

2 Timothy 2.14-15 The Resistance of Contentious Unbelief

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[0:00] Sometimes the church is attacked by those outside of the walls, which we have seen leading up to this part of our text today and examples in the past where the church is persecuted from outside or where Paul was imprisoned or believers are killed, they're martyred and they're attacked from the outside by the world that disapproves of the gospel.

And sometimes the church is attacked from the inside, attacked by those inside its walls who speak things, well, it may be in the name of Christianity or under the cloak of Christianity.

It's actually spoken to the ruin of the church and it's out of unbelief. So they will use plausible arguments to try to teach things that are contrary to the authorial intent of the text.

Error is unbelief. Error of scripture is unbelief in what the scripture says, what the text says, the authorial intent of the text, whether the person doesn't like it or they just don't believe it.

Error is out of unbelief. It's not believing what God has said and departing from it, departing from what God has said. Now today we're going to look at 2 Timothy 2 verses 14 and 15, but we will read starting in verse 1 of chapter 2.

[1:32] You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus and the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier. And also, if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. The hardworking farmer must be first to partake of the crops.

Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things. Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel, for which I suffer trouble as an evildoer, even to the point of chains.

But the word of God is not chained. Therefore, I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

[2:46] This is a faithful saying. For if we died with him, we shall also live with him. If we endure, we shall also reign with him. If we deny him, he also will deny us.

If we are faithless, he remains faithful. He cannot deny himself. Remind them of these things, charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit to the ruin of the hearers.

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. Our great God, we again praise you for who you are, your very essence and perfections.

And we thank you that you have given us divine testimony recorded in the scriptures. We pray that as we seek to understand what your word says, that you would attend the preaching of the word. You would bless the preaching of the word and the hearing of the word. We pray, Holy Spirit, that you would illuminate your word to us and give us an understanding which is spiritually discerned. Pray these things in Jesus' name.

[4:00] Amen. Now, as we see in verses 14 and 15, that the church is accountable before God to guard the pulpit against contentious unbelief and to deliver sound doctrine.

So the church is accountable before God to guard against an improper method and to deliver a proper method. Something that we've seen in 2 Timothy is a succession that occurs and that succession is the passing down or the contending for the faith once for all delivered to the saints.

And how we have seen it is Christ taught his apostles. The apostles taught others. For example, the apostle Paul taught Timothy.

Timothy then taught other faithful men. Those other faithful men are to teach other faithful men. And so on and so forth throughout all the generations all the way up to our present age today.

We see this succession of passing down apostolic teaching and contending for the faith once for all delivered to the saints all the way up to our present day. Now, in our text in verses 14, it starts off by saying, remind them.

[5 : 16] So who is them? Who is the them that what we're about to read is for, is to be reminded? Well, in that verse itself, in verse 14, we see it is those who have hearers, the end of 14, to the ruin of the hearers.

And they have a charge over what is to be heard. Now, the them of verse 14, who is to be reminded, brings us back to chapter 2, verse 2 of the faithful men.

And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. Remind them of these things.

So, in verse 14, we have the improper method. And in verse 15, we have the proper method. Verse 14 says, remind them of these things.

Charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit to the ruin of the hearers. So, in the improper method, we're going to see that there's wrong intentions, wrong actions, and wrong doctrine.

[6 : 30] But before we jump into that, there is a command that starts off the verse. The command, it says, is to charge or to warn. Now, the way that it's used is an imperfective aspect, which means that it's not a finished, it's not a closed, it's not a bound action.

It's not that it has been done, but because it's imperfective, it means that it's ongoing. It's continuous. In other words, this is to be an ongoing thing, to continually charge them, continually warn them.

Something that continues in this succession of contending for the faith once for all delivered to the saints, that is taught to faithful men, those faithful men, to other faithful men.

And as it's passed down and contended for, to be ongoing, to be continually warning them or charging them against this improper method that's to follow.

Now, it says, charging them before the Lord. What does that mean, before the Lord? It means that these teachers, these faithful men who are to teach, faithful men who will be able to teach others also, will be called to account before God.

[7 : 48] They will be called to accountability before God himself who sees everything and who knows everything. So already there's a certain solemnity to what's to follow.

To these teachers, these faithful men, reminding them, warning them, charging them, in the solemnity of what is to follow, that they are accountable before God himself.

