

The sermon

Intro

There's a term used in America to refer to people who've left the evangelical church: exvangelical. Some opt for progressive "Christianity." A departure from Jesus' gospel/the apostles' doctrine by redefining the faith in ways that disagree with Jesus. Others become agnostic. I can't be certain about God. I can't even be certain God can be known. Others become atheists. There is no God.

The Bible calls this falling away. Paul calls this failure to endure. Denying Christ. Being faithless. Swerving from the truth.

The reasons given for departure vary: the church's failure to embrace evolution, a shift in political views, the church's stance on LGBT issues, the church's stance on women, bad experiences in the church, abuse, domineering pastors, trouble with the church's doctrines, trouble with God's actions in the Bible.

Could the reasons also include a desire to fit in? No one wants to be told they're unloving. No one wants to lose friends. No one wants to be called a bigot. No one wants to make people sad. No one wants to make people angry. When put on the spot, we might be hesitant to straight up tell people their sexual behavior is sin. Declare Jesus is the only way to heaven. Challenge their belief that they're a good person.

Could the reasons also include a desire to do life our own way? I want to do what my co-workers are doing. I want to gratify my desires. So I either need to revise my faith or discard it altogether.

People swerve from the truth. It happened in Paul's day. It's happening in America today. Paul tells us how to respond.

READ PASSAGE

Body

Point 1: Counter word quarrels with gospel reminders (2:14)

Remind them of these things, and charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers. – 2:14

“them” = the Ephesian church. Timothy has a duty to his congregation.

“these things” would include the trustworthy saying:

If we have 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. – **2:11-13**

And things like Jesus' death, resurrection, the defeat of death, and immortality (1:10; 2:8). Gospel truths.

Correct error with gospel truth!

Why shouldn't the church ***“quarrel about words”***?

Two problems. **First**, it ***“does no good.”*** People aren't being helped. **Second**, it ***“only ruins the hearers.”*** People are being harmed.

What is meant by ***“quarrel about words”***?

Let's first understand the situation.

1. Timothy's congregation is partaking in word quarrels (***“charge them”***).

2. Someone is pressing the matter = false teachers (Hymenaeus and Philetus – 2:17).
3. These word quarrels are anti-truth.

That's why gospel reminders are necessary.

Lies are being spread through these word quarrels. That's why hearers are being ruined.

So false teachers are talking about words to church people. What's being said is untrue and anti-gospel. The discussions are spreading lies. These discussions are creating quarreling/arguing. The church is in danger.

The congregation needs to avoid discussion because these lies don't deserve a hearing! These aren't the discussions that should be happening in a Christian church!

What might it look like in our day?

Some folks leave the church because they can't stomach the gospel that Jesus actually taught. But they want to keep religion. But they don't want Jesus' religion. So they redefine some words. Salvation isn't Jesus dying in my place, forgiveness of sins, and being given a new heart. No, salvation is liberation from oppressive, tyrannical rulers; a just society (i.e., liberation theology). Jesus was a good moral teacher, anarchist, social justice warrior, etc. Not the eternal Son of God, born of a virgin who lived a sinless life and died on the cross for sinners.

They spread these redefined words to church people. Church people buy into these redefined words. These redefined words enter the church. Arguments ensue in the church. Pro-gospel people reject the new definitions. Receptive people press the new definitions on the church.

No one is helped by these new definitions. But many are harmed. People swerve from the faith. Jesus is rejected for a lie.

Paul says counter lies with gospel reminders. Paul says get these redefined words out of the church. Take a stand. Draw the line. Rescue the people from ruin.

Paul isn't saying don't discuss the meaning of faith, repentance, justification, salvation. Getting these words right is critical! He's saying don't get sucked in by the false teachers. Don't be an agent of Satan's lies. Don't ruin the church by arguing for lies!

Paul isn't saying we can never talk with false teachers. If a Jehovah's Witness comes to your door, slam it in their face. Next week we'll see Paul counseling Timothy on how to talk with false teachers.

