

The sermon

Intro

When a Jehovah's Witness comes to your door, what do you do? When you have a Mormon friend who invites you to their gathering, what do you do? When a family member is deconstructing their faith and is encouraging you to read some book that swerves from Jesus' gospel, what do you do?

Paul counsels us how to engage these opportunities. Yes, I said opportunities. What fruit might emerge if each one of us speaks into gospel controversies?

READ PASSAGE

Body

Point 1: Ignore controversies based on stupid speculations (2:23)

Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. – 2:23

What I want to make clear is that it's okay for you, Christian, to enter into controversies. It's okay for you to talk to a Jehovah's Witness about the deity of Christ. It's okay for you to state the biblical perspective on gender. It's okay for you to offer correction when people say "I like to think of God this way."

Paul isn't saying we can't enter controversies. Paul's saying avoid a specific type of controversy.

Note the words "*foolish*" and "*ignorant*."

"foolish" = stupid, dumb, senseless, useless, nonsense. The Greek word *móros* from which we get moron. Jesus spoke of "*a foolish man who built his house on the sand*" (Matt 7:26) = the person who fails to do Jesus' words (Matt 7:24). Jesus called the scribes and Pharisees "*blind fools*" (Matt 23:17) because they came up with clever oath schemes to get out of keeping their word. Jesus told a parable about five foolish virgins (Matt 25:2-3, 8). The fool is the person who isn't ready for Jesus' 2nd coming.

"ignorant" = uneducated, uninstructed = uninformed speculations that are silly, stupid.

Some controversies are just plain stupid. Entering these debates creates "*quarrels*" = used literally of physical combat and figuratively of heated, intense verbal sparring.

"have nothing to do with" is directed at Timothy. The idea is the Sunday morning sermon, Sunday school, etc. aren't the place for debating stupid speculations. Introducing the church to stupid speculations will only create heated arguments in the church.

Examples?

Things that come to mind include flat earth, no one actually landed on the moon. Imagine a church where the preacher was using the sermon to talk about this stuff instead of God's word.

Others might include scholars arguing that David's stone hit Goliath in the knee, not the head. People saying Christmas trees are idolatrous because on Jeremiah 10:1-5. The issue wasn't decorating trees. The issue was turning trees into idols.

It's easy to see how the conversation would descend to hostile speech. Someone truly believes some silly belief with all their heart. Another mockingly looks down on such absurdities. A recipe ripe for conflict.

Recap

To recap, avoid turning our services into debates about stupid speculations. But we're not forbidden from entering into controversy altogether.

Practical question: Am I arguing for stupid speculations?

Point 2: People are captured by Satan's lies (2:25-26)

Before discussing how to respond to false teachers, I want to examine the spiritual state of these false teachers.

God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, – 2:25

Timothy's opponents don't have repentance. They don't have *"a knowledge of the truth."* They're non-Christians.

and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, – 2:26

"come to their senses" = regain a proper state of mind. The verb was associated with drunkenness. Alcohol impairs the senses. When the alcohol wears off, they regain ability to function properly. Likewise, when a person escapes Satan's snare, they're able to see life as they ought to.

"snare" = a trap used to catch animals. Rope to catch a bird's feet. A net to capture a deer. Once my Dad had a beaver problem. He lived on a pond where beaver dams were blocking the stream. Water levels were raising. There was concern the piers would be under water and beaches would be lost. So my Dad got a metal spring trap. Once caught a 54 pounder.

Timothy's opponents are trapped by Satan. They're in a cage and they're powerless to escape. Stuck, helpless. Can't spring themselves free. An outside force is going to have to release them. Their only hope is God granting repentance. The result of being caged isn't physical death, injury, bleeding, starvation. It's they're not in their right mind. They can't see. They're live-trapped.

after being captured by him to do his will.

Timothy's opponents are trapped *"to do his will"* = Satan. In this case, Satan's purposes for entrapment are:

1. To sow lies among church people.
2. To create division within the church through these lies.
3. To distract the church by getting the focus on stupid speculations.
4. To use these lies to get church people to swerve from the truth.

