

2 Timothy

I. Introduction

A. **2 Timothy 2:14-19** . . . Remind them of these things, and solemnly charge them in the presence of God not to wrangle about words, which is useless and leads to the ruin of the hearers. [15] Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth. [16] But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness, [17] and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, [18] men who have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and they upset the faith of some. [19] Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, “The Lord knows those who are His,” and, “Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness.”

B. Two Sundays ago we used the first five words of **vs 14** to talk about four truths that I urged you to remind yourself of regularly, and to remind those around you of these same truths – as they have need of being reminded. These four truths are: **(1)** God is perfectly good. **(2)** Godliness is the only path to the abundant life. **(3)** Changing what is in your heart brings about a far greater good than changing your circumstances. **(4)** Love according to the principles and ways of love.

1. In talking about these four truths, I also urged you to use these kinds of reminders to help you in your effort to keep thinking as you ought to think and doing what you ought to do as a Christian.

2. Today, we will talk about the rest of **vs 14** and **vs 15**.

C. Prayer

II. Worthless debates; approved by God.

A. Our focus today begins with the second part of **vs 14**, which says, “Solemnly charge them in the presence of God not to wrangle about words, which is useless and leads to the ruin of the hearers.”

1. On several occasions, I have encouraged you to use a dictionary when studying God’s word.

a. This verse contains one two-word phrase and three single words worth looking up. They are: solemnly charge, wrangle, useless, and ruin. Now I have no doubts that you have a general understanding of these words.

- b. However, it is your general understanding that makes it easy to continue reading, rather than slowing down and pondering how each word affects the meaning of the verse, and how you might apply the message to yourself and our church.
 - c. Therefore, I turned to Webster's 1913 Unabridged Dictionary to gain a better understanding of each word. Here is what I found.
 2. To **solemnly charge** – means to implore or entreat with the intention of awakening or promoting serious consideration. In this case, the serious consideration is supposed to result in abstaining from wrangling about words.
 3. To **wrangle** about words – is to engage in an energetic debate, or a dispute, or a quarrel with someone who holds a different position than you. The goal is to win the debate and prove them wrong or that your position is superior.
 - a. Christians are prone to wrangle about such things as theology, end times, God's involvement in world affairs, Church music, religious traditions, and current hot topics like abortion, homosexuality, same-sex marriage, and gun laws.
 - b. Yet Christians also wrangle about such things as world affairs, current events, national and state politics, sports teams, forms of entertainment, financial investments, how to stay healthy, and anything to do with doctors, hospitals, and medicine.
 - c. Now you may be wondering, if wrangling is so common among Christians, why does God's word **solemnly charge** us not to do it? This is where the words **useless** and **ruin** become important.
 4. The word **useless** means to be of no use, or of no value – because nothing good comes from it. In other words, nothing good or of value comes from wrangling. Therefore it is useless.
 - a. In relation to Christianity, it is impossible to wrangle about the topics and issues just mentioned and bring about a good end, that is, an end that edifies those involved or that produces some spiritual profit for those engaged in the wrangling, or those listening to the wrangling.
 - b. Yet, though wrangling is incapable of producing a good outcome – spiritually speaking – it is capable of stirring the passions of those involved, feeding pride, driving impatience, and promoting dissension among Christians who should be preserving the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (**Ephesians 4:1-3**).
 - c. In other words, wrangling is not just a waste of time, it is damaging to the spiritual well-being of the individual Christian

and the overall spiritual health of the church. We see the truth of this in the last word, **ruin**.

5. The word **ruin**, in this context, does not speak of immediate destruction or total loss in a moment of time. Rather, it speaks of the slow process of decay – a process that over time results in destruction and total loss.
 - a. Examples of this kind of process are metal rusting, and repeatedly making foolish financial decisions that ultimately lead to bankruptcy.
 - b. Therefore, there are two important truths that come from this word **ruin** which help us see why Paul speaks against it.
 - (1) **First**, because the word **ruin** speaks of a slow process of destruction, it is hard to see the damage done from a single occasion of wrangling. Sadder still is the reality that many Christians don't see the damage wrangling has done to them and the church even after years of wrangling.
 - (2) **Second**, as has already been said, wrangling is not only useless, it is destructive to the spiritual well-being of the individual Christian and the overall spiritual health of the church.
 - c. You cannot stir such things as argumentative passions, pride, impatience, and intolerance without feeding a kind of thinking, speaking, attitudes, and self-exaltation that work against godliness and the edifying of one another.
 - (1) Therefore, instead of engaging in that which slowly destroys our spiritual health, and tears down others in the church, we ought to engage in edification – which is a process of building up ourselves and one another through a personal and community pursuit of God and godliness.
 - (2) The Bible speaks of edification in several places. Here is one: **Romans 14:19**, So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.
6. Two more thoughts on wrangling.
 - a. Some Christians wrangle, debate, and argue about words, portions of scripture, theology, and other topics for the fun of pitting their intellectual and verbal skills against an opponent. For them, it is the fun of the debate – and the more worthy the opponent, the greater the fun.
 - (1) Yet this kind of fun turns “where two or three are gathered in my name” into a competition of (1) intellect, (2) ways with

words, (3) research, and (4) trivia knowledge rather than a time to edification and encouragement in the faith.

