

It's not 'common practice' to lead with the punch-line of a sermon, but I reckon that's going to be best way for us to make a start today.

There's a lot going on in this passage, and there's a bunch of thoughts running through it, which would make it so easy to wander off onto a bunch of different tangents, but the key thought that ties all of these concepts together, is

**V<sup>15</sup> 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.**

And, we're going to spend more time on this one verse than most of the others, because we really need to nail down what this central point is, and then the rest will all just fit with it.

When a person preaches/teach in the church, it's actually quite tempting, to go for a message that's going to get the approval of men... (we all like to be liked, and not many of us want to make others uncomfortable, and we don't want to be disagreeable).

And so the temptation for any preacher on any given day, might look a bit like this:

- a) to avoid topics that they know some in the congregation are going to disagree with; or
- b) to concentrate on pump-me-up feel-good messages that tells everyone how wonderful we are and how lucky God is to have us, and to shy away from messages that demand something of us – things like

- repentance
- commitment
- longsuffering; and

c) to tell you that God is going to bless you in all the ways that your flesh craves, and to steer away from the message we've been hearing for the last 2 weeks, that faithful Disciples of Jesus will suffer for their faith

Alright, the temptation is ever-present, to give a message that gets the approval of men...

That's not the way Jesus taught. I think of a time when Jesus had actually grown the first mega-church – 5000 men (plus women & children) at the feeding of the 5000. And then, very shortly after (John 6), He gives a hard teaching, and most of them up-&-leave. And in the very next scene, He's left with 12. And Jesus says to the 12 disciples, "Are you going to leave me too?" and Peter said, "Where else would we go? You've got the words of eternal life."

Alright, so when Jesus taught, He could take a megachurch, to a group of 12 (in one message) (and even one of them wasn't faithful). And that's what can happen when what we teach, meets with God's approval, and not the approval of men.

We do **not** preach for the approval of men, and we do not teach for the approval of men – we do it for the approval of God – He's the only one who counts.

**15 Do your best (persistent zeal) to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker {not a slacker – a worker} who has no need to be ashamed...**

Do you understand what that's saying??? If there are workers of the Gospel, who **are** approved by God, and have no need to be ashamed, do you realise that Paul's telling Timothy, "Make sure you're one of these, because there's also those who **should** be ashamed of themselves, because their teaching **doesn't** meet God's approval"...

And the dividing line between those who please God and those who don't, is this: The ones who are approved by God rightly handle the word of truth.

The Gospel is **the word of truth**. It's the Good News of Jesus Christ. It's what was taught by Jesus and the Apostles. So, where do we find **the word of truth** today? It continues to be the teaching of Jesus and the Apostles, and it's found in our Bibles.

And so, an approved worker today – one who need **not** be ashamed before the Almighty God, is someone who rightly handles the Scriptures... But, what does that mean? – to rightly handle? Well in the Greek, it literally means to "cut a straight road"...

*My, how farming has changed.*

*Once upon a time, it used to be quite an art to plough a straight line in the paddock. But now even the most unskilled*

*tractor drivers, provided they can engage the GPS, are able to plough a nice straight line.*

*When I used to be an instructor at the Ag College, I nearly always had beginner operators on the tractors. And I'd start them off with a nice straight line, and then I'd have to stay with them for a while, and give them a few pointers...*

*And then usually before I left them, I'd have to straighten up the row for them again. But then later in the day when I'd come back and give them their smoko/lunch, it would be quite common for it to be not too bad in the middle, but at the ends (Particularly if it was a tapered paddock), there'd be a great big whoopsie. And so, while they ate their lunch, I'd cut it straight again...*

*You see, particularly when it's a tapered end on a paddock, to keep it straight, you have to pick a point on the horizon, and focus on that, and keep the tractor heading straight towards it... But young fellas are easily distracted, and that's when they wander off. And at each pass of the paddock, it gets worse and worse and worse...*

And that's what I think of when I read this. To rightly handle the word of truth, is to cut a straight line... And if we get distracted from the simple straight-forward truth of God's word, we're going to drift further and further and further away from Godliness...