Now, with the improper method, as I said, there's wrong intentions, wrong actions, and wrong doctrines. So we'll first look at the wrong intentions. It says, charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit.

It might also say not to contend about words, but to strive or to contend. Now, if we were to just read that, there's probably a lot of different views that could be brought into the text that aren't already there.

Some might try to say, well, if you're prioritizing doctrine, if you think theology is important, you're striving about words in Scripture.

[8 : 56] It's about the relationship and that doctrine stuff. What the words say in Scripture, that's getting in the way of relationships. So they will misuse texts like this to try to downplay or denigrate what the true meaning is in the Scripture.

And God gave us divine testimony. He gave us supernatural revelation. Everything that's there is there for a reason. So it's important to understand God's intent, God's purpose in why it is there and what it is, what it says.

But notice that it doesn't just say, charge them before the Lord not to strive about words. It says not to strive about words to no profit to the ruin of the hearers.

Now, Jude 3, it says, to contend earnestly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints. So in Jude, we're exhorted to contend.

But in this text, there's something that it's pointing us to, to not contend. Now, we believe in the inspiration of Scripture. So Jude 3, as well as 2 Timothy 2, is inspired by God.

[10:08] And God does not lie. God cannot contradict himself. God knew exactly what he was doing when the apostles were moved by the Holy Spirit in the inscripturation of the word.

So, understanding that it must harmonize with all of Scripture, what does this mean? What it's getting at is do not battle with reviling words or speak falsely, being persuaded by clamor, attacking the truth to which there is no profit.

Here's an example. In the year 325, this was a few years ago. It was a while ago. None of us can remember it. We weren't there. There was something that occurred that was causing a great division in the church.

And it was at the time the Roman emperor was Constantine, who was a Christian. So there was a great shift. Christians were persecuted, but Constantine, as emperor of Rome, as a Christian, wanted to settle this debate that was dividing the church.

And it was the teaching of Arius. Arius was teaching something different. Arius was teaching that Jesus Christ was not eternally God.

[11:26] Arius was teaching that there was a time that the sun was not. He was but a creature.

So the Council of Nicaea was the first ecumenical council of over 300 theological church leaders who came together to deal with this, to assess it.

And it came down to a contending or a striving over two words. And the Greek words are homoousios or homoousios.

The difference of one letter. And it was striving over these two words. So is this wrong? Is this unprofitable, what they did?

Now, we still know about this council because we know of the Nicene Creed, which was the result of it. It was an ecumenical council in that it was determined in that if it's not according to this creed, then it's not according to the faith of the gospel.

[12:34] So it was contending over these two words. Was that unprofitable? Is any contending at all over words unprofitable? Well, those two words, what they mean, what they signify, is that the first one is that the sun is of the same substance as the father.

The second word means of like or of similar substance to the father. So is it an important distinction to strive over these two words?

If you believe the first, then you're within the sphere of orthodoxy. If you believe the latter, then you're a heretic and still, and God's wrath still remains on you.

So some words are worth striving for because they are to your prophet. That prophet is your eternal blessedness and that of the church too.

This was dividing the church. And one way in which this heresy was being spread was the teaching was set to catchy songs, catchy tunes that people would sing.

[13:42] So it was spread by everyone singing these catchy songs. And it was dividing the church significantly. So this would be being taught. So that would mean that people's eternal blessedness was on the stake or was at stake.

So in this case, there was great prophet. So if there is a time to contend and there is a time not to contend or to strive about words to no profit, how can we make that distinction?

Three things quickly is that it is correct to contend, first of all, in moderation. Second of all, the proper circumstance. And third, in defense of the truth.

So it would not be proper to contend for words all the time, every circumstance, or if it was not for truth, just for the sake of being contentious.

So in other words, it's not profitable to be perpetually obsessed with polemics. And it brings attention when a preacher preaches polemics.

[14:48] But to be constantly everything being about polemics and putting down heresies, then it becomes to the point where it's not a profit.

So it's not speaking about, it's not good to have a perpetual obsession with polemics, nor to be done for the sake of being contentious. 1 Corinthians 11, 16 says, But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God.

So with this improper method, they have the wrong intentions. They're warned against this wrong, the wrong intentions, but then also the wrong actions.

