

2 Timothy 2:14-26

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[0 : 0 0] This morning, as I've said, we're carrying on in our series in 2 Timothy that we started a few weeks ago. And I found it a remarkably challenging yet strengthening book for us to look through as a congregation.

Particularly, I think, as we're building now towards launching publicly, as we read of what Paul is saying, this experienced older minister saying to the young pastor, Timothy, who he has great affection for.

And throughout the book, the line that I've kind of tagged onto the series, really, which you'll have heard me mention each time, it comes from chapter 1 in verse 14, where Paul says to Timothy, he says, Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you, guarding with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

And essentially, what we're seeing is Paul is telling Timothy of what it looks like to be a pastor. But we also get what it means to look like, really, as a Christian, to guard the good deposit that is entrusted to us with the help of the Holy Spirit.

And today, in this passage, the issue that Paul is telling Timothy is to guard the good deposit from false teachers.

[1 : 1 8] It's what Jesus would call wolves in sheep's clothing. In our day, that would be people who have, wolves in sheep's clothing would be people who have a position of authority and responsibility within the church, but they preach a different gospel.

They might look on the outside like sheep, but inside their intention is to devour and to destroy. And it's actually a problem we have generally, one of the problems we have generally in our Western world today, there is a problem because, more generally, there is a growing mistrust towards those in positions of authority.

There's an understandable reason for that, because within our own nation, the UK, there has been episode after episode of moral failure within leadership.

And we've seen it, we've seen it on a national scale, scandal after scandal after scandal. And so that question we often have for those, we now, maybe as a more general thing, have for those in positions of authority is, how can we really believe what they say?

Are they just telling us what we want to hear, or what we need to hear? How do I know if whoever it is is trying to put the wool over my eyes? And this lack of trust in authority figures it affects the church, because ministers, pastors, are placed in a position of responsibility.

[2 : 5 1] It is a position of authority. And let's not sugarcoat it, the church has not been free of scandal either, has it? It is not immune from scandal, we've seen it, across other denominations.

And what happens is, with both of these things going on, it breeds fear that maybe when listening to a church leader, a minister, a pastor, maybe even of me, that I might be here to pull the wool over your eyes, that I have an agenda.

And so this passage is really important. It's really important because it speaks into that issue, that we need to guard the good deposit entrusted to us, our faith in Jesus Christ, by actually being active against false teachers.

But the only way, the only way that a church can do that is actually by knowing what a true gospel man looks like. A true, a good news kind of a leader.

What do they really look like, and what does that really mean? What does a good news worker look like? Jesus, you might remember Jesus said to his disciples in Matthew 9, he said, The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.

[4 : 11] And then he said this wonderful prayer that we should ask. He said, Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. When we pray that prayer, that's what we want in the church, isn't it?

Good news kind of men. Gospel workers. Good news. Men and women that can be trusted to lead with authority, with conviction and with truth.

Whose only agenda is for the glory of Jesus Christ. For the fame of his name. For the spiritual edification of his people. Not for the fame of their own name.

When we pray that prayer, that's how we want the Lord Jesus to answer it. To raise up good news workers. Gospel workers. Whose heart is devoted to Jesus Christ.

The good deposit entrusted will be guided if we have those types of people leading the church. And so this morning that's what we're going to be thinking about. The types of leaders the church needs.

[5 : 15] It's not actually necessarily what they might want. But it's the type of leaders the church needs. The type of workers.

Three points. God's workers are known by God and they call on him. God's workers flee evil and pursue righteousness. God's workers use their words to point people to truth.

So firstly, God's workers are known by him and call on him. It is a disconcerting thought, isn't it? It is disconcerting that false workers, fakes exist within the church.

Choose intention. It is not to lead people towards Jesus but away from him. It is disconcerting knowing that that's a reality. And I think it's perhaps one of the big anxieties for God's people.

Asking how do we know if we're being duped? How would you know? Because fakes and phonies don't come wearing a big badge saying, Look, I'm a phony.

[6 : 21] Don't listen to me. I'm lying to you. Be very careful of what I'm going to say. And let's not think that we're too big or proud that we couldn't easily be hoodwinked either.