- (2) When this happens, the community good is sacrificed on the altar of self-interest, and the spiritual health of those involved is sacrificed on the altar of verbal sport.
- b. Another reason Christians wrangle is to prove the superiority of their position, that is, to show the other side how wrong they are.
 - (1) In a setting like this, even if the other side is wrong, the motive to wrangle is pride, not truth for the sake of correct understanding, or stronger faith, or growth in godliness, or fellowship with God, or the good of the church.
 - (2) In other words, this kind of wrangling puts the focus on self and self-exaltation. It's intention is to win, not edify, and to gain a sense of importance or superiority, not serve. To feed pride or conceit or arrogance in any form is to work against love, humility, spiritual growth, the good of the church, and your own spiritual, emotional, and mental maturity.
7. In summary, wrangling has more to do with self-love and self-exaltation than promoting truth, growth in godliness, and the spiritual health of the believers with whom you are conversing.
 - a. Therefore, wrangling is not only useless, it progressively ruins your own Christian character, and the spiritual health of those who participate in wrangling with you.
 - b. However, there is a cure for wrangling. And this cure is found in **vs 15**. It is a cure that begins with you – that is, with you diligently pursuing growth in godliness, a growth that includes getting to know and accurately handling the scriptures – not just in relation to theology and Bible doctrine, but also, and maybe even especially so, in relation to how you think, what you speak, your attitudes, values, Christian maturity, how you deal with those around you, and what you want for our church.

B. [15] Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth (*as opposed to wrangling about words*).

1. Returning to Webster's Dictionary, to **be diligent** means to give intentional, careful, and persistent attention and effort to something.
 - a. Therefore, in this context, diligence is the opposite of being negligent or careless or apathetic or distracted by other things in

- relation to your spiritual growth, your knowledge of God and His word, and your interactions with other believers.
- b. You might be inclined to conclude that the **diligence** referenced here in **vs 15** is to be focused on getting to know and accurately handling the scriptures, but that is not its focus.
 - c. Its focus, that is, the focus of your intentional, careful, and persistent efforts, is on presenting yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed of the work you are doing – which includes accurately handling the word of truth.
 - d. In other words, we are to diligently live the Christian life, which includes accurately handling the scriptures, so that we can unashamedly present ourselves to God with a reasonable expectation that He will approve of how we have lived.
2. Notice, God is the one who decides what is worthy or unworthy, acceptable or unacceptable – not us. This is an important distinction because many Christians want to make this decision themselves, about themselves.
- a. However, God is our Creator and our Supreme Being. He is our Lord and Master. He sets the standards. And He is the judge who shows no partiality.
 - b. Therefore, it is only natural that He should be the one who decides if we have been diligent in living according to His standards and expectations, and therefore are worthy of His approval and praise.
 - c. That God is the final decider of who is approved is confirmed in **2 Corinthians 10:18**, “For it is not he who commends (*praises*) himself that is approved, but he whom the Lord commends.”
 - d. Though some Christians are prone to commend themselves as worthy of God’s approval – based on their theology, or based on comparing themselves to those they deem unworthy of God’s approval – may make them feel better about their standing with God, but it will not change the basis God uses for determining if they are worthy of His praise and approval.
 - e. Therefore, the wisest thing we can do is to be diligent, that is, intentional, careful, and persistent in living the Christian life – according to God’s standards – so that we can stand before Him unashamed, or at least with a minimal amount of shame.
3. As has been said, diligence in living a godly life includes learning to **accurately handle God’s word** – not only for the sake of having an accurate theology, but also for the sake of applying God’s word to

our daily living in the most accurate and practical ways possible, and for the sake of speaking about God's word to others.

- a. I think we can all agree that we need help with this – which is why God gives us (1) His Holy Spirit, (2) wisdom – when requested, (3) trials to test what we have learned and to further our education, (4) pastors, teachers, and elders – to guide us into truth and show us how to live according to truth, (5) the church – to support and encourage us along the way, and (6) the great cloud of witnesses who have left behind stories, insights, lessons learned, and examples of how to live a God approved life.
- b. Yet in spite of all that God has done and continues to do in enabling us to accurately handle His scriptures, some Christians still use them in self-serving or misleading ways.
 - (1) An example of the self-serving use of God's word is the husband who tells his wife that God's word says she is to submit to him – while ignoring the scripture that calls him to love his wife as Christ loves the church.
 - (2) An example of the misleading use of God's word is holding to a theology or doctrine that is built on part of God's word while ignoring those parts that differ with or appear to be incompatible with our theology or doctrine – and teaching others to do the same.

III. Conclusion

- A. In light of what God intends for us to be, let us run from wrangling, and diligently run toward living a God-approved Christian life – which includes making use of all that God provides for accurately handling the scriptures – for our own sake and the sake of those we deal with.
- B. And why is this so important? It protects the truth of God's word. It brings glory and honor to God through more accurate examples of how to live according to God's word. It promotes our own spiritual growth and development. And it edifies and promotes the spiritual health of the church.