

## God's word in 2 Timothy Understanding God's Word, ch.2:15

*[Please note : New King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

Hello, and welcome to the latest in the series entitled "God's Word in 2 Timothy" and today we are looking at Chapter 2 Understanding God's Word (v.15). It would seem that some time had elapsed, perhaps 4 or 5 years between Paul's first Epistle to Timothy and this second one. During this time there seems to have been a real onslaught by the enemy within the Church bringing in false doctrines and also turning many believers aside due to persecution. The Apostle Paul himself was now back in a Roman prison and his hopes of ever being released were very small, he seems very much resigned to the fact that he would soon be put to death for the sake of his faith. In these most difficult circumstances it is therefore remarkable that the main theme of the epistle is to encourage his younger friend to hold fast to the very faith that was about to cause his own martyrdom. The faith that can only come through the Word of God. A faith that is not blind faith that just follows men's teachings or dictates, not simply adhering to a form of religion or tradition but a faith that is based on and strengthened by the Word of God itself. That Word divinely given by inspiration through Paul and the other New Testament writers, was passed on in the early days, maintained by faithful men and women down through the centuries, and is now preserved for us in our own language. What blessed and privileged people we are!

It is very clear that Timothy was already well versed in the doctrines that Paul and the other disciples had taught, he was obviously very clear about the truth of the Gospel so there is no need in this second epistle for Paul to reveal truth to him, it's more about reminding him and encouraging him in what he already knew. We will see when we go into chapter 4 of this epistle that Paul mentions those who "have itching ears" referring to those who are always looking to hear a new thing. If that was true all those centuries ago, how much more is it true now? I believe it is part of our fallen nature that we always want something new! A new car, a new job, a new house, new clothes, a new theory! The list goes on and on and these things in themselves never bring lasting happiness and contentment. I am not saying that we should not look to move forward but we always must remember the principles that form the base on which everything else has to be built and that is the Word of God. If we are building on anything else, then we are like the man who builds his house on the sand, and it gets washed away when the storms of life come. The Lord Jesus explained this in a parable in Matthew's Gospel chapter 7 verses 24 to 27. How we loved to sing the little chorus as children in Sunday School: "The wise man built his house upon the rock." So Paul here is reminding Timothy about the Rock that is the Word of God, and we all do well to recognise this and be similarly reminded of it as we go through chapter 2 of 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy that is before us today.

After the introduction of chapter 1 where Paul has reminded Timothy of the heritage he has received from his grandmother and his mother he encouraged him not to be ashamed of the Gospel and to be loyal to the faith, he now begins chapter 2 with a wonderful phrase: "Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." In general, when the New Testament writers use "Christ Jesus" as opposed to "Jesus Christ" they are referring to the Risen Christ. That which pertains to and

flows from our Risen Saviour rather than that which He said or done as a Man here. This is really important and should encourage us in all we do for Him, as the hymn states: "We serve a risen Saviour." Grace gives us something that we don't deserve whereas mercy takes from us that which we do deserve, that is, the judgement of God. The fact that Christ has risen from the dead and gone into heaven now gives us that direct link with God the Father and allows us to have that communion day by day which can strengthen us beyond anything else. As Paul is about to give examples of a soldier, an athlete and a farmer, all of whom have to endure hardships in various ways, what better preparation can Timothy have to carry on his work? In our world today, those who can inspire, motivate and encourage others for a particular task are highly sought after. The army general, the sports coach or the business leader all look for ways to get the most and best out of those they have responsibility for, this is what Paul is doing here and there could be no better way of doing this. This same motivation, the grace of Christ Jesus, has strengthened believers all down through the centuries and has changed the course of this world.

Verse 2 is very important also before we think about the hardships to be endured. Timothy had heard the truth from Paul, among many witnesses and Paul is now encouraging him not just to keep it to himself but to pass it on to faithful men who will then in turn be able to teach others. The truth is to be propagated! How we must thank God that this has been done as how blessed we are by it. How do we then continue in our similar responsibility to do likewise? The same Gospel and truth of God is still touching and changing lives all over the world today and we need to be constantly encouraged by this. It is important to notice that Paul is here confirming again that divine truth was passed to him through the Holy Spirit. Not simply his views and opinions, irrespective of however well qualified and intelligent he himself was, this is the Word of God that he is referring to. Among these faithful witnesses would be men like Silas, Barnabas and Luke and many others that we read of particularly in the Acts of the Apostles. Timothy is then instructed to pass on this truth to others with proven spiritual character who can then teach others also. So in this verse we have 4 generations of godly leaders. Paul to Timothy to faithful men and to others also. A tremendous model of propagation surely?

