

## **Intro**

Good Morning. My name is Mark and I attend the 5pm service here at All Saints. It will help if you could keep your Bibles open at this passage as I'll be referring to it.

When people on the streets are asked, What is a Christian? What do they stand for? On nearly every occasion words come back such as: (Sojourners Magazine)

- Anti abortion, anti gay, anti feminist, anti this anti that.
- Harsh, self righteous, intolerant, mean spirited

Yet another poll of people, asked what they think Jesus was like, answered this:

- compassionate, non-violent, peacemaker, reconciler

How do we explain the difference here? Have they got the wrong idea about Jesus or the wrong idea about us?

This last half of chapter 2 that we are looking at today is devoted to Paul telling Timothy how to be an "approved workmen" who is "useful to the Master", a worker who does not need to be ashamed. And the focus for this approved worker as it says in verse 15 is handling the word of truth.

Today I'm going to focus on  
why is it important that we handle the word of truth correctly  
secondly what happens if we don't  
thirdly how we should handle the word of truth correctly and  
finally how we should live the word of truth.

## **Why is it important that we handle the word of truth correctly?**

Verse 15 says "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

So why is it so important that the Bible is correctly handled? In summary because it is a very sharp instrument.

In John chapter 15 Jesus likens his words to a pruning knife, used for cutting and trimming the branches in the vine that is the church. You'd want to make sure that a person knew what he was doing before letting him loose in your vineyard. You would want to make sure he was handling the knife correctly.

In our text today the cutting theme is continued, although it may not be immediately obvious. In verse 15 the greek word that Paul uses for "correctly handle" is *orthotomeo*, which literally means "to cut straight". Again we see that the word of truth is a sharp instrument, a tool that needs to be handled by an approved workman.

If you look at a road atlas of England (get image if possible) you'll notice that most of the roads are pretty wriggly and windy. But every now and again you'll spot one that's dead straight for miles and miles, and you can bet that it was originally built by the Romans. Knowing that a straight line is the shortest path between two points, the Romans built their roads as straight as they could to make their troop movements as efficient as possible. Perhaps this is what Paul, a Roman citizen himself, has in mind when he says that an approved workman should "cut a straight path" with the word of truth. In this context the workman is a teacher in the church. To cut a straight path with the truth is to accurately explain it, and make it plain to others. The Word of Truth is a straight edge, or a surveyor's instrument, that is true and accurate. If handled correctly it will guide the road-builder safely to the destination: the kingdom of God.

What is the content of this truth? If you look over to chapter 3 verses 14 and 15 that we looked at last week with Derek, you can see that first of all it is the Scripture of the Old Testament. Added to this is the teaching of the Apostles which Jesus himself approved, and which Paul declares is true in chapter 1.

In short, the truth that defines the straight path the teacher should follow is the Bible as we have it today. The Bible that you have in your hands, old Testament and new. This is the truth.

### **What happens if we don't handle the word of truth?**

So what happens if we don't handle the word of truth or wander away from the truth. Verse 16 and 17 says that not handling truth is ungodly and that it will spread like gangrene. Not a particularly pleasant image.

We see that in verse 18 where two characters, Hymenaeus and Philetus are contrasted with the approved workman. Paul says they have wandered away from the truth.

The particular issue on which these two have wandered from the word of truth is to do with the future physical resurrection of believers. They are teaching that the resurrection of believers has already taken place in some spiritual sense. In other words they are teaching people "that's your lot, there's nothing in the future to hope for. This is all that there is to the Christian life. What you see is what you get". This is in direct contradiction to the Bible which teaches time and time again about a future day when the end will come and there will be a new heaven and earth where we will dwell with God. For their own reasons they have left behind the word of truth, they have wandered off, and in the end destroyed the faith of those they took with them.

The point is that Christianity is a revealed faith. God has shown us the truth through His word. Our Faith comes from God, not from us, and we don't have permission to change the faith: to add to the faith, to subtract from the faith, or to make it up as we go along. All

of these examples are wandering from the straight path of the word of truth. And if it's not the truth, then it must be a lie.

Verse 19 reads, "Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: 'The Lord knows those who are his,' and, 'Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness.'" These quotes come from chapter 16 in the book of Numbers in the Old Testament. They refer to an incident where 3 men rebelled against Moses' authority as the leader of the Israelites during the Exodus from Egypt. Their punishment was death as they were swallowed by the earth. It is a strong warning against those who would lead the people of God astray again stressing the importance of handling the word of truth correctly.

### **How we should handle the word of truth?**

So we have seen why correctly handling the truth is important and the impact of not handling it correctly. Now I want to discuss how we should handle the word of truth. Paul a few times in this passage refers to the negative effects of quarreling or arguing. As Derek preached on last week the bible is to be used for teaching, correcting, rebuking and training in righteousness. **The bible is not there to be argued or quarreled about, it is there to deepen our faith in God and help save those who are lost.**

"The Lord's servant must not quarrel, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful." This is easy to fulfil when dealing with kind and pleasant people but in dealing with cases where people are being difficult what should we, do? The key words are "gently instruct". Where we get into trouble is overemphasizing the one to the loss of the other.