You see how many people were, how many of the disciples were hoodwinked by Judas. We can, it's not too easy for any of us to be taken in by a charismatic personality.

We can be easily hoodwinked and especially, I think especially if we see it coming from a ministry that on the outside looks really successful. And we might be drawn to thinking, they must have it right.

They must know what they're doing. They must. From the middle of this chapter, Paul is addressing this issue to Timothy. To guard against the fakes and phonies.

And just throughout, just as a side point really, it's probably worth saying that this is probably the number one issue that Paul addressed, that winds Paul up really in the New Testament.

[7 : 31] There are two things that Paul really goes hard on in his writings, severely. The two things are false teaching and disunity. But false teaching, it always takes the precedent.

It is always the primary concern for Paul. Don't get me wrong, he has a lot to say about disunity and that is a big problem. But unity must never come at the expense of what is truth.

It's the truth that actually brings unity because we're united around the truth which is Jesus Christ. And so, Paul and actually, this is God's word.

They actually have no problem with calling out people who propagate lies. You just think this letter alone, we see that. Chapter 1, verse 15. Phygelus and Homojones, he calls them out.

He says they've deserted him. Today's reading, we've got Hymenaeus and Philetus. It says they've departed from the truth. Chapter 4, verse 9, we've got Demas. Because he loved the world, has deserted me.

[8 : 38] Verse 14 in chapter 4. Paul said, Timothy.

Timothy. These are the guys you want to watch out for. It's these guys who bring disunity because they departing from the true gospel. And he wants him to take a leaf out of his book.

Then there's nothing wrong in Paul and there's nothing wrong in Timothy calling out the fakes and the phonies. There's nothing wrong actually in us doing that. Now don't get me wrong, we've got to make sure we get it right.

But we're in good company if we do because Paul's never properly doing it. Paul highlights what two of them, Hymenaeus and Philetus. They've been working in Ephesus, which is where Timothy was a pastor.

And Paul highlights, you see what he says about their teaching? He said it spreads like gangrene. I used to work, in a former life, I used to work as a nurse.

[9 : 42] And one of the wards that I worked on, I used to work on a vascular ward. And I've nursed people that have gangrenous legs, part of their body is dying.

And there's lots of different treatments they can do on the wound. The first one is that they actually put maggots into the wound and they eat the dead flesh to try and get rid of it to see if the leg will recover and then they can keep the leg.

But if the maggots don't work, there is only one option. The only option is an amputation. They have to chop off the gangrene to get rid of it.

Because it is causing death and it is spreading. False teaching, if it's gangrenous, must be cut off.

It can't be allowed to spread. And so I think it is a really important point. And I think this is especially true if you know a young person in the faith.

[10 : 45] Ask who they're listening to and what they're reading. And go and check. If you've never heard of that person, go and check them out. And if you find out that what they're teaching is not in line with the apostolic gospel, I'd mourn them against it.

We don't play with fire. By all means, show them from the Bible why it's wrong. So that it's not just your opinion that somebody is a false teacher. But show them.

And if there is someone that you're not quite sure about, maybe you're reading yourself, you want to check, come and ask. You can ask me or ask someone else. Come and ask and I'll do my best to find out about them and if what they're teaching is in line with what Jesus teaches.

And I won't say it from my own opinion. I'll show you from the Bible. That is actually part of my job as an under-shepherd, to protect you from what is wrong. To spot the wolf and say, don't go anywhere near him.

If I fail to do that for you, I'm not fit to shepherd you. I'm not fit to shepherd you. I'm not doing what Jesus has called me to do.

[11 : 53] We can see how this might cause a lot of anxiety, don't we, with God's people. It might cause a lot of anxiety for me, not knowing who to trust.

You can understand why followers of Jesus and leaders within the church would be anxious, upset or even angry at the impact that Hymenaeus and Philetus were making. Which is why verse 19 is, I think, of the chapter we're looking at, it is the most important verse to remember when we hear or we read about false teaching.

Verse 19. Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription, the Lord knows those who are his.