And as previously said, to be the action of using the pulpit to be perpetually contending about words that tend to no advantage of the hearers.

And when it says not strive about words, it does not mean denigrating or devaluing the meaning and significance of the words.

[15 : 57] This is done a lot today, especially after the ecumenical movement with enlightenment period thinking, and then the ecumenical movement and all these non-denominational churches where they see doctrine as dividing, so they have to do away with doctrine because that divides.

And then to focus on what the words and scripture say is seen as a bad thing.

And they will use texts like this, striving about words, to denigrate or devalue the meaning of the text, which is we're being warned against the improper method, but then what follows is the proper method.

We're not there yet. But what I'm getting at is that accuracy of interpretation is crucial. This verse isn't downplaying semantics.

Some might try to say because they don't want there to be precision or accuracy of theology because that will prove their ideas to be wrong. So when somebody is being specific, brings scripture and specifically what it says, especially when it's clear, they will say you're just getting caught up with words.

[17 : 22] You're just getting caught up in semantics as though that's a bad thing. But accuracy of interpretation is crucial. What this is saying is do not entertain disputes that stray or split off from retaining and passing on the apostolic teaching.

So the contending about words that strays from the apostolic teaching or strays from what is the intended meaning of the text is what it's warning against.

Now, John Trapp in his commentary, he wrote, So their actions he associates with torture, torturing the text to make it say something that it doesn't want to say.

Some people also call it hermeneutical gymnastics. Hermeneutics is the art and method of interpretation. Gymnastics is flipping it and spinning it so it looks like something it's not intended to be.

I like to think of jiu-jitsu, hermeneutical jiu-jitsu, to forcefully contort something into a position that it doesn't want to be in. The point is striving with these words to cause them to stray from the intended meaning.

[18 : 47] And a reason is given. A reason is given why the church is warned or is charged against this improper method. And that reason, as you see, it says, For it is to no profit.

There is no profit to this improper method. And it's not just that there's no profit. It's not just that I'm not getting any good out of it. But it's even worse than that it is to no profit.

So there's the wrong incentive, the wrong actions, and the wrong doctrine. It's not just that there's no profit in it.

It's worse than that. That the words are to no profit. And it results in something. And what it results in, the text tells us, is ruin.

It's not just that I'm not getting anything out of it. It's that it's causing destruction. It's causing subverting. It's causing somebody to doubt what has previously been established as certain.

[19 : 55] Such as in 325, the Council of Nicaea, what was established to be certain, this Arian thinking and this teaching and these catchy songs, was causing people to doubt what had previously been shown to be certain.

And as a result, straying from the truth. So there are words to no profit that result in ruin, straying from the truth and drawing into factions, which is what was occurring with Arianism.

It was causing factions. It was splitting the church. And there is no good result from listening to them. And it is detrimental to those who do.

To those who hear them. Those who listen to them. And these should be driven away. Not just the teaching.

It's not just that the teaching should be identified and driven away, but the unrepentant people themselves who are trying to push this teaching. Because while the teaching itself may be identified as wrong and corrected, if it is that person's agenda, in other words, if they are unrepentant about their heretical doctrine, then they will just become whisperers and they will try to spread their agenda a different way.

[21:17] Or even if that's what they think, their very framework and the way they think about things, it will be influenced by that heresy and then it will come out in other ways.

There's great peril in listening to these people. It results in ruin. So the ministry of the word requires guarding against an improper method as well as application of the proper method.

So in verse 15, we see the proper method. It says, Be diligent to present yourself, a proof to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

So in 15, we'll also look at the right intentions, the right actions, and the right doctrine. So the right intentions. When a preacher prepares a sermon and delivers a sermon, his aim might either be to give the hearers what they want to hear, or his aim might be the approval of God.

And those two are very different. And you might think, well, there might be overlap. And there is certainly overlap because maybe the hearers want to hear sound Trinitarian teaching and pure gospel, and that is the approval of God.

[22:36] So there is overlap, but to have the goal in preparing and delivering a sermon to be what the people want to hear or the approval of God are two different things because the first one is seeking the approval of man, and the second one is seeking the approval of God.

And the right intentions, as it tells us in our text, is this. Be diligent to present yourself approved to God. Seeking to do things according to God's approval.

