

“At one time during the American Civil War, Gen. George B. McClellan, then in command of the Union forces, was conducting a waiting campaign. He was so careful to avoid mistakes that little headway was evident. President Lincoln thereupon wrote him a letter: ‘My dear McClellan: If you don’t want to use the army, I should like to borrow it for a while. Yours respectfully, A. Lincoln.’”¹

General McClellan’s army kind of reminds us of the Church, God’s army. The Church today is so careful to be politically correct and not offend anyone; they neglect to teach half the Bible. Consequently, the Church is leading a retreat and not a charge. If a pastor does not speak out against abortion, homosexuality, adultery, fornication, gambling, profanity, alcohol and drugs, pornography, lying, and the many other things that we could name, he/she is a coward. Like McClellan, he/she needs to decide that if they are not going to lead God’s army, they should get out of the way, retire, quit or go into some other line of work. If McClellan had remained head of the union forces, we would all probably be singing “Dixie” on the Fourth of July.

Now let us take a closer look at what God wants us to learn from verses fourteen through nineteen:

2 Timothy 2:14-15:

¹⁴ **Remind them of these things**, and solemnly charge them in the presence of God not to wrangle about words, which is useless and leads to the ruin of the hearers.

¹⁵ Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.

Paul now urges Timothy to “keep reminding them of these things.” The word, “them,” undoubtedly refers to Christians. The “things” of which Timothy is to remind them is perhaps the whole content of the epistle thus far but most likely refers in particular to the “faithful saying” or “trustworthy statement,” of verses 11-13.²

2 Timothy 2:11-13:

¹¹ It is a trustworthy statement: For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him;

¹² If we endure, we will also reign with Him; If we deny Him, He also will deny us;

¹³ If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.

They must be reminded continually of the Gospel and how it applies to each of their lives and the lives of the generations that will come after them. They must be warned against quarreling

¹ Tan, Paul Lee: *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations : A Treasury of Illustrations, Anecdotes, Facts and Quotations for Pastors, Teachers and Christian Workers*. Garland TX : Bible Communications, 1996, c1979.

² C. Michael Moss, Ph.D., *The College Press NIV Commentary – 1, 2 Timothy & Titus*, ed. Jack Cottrell, Ph.D. and Tony Ash, Ph.D. (Joplin, Missouri: College Press Publishing Co., 1994), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 213.

about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen to such arguments. Paul explained this quite specifically in his first letter to Timothy.

1 Timothy 6:3-5 (NLT):

³ *Some people may contradict our teaching, but these are the wholesome teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. These teachings promote a godly life.*

⁴ *Anyone who teaches something different is arrogant and lacks understanding. Such a person has **an unhealthy desire to quibble over the meaning of words.** This stirs up arguments ending in jealousy, division, slander, and evil suspicions.*

⁵ *These people always cause trouble. Their minds are corrupt, and they have turned their backs on the truth. To them, a show of godliness is just a way to become wealthy.*

Paul now moves on in verse 15 to contrast the lies of the false teachers to what Timothy is to do with the Word of God. It is quite common for false teachers to sit around arguing about words. Some believing Christians get caught up doing this as well. You do not want to waste time or look foolish by debating things that are not important to being a good worker for God. Curiosity about things in the Bible is natural, but spending a great deal of time trying arguing about how many angels can fit on the end of a pin is simply not necessary. Timothy, however, is called to do his very best in order to be approved of by God as to how he explains God's Word of truth. Paul wrote this to the Corinthians:

2 Corinthians 10:18:

¹⁸ *For it is not he who commends himself that is approved, but he whom the Lord commends.*

God expects Timothy to do his very best as God's worker entrusted to teach and represent God's Word. Timothy's goal should be that he do his very best for God so that he never need be ashamed. Any workman should be ashamed if he/she does shoddy work. For Timothy to be unashamed he must handle God's Word accurately. He must not add anything to it or remove anything from it, as false teachers do. Nor is he in any way to misinterpret it as many false teachers do.