Then from verse 3 to verse 13 Paul wants to warn Timothy that in being faithful to this work of God it will not be all plain sailing. It is very easy for us to take the easy path, but we must always recognise that since these days when Paul was writing, all through history up to the present day the truth of God has been attacked. It is a sobering thought that there are more Christians being persecuted today for their faith than at any other time in history so the warnings and subsequent encouragements to Timothy are still very relevant for us today. So Paul writes about the soldier, the athlete and the farmer and there are aspects of each that I think we can learn from.

Firstly the soldier, and I want to say that there are many who have served in the armed forces who will be able to speak from real life experiences far more than I can. However, Paul here states two things specifically, that is, the hardness and absolute obedience that is required. I can only imagine what it must be like to be in the enemy's land and the hard knocks and setbacks that must be a daily experience and yet all the time being completely obedient to the power that you serve. In those circumstances there are no aspects of life that you will be able to be entangled with unless it is those which are essential in that very moment. Are we easily set aside from our service for God when something goes wrong or are we simply too involved in the things of life, however innocent they may be, to even serve God at all?

Then Paul takes our thoughts to the athlete. He talks about the athlete in other places in respect of the nature of the training and the self-sacrifice that is required to win the prize but here the emphasis is more on obeying the rules that is required. How often down through the years have sporting triumphs ended in bitter disappointments because rules have been broken in some way or another. Olympic medals have even had to be changed hands years later when things have surfaced which show rules had been breached. So in this we see that not only is self-discipline required in the service of God, but the truth of God's Word must always be held as paramount and never watered down.

Now we reach verse 6 and Paul brings the hard-working farmer before Timothy. It is always great to see how Paul uses everyday examples to explain things in a clear way. Timothy would be able to relate to the soldier, the athlete and now the oldest occupation in the world, the farmer. Here the lesson is again twofold, the farmer works relentlessly hard, and then he is able to be the first to enjoy the fruits of his labour. The word used here for “hard-working” is from a Greek verb meaning “to labour to the point of exhaustion.” This was what was required from those first century Christians in order for the gospel to be taught, established and spread and we should always be thankful for this and be prepared to play our part in it. This hard work was to result in spiritual nourishment for the worker as well as blessing for others. How many servants of God have laboured hard and yet do not seem to have enjoyed the things of God themselves? Also, can we be so taken up by service that our communion with God has been lost and our souls become dry and empty?

These 3 examples seem to be very straightforward to understand and yet in verse 7 Paul says that we must consider these things so that the Lord may give us understanding in all things. It just re-emphasises the fact that the Word of God should never be taken lightly and that everything that is inspired of the Holy Spirit requires our serious contemplation. Perhaps Paul expresses a similar thought to the Roman Christians when he writes in chapter 15 of his epistle to them, verse 4, “For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.” We do well to remember then that all of the Word of God, the Bible, whether seemingly straightforward or very difficult to understand requires, in fact demands, our most concentrated attention and consideration.

As we come into the last few verses of this first section there is another statement of Paul that has more force to it than would be obvious to the casual reader. In verse 8 Paul asks Timothy to remember that Jesus Christ was of the seed of David and that he has risen from the dead, again very similar to our thoughts from verse 1. It is important to remember that He was of the seed of David and as such has the legal title to God’s throne on the earth, and in due time He will bring this to pass. Also, we are not only to remember that He has risen from the dead, but also that He is in fact the Living One. The most accurate reading of the verse would be: “Remember Jesus Christ of the seed of David raised from the dead.” So Paul is encouraging Timothy not just to keep in mind the grace of the risen Christ but that he should also keep the Lord in view as the Risen One. In so doing Timothy and by extension us today will find it a preservative against innumerable perversions of the truth of the gospel. I would also say that every false doctrine, teaching or religion outside Christianity would be set at nought if Jesus Christ was known, understood and accepted as the Risen One! The last clause of verse 8 makes the person of the Risen Christ as the very foundation of the gospel. It was this very thing that brought so much trouble to Paul, he calls it, “to suffer as an evildoer.” Surely the thing that has brought so much trouble to someone would be seen as a terrible thing but not Paul. He seems to rejoice in verse 9 that even though he himself is in chains the gospel itself can never be chained. Verse 10 then explains that Paul counted it an honour to endure all things “for the sake of the elect.” This means all those who would accept the salvation that Christ offers and the thought of such being brought into eternal blessing is what motivated this man who not so long prior to that had sought to stamp out the gospel and put Christians in jail. What a turnaround!