The point is don't let the Christian church become a place where lies are being spread, quarrels are happening, and people are being ruined by lies.

Practical question: Am I on guard against false teachers who are redefining the faith?

Point 2: Want the word handled well (2:15)

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. – 2:15

This is counsel directed at the Senior Pastor. The elder. The Sunday school teacher. The small group leader. The women's Bible study leader.

Congregation, this is what you should demand from those who teach you.

I want to draw your attention to **four words**: approved, worker, ashamed, handling.

“approved”

Approved on the basis of testing. Judged positively by God. God’s evaluating Timothy’s teaching! The rest of the verse spells out what an approved teacher looks like.

“a worker”

Someone who engages in physical labor. Used of vineyard workers (Matt 20:1), silversmiths (Acts 19:25), field mowers (Jas 5:4). A teacher who works hard. Straining for a good product. Maximum effort.

“ashamed”

No reason to be ashamed of his teaching/preaching. Maybe you’ve seen someone repair a roof or install a bathtub and you’ve said to yourself, they should be ashamed of their work.

“handling”

The word translated **“rightly handling”** was used for cutting a straight path/road through a difficult terrain. Like a forest area. On my way to Augusta I see a path cut through what used to be rocky mountains.

The idea is the teacher is supposed to guide the Scriptures along a straight path, hold to a straight path = teach accurately, correctly. Not go in a direction other than what the Scripture being taught intends. To not swerve from the truth (2:18).

Putting these together, the approved teacher works hard, putting in maximum effort. They have no reason to be ashamed of the product they present to God’s people. They stick to the path the Scripture has set for them. They don’t make it up. They don’t go in a different direction. They don’t revise it.

Note they handle the Scripture. Teachers can fail by mishandling a Bible passage. Getting it wrong. Going in a direction other than what God intended. Teachers can also fail to handle the words that are there. The Bible isn’t a springboard to the preacher’s own thoughts. Teachers, we protect ourselves by carefully staying on point and following the path the Scriptures have laid out for us.

That’s why I go step by step through the words of the passage. I let the words of Scripture set the direction and shape of the sermon. I let the Scripture shape how we’re supposed to think and feel and respond.

Caution

A word of caution. Teachers in the church will be at different levels. One person puts in maximum effort. Another does the same. But the product isn’t identical.

There’s a variety of factors that go into this. A theological education helps. Greek and Hebrew classes help. If your father was a pastor and you sat through rightly handled sermons for years, this helps. If you had a pastor meet with you one-on-one and coach you through how to write a lesson from scratch, that helps. If you were given opportunity to teach and were given helpful feedback, that helps. If you were guided to the best resources, that helps.

What I’m saying is someone could do their best and have room for improvement for a variety of factors.

Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. – 1 Timothy 4:15

“these things” = public reading of Scripture, exhortation, teaching. Teachers should be making progress. Rightly handling is a process. Through opportunity, feedback, being guided to good resources, and exposure to right handling, we make progress.

What about the congregation?

Be Bereans.

Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. – Acts 17:11

A mature congregation is open to learning new things. A mature congregation doesn't automatically accept the things they hear. A mature congregation asks questions. A mature congregation measures what they're hearing against the Scriptures. A mature congregation is learning.

I should be okay with questions. I should measure my answers with Scripture. I should give people time to wrestle with truth. You might be afraid you'll irritate me if you ask me a question. I might be afraid I'll irritate you with my response. Better is, when you ask a question, it's opportunity for me to learn. And questions = opportunity to learn. Opportunity to turn to God's word for answers. A good thing!

We shouldn't be afraid of the Bible. We should want the Bible. We should want it rightly handled.

Practical question: Do I want the Bible rightly handled? Can I tell when the Bible isn't being rightly handled?

Point 3: Avoid godless empty talk (2:16-18)

But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, – 2:16

“irreverent babble” is godless empty talk. The thoughts of fallen men with zero substance. This *“babble”* guides people in the wrong direction: *“into more and more ungodliness.”*

False teachers are promoting empty ideas (no substance), God's left out of the picture, and sin is being promoted. This talk has no place in the church.

and their talk will spread like gangrene. – 2:17

If left unaddressed, things will only get worse.