Now possibly one or more of you is thinking, "This is for pastors and teachers, it doesn't apply to me." But that is not so. Verse 15 applies to everyone. Pastors and teachers, however, will be held doubly accountable as to whether or not they obey it (James 3:1).

The King James Version begins verse 15 with "*Study to show thyself [yourself] approved.* . . . "Since this verse is talking about accurately handling the Word of truth, "*study*" seems appropriate. How else are you going to understand the Scripture and be able to live it unless you have studied it enough to make it a vital part of you and your life? How can you present yourself to God as a workman if you have not familiarized yourself with the tools, the Bible? How can you do these things without reading the Bible every day?

In addition, to handle the Word accurately also suggests that you understand the relationship of the Old and New Testaments and that you are aware of which passages teach the various doctrines.

Therefore each Christian is individually responsible to read and study the Bible so that when a younger Christian or an unbeliever asks a question he or she can answer it accurately: *“as a workman who does not need to be ashamed.”*³

First Paul tells Timothy what he must do in verses 14 and 15, and then in verses 16-18 He tells Timothy what he should not do.

He is first to *“avoid meaningless chatter.”* Paul made this pretty clear right at the beginning of his first letter to Timothy:

1 Timothy 1:5-7 (NLT):

⁵ *The purpose of my instruction is that all believers would be filled with love that comes from a pure heart, a clear conscience, and genuine faith.*

⁶ *But some people have missed this whole point. They have turned away from these things and spend their time in meaningless discussions.*

⁷ *They want to be known as teachers of the law of Moses, but **they don't know what they are talking about**, even though they speak so confidently.*

Such chatter directs people to the wrong path, which only leads to more ungodly thoughts and behavior. Think of the churches that have climbed aboard the wagon to legitimize homosexuality and same-sex “marriage.” Do you believe that such churches are leading those who do not know any better away from God? You bet your life they are!

In verse seventeen Paul tells us that this kind of teaching will spread like gangrene. The *Tyndale Bible Dictionary* has this to say about Gangrene: “Death of tissue due to loss of the vital blood supply to that part of the body. Often the most distal [outer⁴] tip of an extremity, such as fingertips or toes, will turn black and surgeons will amputate the dead part to prevent extension and harm to more of the limb or to life itself.”⁵ Sounds like Paul is saying that the only remedy for false teaching is to cut it out, remove it completely from the Body, the Church.

Then Paul identifies a couple of these false teachers, Hymenaeus and Philetus.⁶ Hymenaeus is not a common name and could be the same man Paul had referred to in 1 Timothy 1:20. There

³ “... always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence”--1 Peter 3:15.

⁴ Brackets mine.

⁵ Elwell, Walter A. ; Comfort, Philip Wesley: *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Tyndale House Publishers, 2001 (Tyndale Reference Library), S. 513.

⁶ In the history of Hymeneus and his companions, and in their bold and anti-Christian teaching which had overthrown the faith of some, we cannot fail to see the fulfillment of what Paul had said many years previously, in his farewell address to the elders of the church in Ephesus: "I know that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them" ([Acts 20:29f](#)). It was in the Ephesian church that Hymeneus and

Paul stated that he had handed him, along with Alexander, “*over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme.*” Hymenaeus is accompanied in his teaching by Philetus, about whom there is no further information that we have been able to find..

Both of these dunderheads for one reason or another decided to teach something that they had created in their own minds in contradiction to the true Word of God. They claimed that the resurrection had already taken place, saying that the day of the Lord had already come, and thus misled people which could well have caused them at that time not to accept Christ as Savior. Paul had warned Timothy earlier about this in:

1 Timothy 6:20-21 (NLT):

²⁰ *Timothy, guard what God has entrusted to you. **Avoid godless, foolish discussions** with those who oppose you with their so-called knowledge.*

²¹ ***Some people have wandered from the faith by following such foolishness.** May God’s grace be with you all.*

2 Timothy 2:19:

*Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, **"The Lord knows those who are His,"** and, "Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness."*

Paul is simply saying here that anything from God is built on a rock solid foundation. He will endure and His will will be done, and false teachers will not be able to change that.