That's Satan strategy in Ephesus.

Application

Everyone born into the world has been blinded by Satan.

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴ In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. – 2 Corinthians 4:3-4

Veiled means they can't see. Perishing means they're the living dead. Death-like existence. Spiritual bondage. They don't see the triumph of the cross and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. They don't see their need.

"has blinded" indicates a past event. When did Satan blind the mind of every unbeliever in the world? When he provoked the fall. After Adam ate of the forbidden tree, sin came into the world. Adam and Eve became sinners. And every human

born into the world after them came into the world with a sinful nature. From the womb, every one of us is entrapped by Satan and unable to see.

Everyone is blinded generally. Some are blinded specifically (i.e., these false teachers). They've been blinded to believe stupid speculations. They've been blinded to believe the resurrection of believers had already happened (2 Tim 2:18).

Blindness manifests itself in a variety of ways. Some unbelievers are blinded by Satan unto particular lies for specific purposes.

Practical question: Do I have compassion for entrapped, blinded people?

Point 3: Speak into controversies well (2:24-26)

And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, ²⁵ correcting his opponents with gentleness. – 2:24-25

“the Lord’s servant” = Timothy. I’m not limiting the instruction to pastor/elders. You might have a co-worker or someone you play pickleball with who’s captured by lies. They might be evangelizing you. Here’s how you respond.

Five characteristics for dealing with false teachers and their followers:

1. “must not be quarrelsome”

We can correct, but we can’t quarrel. Where do we draw the line?

“quarrelsome” = a heated dispute without the use of weapons. A war of words. Intense word battles.

So heated, angry, out of control, shouting matches are what we avoid. We need the self-control to speak without getting heated and hostile. Angry, hostile debate isn’t going to win anyone to Christ. But it might incite hatred and violence.

2. “but kind to everyone”

“kind” = kind in terms of gentle, mild, calm. Not hostile. Not inciting rage. Respectful speech.

The goal isn’t to make someone angry. The goal is to be winsome. To help someone see the error of their way so that they embrace Jesus.

Paul’s after our manner of conversation. We can accuse, belittle, incriminate, insult, mock, presume motives, scoff, shame. Or we can ask respectful questions to draw out where they’re really at.

Kind, calm, gentle speech might be winsome in our hostile American culture where people routinely use words to incriminate and shame rather than persuade. Disarm people with calm conversation that isn’t accusing.

Not being nasty encourages people to ask us questions!

3. “able to teach”

“able to teach” = an elder requirement. The ability to teach a body of believers when the church is gathered.

So, technically, this is specific to Timothy. The teaching gift is granted to some believers, not all believers. On the other hand, every believer is supposed to teach in a more restricted sense. Fathers teach their children. Mothers teach their children. Older women teach younger women about self-control, purity, kindness, etc. (Titus 2:3-5). Romans 15:14 speaks of church people instructing or warning/admonishing one another.

Every believer is responsible to evangelize.

Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. ⁶ Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person. – Colossians 4:5-6

This was directed to the body, not the elders. People will ask questions. We speak answers.

but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, – 1 Peter 3:15

Likewise, Peter's writing to God's people in general, not leaders. Likewise, Peter endorses gentleness and respect. Likewise, Peter assumes questions will come out way. Likewise, Peter sees questions as opportunity to speak truth.

Questions = opportunity. Accusations against the Christian faith = opportunity. Insults = opportunity. In order to be making new disciples, we need to seize speaking opportunities!

4. *“patiently enduring evil”*

We're tolerant. We endure hostility without resenting the person.

If people deal with us in condescending mockery, if people incriminate and shame us for our Christian beliefs, if people up the hostility in their rhetoric, we bear with them. We don't respond in kind. We don't return evil for evil.

I think believing what Paul says about the sinner's condition is helpful here. If we truly believe the person has been ensnared by Satan and captured by Satan to do Satan's will, there should be a sadness in our heart. We should look on that person with pity like Jesus looked on us with pity. That's part of what moved him to die our place. He pitied our miserable condition.