Because if the aim or the goal is always to seek man's approval, no two people agree on absolutely everything, and people are not infallible, and God is.

So the right intentions is then followed by the right, we also have the right action. It starts by saying, be diligent. In other words, careful study to be given to advancing one's aptitude.

Martin Lloyd-Jones gave a lecture of series to preachers on preaching and preachers, and there's a book from it, and I recommend reading that book. Or it's also, the lectures were recorded, and it's on, like on podcast, whatever you call it, where you can listen to podcasts, platform, I guess.

[23:52] You can listen to those lectures, the recorded lectures, on that, and it's excellent. I think everybody that goes to church should listen to them, but he outlines how important it is for a preacher, a pastor, a minister of the word to be given to study, to be completely immersed in it, and to be constantly reading, reading theology, not just to have studied it once, but to be fresh into it, and have a diversity, a variety of reading.

But it says, be diligent to present yourself approved to God, to be diligent in careful study, a worker who does not need to be ashamed.

Think of a professional auto body detailer. If you've got a scratch in your car, you're in a fender bender, and you want it to look new again, if it's a new car, and you want it to look good, you want it to look professional, but somebody tells you, they say, I know a guy that does it cheaper.

So you take it to that guy, and by the time he's done with it, it looks like a toddler had done something with it. You'd think the guy that did it would be ashamed. Rather, a person, a professional, who does something, such as auto body detailing, would put a lot of work into the results, so that they wouldn't be ashamed with the results.

And it is hard work to do something well and not be ashamed of the results. Therefore, the minister of the word also must be diligent to present yourself approved to God.

[25:33] And the gospel, like a, if you were to get your car detailed and painted, it came back blotchy. That's not what you wanted.

That's not the intended purpose. Or if he changed the color, if you wanted it to be the same color that it was, and the detailer changed the colors so it was completely different. That's not the intent. That's not what it's supposed to be. So also with the gospel and how it's delivered. If anything's changed because of a personal preference, it's not true gospel. An altered gospel is something that is not according to its intent.

But the true unaltered gospel is something to not be ashamed in. And Paul said, I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes.

So the pure message, unaltered message of the gospel according to the authorial intent is the power of God to salvation to everyone who believes.

[26:37] So the eternal blessedness of those who receive Christ comes from hearing the word, of hearing the gospel without altering it. As soon as, like Arius, altering it, it's no longer the power of God to salvation to everyone who believes.

And that is worthy of being ashamed. Paul is unashamed of the gospel knowing that it is the power of God to salvation. So altering it in any way such as Arius did of Jesus' divinity, I'm altering it from the significance of man's need of salvation and of the Son of God, the incarnation, the Son of God assuming our nature, having divine nature and human nature united together in the one person of Jesus Christ, his perfect obedience, his life of perfect obedience and righteousness, his suffering and dying as a substitute to satisfy God's holiness, to satisfy divine justice, suffering and dying as a substitute, paying the redemption price, paying the price for the penalty of the sins of his people, to purchase a people for his own possession, being raised from the dead, victorious over sin and death, ascending on high where he reigns and he will return.

We cannot alter any of those details. So, rightly dividing is the right action.

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. Rightly dividing isn't wanting to say something and then trying to find a passage in scripture to tack on to your pep talk regardless of whether it's in context or out of context.

Rightly dividing is according to the text's intention and then communicating the text's intention properly or what we would call authorial intent. For example, let's say you were going away by yourself and whatever it be, you needed somebody to help out with your house or you needed somebody to help out with your children or you needed somebody to help out with your wife. [29:00] So, you wrote a letter for that person so that they may know how they ought to conduct themselves according to your intent of how to take care of your home.

And they read that letter and they don't like the details of what you have said so they contort it against what you intended it to say. They flip it, they spin it, they twist it to make it say what they would rather have it say.

You would not be very happy. That was not your intent in what you had written. So, also, the church is the bride of Christ and Christ is the head of the church has given us in writing how the church ought to conduct itself.

And these false teachers, those who are guilty of unbelief because they don't believe or they don't like what God has said, they twist scriptures, they stray from the intended purpose to make it say what they want it to say.

So, the authorial intent goes back to not what the preacher or the teacher wants it to say, but what the author wants it to say. Now, there's both the human authors as well as the divine authors.