***We either get too concerned about truth and **ride roughshod** over people who don't agree with us, or we are so intent on preserving happy relationships that we wander from the truth.***

Either way we are in big trouble. Here we have the solution to the problem. Paul is passionately committed to handing on the deposit of truth, and cannot bear to see it corrupted. But he is equally committed to proper pastoral relationships characterised by grace and sensitivity. This really reminds me of what Bruce spoke about last year of speaking the Truth in Love.

The attitude of not quarrelling actually shows a lot of faith in God. A lot of the time we want our excellent arguments to sway people's opinions, and so we get quite passionate about them. But this passage says that we've got to do our instruction gently, in the hope that God will do the work through his word and through the spirit.

One Christian apologist had opportunities to publicly debate a well known atheist Madeline Murray O'hare. After the appearance, some were troubled by the apologist's combative,

demeaning attitude to Madeline. His response was "I did not go there to save souls but to destroy a heretic." I believe the apostle Paul would have hoped to save a soul rather than destroy a heretic.

We must be kind as we teach our faith and not be resentful. If we are too caught up in quarrels, we will lack the concentration, and clear thoughts needed for good teaching. If we are always critical and condemning of others, we are not going to attract anyone into God's Kingdom by our love and attitude of service.

Going back to the survey at the beginning of the service, in this life we will always need to take some stands that are anti, but the issue is whether we can do this in a way that will not involve quarrelling. What is forbidden of us is controversies which in themselves are 'stupid and senseless' and in their effect 'breed quarrels'. They are 'stupid' or 'futile' because they are speculative and not based on God's word. We should not let arguments about which musical instruments to use in church or what the minister wears affect our daily Christian lives and relationships.

I remember at another church I went to we were having disagreements about the type of music played in the service. Whether it should be more hymn based or if it should be more modern. This led to friction between the various members of the church. The way it was resolved was when both sides sat down and gently discussed. The primary focus, to each others amazement, was to praise God. Each group felt that their music was for them the best way to do it. As that understanding was reached, both sides actually wanted the others music played as well as their own.

### **How to live the word of truth?**

Throughout Paul's teaching he always reminds people that the truth is not just about what he says, it is also about his actions. If we are speaking the word of truth correctly we also need to live it for it to be handled correctly. For example if someone was telling you that smoking is bad for you and you should quit, and that it is the truth, yet they smoke themselves, their credibility is lost and it doesn't matter what they have said even if it was the truth.

Paul uses an analogy and then gives some examples of what we should do with our lives. In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble. If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.

From this imagery we can see that the two sets of vessels in the great house are true and false teachers in the church. Paul is still, in fact, referring to the two sets of teachers he has contrasted in the previous paragraph, the authentic like Timothy and the false like Hymenaeus and Philetus.

To cleanse ourselves means that we are to avoid the error and the evil taught by the false teachers. To purify ourselves 'from these' is essentially to get rid of their lies from our minds and their wickedness from our hearts and lives. Purity, then—purity of doctrine and purity of life—is the essential condition of being useful to Christ.

*What we are to avoid is not so much contact with such men as their error and their evil.*

This is a wonderful privilege the Apostle Paul here sets before Timothy in verse 21 and to all believers. 'He will be a vessel for noble use.' 'holy, or consecrated, that is permanently set apart, 'useful to the master of the house' and 'ready for any good work'. No higher honour could be imagined than to be an instrument in the hand of Jesus Christ, to be at his disposal for his purposes, to be available whenever wanted for his service. Whether the service is to go overseas and be a missionary or to help teach Sunday school here at All saints.

Another interesting point to note is that the separation from the dishonourable articles only means that we are prepared to do any good work, our job is not finished. The separation must be followed by the changes in what we do. Matters of truth are linked with matters of conduct. The approved workman employs righteousness, faith, love and peace, gentleness and hope in the business of trying to return people to the straight path.

### **Conclusion/Application**

So, how are we going to make sure that we are following a straight path? First we must examine our leaders. Are they teaching the Bible clearly and plainly and so making a straight path for us to follow, or are they wandering off in their own direction? Are they living lives consistent with that truth? **We want them to not be rebuked by Jack Nicholson.**

Second, we are in the end each responsible for our own doctrine. We need to be reading the word ourselves, going to Bible studies and praying.

Thirdly we need to live the truth. As unashamed workmen we must be accurate and clear in our explanation of the bible. As vessels for noble use we must be righteous in our character and conduct. And as the Lord's servants we must be courteous and gentle in our manner.

Only if we cut the truth straight and do not swerve will we be approved by God and have no need to be ashamed.

Only if we purify ourselves from what is ignoble, can we be vessels for noble use, useful to the master of the house.

Only if we are gentle and not quarrelsome, as the Lord's true servants, can people see God's love through us.

Let us not spend time quarrelling in the church, instead let us focus on gently instructing others to bring them to Christ.