

2 Timothy 2:14-19 — How Do I Evaluate A Pastor?

February 21, 2021

I want to start by thanking those who joined us last week for Valentine's



Day, especially those who were online. I told you I was still working on a Valentine's gift for my wife. I asked for suggestions on what I should do for her. I asked those who were watching online to send those suggestions electronically. Some of you did.

I decided to use an idea submitted by a viewer watching from Council Bluffs, IA. His suggestion was to make a heart-shaped calzone and serve it for dinner. I went with that plan, and Cindy was thrilled! If you are watching online, thank you for worshipping with us. Thank you for the great Valentine ideas!



This morning, we continue our study in 2 Timothy. If you are new to this series, you need to know this book is the last letter Paul wrote before he was executed by Nero. It was written to young man named Timothy. He was a young pastor in his 30s that Paul left in charge of the church in Ephesus. Paul planted the church in Ephesus, but he knew that once he left Satan would attack and try to destroy the church. Paul knew Timothy would have a hard time pastoring the church. That is why he wanted to encourage him. In Acts 20, when Paul was last with the Ephesian elders, he warned them about divisiveness he was sure would happen once he left.

I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Acts 20:29–30 (ESV)

That is exactly what happened. Young Timothy found himself pastoring a church with a number of false teachers that rose up from inside the church. They were twisting the gospel and pulling people away from the church. Timothy needed lots of encouragement.

In the first chapter of this letter, Paul encouraged Timothy by telling him to change the way he thought about his job description. Being a pastor isn't an easy job. Think of being a pastor like serving as a soldier. You are in a war. Expect people will shoot at you. Get used to being on the front lines. Timothy also needed to think of himself like an athlete. He had to always give his best. He was to think of himself as a runner in a marathon. As a pastor, there was no time to relax. That is OK. A pastor gives his best effort because he knows that one day he will be judged and rewarded by Jesus. Timothy also needed to think of himself as a farmer. There was a lot of hard work in his life but the payday in the future would be a crop of healthy Christians in the next generation.

Last week, Paul encouraged Timothy to be bold and speak about Jesus around people who needed to meet Jesus, even though Nero was killing Christians. Why was Timothy to boldly speak about Jesus when most people were trying to keep a low profile about Jesus? The reward for boldly speaking about Jesus always outweighs the sacrifice.

Today, we come to another section in this letter. It will take two weeks to cover this section. In this section, Paul taught Timothy what it meant to be a good pastor. That was an important thing for Timothy to learn, because in Ephesus,

there were plenty of bad pastors. Timothy needed to know what a good pastor looked like and not imitate a bad one.

What a good pastor looks like compared to a bad one is an appropriate question for us to ask. Now that we have the Internet, we can watch any pastor we want around the world. When the pandemic began, many of us found ourselves surfing the Internet to access the most popular Bible teachers in the nation. While popular pastors have the applause of the crowds, how do we know if they have the applause of God? That is the answer we will find this morning. Let's read the text and study it together.

Remind them of these things, and charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some. But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity." 2 Timothy 2:14–19 (ESV)

In these verses, Paul gave Timothy six descriptions of what a good pastor looks like, then three descriptions of what a bad pastor looks like. Finally, Paul told Christians what they need to know and what they need to do when they find themselves surrounded by false teachers taking people away from the truth.

What is a good pastor?

A good pastor reminds people about what they already know.

Remind them of these things... 2 Timothy 2:14 (ESV)

Paul told Timothy his job was to remind people. What was Timothy to remind people about? What Paul taught them. He was to remind them about the

gospel message Paul spoke to them. Timothy was not allowed to be creative and make things up. He was to be faithful and keep reminding people of the gospel message Paul taught them. Does that mean Paul was allowed to be original and Timothy was not? Paul was also not allowed to be creative. He didn't make up the gospel. Where did Paul get the gospel message? He was given the gospel message from Jesus. Paul also was not allowed to be creative but was just supposed to tell Timothy and others what Jesus told him.

But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. Acts 20:24 (ESV)

This is an important point. Paul and Timothy were not allowed to make stuff up. Their job was to remind people about the gospel they already knew and the Bible they already had. That is what a good pastor does. They teach and re-teach the Scriptures. They are to remind people of what they already know and help them apply what they know. Pastors do not have the liberty to make up theology.