The Lord knows those who are his. God is sovereign over his church. He knows who the fakes are. He's sovereign over his church.

He knows who belongs to him and who doesn't. And you see what this means? It means, even if you've been hugged, winked, even if you have been duped, if there is a wolf that hasn't been spotted, if you've succumbed to a false message, if you belong to Jesus, the Lord knows that you do.

[13 : 13] If you belong to his flock, if you've called on his name, if you've heard his call and been drawn to him, even if you've succumbed to the godless, gangrenous words of a wolf, it can't separate you from him.

It's a great assurance to know in the face of false teaching, it's a great assurance to me, that even if the false teaching is out there, it can't separate from you from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

And you know, if you do have true faith, if you've called on his name, you know the wolf can't actually devour the true sheep. He'll never actually get close.

As an under-shepherd, I could miss something. I could not spot the falsehood. But for the wolf to get to your faith, he has to get past Jesus.

For the wolf to get to your faith, he has to get past the true shepherd, the king of the kings. And he will not let that happen. He'll preserve your faith. He'll make you lie down in green pastures, still your soul, lead you beside quiet waters, where the green pastures are wolf-free.

[14 : 26] He always preserves his sins till the end. God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription, the Lord knows who are his.

He knows you. So that's the first point. God's workers are known by God, and they call on him. Secondly, God's workers flee evil and pursue righteousness.

You just look with me, the second part of that verse, verse 19, what he says, everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness.

And Paul spells out to Timothy what that looks like. There's this illustration used in verse 20 that I actually think, I actually think it's quite a difficult illustration to get our heads around.

You just read with me from verse 20. It says, 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 are for common use.

[15 : 30] Now what he says is that there's, that he pictures God's people and the church as a house. And I don't know, when I was growing up in our house when I was little, I don't know, maybe this is the same, this was the same for you or it is the same for you, but we had, my mum and dad, they always had certain cutlery and crockery or special coffee cups that were reserved for special occasions or if people came to visit.

But they wouldn't use those for everybody. They'd use the sort of everyday china. And the point here that Paul is making is the king has come to dwell in his house, the church.

He's made his home in you. And so if you knew, if you knew that the king of kings was coming, would you use the everyday common china? You wouldn't, would you?

You'd use the finest every time. Paul is making the point, only the finest for God's house. Verse 21, those who cleanse themselves from the latter, from the common, will be instruments for always what is special.

made holy, useful to the master, prepared to do any good work. If you get rid of everything that is common, you'll be left with the things that bring the wow factor to the guest, to the king of kings.

[16 : 49] And do you remember how much gold and silver filled God's temple in the tabernacle? But now the church is, it's the church that's the temple of God, God's people.

He's saying do it, do everything you can to make yourself a fitting temple, a fitting house for God to dwell, to reside in, to cleanse yourself from anything that makes you look like the rest of the world, from anything that is common.

Cleanse yourself from spiritual toxins. Get the spiritual brass or arrow and polish off those stains so you're a fit place for the king. And that goes for us individually, but it also goes for us as a group.

It goes for us as a church because our collective holiness matters. Your holiness is not actually just about you, although it is about you, but it's actually about all of us.

Your holiness matters to me and my holiness matters to you where we're holy together. And the reason why, verse 21, so that you're an instrument for special purposes, you're made holy, you're useful to the master, you're prepared to do any good work.

[18 : 05] We belong to Jesus and we have a responsibility to ourselves, to one another and to other people looking in on the Christian faith to demonstrate that we're the real deal, that we're God's workers and that we're the ones where Christ lives.

that we are authentic Christians, not fakes or foeys. And what does that mean in practice? It means, verse 22, flee the evil and pursue righteousness.

Flee the evil and pursue righteousness. Flee the dishonourable. Pursue the honourable. Guard the deposit against false toads by living according to the truth.

That's what actually sets the true workers apart from the foeys. Because a false worker wouldn't do that.

You know that if we're pursuing righteousness, faith, love and peace, what is that actually? We know what that is. It's pursuing Jesus. And all that he is.

[19 : 19] And pursuing him because he pursued you. It is looking at who Jesus is and what he's like and in response to what he's done for you, aiming to be like him.

