

Faithfulness and Truth

Scripture Focus

2 Timothy 2:14–26

Key Verse

“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15).

Overview

Controversy over beliefs is a serious matter. Often controversy brings out the worst in people. Some fight from carnal motives or by carnal means. Others desert the truth due to carnal cowardice. We, as God’s servants, must have the proper attitude toward and response to the inevitable situation of doctrinal controversy.

Topic

Truth

Theme

The servant of God must interpret the Scriptures accurately and present the truth humbly.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will study God’s Word carefully and patiently share truth with others.

Outline

- I. Faithfulness in Doctrine (2 Tim. 2:14–18)
 - A. Erring from the truth (2:14, 16–18)
 - B. Rightly dividing the truth (2:15)
- II. Faithfulness in Behavior (2 Tim. 2:19–22)
 - A. Proposition (2:19)
 - B. Illustration (2:20, 21)
 - C. Action (2:22)
- III. Faithfulness in Controversy (2 Tim. 2:23–26)
 - A. Eluding foolishness (2:23)
 - B. Educating fools (2:24–26)
 1. Method to follow (v. 25)
 2. Manner to display (v. 24)
 3. Purpose of confrontation (v. 26)

Materials

- RBP transparencies 1 and 13
- Lesson 10 case study from resource CD
- 2 Timothy 2:15 verse card from resource CD
- A dirty vessel

Getting Started

Birthday Party Blues

Your five preschool-age grandchildren have all gathered to celebrate your birthday. As the cake is served, tears overflow Natalie's eyes and she begins to sob. You tenderly inquire about her distress and learn that she wanted the blue icing flower, not the green one.

Ask: How does Natalie's problem look from an adult's perspective? Why does our interpretation or perspective of so many things change as we mature? (Questions 1, 2)

As believers, we are to mature in our understanding of the Word. We are to get better at handling it properly. We should eventually be able to help those who have fallen into doctrinal error. Paul wrote Timothy about dealing with those who were spreading false doctrines.

Searching the Scriptures

I. Faithfulness in Doctrine (2 Tim. 2:14–18)

A. Erring from the truth (2:14, 16–18)

The Christian must not strive about words to no profit. The phrase “words to no profit” (2 Tim. 2:14) contrasts with “the faithful saying” (v. 11). A person can depend on the faithful saying, but words to no profit subvert the hearers. The word “subvert” literally means to turn down or to turn upside down. It's the word from which our English word “catastrophe” is derived. Striving about words to no profit causes spiritual catastrophe.

The reminder about faithfulness and unfaithfulness (“these things”) should help Christians to avoid striving about words to no profit. If one's mind is filled with the eternal issues of God, he is unlikely to get sidetracked into pointless controversy.

READ: 1 Timothy 6:20; 2 Timothy 2:16. **ASK:** What action was Timothy to take regarding profane and vain babblings? What happens to ministry opportunities when we spend a lot of time reasoning with those who flatly deny the truth? (Questions 3, 4)

Verse 16 continues the thoughts of verse 14. God's follower must shun vain babblings, empty sounds or comments that lack genuine merit, for they are common or unsanctified and have nothing of holy character about them. Rather, they “increase unto more ungodliness.”

The word “increase” means to advance. Vain babbling is an advance in the wrong direction, a progress into ungodliness. The babblers do not focus upon the Word of truth where God Himself is revealed. Rather, they focus upon hu-

man ideas about God and explanations of life. As a result, their attitudes and behaviors become more and more ungodly. They themselves degenerate.

Furthermore, what the babblers teach affects others in a detrimental way. Their doctrine eats like a canker or gangrene. It devours their own understanding of godliness and it devours others, drawing them into the same error.

DISCUSS: What would happen to a person's confidence in God's Word if he or she constantly heard from a fellow church member that it could not be trusted? What are long-term consequences of a lack of confidence in God's Word? (Questions 5, 6)

Paul listed two people as examples of vain babblers, Hymenaeus and Philetus (v. 17). They erred concerning the truth. "Erred" literally means to miss one's aim. Their aim was to know the truth, but by getting involved in vain babblings they veered away from the truth.

Paul gave an example of their doctrine to illustrate how they had erred (v. 18). We are not given full details of their false teaching, but it concerned the future resurrection. Physical resurrection is a fundamental of the Christian faith, and its denial is a serious heresy (1 Cor. 15:12).

READ: 1 Corinthians 15:13, 14. **ASK:** Explain the seriousness of denying bodily resurrection. (Question 7)

These erring teachers were likely influenced by a human philosophy called Gnosticism that said that all matter is evil and that only non-matter is good. Consequently, they would have rejected the idea of a physical, bodily resurrection and spiritualized the resurrection. Perhaps they viewed the resurrection of believers as a symbolic description of being born again. And so they said it had already taken place. Of course such a position would deny the bodily resurrection.