You say, "I would expect most pastors would be faithful to the Bible. Are there actually pastors out there who make stuff up?" Yes! As I was helping Pastor Shane prepare for this week's membership class, I shared with him a quote I found on the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America's website. It said, "We believe sometimes the authors of the Bible missed what God was saying or doing...or that God is now doing something new." Those church leaders use this as justification to ignore parts of the Bible they don't like and become theologically creative and make up stuff the Bible doesn't say. That is the definition of what a bad pastor looks like! Pastors are not to be theologically

creative. They are to be theologically faithful. They are to keep their fingers in the text and remind people of the gospel as taught by Jesus, that was faithfully passed to Paul, that was faithfully passed to Timothy and that is faithfully passed to us.

The ministry of reminder is essential for pastors, and it is essential for us. We live in an information-saturated world. There are so many new things to learn that we quickly forget the old things. For instance, who can tell me what they had for dinner last Tuesday night? Who can tell me what was the headline article in the news two weeks ago on Wednesday? Nobody can remember those old things because there are too many new things. This is why we must be continually reminded of what we already know when it comes to the Bible. It is just too easy to forget.

We even see the authors of Scripture doing this. The author of Jude tells us he wrote his letter to remind people of what they already knew. Paul did the same thing in 1 Corinthians.

[Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand... 1 Corinthians 15:1 \(ESV\)](#)

I am part of an Iron Man group. I meet with three other men from the church. We hold one another accountable for memorizing a verse of the Bible of our own choosing every week, for reading the Bible, plus, we also pray for one another. In this week's group, we were talking about how our Bible reading and memory verses have changed us. All of us are familiar with the Bible but the discipline of faithfully rereading and memorizing what we already know has changed us. God uses the constant reminder of what we already know to change

the way we think about life. For example, we were talking about the television programs we used to watch but now would never watch. Today, we see them as a bad influence on our lives, when before we were reading and memorizing the Bible, we didn't see anything wrong with them. What changed us? Constantly being reminded of God's Word.

To be a good pastor, Timothy was not to focus on being particularly entertaining. He was to focus on faithfully reminding people of the Word of God. That is why we preach from the Bible at CrossWinds. That is why I am constantly having you look at Bible verses in the sermon and in your outline. I don't want you to forget what we already know.

A good pastor reminds people of God's presence in their lives.

...and charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers. 2 Timothy 2:14 (ESV)

Timothy was not to just remind people what they already knew but he was to charge them before God. What does that mean?

The word charge means to command someone, like you were instructing a soldier. This is the way you talk to your children about the importance of them not playing in traffic. You make sure they hear and understand. Notice how Timothy was to charge his parishioners. He was to charge them before God. He was to remind them God was watching their lives and God knew how they lived their life. What mattered was what God thought about their obedience to this command. If they tried to pull a fast one and disobey what Paul said, they weren't fooling God. He knew their hearts and their motives.

When I read these words, I think this shows us the difference between the way a good pastor and a bad pastor approach their jobs. A bad pastor focuses on people and what makes them happy. His sermons are about five secrets to financial success or three tips on how to have a fulfilling marriage. A bad pastor preaches as if people and their self-centered wants are the center of the universe. That is not the way the world works.

The truth is that God is the center of the universe. What matters is not how much happiness we have in life but what God thinks of the way we live our lives. A good pastor reminds us to live our lives before God in a way that is pleasing to him!

Look what the Bible says about God's knowledge of our lives.

...would not God discover this? For he knows the secrets of the heart. Psalm 44:21 (ESV)

And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us... Acts 15:8 (ESV)

As I say this, I think about some of the things that have surfaced about Ravi Zaccharius and his sexual improprieties. He kept them hidden from people so he looked good in public. He focused on how to have a successful life. What he kept hidden from people was fully known by God. Today, when he is with Jesus, he only wishes he had lived his life more pleasing to Jesus.

So a good pastor reminds people of what they already know. He keeps his finger in the text and brings people back to their Bible. A good pastor doesn't just remind us of what we know but he reminds us of what God knows. God knows

our hearts. We will one day stand before him, and as Christians, be rewarded by him based on how we lived.

A good pastor will steer people away from pointless conflicts.

...charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers. 2 Timothy 2:14 (ESV)

What was Paul talking about when he said we should avoid quarreling about words? In the Greek, this literally says to wage a war over words. That term is a touch difficult to define because this is the only time it is used in the Bible, but it is not out of reach to understand.