Knowing that you can never do that completely, but aiming to be like him, that he is righteous. Pursuing him as the one who has been righteous in your place. That he has loved you.

That his love for us awakens our love for him. That he is our peace. Because he has broken down the walls of hostility that you put up against him.

Pursuing a life that looks like Jesus out of the knowledge of what he's done for us and aiming to replicate that, to be conduits, rivers of his righteousness, love and peace to others.

That workers are actually the hands and feet of Jesus in a world that has turned away from him. Not to gain extra favour, but because of what we've received.

[20 : 22] Because he's pursued us, in response we pursue him. We're known by that fruit. We're known by that fruit. That's how people know who the authentic Christians are, because faiths and folies don't live like that.

Third point. God's workers use their words to point people to truth. Now, I've just mentioned that we are the hands and feet of Jesus in the world that doesn't know him.

And there's lots of ways that that might be true. There's lots of ways, applications that you could make from that point. But you'll have noticed as we've read through this passage that there's a particular aspect that he points to of what that looks like.

And it's how God's workers use their words. And there's a contrast. It comes with, there's a contrast with how those who are committed to falsehood use their words.

And there's two aspects to this. There's, there's, and there's, I suppose this is true, isn't it? How we use our words does have two aspects. The content of what we say is really important, of course.

[21 : 40] But also the manner in which we say it is no less important. The content and the manner of what we actually say. And we see this contrast. And I just want us to highlight the differences.

Firstly, just look how those who are opposed to Jesus speak. I know it's not just what they say, but how they say it. It's both at odds with what you would expect from a gospel man. Verse 14, we have quarreling.

Verse 16, we have godless chatter. And then the content. Then, if we read verse 18, they've departed from the truth. They're teaching the resurrection has already happened.

Verse 26, we see that they're doing the works of the devil. And then we see the effects of their works. As we'd expect, it has a negative consequence.

Verse 14, it ruins those who listen. We looked at earlier, verse 17, it is like gangrene. And verse 18, it destroys people's faith. It has devastating consequences.

[22 : 46] But in contrast, look with me at how God's workers are taught to speak. How Paul says to Timothy, this is how you should use your words. To point people to truth.

Verse 15, to correctly handle the word of truth. Teaching and applying what the Bible says. It means that God's workers must work hard in communicating what Jesus actually says.

And what he actually means when he says it. Not what we think it means about what fits with what we like. But that cuts against the grain of maybe where in society, in our lives, where we're living apart from that.

That we have to handle it rightly. It's a little bit like how you might handle a nice piece of meat. I don't know, I'm not the greatest chef. Where Annabelle is excellent.

She always cooks up a tasty meal and I'm greatly thankful to her cooking skills. But I don't know if you ever, if you wanted to handle a fillet steak right, you'd have to know the cut of meat and what you were supposed to do.

[23 : 54] I'd have to do a lot of reading. So, otherwise I'd probably ruin it for everyone. It's the same here. God's workers must know how to rightly handle the word of truth as they're preparing it.

It's why God raises up preachers and teachers. But just as important is how they communicate it. They're to speak, not just to speak the truth of Jesus, but to speak the truth like Jesus.

Verse 24, with kindness, without resentment. Verse 25, with gentle instruction. And the real key to it all, the real key to it all, is the purpose.

What is in the heart of the preacher? It is not a self-generated agenda, but it's always for the benefit of the hero and for God's glory.

You see that? I think it's verse 24. Repentance. Knowledge of the truth.

[24 : 58] Verse 25, so that opponents come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil. Now I don't know when I first was going through the first point and I read all about these false teachers, it could seem there's a topic that's really popular at the minute that a lot of people are speaking about.

You might have heard about cancel culture where people, they teach something, they get heard for saying something and they get cancelled and they're taken off the airwaves because of what they've said.

And you might say, well isn't that just what Paul's doing? Isn't he just cancelling them from what they've said? But do you see in these last few verses how he's not doing that?

That his heart is actually for the false teacher to come to repentance? That the false teacher has been ensnared by the devil and he wants them to come to their senses?

