and everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness, what are you to

do? What's going to cut through that dynamic in church life?

What will expose hearts? What will lead people away from wickedness? What will demonstrate to people that they're faking it? Straight, honest, clear, to the point Bible ministry by a teacher who works hard and seeks the approval of the Lord and not men.

I want you just to think with me right now. What is happening right now as we open the Bible together? I think the sense of what's going on here in 2 Timothy 2 is that Paul is suggesting that this, if you like, is a moment in front of the tabernacle with chorus people.

That's what's going on every time we open God's word, isn't it? As we open God's word, this is God cutting through the fake and the real. I don't expect the ground to swallow people up.

[15:15] If the ground opened here, I would assume it was just the floor failing, which is maybe not totally unlikely. But God does expose our hearts as we open the Bible together. And I hope you're experiencing that.

You see, we're a mixed bunch, aren't we? There are people in this room who love the Lord and are keen to live for his glory. And there are people who know that's not them, but they are pretending that it is them.

There are people in this room who know it's not them and they want to find out more. And there are people who aren't Christians, but think they are and are self-deceived.

And like I said before, no one's wearing a label, are they? No one comes in with a label. I am fooling myself this morning. I want you to think I'm a Christian, but really I'm not. I'm only investigating.

No, none of us wear a label and that's absolutely fine. But God knows your heart right now, this morning, and he's cutting through it with his word and exposing you.

[16:18] It's not me, it's him. And it's not the sort of vague inferences of God's word about issues that don't really matter. No, it's the central message all the way through the Bible, the message about salvation in Christ alone, through faith alone, to the glory of God alone.

That's what's going on here. That's what exposes us. God's word confronts us with our sin. That the God who made you, who loves you, who gives you life and breath and everything that you enjoy, that God deserves your worship and your praise and your very life.

But you've lived for yourself, for your own glory and not his. We all have. And so we deserve his judgment. Having received life as a gift and lived it to ourselves, our life is now forfeit.

We deserve to die. But in an act of unfathomable mercy, God sent his son, Jesus Christ, God in flesh, living in perfect worship and praise of his father, before dying on a cross in our place, bearing the punishment that we deserve, that we might receive resurrection life through him.

It's that message, which it takes the whole Bible to tell, that exposes your heart. I'm a sinner. Jesus alone can save me. I need to trust in him.

[17:40] The truth is, this exposing work happens whenever the Bible is open. So perhaps this morning, you find yourself as being one of those people who's responsible for perhaps a community group or for youth ministry or for Sunday school or for doing a one-to-one.

Perhaps you've got your own children that you're trying to teach the Bible. Maybe you've got grandchildren, nieces or nephews, or maybe you're sharing in the preaching ministry in the life of the church. Well, then you need this instruction in verse 15, don't you?

That you need God's approval, not other people's. You know, if you open the Bible looking for people's approval, then what you will do is you will fall into the godless chatter.

People love godless chatter. You know, if you spend hours talking about who the beast is in Revelation 13, they'll love to chat about that. Or worse, you'll find yourself spreading the gangrene of telling people what they want to hear, like Hymenus and Philetus.

You've got everything you want. Life's going to be brilliant. Instead, though, you need to be examined, tested, trained, open to feedback and criticism so that you're clear that what you're saying is what the Bible is saying.

[18:45] So that as you speak for the glory of God, you do it, not as someone who's just rocked up and is saying whatever's on their mind or in some super spiritual way, speaking as if, you know, preparing to preach or preparing to speak or preparing to share God's word takes no preparation at all.

No, the image of road building implies sweat, doesn't it? Hard work, graft. The spirit loves to bless hard work. I think it's probably worth us just lingering here on this for a moment.

I received an email from a friend this week who's a retired seminary professor. He spent his working life training men and women for ministry roles in the life of the church.

We exchange emails every now and again as we debate various different things and he made this comment. He said, just in one line, he said, mediocre preaching is now the rule and not the exception in churches in Britain.

In other words, he said, the weakness of the church is not about the cultural moment that we live in but that ministry in churches is done by unqualified people working for the approval of men and women.

[19 : 52] That was his point. He's not the only one saying it, actually. So what does it look like to be a church that bucks that trend and takes this instruction in verse 15 seriously?

But I think it means that one of the things that we are going to invest in as a local church is training people, men and women, to be these approved workers who work for God's glory and who are straight-talking word ministers, right?

You see, think about what's being said here. If Paul is right that in churches of invisible hearts where preaching is the thing that cuts through it, God's word cuts through invisible hearts that aren't really exposed to us, then two things are true by implication.

One, which we've seen, is that it's the ministry of the word that does the exposing. You know, ministry of the word is like cancer surgery, right? It's cutting open and cutting out the bad. But the second implication is that it's not just any old Bible ministry that does that work.

