

Basic Instructions

2 Timothy 2:14-18

Introduction

A lot of companies and organizations use a document called a Memorandum of Understanding. It is not a legal document but it is a strong statement of mutual understanding between individuals or parties. Paul's last letter has been called a last will and testament but it could reasonably be called a Memorandum of Understanding as well. The point of a Memorandum of Understanding is to communicate to all parties concerned. The communication is plain and less is more.

The theme of this short letter is found in this section. Paul has devoted his life to Jesus and to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is an expression of Paul's heart. In Ephesus, Corinth and Rome Paul has preached and taught the great themes of salvation by grace through Christ. But now many questioned Paul's apostolic authority and message. A growing number of people were departing from the foundational principles Paul had carefully laid. The theme of this book is holding on to truth when others seem to be letting go. William MacDonald wrote; "This theme may be stated as "Individual Responsibility in a Time of Collective Failure" (see *Believer's Bible Commentary* p.2107).

In this letter Paul covers the mega themes of boldness in the face of aggression, opposition and persecution. The exhortations to Timothy have included fidelity to the truth and endurance in the presence of suffering. We all have a choice. Will we remain faithful to the truth of the Gospel in Christ Jesus or will we join the swelling ranks of those who have compromised the Gospel or abandoned the Gospel.

Timothy is tasked with taking the torch of truth and passing it on to future generations. Preach and teach the Gospel; do not be ashamed of Christ's message or Christ's messengers. Be prepared to suffer. In the final days before Christ's return there will be false teachers spreading false teaching; spiritual dropouts who twist the truth of God's Word.

With opposition and deception and false teaching comes confusion in the Body of Christ and some abandon faith in Christ. Timothy must be disciplined and ready to reject error. The best strategy to defeat error is to know the truth and practice the truth. And since Jesus is the author of truth and the Word of God is the receptacle of truth; God's Word is both the source and standard to evaluate all truth claims.

First Reminder: Focus On Essentials (v.14)

2 Timothy 2:14 (NKJV)¹⁴Remind them of these things, charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers.

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Paul's exhortation begins with a reminder "*of these things.*" *What things? The mega-themes of chapter 1 and the beginning of chapter 2.*

The expression "*charging them before the Lord*" provides both motive and spirit behind the admonition.

"to the ruin" is the strong Greek word *catastrophe*. You know that word. It has come down in modern usage with its ancient meaning; ruin or destruction. In context it carries the meaning subvert or strive. The expression strive about words (*logomacheo*) means *to fight with words*. This expression is unique in the Greek New Testament—but is found in its noun form in 1 Timothy 6:4—where Paul talks about the false teachers in their pride, knowing nothing, obsess over words. The meaning "word battles" in both places includes collateral damage. In 1 Timothy 6:4 the consequences include "envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, (5) useless wrangling of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself." Here the consequence is *ruin* (v.14).

For the person who argues that words and definitions matter I agree. But remember the context. In the first chapter Paul pleads with Timothy to remember God's call on his life (1:1-6); the resources of God's grace (1:7-11) and the reward found at God's throne (1:12-18). Suffering is a part of the Pastor's call; we endure suffering as a privilege (2:8-13).

How do we discern the essential from the non-essential? What is important and what is less important? Paul uses the language of profit and loss.

In broad categories there is conversation that builds up and tears down. Gossip and unfair criticism tear down. There are literally hundreds of theories and speculations about non-essential matters that occupy the minds and resources of talented and gifted Christians.

William Barclay offers this excellent insight into what happens when some overhear these conversation:

"Discussion can be stimulating and invigorating for those whose approach to the Christian faith is intellectual, for those who have a background of knowledge and of culture, for those who are characteristically students, for those who have a real knowledge of, or interest in, theology. But it sometimes happens that a simple-minded person finds himself in a group which is tossing heresies about, and propounding unanswerable questions, and it may well be that the faith of that simple person, so far from being helped, is upset. . . And it may well happen that clever, subtle, speculative, destructive, intellectually reckless discussion may have the effect of demolishing, and not building up, the faith of some simple person who happens to become involved in it. As in all things, there is a time to discuss, and a time to be silent" (The Letters of Timothy, Titus and Philemon; p. 197).