That he loves them. He still has, despite that they've harmed him, despite that they've departed from the truth, he doesn't want them to stay that way.

[26 : 17] He would be, he's weak, do you think, well how do we think he responds to Phileas and Hermogenes? He's weeping for them. He's weeping, they were his brothers, they were doing ministry alongside him, he's desperate for them to come back.

He corrects them with gentleness and his, it's not to, he doesn't have a self, it's not an agenda that he's preaching, he's preaching, he's, he wants to preach with gentleness out of love and compassion, not just to win an argument but to win them back for Jesus Christ so that they can see the errors of their ways and turn to a knowledge of the truth to escape from the trap of the devil.

the good news of Jesus liberates. It liberates. Even if you've done that, even if the most false teacher, the biggest atheist who thinks that they're too far from God, who's blasphemed him, who looks like they're never going to come back to Jesus, the truth liberates.

You see, words that are, that's the real issue, what's the heart of the preacher? Words that are self-serving, where the preacher has an agenda, they only add bricks onto people's backs, weighing them down, but truth takes the heavy load away.

It makes people see themselves as God sees them in his image and special to him and Paul knew this. Paul knew this only too well. You think of Paul, he was a false teacher at one point.

[28 : 00] He was killing Christians. He was rescued from the trap of the devil. This is how Jesus used his words. It's how Jesus speaks to each of us.

He wants to win us for himself, not just to win an argument. Can you imagine a godly workforce?

The church that epitomises all these qualities. We're the church where his labourers in his hard graft and this is there to motivate us. It's for the glory of the king and has the most beautiful consequences.

Gospel, good news ministry liberates people. It's what Jesus did. It's what Jesus did. You remember Mark 5? Mark 5, there is a man who is demonised, who is in chains.

He's been cutting himself because he's been plagued by his own demons and he lives in the graveyards away from everyone. The people have literally chained him so that he can't hurt himself or anyone else from lashing out.

[29 : 08] And by a word, he tells the demons to flee and they do. He liberates him and the word afterwards says that the man is sat in his right mind.

This is what the truth does. It's what Jesus Christ does. Shows them that he is the way. Gives them life. False teachers can't do that. There is no power. They can't set people free but Jesus Christ can and he does.

And he is at work through his workers to free people who have been captured by evil and need to have their chains removed. The truth can do that. What a joy. What a joy.

The way to guard the deposit in the face of false teaching is not only to warn about it but is to live out the truth and to teach the truth ourselves because people will see that there is something different, something authentic in the way that we live.

Flee evil, pursue righteousness, speak the truth. Let's pray. Almighty God, I thank you that you are our shepherd and I thank you that in green pastures there are no wolves.

[30 : 34] I thank you that you are the one who protects our faith and that even false teachers they have to get through you to get to our faith.

That it is secure forever in you that you hold us fast and that your love will never depart from us. I pray that you would protect us as a church from false teaching I pray that you make us alert and I pray that you give us discernment against falsehood but I pray where we see it I pray that we wouldn't be anxious or upset or worried but we know that you are sovereign over the church that you are the one you know the true gospel workers from the faiths that we can trust you that you know those who are yours who belong to you but I pray that you'd protect us and I pray Lord that you would guard the deposit of faith in each of us and in our church by not just by pointing out helping us to point out but by us living what it means to live as an authentic

Christian that we would be repentant that we would we wouldn't play with fire we wouldn't play with sin but we would flee evil and we would pursue you we would pursue righteousness and love and faith and hope and peace that we would do that that we would cleanse our house from the common so that we're special that we can be used for special purposes useful to the master would you do that in us Lord Jesus and I pray that you would see us doing that to be the hands and the feet of Jesus with the words that we speak that we would be speaking words of truth and that you would also give us a love for those who have turned away from you maybe even those particularly we find it more difficult when there's people being in the church who have departed from the truth we find that more challenging help us not to be resentful or bitter but give us a heart of gentleness of kindness where our heart is motivated by realizing that they've been ensnared and captured by the devil and help us to speak words of truth so that they can be liberated from their chains we ask for this in Jesus name

Amen