“gangrene” = a disease involving severe inflammation which, if not addressed, results in the spread of ulcers (possibly cancerous) which eat away at the flesh and bones.

“irreverent babble” is like a spreading disease that will only get worse if left unchecked. Like cancer must be stopped lest the spread be disastrous, false teaching must be stopped lest the whole church be infected. Serious measures are required!

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

Two false teachers are listed by name. Hymenaeus was mentioned in 1 Timothy 1:20. Hymenaeus had rejected faith and good conscience, resulting in a shipwreck of his faith and him being removed from the church (1 Tim 1:19-20) = church discipline = judged by the church to be a non-Christian because of his refusal to repent (Matt 18:15-17).

One thing they were saying was that the resurrection had already happened = the resurrection of believers at the return of Christ. This is it. No new heavens and new earth. No immortal bodies. No end of death.

Hymenaeus was removed, but he was still infecting the church. Have you ever seen people's faith upset by lies?

People in the church swerving from the truth raises a question.

Can a true Christian fall away?

Three truths:

1. Some fall away from the faith (1 Timothy 4:1).
2. Believers cannot lose eternal life once it's theirs (John 10:27-29; Romans 8:30).

"I give them eternal life, and they will never perish" – **John 10:28**

3. Those who fall away won't experience salvation (Matthew 24:9-13; Hebrews 6:4-6, 8).

"But the one who endures to the end will be saved." – **Matthew 24:13**

Two deductions:

1. Genuine believers, born again people, can't fall away.
2. Those who fall away were never born again. They never had saving faith (1 John 2:19). Jesus never knew them relationally (Matt 7:23).

We have both divine sovereignty (God's keeping power = the preservation of the saints) and human responsibility (perseverance of the saints = continue, endure, persevere).

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. – **1 Peter 1:3-5**

Those who are born again have an imperishable inheritance = kingdom of God/new heavens and new earth. It can't decay. It can't die. It's indestructible.

God's power is guarding us through faith means the Holy Spirit is strengthening our faith so we don't turn away from Jesus. That's preservation of the saints.

So we endure with confidence in God's keeping power. We endure because God is strengthening our faith. We endure because God is working his good pleasure in us (Phil 2:13). We endure because God will complete the work he begins in us (Phil 1:6).

Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. ¹³ But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴ For we share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. – **Hebrews 3:12-14**

It's possible unbelief is present in the Christian church. So the Hebrews author encourages ongoing faith. What's the proof that I presently share in Christ? The proof is my continuing firm in my confidence in Christ. In other words, continuing in faith. I can be confident I share in Christ because I am presently trusting in Jesus. Continuing in the faith. That's the perseverance of the saints. In obedience I continue, trusting in God's keeping power.

False teachers help people swerve from the truth. False teachers upset our faith. So they must be rejected and silenced with gospel truth.

Practical question: Am I rejecting godless empty talk?

Conclusion

This morning we've learned about false teachers who creep into the church. They redefine words. They have zero substance. They promote sin. They don't help. They harm.

On the other hand, God's teacher/preacher handles the word with maximum effort so they won't swerve from the truth and be ashamed. We need God's word, not man's ideas. We need to get the gospel right!

What do I mean by gospel? The good news of rescue from sin through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." – **John 3:16**

God furnished proof of Jesus' promises by raising Jesus from the dead. The Christian faith isn't a baseless, empty talk religion!

God actually revealed the future. Jesus actually did miracles. Jesus actually rose from the dead. God actually gives sinners new hearts.

Jesus rescues believers today. Forgiving sin. Giving us new hearts with new desires.

Jesus will rescue believers in the future. When he comes to judge the living and the dead and grant his people immortal bodies that can't die or decay.

Turn from your sins by trusting in Jesus' death and resurrection. Tell us if you do.

Christian, reject false teachers by reminding yourself of God's word. Long for and pray for right handling of the Scriptures. Keep trusting. Continue.