Words are quickly spoken. Words are often said that can inadvertently offend people. When we speak, there is a natural lack of precision. Sometimes what we mean by a word is different from what people hear because we have slightly different understandings of what a word means. Be careful to not wage a war over small issues like a few spoken words.

When it comes to the Bible, this is not saying we shouldn't discuss theology. This is not saying we shouldn't talk about how a Bible passage applies. This is not saying we can't have disagreements about what things that are hard to understand in Scripture mean.

It is saying we must be careful what we choose to wage a war over and divide the church over. Don't wage a war over trivial things such as a word not aptly spoken. The church is God's family. We are brothers and sisters through Jesus. Don't divide the church over those things. Paul reminded us, "Remember God is watching our lives." God knows when we are dividing the church over trivial reasons, and he is not happy about it. One day we will stand before him

and give an account for it because we refused to show charity to a brother or sister over a trivial issue.

As I was thinking about what a war over words that divides the Christ's Church over a trivial issue looks like, an example from years ago came to mind.

Years ago, I put a simple gospel explanation in a bulletin: 1. Confess our sin; 2. Turn to Jesus and ask him to forgive our sin; 3. Follow Christ with your life. That sounded pretty straightforward to me. I didn't see anything wrong about it. It was meant to be simple and clear.

A week after I put it in the bulletin, someone reached out to me because this person didn't like what I said. This person claimed I was twisting the gospel. I was adding works to saving faith by telling people that after someone trusts in Jesus to forgive our sin, we are to follow Jesus with our lives. This person's point was since we are saved by grace through faith, we can be saved by God's grace and don't need to make a choice to follow Jesus with our lives or we are adding works to the gospel message. That began an e-mail exchange that went back and forth for a few weeks. I kept showing this person verses that remind us that while we are saved by God's grace alone and faith alone, saving faith is never alone. True saving faith will always lead to a decision to follow Jesus with our lives. For example, look what the book of James says about saving faith.

What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? James 2:14 (ESV)

But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. James 2:18 (ESV)

Jesus' definition of what it means to be a Christian is much stronger than the third point I gave in that simple gospel presentation. I simply said we are to follow Jesus with our lives. Jesus said the same thing but in a much stronger way. This was Jesus' definition of a Christian in the Gospel of Mark.

And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." Mark 8:34 (ESV)

According to Jesus, becoming a Christian is following Jesus with our lives, to the point of death, if necessary, even death on a cross.

This discussion over being saved by God's grace through faith, but a faith that is never alone because saving faith always results in a change in our lives, morphed into an e-mail war over words. Everyone was very civil in the discussion but it ended in a discussion that was splitting hairs over when was the point of salvation and when was a life changed by that salvation.

I asked the elders to be part of the discussion. I asked them to check my theology and examine the correspondence. I asked them to hold me accountable on my theology and to make sure I was always as gentle and kind as possible. The elders thought I was conducting myself properly, but here is the way it ended. The person sent a final e-mail letting me know they were leaving the church, not because anyone was mean or hurtful to them or even that they were treated inappropriately. They felt it was appropriate to leave the church over a disagreement on the definition of a few words.

I felt terrible. That is not the kind of stuff you leave a church over. That is not the kind of stuff you tear apart the body of Christ over. The discussion centered around a small theological point that was worth discussing but was not

worth tearing the church in half about. At the end of the day, we both love Jesus, trust in Jesus alone, and are saved by Jesus.

This is why Paul said a war over words does no good. It only ruins those who hear. They get drawn into controversy. Instead of putting energy into reaching people with Jesus and serving our brothers and sisters in Jesus, the bickering over small things, such as definition of a word tears people apart.

Petty bickering results in a lot of wasted sideways energy. That is energy that doesn't build up the church. It leaves people exhausted and wastes time as people spend their time fighting with one another. This kind of stuff tears apart the unity of the church.

Paul told Timothy to remind people they were living in the presence of God. God was watching how they lived and what they bickered over. Refuse to be drawn into a war over small points that misses the church's big point.

This is one of the reasons I love our denomination. When the denomination was put together, the leaders decided there would be issues on which they would be silent. We will not fight about them. We are not talking about the clear teachings of Scriptures. Those are things we firmly hold. There are other issues in Scripture upon which we may have a conviction but agree it is not such a core issue that we will divide over it.