It's approved by God straight-shooting Bible ministry that does this. And Paul says that really that kind of ministry requires examination, it requires training, it requires testing.

[21 : 04] Which means that if you expect to be able to teach young people, to preach, to lead a Bible study, and the only training that you've received is you've sat in church and watched someone else do it for a few years, that's like someone turning up and doing a cancer operation and says, well, I watched it on YouTube.

What? You've got a scalpel, you're cutting into them, what are you doing? That's it. It happens in churches all the time, doesn't it? It means that we, as a church, need to take care who we appoint to be teaching elders, but also that we need to be serious about training others as well, ourselves and others.

We need to turn up, we need to knuckle down, we need to listen carefully to feedback, we need to study hard, formally and formally. There's a research group called the Barna Research Group that suggested in 2024 that the attrition rate of pastors leaving or wanting to leave their jobs in independent evangelical churches like ours is 50%.

Like 50% of men in ministry, if you ask them would they like to quit their job, would tell you yes please, right? I mean, that is incredible.

But if you take into consideration that and the average age of people in pastoral ministry, then churches like ours, and this was a back of an envelope kind of calculation, I think we probably need to be training up somebody every two years to send them into pastoral ministry.

[22 : 24] Because if we're not doing that, we will be running out of people to do ministry. In fact, I think you could make a good argument that for a church like ours in inner London, you know, there are twice as many young people living in inner London as there are in other parts of the country, means that we should be doing more of this than any other church.

We should do twice as much of this because we have twice the opportunity. So a church like ours should invest heavily its money in providing training to men and women, not just for full-time roles, but for lay roles too.

So that we might serve God's people for God's glory and for their good. And if we won't invest there as a church, we can expect to be in a mess because we're called to be road builders in a church where the Lord knows those who are his.

That's the first illustration, road builder. Second illustration, housekeeper. Have a look down at verse 20. In a large house, there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay. Some are for special purposes and some for common use. Those who cleanse themselves from the latter will be instruments for special purposes, made holy, useful to the master and prepared to do any good work.

[23 : 41] Here the image then is a grand house with servants in it. And the servants have two kinds of tools at their disposal. They have dirty tools for dirty jobs and they have special tools for special jobs.

Dirty tools like hammers, shovels, clay jars and the like and clean tools for fancy jobs like silver service implements, golden candelabras, goblets and the like.

And the point is this, right? Be like the gold and silver tools, not like the wooden clay ones. What does that mean? Well, remember verse 19, the Lord knows those who are his and everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness.

In other words, the point is God will get the job done, right? God knows who is his. God doesn't look at the church and go, oh, I'm not quite sure I know what I'm doing, right?

God knows what he's doing and he will get the job done. He knows who his people are. God's mission is not threatened by false teachers and by bad workers in the church. No, the point is really that false teachers and bad workers in the church are like these wooden implements, clay implements.

[24 : 54] They're used by God for the dirty jobs and then discarded. You know, they're like the Assyrians in Isaiah chapter 7 who are used like a razor on the head of Israel, right?

They are used despite themselves to accomplish the purposes of God or like the circumcision party in Acts 15 who make the church much clearer on the gospel by disputing with the church on circumcision.

You know, they're not seeking to serve God, they're serving themselves but nevertheless they accomplish God's purposes even unwittingly. The point is that false teaching in the church is not bad for God.

It's bad for the false teacher and for those who listen and God's point here is don't be a wooden hammer, be a silver spoon.

You know, don't unwittingly bash out God's plan, be a golden candelabra that holds the flame of the gospel brightly because the Lord knows those who are his and everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness.

[25 : 53] So turn away from wickedness. That's what God's people do and that's what you should do. I wonder sometimes whether we get confused by these warnings in the Bible.

How can both those statements be true? How can the Lord know those who are his and accomplish all his purposes and at the same time warn us about disobedience? How can those things be true? Now, I think actually sometimes we get confused about this because we don't really listen.

The point is that the warning will work if you listen to it even if you're listening to the warning is not necessarily related to the warning itself.

Let me try and give you an example because that's confusing, isn't it? If I tell you, right, don't go play in the railway line, whether you listen to my warning of not playing in the railway line is probably related something to do with whether you think I'm sensible or a fool.

I'll never listen to that Steve guy. What does he know about railways anyway, right? So you don't listen to the warning. But if you think, do you know what, Steve might be worth listening to. I know he's got some experience of railway lines.

[26 : 59] I don't actually, but you know, he's got some experience. He probably knows what he's talking about. I should listen to his warning. In that case, the warning works because of your relationship with me. God warns his people and it divides them between those who listen and the warning works and those who don't listen and therefore the warning doesn't work.

And that's what's going on. The same is here. God tells you, cleanse yourself from being a tool of ignorance to be a tool of glory. You should listen. Be useful for good work.