These babblers overthrew the faith of some who professed faith in Christ. What a time of accountability babblers will have before God!

ASK: Babblers set themselves up as an authority over the Bible. What sin is at the root of such an action? (Question 8)

The babblers remind us of contemporary cultists. Cults often turn aside from the Word of truth and proclaim other messages that are really just vain babblings, not additional revelations. And even more confusing is the fact that some who claim to be evangelical are substituting "discussion" for the clear statements of Scripture. Babblings are emerging from their dialog. Satan is today attacking the truth of God in the same ways as he did in New Testament times.

B. Rightly dividing the truth (2:15)

The man of God is to focus on the Word of truth. The Word of truth for

Timothy would have included the Old Testament and apostolic teaching. For us it would be the entire Bible.

READ: John 17:17. **ASK:** How does Jesus describe God's Word? What effect does God's Word have on those who belong to Christ? (Questions 9, 10)

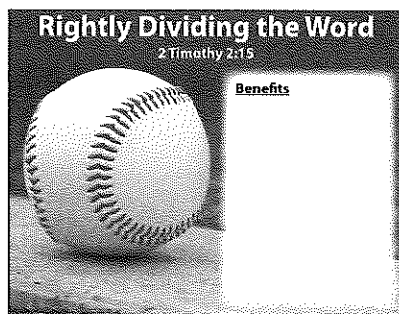
Timothy was to be a workman in the things of God who rightly divided the Word of truth. "Rightly divide" means to cut a straight line. The word is used in a number of secular contexts: of making a road, of plowing a furrow, of constructing a stone wall or building.

Perhaps the primary allusion in Paul's mind was the word's use in tent-making, for that was his occupation. Tents were made of animal hides, not of huge sheets of ripstop nylon or nylon taffeta, such as we have today. Several animal hides had to be cut straight so that one would butt up straight against the other; then they could be stitched together to make the tent.

Likewise, the workman of God is to cut straight when handling the Word of God. That is, he is to interpret it correctly, understanding its various doctrines and seeing one Scripture in the light of other Scriptures so that all fit together into one harmonious whole. Many cults claim to base their teaching upon the Bible, but they isolate words or statements and give them meaning that will not harmonize with the rest of the Bible. Then they produce a false teaching or cultic doctrine.

Today the baseball is a perfect example of the importance of making sure two pieces of leather are lined up next to each other with no holes or overlaps. A pitcher must have a perfectly aligned baseball if his curve and slider are going to be effective. In the same way, a pastor needs to align the Scriptures as God intended if the Scriptures are going to be effective in his hands.

In order to rightly divide the Scriptures, Timothy needed to study (v. 15). The word "study" means to have diligence or to give haste or to show eagerness. It has been interpreted by the translators as "study" because the context is one of handling the Word. We ought to study it with diligence, not just when it happens to be convenient. We ought to study it with haste, not rushing through it but rushing *to* it. We ought to do it with eagerness and willingness.



TRANSPARENCY: Display transparency 13. **ASK:** What are the benefits that come with handling God's Word properly? (Question 11) Record learners' answers on the transparency.

The results of such diligent study of the Word are correct understanding of its meaning and God's approval. He will examine the workman's work and declare it acceptable, or the workman will be put to shame.

READ: John 16:13. **ASK:** What ministry does the Holy Spirit have with regard to Christ's disciples and truth? (Question 12)

II. Faithfulness in Behavior (2 Tim. 2:19–22)**A. Proposition (2:19)**

In spite of the fact that there were some, even in the church, who were babblers, the foundation of God stands sure (v. 19). “The foundation of God” seems to be a reference to the true people of God, that is, the church of God, which is His Body. God began the church in apostolic times. The apostles were the foundation, with Jesus Christ the chief cornerstone (Eph. 2:19–22). In the minds of the apostles the church had just begun to be built, and all that was really there was the foundational level. The church could be referred to easily as the foundation of God.

READ: 1 Timothy 3:15. **ASK:** What is the church’s relationship to the truth? (Question 13)

The true church of God stands sure in spite of false teaching. Even the gates of Hell will not prevail against the church (Matt. 16:18).

The church stands sure, having a seal or inscription or identifying mark placed upon it by God. The seal is a twofold or two-sided seal. First, the Lord knows them that are His (Num. 16:5; John 10:14, 27). God knows who is really saved. All in the visible church had professed faith in Christ. Some had their faith overthrown by babblers. But the church of God stands sure because God knows those who are His. God is not confused by the confusion in the churches. From the Lord’s viewpoint, God’s people are safe, for He knows who they really are.