Paul calls on Timothy to remind believers—do not argue or strive over issues that will not profit those listening. Be careful not to tear down people with your words.

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Second Reminder: Faithfully Study The Word Of Truth (v.15)

¹⁵Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

The Pastor points people to Jesus. The Pastor helps administer the ordinances of the Church like baptism and communion or the Lord supper (see Matthew 28:19-20). The Pastor is to be a man of prayer (1 Timothy 2:1) both guiding and guarding the sheep—the flock of God (see 1 Timothy 4:1,6). The Pastor watches over souls, both his own and others (1 Timothy 4:6); the Pastor leads and feeds the flock and is an example to all (1 Timothy 4:12 and 1 Peter 5:3). The Pastor preaches (2 Timothy 4:2; Acts 6:2-4) and the Pastor must faithfully study the Bible; the Word of Truth (here v.15). Every single word in this powerful verse deserves careful exposition. In the interest of time I offer these basic comments: Paul reminds Timothy to present himself to God for God’s approval. **The Pastor or Bible teacher who does not get right with God in his or her personal life does so at their own risk.**

It was R.A. Torrey who said the first task of Biblical interpretation and exposition is to get right with God. How in good conscience do we dare to teach or preach God’s Word and leave our own hearts neglected? It may be that most of a Pastor’s preparation takes place in the secret recesses of a heart in desperate need of repentance of sin!

The Preacher’s concern is not the approval of men but the approval of God. How can we carry the powerful truths of the Gospel while harboring the toxic waste of unconfessed and unrepentant sin? Only a fool would dare teach this passage and not ask the question; “How can I secure the approval of God?” We are all traumatized by sin. Go to the emergency room immediately. How do we secure the approval of God? It can only be found in the Lord Jesus Christ. You are chosen, adopted, accepted in the Beloved. Your approval comes through Jesus Christ the Lord.

What else secures the approval of God? You are a workman—this is the diligent worker who toils to the point of exhaustion. Athletes train to the point of exhaustion. Soldiers train to the point of exhaustion. Farmers get up early and go to bed late.

If you do not study your Bible to the point of exhaustion you are probably doing it wrong. And what is the focus of our study? The word of truth. We rightly divide the word of truth.

This is the Bible. The very precious letter that Timothy held in his hands contained the Word of Truth. You cannot secure the approval of God by mishandling the Word of God. The Lord knows we are human. The Lord knows that we are capable of making mistakes. The Lord knows we can be led astray and make false statements and draw false conclusions.

Every Bible teacher should understand the stakes.

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The English word “approved” is based on the root word *prove*. The adjective is *dokimos*—*related to the verb dokimazo—which meant to test, to try to prove*. It was used often in the purity of metals. There is a sense in which the minister first proves before being approved. Arndt and Gingrich define *dokimos* as “*approved (by test), tried and true, genuine.*” God can approve only those who have proved themselves true in the tests of life.

You cannot rightly divide the Word of Truth if you pour into it meaning it never had or draw from it a meaning it does not contain. Let me put it to you plainly: The Bible can never mean what it never meant. Any given book in the Bible or passage in the Bible can never mean what it never meant.

The expression rightly dividing translates the Greek verb *orthotomounta—cut straight*. *And what exactly are we cutting straight?* In the ancient world this word was used to describe digging a straight furrow in a field; or laying out a straight road. In the Septuagint it used in the sense of direction; make a straight path—make it plain. One Lexicon translates this “teach straight”. The stone mason or tent maker required exact measurements. Precision and accuracy are required for Bible teachers.