For example, do we practice infant dedication or infant baptism? Ninety-five percent of EFCA churches practice infant dedication. If someone feels strongly about infant baptism, and that person realizes infant baptism is not saving their child or conveying special grace to their child, we are fine with infant

baptism --- if people realize it is no different than a wet dedication. We refuse to fight over that issue and let it tear us apart.

When it comes to adult baptism, do we immerse or sprinkle? Ninety-five percent of EFCA churches practice baptism by immersion. Even the definition of the word baptize, which means to immerse, leans toward baptism by immersion. If there are people who feel strongly about being baptized by sprinkling or if there is a reason baptism by immersion cannot be practiced, we are fine with practicing baptism by a different method.

One time there was a woman at the church I served who was dying of cancer. It was an amazing story of how she came to Christ. After becoming a Christian, she didn't have long to live. At the time, we baptized in a local lake. The doctor told her he didn't want her in the lake with a chemo port in her body. She asked if I could baptize her by sprinkling. I was happy to accommodate. We will not let those kinds of things tear us apart.

Another way we desire to hold to the plain truths of Scripture but allow charity on debatable matters of Scripture is the return of Christ. We clearly hold the clear truths. Jesus is coming back. He will raise our dead bodies and transform them into resurrection bodies. He will create a new heaven and a new earth where heaven and earth are combined as one and the dwelling place of God is with man. That is clear. In the last 2,000 years of history there are a number of different ways godly Christians have understood the return of Christ would unfold. There is the premillennial view, the amillennial view, and the postmillennial view. Great Christians who have a high degree of respect for the

Bible and the inerrancy of the Bible have disagreed on the fine details of these issues. We may be convinced one of the millennial positions is better or more Scripturally accurate than the others, but we will not divide from brothers and sisters in Christ over the debatable details about the return of Christ. The unity of Jesus' church is too precious to be torn apart over small debatable issues.

A good pastor works hard for God's approval.

[Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved... 2 Timothy 2:15 \(ESV\)](#)

Paul reminded Timothy that as a pastor, he was to do his best. It is the Greek word *spoudazo*. It means to give your maximum effort at something. It means to try your hardest. A good pastor is a hard worker. He is not lazy. The word means he is literally willing to work to the point of exhaustion.

This reminds me of my CrossFit class. As part of the class, there is always a section of the workout when the instructor gives us eight to twelve minutes of non-stop exercise without rest. That is the hardest part of the workout. There is two ways to handle it. One is to be lazy and go easy. Keep the heart rate low and easily make it to the end. The other is to work as hard as possible, pushing against the wall of exhaustion, not pushing yourself to the point of collapse but pushing yourself to the edge of it so you know you are giving your absolute best effort. This is the kind of effort Timothy was to put into his work as a pastor. A good pastor does not coast. A good pastor works hard. When a good pastor is tired, he doesn't throw in the towel but keeps pushing. He gives his best effort.

In most things in life, it is easy to give partial effort. A good pastor cannot be like that. A good pastor must be willing to work long hours. A good pastor must be willing to make himself available for people. The reason a pastor is to give his

best is because he is not working with trivial things. In one sense, people's lives hang in the balance. A pastor is presenting and living for the gospel. Why would a pastor do anything less than his absolute best when trumpeting the gospel message?

I was privileged to spend time around some of the best pastors in the country in my doctoral program. While all of them were gifted men, one thing characterized every pastor in the program. It was their drive. All of them were incredibly hard workers. Our first class was about the importance of balancing our desire to achieve with the rest of life because so many doctoral students work themselves half to death.

The reason a pastor works hard is not for the applause of the church. It is for the applause of God. Timothy was to be a workman approved by God. Ultimately, it doesn't matter what a church thinks of your life. What matters is what God thinks of your life. We want God's stamp of approval on the way we live. This is the way Paul lived his life and the way each of us are to live our lives.

...but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts. 1
Thessalonians 2:4 (ESV)

A good pastor rightly handles the Word of God.

...a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. 2
Timothy 2:15 (ESV)

Paul reminded Timothy that he was a craftsman. He was to do a good job in his work and not be ashamed of the product he produced, not to be ashamed of his craftsmanship. What was Timothy crafting? What was Timothy to be skilled in making? Timothy's job was to rightly handle the Word of God and faithfully

bring it to the people of God. He is to be a skilled craftsman of the word that does not do sloppy work in the Word.