So we have seen that Paul is inspired firstly by the fact that the Word of God cannot be bound, secondly that the elect will be brought into eternal blessing and that his own personal sufferings for the Gospel will not be in vain; and now thirdly, in verses 11-13, it is the fact that the sure working of the government of God will come to pass. He expresses that this is a faithful saying, that is, God will not go back on His promises. If we died with Him, we shall live with Him does not only refer to those who have been martyred for their faith, but all who have spiritually participated in His death and have eternal life through it. Believers who endure or persevere give evidence of their faith and will reign with Him in His future eternal kingdom. The old chorus says, “Kingdoms may rise, Kingdoms may fall”, and how true this is but Christ’s Kingdom will be eternal. In verse 12 when

Paul talks about those who deny Christ being denied by Him, he is not referring to the temporary failure of a genuine believer in a moment of weakness, as was seen in the apostle Peter, but a final, permanent denial of the unbeliever. Then this section finishes in verse 13 with the ultimate statement of the working of God's government, that He will indeed remain faithful in spite of the unbelief of man. The word faithless or unfaithful is really better rendered "believe not." It is not meaning that if a genuine believer lacks faith in any given situation of life that the Lord will not be faithful. Nothing can ever act against God's government, and this is necessary for our good and His glory that His purpose and grace is brought to fruition. In this He cannot deny Himself, He can only work both in grace and righteousness.

In verses 14 to the end of the chapter we now come to the pivotal verse in terms of the title of our talk today, that being verse 15: "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." I mentioned earlier that the Word of God demands our most concentrated attention and consideration. The Bible as the living Word of God is like no other book which we can read, perhaps even just scan through, and can get the general theme and understanding of it. I always remember an old friend of mine who in his latter days of failing memory and living alone, having spent his entire life studying the Scriptures, once said that he had noticed something in a particular chapter that he had never noticed before and it had given him great joy. There was no doubt that he had noticed this before, but the Holy Spirit had brought this to his attention once again in that moment in order to lift his spirit above his current circumstances and it was absolutely evident in his demeanour that day.

The dangers that can come through not observing these verses and therefore not dividing the word of truth correctly are huge both to the faith of the individual Christian and the Christian Church as a whole and we will go on to see this in these verses. We have already had before us the soldier, the athlete and the farmer and now Paul uses the example of a workmen. This term, 'rightly dividing' really means "cutting in a straight line." Now I am far from being a carpenter but sawing wood in a straight line always seems to me to be an easy thing to do, until you start doing it! It requires practice, patience, and continual re-checking to ensure the line is still straight. Also, it takes a lot more physical effort than it may initially seem to. All of these things are required in "rightly dividing" the Word of God, it does not come easy.

From verses 14 to the end of chapter 2 then Paul advises Timothy three times not to get engulfed with endless and pointless arguments with false teachers but rather to stand firm himself on the Word of God and that God will deal with such teachers in due course as well as give grace to genuine believers who are taken in by them. In verse 14 he warns against "[striving] about words to no profit." In verse 16 he tells Timothy to "shun profane and idle babbling" and finally in verse 23 he uses the phrase "foolish and ignorant disputes." How much time has been wasted down through the centuries with this where there is no doubt that more heat has been generated than light! And yet with all this in mind there is no sense that Paul is just saying we should not strive for the truth, on the contrary, he says in verse 17 that the erroneous message of the false teachers will not only lead to more ungodliness but that it will spread like a cancer. He then takes the slightly unusual tack of naming names; Paul makes it quite clear the kind of false teaching he is talking about. Hymenaeus and Philetus were in positions of power and yet had divided the Word of God crookedly, they had not cut a straight line.

We have other New Testaments scriptures which deal with other ideas that were prevalent in the early days and sadly many have continued to cause problems in the Christian Church down through the centuries. These include mixing things Jewish with things Christian, remember it was taught by some that circumcision was required for Gentile believers. Then some mix up and confuse law with grace, what problems these things have caused. In this case, these false teachers Hymenaeus and Philetus were saying the resurrection had already passed. The very unique and foundational aspect of the Gospel that as Christ has been raised from the dead so too then will every believer. Paul could tell the Corinthians that if this was not the case then their faith

was in vain. Nevertheless, there were some genuine believers whose faith was overthrown by this. So in verse 19 Timothy is given very clear guidance as to how to deal with these men, a very clear two-fold seal, that being:

- 1) “The Lord knows those who are His”  
and
- 2) “Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity.”

The first part of the two-fold seal is that those who are genuinely believers, God will recognise and in His sovereign grace and mercy will not turn His back on those deceived. The second part is therefore our responsibility and response to God’s sovereignty and that is to have nothing at all to do with those who teach such falsehoods. Interesting to note that at the end of verse 19 Paul makes it very clear that such false teaching is “iniquity.” In Numbers chapter 16 verses 5 and 26 we have a very good example of exactly this principle being worked out in practice.

Then in the final few verses we have two things that the Apostle uses as an example for the believer, they are: the vessel in verse 21 and the servant in verse 24. In order for us to be worthy and fit to carry out either of these examples we must both withdraw from whatever is evil and iniquitous and then pursue that which is right. Verse 22 says, “Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” I trust these few thoughts will help us to know what to flee from and what we should be pursuing after and encourage us to do so in order that we may be vessels and servants fit for the Master’s use.

Thank you for listening to this talk today, number T1390, Understanding God’s Word, in the Truth for Today series ‘God’s word in 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy.’

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