And so, my job today, is **not** to create a new meaning, or to try and explain God's word in a way that changes (**at all**) what Jesus and the Apostles meant when they said it...

My job, is to make known God’s Word – the word of truth, along with all of its challenges **and** all of its blessings... If I were to change **the word of truth**, what would we have to call it then? A changed word of truth, is a lie.

Alright, so that’s the main point, and all of these other thoughts revolve around this one key point: “Timothy, as the pastor of that church in Ephesus, make sure you rightly handle **the word of truth**.” And Paul **needs** to say this, because we can see that Timothy is confronted with false teachers, who believe some crazy stuff – they’re **not** handling **the word of truth** correctly, and Timothy has to deal with it.

And so, the first thing, is the necessity to maintain **right** doctrine. When all of the crazy stuff – twisted forms of the Gospel get trotted out, the one thing that is most needed in a church, is consistently good, sound, straight-forward biblical teaching. And that’s why Paul has just reminded Timothy of “**these things**” (stuff that he’s taught before)... “You stick to the truth, Timothy”... And we must too.

So, in the previous section, he’s been talking about persecutions – attacks on the church, from outside of the church. But when it comes to false teaching, the danger comes from inside the church.

*When I used to be in another church, (it was a large denomination). I was on a Synod discussion group. It was a group to discuss issues and theology within our denomination. And there were a few (very vocal) people, who were following*

*what they used to call “progressive” theology (arrogant & full of themselves). Basically it removed all supernatural presence and power of God, and it was more like humanistic philosophy... And these people would post the most heretical, unbiblical, statements... But they’d sort of post it in the form of a “thought bubble”...*

And this is immediately what I thought of when Paul said to Timothy, **avoid [shun] irreverent babble, [shun godless chatterboxes] for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness**

And that’s exactly what it does. When discussion groups start introducing a whole heap of godless thought-bubbles that are completely different to what Jesus and the Apostles taught, people just get led further and further and further away from godliness.

And he says: <sup>17</sup> **and their talk will spread like gangrene.**

Do you know what “gangrene” is? I think it’s when the circulation gets cut off from part of your body, and that part of your body dies off and starts to rot, and the rotting flesh spreads and spreads and spreads...

And **irreverent babble, [godless chatter]**, is like that in the church. More and more people are led into more and more ungodliness, and it spreads. And Paul illustrates this with 2 blokes who used to do this sort of thing in Ephesus (**Hymenaeus and Philetus**). They didn’t cut-a-straight-line – they swerved from the truth (in a big way)... They were saying that the resurrection has already happened... Now, we

don't know exactly what they were teaching, but it sounds like they were thinking of a spiritual resurrection (“We've already been raised with Christ”)...

A typical philosophical temptation, was to make it a thing of the mind and of the Spirit, and not of the body...

Whereas, Christians, we believe in the resurrection of the **body**. When Jesus Christ returns, you won't be a free or floating spirit – He will give you a body. A body that won't get sick and die – a body that won't wear out...

*During the week, Bruce and I were comparing our fused ankles. In the power of God, and with the wonders of modern medicine, we can both walk again, and we're not cripples. But there's some things we can't do. But at the resurrection, we're not going to have fused ankles anymore, so we won't embarrass our children when we try to run or go down a hill.*

But with their crazy-talk on the resurrection, they were upsetting the faith of some (upending)...

And that's what godless chatter/thought-bubbles do. They present a new idea, that's a whole load of rubbish. Some believe it, and their faith is upended. And some are just lost with the arguments that go to and fro, and “Oh, this isn't what I thought Christianity was supposed to be, and their faith gets up-ended too.”

But while false teaching is like rotting flesh that spreads, God's word stands. It's a firm foundation... **bearing this**

seal (this is the proof/mark): “The Lord knows those who are his,” (Isn’t that a comforting thought) and, “Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.”

Now, to understand what Paul is saying here, we need to go back to our Old Testament. He’s quoting Numbers 16:5.