When it says “rightly handling the word,” in Greek, that literally means to cut something straight. "Timothy, don't cut the Word of God crooked."

By trade, Paul was a tent maker. In those days, tents were made of animal skins. Animal skins are notorious for being misshapen. If you planned to sew them together, you had to slow down and carefully cut them straight. If you didn't cut them straight, when you sewed them together, your tent was crooked. You were ashamed of your workmanship.

Paul reminded Timothy to think of himself as a craftsman working in the Word of God. He needed to do the hard work of understanding the Word. He needed to do the hard work of understanding the people and then thinking, praying, and preparing teaching of the Word of God that built up the people of God. None of that can be thrown together. It takes hours of self-discipline, study, prayer and work. If you do a sloppy job, it will show.

Today, we have many people claiming to be Bible teachers. Many people don't know their Bible well and don't handle it well. They do Bible work that they should be ashamed of because they don't cut straight. At the end of the day, when they stand before God, they will be ashamed of their lives' work because they were poor craftsman of the Word of God. They misrepresented the Word of God.

What are some examples of this? Even in the conservative biblical camp, there are some that play



fast and loose with the Bible by using verses out of context. That way they make God say things God never said. One of my favorite illustrations of this is the way people misuse Bible Jeremiah 29:11 by putting it on calendars, greeting cards, and wall art.

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Jeremiah 29:11 (ESV)

That verse sounds incredibly encouraging. The problem is that it was not written to all people for all time. It was written to ancient Israel when the Israelites were in exile in the land of Babylon for 70 years. Unless you are a Jew living in Babylonian exile around 600 B.C., this verse was not written to you. Does God love us? Yes! Does God forgive us through Jesus and have great plans in eternity for us through Jesus? Yes. Be careful about claiming this verse as God's direct word to your life. It isn't. Using this verse out of context is not cutting the Word of God straight.

Maybe you are familiar with the prosperity gospel. Let me give you the prosperity gospel's definition of faith.

Faith is a powerful personal force that enables you to express supernatural energy that overcomes all restrictions and creates the world that you want.

Prosperity preachers claim faith enables us to create the world we want --- a world of health, wealth, prosperity, and success. That strange definition of faith comes from the word of faith movement, not the Bible. It is espoused by people like Benny Hinn, Joyce Meyer, Kenneth Kopeland, and Robert Tilton. They are not cutting the Word of God straight. There is no place in the Bible that says our faith allows us to create the world we want. There is not a place in the Bible that says if the world is not the way we want it is because we don't have enough faith

to make it that way. When they use the Bible to support that point, they misrepresent Bible passages.

Jesus didn't say that if we just have enough faith, we can create the world we want. He said,

...In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.
John 16:33 (NIV)

Trouble is not something any of us want but it is something Jesus promises we will have. The good news is that in our troubles we have Jesus who has overcome the world. Jesus is bigger than our troubles.

Joel Osteen is another example of someone who doesn't cut the Word of God straight. In his book Your Best Life Now, he says, "If you develop an image of success, health, abundance, joy, peace, and happiness, nothing on earth will be able to hold those things from you." He says, "Anyone can create by faith and words the dreams he desires. Health, wealth, happiness, and success."

He also says, "God wants to make your life easier. He wants to assist you, to promote you, to give you advantages. He wants you to have preferential treatment. We get what we want from God by our faith-filled words."

He claims God gives him priority seating in restaurants and the best parking spots at malls because of his faith. In the book, he says to his son, "You watch Daddy. I'm going to get a front-row parking spot. I can just feel it. I've got the favor of God all over me."

He claims the reasons the Israelites wandered in the wilderness was because of their lack of faith *and their lack of self-esteem*.

God promised Abraham and Sarah a son. Joel claims the only reason Sarah didn't conceive Isaac until she was old was because she didn't have enough faith in her heart so she could conceive him in her body.

Where do these strange teachings come from? Joel is not cutting the Word of God straight for the people of God. Jesus didn't say that if you develop an image of success, you can create the world you desire. This is what he said:

Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. Luke 12:33 (ESV)

Look what Paul said to Timothy about this prosperity gospel.

Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted... 2 Timothy 3:12 (ESV)

So a good pastor cuts the Word of God straight. He does not try to make it say what people want to hear but instead lets people know what it actually says.

A good pastor doesn't waste time in pointless talk and cultural hobby horses.