Paul then quotes two inscriptions from the Old Testament.

“Inscriptions on foundation stones indicate either ownership or purpose of the structure. Here there are two inscriptions with which this foundation is ‘sealed.’ The first, ‘The Lord knows those who are his,’ is very similar to Numbers 16:5.” ⁷

Numbers 16:4-7 (NLT):

⁴ *When Moses heard what they were saying, he fell face down on the ground.*

⁵ *Then he said to Korah and his followers, “Tomorrow morning the LORD will show us who belongs to him and who is holy. The LORD will allow only those whom he selects to enter his own presence.*

⁶ *Korah, you and all your followers must prepare your incense burners.*

⁷ *Light fires in them tomorrow, and burn incense before the LORD. Then we will see whom the LORD chooses as his holy one. You Levites⁸ are the ones who have gone too far!”*

Alexander and Philetus had arisen. The gangrene-like nature of their teaching has already been described. John Rutherford, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. James Orr (Chicago: Howard-Severance Co., 1915), s.v. “HYMENAËUS,” WORDsearch CROSS e-book.

⁷ Op. cit, Moss.

⁸ Descendants of Levi, one of the sons of Jacob and Leah. Some of the *Levites* were religious teachers. Others took care of the Tabernacle, and later, the Temple. Only *Levites* who were descendants of Moses' brother Aaron could

“The context is the rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram against Moses and ultimately against God. There God clearly distinguishes between those loyal to him and those in rebellion. Paul contends that is what God will do in the church at Ephesus.

“Several OT passages have been suggested as the background for the second inscription, “Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness.”⁹ The true servant of the Lord demonstrates that he belongs to him by turning ‘away from wickedness,’ a direction opposite that of the false teachers.”¹⁰

“Someone has illustrated love as the fulfilling of the law in this way: A woman was married to a man whom she did not love. He made her get up every morning at five o’clock, cook his breakfast, and serve it at six o’clock sharp. He made her wait on him, and was exacting in his demands on her time. Her life was made miserable trying to satisfy the requests of her husband. Finally he died.

“After a few years she married again. This time she married a man whom she really loved. One day while clearing out some old papers, she came across the strict set of rules her former husband had written out for her to obey. Carefully she read them over. “Get up at five. Serve breakfast at six sharp.” On and on she read.

“Then she stopped and thought, and realized that she was fulfilling every single one of his demands, but she had not realized it because this time she was doing it for love’s sake. So it is not difficult to serve the Lord Jesus when we really love Him.”¹¹

What kind of servant are you today? Do you take part in senseless bickering about meaningless subjects? Do you know where to find the passages explaining salvation in your Bible? Have you set aside time every day to read your Bible so that you can know what God expects of you and teach it to others when the opportunity arises? **We should always be ready to give an answer for the hope within us, 1 Peter 3:15 (TLB):**

become priests.

Henrietta C Mears, *What the Bible is All About*, (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1998), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "LEVITES".

⁹ Lev 24:16; Num 16:26; Josh 23:7; Isa 26:13; 52:11; Ps 6:8; 34:14; Prov 3:7.

¹⁰ Op cit., Moss, pp. 215-217.

¹¹ Tan, Paul Lee: *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations : A Treasury of Illustrations, Anecdotes, Facts and Quotations for Pastors, Teachers and Christian Workers*. Garland TX : Bible Communications, 1996, c1979

¹⁵ Quietly trust yourself to Christ your Lord, and if anybody asks why you believe as you do, be ready to tell him, and do it in a gentle and respectful way.

Do you pray for others? This book is not speaking to pastors and teachers only, but to everyone who is a Christian. The following was seen on a church bulletin board: **“Work for the Lord. The pay isn’t much, but the retirement plan is out of this world.”**¹²

¹² Cory, Lloyd. *Quote Unquote*. Wheaton IL: Victor Books, 1977, p. 376.