The second side of the seal warns, “Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity” and presents the necessity of a godly lifestyle for Christians. Those who name His name are those who have called upon the Lord for salvation, who named Him as Lord and Savior (Rom. 10:13). Every such person is to depart from iniquity.

Some may become babblers, and others may have their faith overthrown by babblers, but an individual who belongs to God will be faithful.

B. Illustration (2:20, 21)

To show what he meant by the command in verse 19 Paul used the example of a great household where there are vessels of gold and of silver, as well as of wood and of earth (clay). Some vessels are used for honorable purposes and some for ignoble purposes.

If a man (literally, anyone) purges himself from these (v. 21), he shall be a vessel to honor, sanctified and fit for the Master’s use, prepared to every good work. From what must one purge or cleanse himself? Some say “these” (v. 21) refers to the vessels of dishonor, which would be people. Others say that “these” refers to the babblings and youthful lusts. Actually the two are similar because the vessels of dishonor would be people who get involved in babbling and youthful lusts.

The principle of the illustration is separation. Christians are to be separate from ungodly practices and teachings and from so-called brothers who stubbornly

continue in ungodly practices and teachings. Separation from such makes one a vessel fit for God's use.

OBJECT LESSON: Bring a vessel from home from which you would never drink because of how you use the vessel. Show it to the class and describe its function in your house. **ASK:** How does that vessel help you understand the need to separate from ungodly practices and teachings? (Question 14)

C. Action (2:22)

READ: 2 Timothy 2:22. **ASK:** What two things did Paul instruct Timothy to do? (Question 15)

Two actions, fleeing and following, were prescribed for Timothy. Fleeing with urgency is well-illustrated in Matthew 2:13 and 3:7. "Youthful lusts" would include a variety of desires that arise from the self-sufficiency that is characteristic of youthfulness. Timothy needed to flee from such desires, for they are self-centered and not God-centered.

The "following" is an intense chasing after or pursuit. Timothy was commanded to follow after faith, charity (or true love), and peace with a zeal comparable to that with which he was to flee from youthful lusts.

III. Faithfulness in Controversy (2 Tim. 2:23–26)

A. Eluding foolishness (2:23)

Timothy's command was to avoid foolish and unlearned questions ("words to no profit," v. 14; "profane and vain babblings," v. 16; words that eat like gangrene, v. 17). All these would be speculations outside the Word of God. Such speculations breed or engender strife.

Verse 23 needs some explanation in the light of all Scripture. Is the Christian to avoid all controversy? No. Other passages teach that there is a proper place for pointing out error and defending the truth. Verses 24–26 in this context state that the servant of the Lord must proclaim truth and correct those who teach error. Such action risks controversy, for those in error seldom submit easily to the truth. Paul charged the Ephesian elders to protect the flock of God against false teaching (Acts 20:28–30).

READ: Jude 3. **ASK:** What did Jude exhort his readers to do? (Question 16)

There is an important place for showing that a particular doctrine is unscriptural. But there also comes a time when the error has been so clearly exposed by Scripture that further explanations would be pointless. The Bible student argues his point and then rests his case at the appropriate time.

Also there are times when speculative teaching is proclaimed that does not find its base clearly in Scripture and that cannot clearly be refuted from

Scripture. We must be careful to adhere to what the Bible says and not get drawn away into human speculations that are beyond the Word of God. This seems to be a temptation to Christians in the unrevealed details of prophecy. The Lord's children need to be careful about getting into controversy over speculative areas.

The message of verse 23 is not to avoid confronting foolish and unlearned questions but to avoid getting involved in useless arguments over them.

B. Educating fools (2:24–26)

How can a believer be faithful to God when coming face to face with foolish and unlearned questions?

1. Method to follow (v. 25)

The servant of the Lord must instruct opposers. The word “instructing” in verse 25 comes from the same root as the adjective “unlearned” in verse 23. Opposers raise uninstructed questions. God's servant gives the Biblical instruction that will properly deal with those questions. God's servant stands up to the babbler and points out where his babblings are wrong according to the Word of God, which the servant has rightly divided.

READ: Hebrews 12:10. **ASK:** “Chastened” translates the same Greek word as “instructing” in 2 Timothy 2:25. What is God's purpose in chastening/instructing us, and how does that relate to 2 Timothy 2:25? (Question 17)

Babblers are described as those who put themselves in opposition. Some translations render the expression in verse 25 “oppose themselves”; and others render it “oppose him,” that is, the servant. Both are true, for whenever a person wrests Scriptures or rejects the truth, he does it to the detriment of his own soul.