But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene. 2 Timothy 2:16-17a (ESV)

What is irreverent babble? Some translations, like the NIV translate this as godless chatter. It means empty-headed talk. It is talk that has no spiritual benefit. This is talk that does not build up the church or lead people toward salvation. Have you been around pastors that waste their time in godless chatter? They have cultural hobby horses they like to ride instead of talking about Jesus. Pastors are supposed to use their words to build people up in Christ. They are to be reaching people with Jesus. Some pastors, instead of talking about Jesus and things of eternal value, they waste their words on temporal things like

politics. Instead of talking about Jesus, they spent their time promoting gay rights. Instead of talking about Jesus, they spend their time talking about the border wall and immigration policy.

I am not saying those are unimportant topics, but what people need to hear more than your political position is about Jesus. They need to be built up in Jesus. Jesus is the only one who will save a life. Jesus is the only one who can change a life, not politics, not the Green New Deal. It is not that who is in the White House is unimportant but that Jesus is far more important. There is a shortage of people speaking the life-changing truth about him and an overabundance of people speaking about everything else. Pastors shouldn't waste their time and effort on empty chatter. They should focus their words on Jesus because he is far more important.

A hundred years from now nobody will care what political party you voted for. All that will matter is your relationship to Jesus. He will either be your judge or your savior. Stop wasting your time talking to people about everything else instead of him!

If pastors give themselves to pointless chatter, what does Paul say will happen to their churches? The people will become more and more ungodly. The people in your church will not become more woke. They will not become more hip. They will not become more culturally relevant. They will become more divisive and divided.

That just makes sense. We are in a super busy world. Life consumes all of our time. One of the few oases in the week is Sunday. Most of us come to

church and we are malnourished in Jesus. We haven't had time to be fed from God's Word during the week. We come on Sunday and desperately need to be refreshed by Jesus. If people come to church and end up with a sermon filled with godless chatter, no wonder they drift away from Jesus.

Paul said pastors given to godless chatter instead of Jesus don't just spiritually malnourish their people but the division they spread among the people will spread like gangrene. When the blood supply is cut off to a limb of the body, gangrene can set in. It spreads quickly and results in the amputation of a limb if not stopped. That is a scary future for a church pastored by a pastor given to godless chatter.

What is a bad pastor?

Paul then taught Timothy about bad pastors by showing him an example of what one looks like and how they work to destroy the church.

...among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some. 2 Timothy 2:17–18 (ESV)

We have seen Hymenaeus before, in 1 Timothy.

...holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme. 1 Timothy 1:19–20 (ESV)

This guy went haywire and Paul personally kicked him out of the church in Ephesus. He rejected the teachings of Paul about Jesus, which is not a good thing to do. Hymenaeus left the church, but he didn't leave town. Apparently, he went down the road and set up shop. He was able to get some help and join

forces with another guy named Philetus. These guys were the dynamic duo of evil in Ephesus.

A bad pastor strays from the trustworthy word as taught by the apostles.

Not much explanation is needed on this point. As we have already seen, Timothy was to stick to Paul's gospel because it came from Jesus. Hymenaeus and Philetus wanted to teach something different. They didn't care to follow the words of Jesus. They wanted to get creative and make up the truth. That is the hallmark of false teachers. They move away from the trustworthy word.

A bad pastor teaches people can have their best life now.

What were these guys teaching? They were teaching the resurrection already happened. One of the core truths of our Christian faith is that when we trust in Jesus, we are not just made into new people on the inside of our lives, as Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:17, but we look forward to a future that keeps getting better and better. When we die, our bodies go in the grave but our spirits go home to be with Jesus. Paul described that moment as better by far when we close our eyes for the final time in this life and open our eyes to be with Jesus in the next one. Later life gets even better. One day Jesus will return. When he does, he will resurrect our dead bodies from the grave and transform them into resurrection bodies that are just like his resurrection body. These will be bodies that are healed of sickness. They will be bodies that have no more weakness. They will be bodies that are known for their ability, not their weakness. Life will eventually get better again when Jesus ultimately creates a new heaven and earth. He will combine heaven and earth together, and we will live with Jesus in

our resurrection bodies in the new heavens and earth. That is the future we look forward to experiencing.