This passage encourages me to view the non-Christian as a victim, not my enemy.

5. *“correcting his opponents with gentleness”*

“correcting” = correction for another's benefit. The verb's used of God's discipline of believers (1 Cor 11:32; Heb 12:6, 10), a father's discipline of their son (Heb 12:7), and church discipline of a believer (1 Tim 1:20).

The idea is verbal correction with the intent to move them from error and folly to repentance and wisdom. Sobering them up to spiritual realities.

“gentleness” = courteous, considerate in the sense of being mild. Not dealing with others in a harsh way. Not using anger and intimidation to get the desired result.

Recent example

Recently, I had the opportunity to engage in this sort of discussion.

Questions included, why do Christians hate gay people? How can people be born again and so hateful? Comments were made with the gist of we can't truly know who God is.

I used this opportunity to explain gospel doctrines like the fall, sin, the human heart, the new birth, sanctification, the Bible (God communicates), and the fact that God wants us to have certainty.

Questions are opportunities to speak truth. Their misunderstanding is opportunity for correction. We can talk with people who disagree without getting defensive or nasty.

Why do we speak?

To rescue people from Satan's entrapment. Not that I rescue people. God does the rescuing. It's just that God saves sinners with his word. And God uses us to speak his word.

"God may perhaps grant them repentance." I don't know what the outcome will be. I'm not in control of the outcome. I'm simply a tool in God's hands. Repentance is God's to grant. I can't grant repentance. I can't save anyone.

What's my part? I ask God for opportunities to speak. I'm alert to opportunities that arise. When an opportunity arises, I ask for God's help in the moment. I answer questions and correct wrong statements, bringing the gospel into the conversation. I ask for God to help me handle myself in a winsome way that's pleasing to him. I attempt to conduct myself in a respectful manner. I pray for God to grant repentance.

"perhaps" means there's a possibility, but no certainty that God will grant repentance to Timothy's snared audience. When I'm evangelizing, I don't know if God will grant the person repentance. God may or may not grant repentance. It's his decision. But I seek to play my part and pray for God's mercy. I don't know who God will grant repentance to. It's not for me to find out. I simply seek to honor God by speaking truth in a godly manner.

What if this is hard?

If this a challenge for you, don't be discouraged. Timothy was fearful and ashamed.

Christian, God has given you a spirit of *"power and love and self-control"* (2 Tim 1:7), not just Timothy. God gives courage and love and compassion and knowledge so we can speak well for him. In our strength, we're not able. With God's empowerment, the unable are made able. Seek Christ for strength.

I've gone about this the wrong way in multiple ways. Overly aggressive. Not reading the room. Trying to win an argument rather than moving a person towards Christ. Keeping my mouth shut. Assuming no one's ever going to repent so why bother.

Speak. Speak respectfully. Perhaps God will grant repentance.

Practical question: Am I looking for opportunities to speak the gospel to sinners?

Conclusion

Maybe you wouldn't consider yourself a Christian. Three questions you might have.

First, what is repentance? Repentance is turning in the opposite direction, a change of mind about God and sin. Turning from doing life your own way. Turning to Jesus. Trusting in Jesus. Learning from Jesus. Following Jesus' commands.

Second, who is Satan? An evil spiritual being, a fallen angel, who rebelled against God and provoked the first two humans to reject God.

Third, am I captured by Satan? If you were born into this world by humans, then yes. You are captured by Satan. We humans have a sinful nature. So we have selfishness, greed, envy, abusive words, violence, divorce, rape, school shootings, etc. You didn't need to do anything to get captured. You were born captured. The question is, do you see your need to escape? Do you want to come to a knowledge of the truth?

On the cross, God the Father treated God the Son (Jesus) as if he lived your sinful life. If you trust in Jesus, God will treat you as if you lived Jesus' perfect, sinless life.

This same Jesus rose from the dead. Vindicating his claims. Proving he has authority to forgive sin and give eternal life.

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

Christian, avoid stupid speculations. Have mercy on those captured by Satan's lies. Speak into controversies well.