2. Manner to display (v. 24)

The Lord's servant must not get involved in producing strife but must be gentle to all, able to teach, patient (v. 24), and meek (v. 25). As he clearly and accurately presents the truth and is opposed, he must not become personally insulted. It is not his truth or honor that is at stake, but God's. He must be sure that what he says is God's truth, and he should be as patient as Christ, Who did not revile those who reviled Him but even sought their forgiveness by the Father. The servant realizes that only by God's grace has he come to understand and value God's truth, and so he instructs the babbler with an attitude of meekness. The servant does not ignore babblers. He stands up to them and confronts their babblings.

READ: Galatians 6:1. **ASK:** What will happen if someone deals with a person in error but does it without a sense of his or her own weaknesses? (Question 18)

3. Purpose of confrontation (v. 26)

The ultimate purpose in instructing opposers is not to embarrass them, nor

even to merely prove them wrong, though that may be a step to the ultimate purpose. The goal is that they might repent and come to know the truth (v. 26). It is the love of the truth of God that drives God's servant to study and defend the Bible. And God's servant desires that the babblers might come to view the truth with the same love.

READ: 2 Thessalonians 2:10. **ASK:** What does this verse imply that all the saved have received? (Question 19)

Learning spiritual truth involves more than mere human teaching. The unsaved person does not understand spiritual things (1 Cor. 2:14). The Holy Spirit must teach an individual, and so the babbler will acknowledge the truth only if God gives him repentance. Paul did not know what would happen to these babblers, whether they would continue in their vanity or perchance God would give them repentance. So the Lord's servant Timothy needed to instruct them with gentleness, meekness, and patience and trust God to work as He sovereignly would.

The idea that the babblers may "recover" themselves is literally that they may become sober again. The devil is behind vain babblings, for he has intoxicated and snared people's minds with the drunkenness of godless philosophy. The babblers have been taken captive by Satan at his will, though they would probably feel themselves to be free from the narrow constraints of God's Word.

EVALUATE: The more a person fights to be free of God's Word, the more ensnared he or she becomes. (Question 20)

To be faithful to God in the area of controversy is to stand up for the truth, being able to present it clearly to others. It is to instruct others; having the right attitudes and for the right purpose. And it is to do all this with a sense of dependence upon God, realizing that ultimately He is the One Who must give repentance.

Making It Personal

Use the case study for lesson 9 as desired.

Knowing the Truth

Ask: What can you do to better divide the truth of God's Word? About what doctrines are you unsure? Consider securing a good basic doctrinal book to help form a basis for understanding and rightly using God's Word. Ask your pastor for his recommendations. (Question 21)

Sharing the Truth

Select someone with whom you believe you should share some truth of

God’s Word. Arrange a time this week to do so, and pray that God will use the time to profit both of you. (Question 22)

Review Transparency

Use transparency 1 to review the Mark of the Faithful for this lesson: Interprets the Bible accurately.

Memory Verse

Distribute copies of the 2 Timothy 2:15 verse card from the resource CD. Encourage the learners to memorize the verse.

NEXT LESSON

Encourage your learners to complete lesson 11 before the next class.

**Marks of the Faithful**

1. Forgives others as God forgives.	8. Guards and teaches sound doctrine.
2. Remembers and shares God's forgiveness.	9. Ministers with energy and commitment.
3. Seeks and supports godly leadership.	10. Interprets the Bible accurately.
4. Lives a genuine, godly life.	11.
5. Serves zealously in light of Christ's Return.	12.
6. Ministers thoughtfully and intentionally.	13.
7. Serves faithfully in the face of fears.	

Faithfulness and Apostasy

Materials

- RBP transparencies 1 and 14
- Lesson 11 case study from resource CD
- 2 Timothy 3:14 verse card from resource CD

Scripture Focus

2 Timothy 3

Key Verse

“But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them” (2 Tim. 3:14).

Overview

Paul warned that reprobates would create difficulties for believers, opposing truth and leading people astray. However, the servant of God is to follow the faithful example of Paul and remain true to the inspired Scripture.

Topic

Faithfulness to Scripture

Theme

We deal with opposition and false teaching by faithfully continuing in the inspired Scripture, which provides the mind of God for every area of life.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will appreciate that God breathed the very words of Scripture and remain faithful to the Scriptures.

Outline

- I. Character and Deeds of Reprobates (2 Tim. 3:1–9, 13)
 - A. Their character (3:1–5, 8)
 - B. Their deeds (3:6–9, 13)
- II. Timothy’s Comprehension (2 Tim. 3:10–12)
- III. Timothy’s Continuance (2 Tim. 3:14–17)

Getting Started

Looks Can Be Deceiving

A father took his son to a baseball card show when he was a young boy. The father bought a ball and his son got some autographs. One signer made the little boy’s heart sink when he “ruined” the ball by “scribbling” on it—his penmanship was definitely subpar. In disgust the little boy stored the ball away. It turned up about twenty years later, and the young man was shocked to read the scribbled autograph—Cy Young.