Be holy. Be special. And of course, whether or not you listen is not really related to the warning itself. It's related to your relationship with the Lord who gives the warning. So how then do we become useful, holy tools instead of sacrificial screwdrivers that we hit with a hammer when we've got a dirty job we want to do?

Well, that's what Paul articulates in verse 22. Have a look down at it. I'll read it to you. Flee the evil desires of youth. Pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments because you know they produce quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome, must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful.

[28 : 16] Opponents must be gently instructed in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth so that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil who has taken them captive to do his will.

Let's just work through those really briefly. Being useful to the Lord involves running from what Paul calls evil desires of youth. In the context that seems to be going in the opposite direction towards righteousness, faith, love and peace.

So that to flee the youthful desires, the evil desires of youth is yes to run away from unrighteous sexual desire but it's more than that. We're to flee a desire for fame.

We're to flee a desire for influence. We're to flee a desire for material wealth. We're to flee a desire for making a name for ourselves. We're to run after Jesus and do stuff out of faith in him and not confidence in ourselves.

We're to run after loving others, laying down ourselves for their benefit, being willing to become less that they might become more. We're to run after peace and not disagreements.

[29 : 19] In verse 23, Paul spends longer on that, doesn't he? He says that churches are full of stupid arguments, foolish talk that leads to quarrels. And verse 24, the Lord's servant of gold and silver is not to be fighting with the sheep over stuff that doesn't matter.

You've all met that kind of pick-a-fight pastor, right? Well, he's a jar of clay in a bad way, not in a one Corinthians way but in a bad, or two Corinthians way but in a bad way.

He's there for ennobal purposes. Actually, you need a peace-loving pastor. We're to be kind to everyone even when they disagree with us.

We're to be able to teach because we're not distracted by silly arguments that can take away from the point. And our hope is that not that we can change people but, verse 25, look down at it, that God might grant repentance to people.

God is the one that we trust in. God is the one doing the work, turning people back to him in knowledge of the truth and freedom from the devil, verse 23. So here's the question for you and me for this morning, right?

[30 : 22] The question is not, notice, the question is not will you be useful, right? You will be useful because God uses all things for his purposes, right?

That's a given. All things work out for the accomplishment of God's purposes. That is not the question. You know, if you think you can stand in God, it's like standing on Brighton Beach, stopping the tide from coming in, right?

Stop. It's just going to wash you away, isn't it? You can't stand in the way of God. You can't stop his purposes. He's going to accomplish his purpose come what may.

Now, that's not the question. The question is really this. The question is, are you going to be a gold or silver tool or are you going to be a wood and clay one?

The question isn't even, are you a Christian or not? Because it seems like in the context it's possible to be saved and still to be a noble tool in the hand of God.

[31 : 27] Think of the people in 1 Corinthians 3 who were escaping through the flames. You see, the question really, I suppose, you put it this way, do you want God to use you because of your desires and your love for his people or despite your lack of love?

Do you want in your youthful, sinful passion to pursue your own ends and be frustrated and waste your life in causing irrelevant arguments on the edge of church or do you want to grow up and live for God's glory and not your own?

What do you want? Which will it be? It's not that you can thwart God's purposes but you can waste your life, right? You can ruin a church. You can squander your money.

You can lead people astray. You can rob yourself of any assurance that you're really a Christian.

You can lose your joy or you could cleanse yourself from all of that and press into the gospel of grace, leaning in the strength of the spirit, making the most of being discipled and trained that you might be an instrument of gold and silver and the mission of God in the world.

When I was at theological college, I was lectured by a guy called Mike Ovey who died tragically and very suddenly a few years later.

[32 : 41] He used to say, I want to make you the best gift to a local church that I can. That was his purpose. I want you to be the best gift you can be to a local church.

He was under God trying to make wooden hammers into silver spoons. That's what he was doing. And it's not just for pastors, is it? It's for all of us. Let's pray that God might cleanse us from passion for our own glory, for the praise of others, that we might live for the glory of God alone, follow him, obey him, and be a golden tool in the service of our Lord because the Lord knows those who are his and everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness.

Let me pray as we close. Heavenly Father, how we thank you that you have an unstoppable purpose, that you know what you're doing, you know who belongs to you, and you are accomplishing all that you desire in this world.

We want to pray, please, Lord, that you would forgive us where we've been tricking ourselves, pretending that we belong to you when we don't.

Forgive us, have mercy on us, purify our hearts, we pray. And we ask, Lord, that you might make us into useful servants for the glory of your name. Help us to be these approved workmen and women who live for your glory, who handle the Bible properly and truthfully and teach it clearly.

[34 : 29] Help us to avoid godless chatter or false teaching, but to present the gospel clearly and faithfully that you might be at work turning people to trust in Christ and receive life in his name.

As we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Thank you.