Several scholars take this metaphor to mean that the minister makes straight paths for his people to tread. Vincent writes; “The thought is that the minister of the gospel is to present the truth rightly, not abridging it, not handling it as a charlatan. . .not making it a matter of wordy strife” (v.14). E.K. Simpson prefers “cut a road” and adds “It enjoins on every teacher of the Word straightforward exegesis”(p.137).

What are the most basic and fundamental skills necessary to correctly analyze, rightly divide, skillfully teach the Word of Truth?

- 1. Get right with God.**
- 2. Be determined to find out what God intended to teach and not what you wish Him to teach.**
- 3. Get the most accurate text.**
- 4. Look for the plain or literal meaning. The passage cannot mean what it never meant. The Bible contains figures of speech, metaphors, hyperbole and allegory.**
- 5. What was the author’s intent?**
- 6. What are the meanings of the words (lexical meaning and etymology).**
- 7. Understand the grammatical structure.**
- 8. Understand the historical setting.**
- 9. Understand the geographical location.**
- 10. Understand the cultural context.**
- 11. Understand the context.**
- 12. Interpret individual passages in the light of parallel or related passages.**
- 13. Interpret obscure passages in the light of passages that are perfectly plain.**
- 14. Interpret poetry as poetry and prose as prose.**

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15. Interpret what belongs to the Jew as belonging to the Jew; to the Christian as what belongs to the Christian, and what belongs to the Gentile as belonging to the Gentile.
16. Find the most exact and literal meaning of the text.
17. Interpret the words in any verse according to Bible usage.
18. The Holy Spirit is the best interpreter of the Bible.

That sounds like a lot of work. It is a lot of work. Do you want to know what God's Word says and means? Anything less is shameful. What does the Word of Truth include? All of the Scripture in general (John 17:17) and the Gospel message most certainly (see Ephesians 1:13; Col.1:5).

Third Reminder: Forsake False Words (vv.16-18)

¹⁶But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness.

¹⁷And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort,

¹⁸who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some.

The Bible teacher's preoccupation are the Words of Truth. We are to forsake profane and idle babbling. Paul uses the term *kenophonia*—it only occurs here and in 1 Timothy 1:16. The prefix *kenos*—means empty. The suffix *phone*—means sound. Literally the word means 'empty sounds'. The NASB scholars decided to use the term "empty chatter". In both letters by Paul it is preceded by the word *beblos*—profane. Some scholars combine both adjective and noun and come up with *godless chatter* (NIV). Embrace godly talk (the Word of Truth) and avoid godless talk. Godless talk increases the chances for ungodliness.

Does Paul condemn small talk or market place conversations? Paul is condemning the disputes and arguments of his critics and heretics. Embracing destructive heresies does not lead to godly edification but more ungodliness. False doctrine is harmful. Heresy can't save or sanctify. **This is Paul's second warning (see vv. 14, 23).**

What is the message that spreads like cancer?

The word Paul uses describes a deadly disease that results in death.

Paul gives an example. Who were Hymenaeus and Philetus? Why does Paul name them by name?

Whoever they are they have strayed (wandered) concerning the truth. Paul then gives an example of their false teaching: "the resurrection is already past".

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What exactly are the false teachers denying? It would appear that the false teachers were denying the reality of the believer's bodily resurrection.

Some scholars suggest that they may not have denied Christ's bodily resurrection; but rather asserted that all the believer need do is identify with Jesus in His death and resurrection but there was no need to embrace the resurrection of the believer.

The heretical teaching may have extended to the very resurrection of Jesus or the future resurrection of the saints. The teaching may have reflected the Greek or Gnostic notion that the body or matter was evil and the non-corporeal being was good.

Paul then describes the consequences of their false teaching: "they overthrow the faith of some."

I think this is a reference to those who do not have a genuine or saving faith (see Matthew 24:24). Genuine saving faith perseveres. Many people claim to have faith. There is a false, non saving faith.

Conclusion