Hymenaeus and Philetus were not teaching this clear biblical truth. They were claiming the resurrection already took place. Come to their church and have your resurrection bodies and your resurrection life now. If you are sick, come to their church and you will be healed. If you are poor, come to their church and you will be rich. You can have the resurrection life now. What were Hymanaeus and Philetus teaching? An ancient version of the health, wealth, and prosperity gospel. Remember the title of Joel Osteen's book, Have Your Best Life Now. That is what they were teaching. They were not cutting the Word straight. In a grab for popularity and power, they were telling people that at their church, they could have a blessed life, free from all problems now.

The truth is that in this world we will have trouble, just like Jesus faced trouble. Just as Jesus received his reward in the next life, we will receive our reward for how we live in the next life. It is in the next life at the return of Christ when we get our resurrection bodies, not in this life.

A bad pastor destroys people's faith.

As a result of these goofballs, Paul said they are upsetting the faith of some. That literally means overturning the faith of some. Some people were walking away from Jesus because of these bad teachers. How were these people ruining people's faith? Think how this works. You go to Hymanaeus' and Philetus' church and are told you can have your resurrection body now. The problem is you are sick. You go to their church but you don't end up healed. After

a while, you are frustrated and believe the gospel is a lie because you were not healed of sickness. The reason you weren't healed of sickness is because God never promised to heal us of all our sickness in this life. That is how these guys were ruining people's faith. Nothing has changed. Health, wealth, and prosperity teachers are destroying the faith of people the same way today.

Put yourself in Timothy's shoes. The future didn't look bright. The Romans were capturing and executing Christians. The church didn't respect him because he was too young. There was a mass defection of Christians away from Paul in all of Asia. Now we learn there were false teachers in town that came from his own church. They were kicked out of the church by Paul but set up a church down the road and were sucking people away by the lie of the health, wealth, and prosperity gospel. What was Timothy to do? What are we to do as false teachers fill the Internet, saturate our bookstores, and deceive our friends and neighbors? Paul gave Timothy, and us, two ways to respond to these bad pastors.

How is a Christian to survive in a world filled with bad pastors who don't teach the truth?

But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity." 2 Timothy 2:19 (ESV)

In this closing verse, Paul quoted from Numbers 16. Some of you may remember the scene. It was Korah's rebellion against Moses. Korah was the original false teacher that grew up inside God's people and then tried to lead God's people astray. Just as Hymanaeus wasn't working alone, Korah also had friends behind him --- 250 chiefs of the congregation that were well-known men

stood with Korah against Moses. It is a bad day when 250 people become false teachers and try to bump you off. What did Paul say we can learn from Moses and Korah about handling false teachers among us?

God protects his elect from a false teacher's deception.

At the time of Korah's rebellion, Moses said, "The Lord will show those who are his." Paul roughly paraphrased that by saying, "The Lord knows those who are his." Nobody was fooling God. God knew who were his and who were the false teachers trying to lead people astray. That is the doctrine of election. God knows who he has chosen, and false teachers will not be able to deceive them and tear them away. Take comfort in the fact that God will not allow his elect to be deceived by a false teacher into apostasy. Just as God drew his people near to him in Korah's rebellion against Moses, God drew his elect to him in Ephesus so they were not deceived by Hymanaeus and Philetus' false teaching. The same is true today. Take comfort in the fact that God will protect his elect from the deception of false teachers and will enable them to see the truth about false teachers.

Jesus talked about this in John 10 when he said, "My sheep hear my voice and they follow me.... *No one can snatch them out of my hand...* My Father has given them to me. *No one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hand.*"

Identify false teachers and distance ourselves from them.

In Numbers 16, Moses told God's people to distance themselves from Korah and his followers. Get away from false teachers. If you know the story of Korah, you know what happened after God's people distanced themselves from

Korah and his followers. The earth opened up and swallowed Korah and all his followers alive. That was the end of that rebellion. One of the reasons we distance ourselves from false teachers is to show there is a clear difference between what they claim and what we believe. Another reason we distance ourselves from false teachers is because when God's judgment falls on them, we do not want to be standing next to them. It is not our job to destroy or expose false teachers. That is God's job. Our job is to simply identify them, explain why they are false teachers, and to separate ourselves from them.

That is what I did this morning with some of the prominent prosperity preachers of our day such as Benny Hinn, Joel Osteen, Joyce Meyers, Robert Tilton and other. We don't need to fight them. We need to identify them, explain what is wrong with their teaching, separate ourselves from them and let God take care of the rest. We just focus on knowing, following, and honoring Jesus.



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