[30:15] we know that the human authors are inspired by God, by the Spirit in writing it in God. So, the author of all of Scripture is God.

So, what is God's intent of all of Scripture? And we can see in the New Testament's referencing of the Old Testament that it's not limited to the human authors.

while the human authors in the Old Testament wrote things. We see divine interpretation of that in the New Testament that it meant more according to the scope of Christ, his suffering and his glories pointing to Christ.

So, not what they want to twist it to say, but according to the authorial intent. The right intentions, the right action, and then finally we have the right doctrine.

Rightly dividing the word of truth. Rightly means to handle something correctly. Dividing means to cut. An example is if there were a bunch of people sitting around a table and a big plate of meat is brought out, that meat is cut into portions to be served, to be handed out to those who are seated at the table.

[31:35] To be for everyone at the table for their proper portion of nourishment. So, in other words, to rightly divide is to handle the word of truth accurately.

And to do it rightly means not looking for personal gain or for selfish gain, but to do it rightly means for God's glory, the edification of the saints, and the salvation of the lost.

So, what are some concluding uses that we can take from these two verses? First of all, it is very important to guard the pulpit.

And you see with churches that do not guard the pulpit and typically with non-denominational, heresy or false teaching or heterodoxy can be served up right from the pulpit to the people. but it is so important for the church to guard the pulpit. The one who is to sort of say carve the meat and serve it up must do so according to the authorial intent and properly communicate its meaning.

[32:50] So, guard the pulpit but also guard your soul. It is very important that those in the pews, that the hearers hear the rightly dividing of truth and receive proper nourishment in church.

But what about when you go home and throughout the week? What about then? Guard your soul also, not just the pulpit.

Regardless of how entertaining and curious, do not listen to those who have demonstrated a strain from sound doctrine. I mentioned with Arius and the catchy songs and so people would be singing these catchy songs and they're entertained by the songs, they're popular songs, everyone's singing them but they're having this heresy starting to form the way they think because they're singing these catchy songs and we're not exempt from that today.

They're certainly people who are good musicians and they want to write Christian music. So without any theological understanding, they write, whether good intended or heretical intentions, they write these songs with excellent musical skill but it's not sound doctrine.

And so because they're good songs, people listen to them and then it starts to formulate their thoughts and there are, there is much out there under the cloak or under the description of Christian music which they're thinking is heresy and it starts to permeate the thoughts of those who listen to them.

[34 : 36] So regardless of how entertaining and curious, do not listen to those who have demonstrated a strain from sound doctrine. Even though you might think, well I know I disagree with them on this.

I know that Arius got it wrong with the son of God thinking that he wasn't eternally divine. He got that wrong but he's really good on this other stuff so I'll listen to him there.

Even though you know you disagree and think that it will be easy to spot the disagreements, remember their whole framework, their whole way of thinking underlies how they came to those conclusions.

So while you may identify that conclusion, their way of thinking that led them there is a lot more subtle and that could cause an influence as well.

Their framework, their method, it's built on something wrong. It's built on something that strays and their way of thinking will subtly subvert their hearers so don't let that be you.

[35 : 35] An example of a way you've probably seen it is critical race theory and intersectionality. They've got this agenda but even when they're not talking about that agenda or even when they're not talking about CRT the words or the definitions or that way of thinking or that framework you can see it coming out in discussions about other things.

It's just interwoven into their whole way of thinking and communicating. The same concept applies to someone who has an agenda for some form of doctrinal error.

Their underlying agenda is interwoven in their way of thinking and communicating. So don't be subconsciously subverted. Stay away from their books. Ditch their podcasts.

There's so much excellent stuff to be listening to, to be reading and there's way more excellent stuff that one person has time for. So make the best use of your time and don't spend it being subverted to no profits and to your own ruin.

Also, use your precious and valuable time hearing, it speaks about the hearers, hearing from those as approved by God who need not be ashamed and who in every respect, not just in some respects, but in every respect, rightly handle the word of God.

[36 : 58] Not those who rightly handle in some areas, but very wrongly subvert in others. And next week, when we look at the following verses, we will see more of the destructiveness, the infectiousness, and the peril of listening to messages with an agenda for doctrinal error.

Let's pray.