Korah (descendant of Levi, and therefore one who was set apart to serve in the tabernacle), but he wanted more than that. So, along with a few other men, and joined by 250 of the leaders in Israel, they rose up before Moses, and said, “Moses, you’ve gone too far. All of Israel are holy. Why can’t we serve in the most important jobs in the Tabernacle? Moses, you and your mates are exalting yourselves – we should all get a go at this...”

Now, that was a bit of a problem, because God had given the instructions of who was to do what...

Numbers 16:4-5 (ESV)

<sup>4</sup> When Moses heard it, he fell on his face, <sup>5</sup> and he said to Korah and all his company, “In the morning the LORD will show who is his, and who is holy, and will bring him near to him. The one whom he chooses he will bring near to him.

And so there was a plan put in place, so God could show who were His... But Korah, Dathan and Abiram refused to show up.

And so Moses said, “Everyone, get away from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs, lest you be swept away with all their sins.”

<sup>28</sup> And Moses said, “Hereby you shall know that the LORD has sent me to do all these works, and that it has not been of my own accord. <sup>29</sup> If these men die as all men die, or if they are visited by the fate of all mankind, then the LORD has not sent me. <sup>30</sup> But if the LORD creates something new, and the ground opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into Sheol, then you shall know that these men have despised the LORD.”

And that’s what happened. The ground opened up and swallowed them and their tents and their families...

They wanted to introduce a new narrative – a new story. They wanted to cut their own crooked line, instead of sticking to God’s straight-down-the-line word.

God knows who are His. And it wasn’t Korah and his mates. And it’s not babblers of godless words who keep introducing godless teaching into the church. And just like Moses’ word to the congregation of Israel, was, get right away from those men, unless you get caught up in it, Paul’s word for Timothy and the church in Ephesus, is “Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.”

In other words, “get away from that crooked twisting of God’s word”. Have nothing to do with it. Shun those who teach these destructive things, otherwise others might get caught up in it too.

Now, how does this fit with our understanding of “the church”? If the church is our brothers and sisters of Christ, how does this fit with shunning them and cutting them off, and having nothing to do with them???

And to help us to understand this, Paul gives a picture of the church community, being wider than the actual church...

Alright, what **we** often think of as “a church”, is much wider than **the** church. It’s what I’m going to call “a church community”. It’s a whole bunch of people who meet together, but we’re not all at the same place with God.

- Some are truly God’s people (**the church**). They:
  - believe in Him;
  - trust in Him;
  - follow Him;
  - serve Him;
  - are being transformed by Him, as the Holy Spirit makes them more and more holy and Godly...
- Some of them are seekers, wanting to know “What’s this Christianity thing all about.”, and they come along to church to find out... And I do hope that each of you are inviting people to come to church as “seekers” – to

discover what this Christianity thing is about.

- Some who come are looking for answers, but aren't believers.
- Some are wanting to experience some kind of Spiritual experience, but they aren't committed to the one true God.
- Some aren't interested in God's beautiful truth – they want to have taught what they want to believe (for whatever reason)...

And so Paul gives an image of the church community being bigger than “the church” – it's a big house.

And in a house, there are vessels. Some for honourable use – made of gold and silver (think of your good cutlery and your good crockery)... And some for dishonourable use – made of wood and clay (think of the rubbish bin, or before there were toilets, think of the potty, or the proverbial dunny bucket)... Not a nice image, but that's really what he's talking about.

Now, some folk might get offended at this “Is this saying that because I'm not a true believer, I'm a bucket for the proverbial...”

But don't get offended, the great part of this illustration is this is the story that we've all lived. The contrast is between the honourable and the dishonourable – a contrast between holy and the unholy...

And at one time, none of us were holy – that is, until we became His.

And in Paul’s illustration here, there’s some great news:  
V<sup>21</sup> Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonourable, he will be a vessel for honourable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.

When we repent of our sin/wrong-doing/godless babble, our Lord takes us who once were dirty & dishonourable and He cleanses us and re-creates us...

And so Paul says to Timothy (who’s a young fella): <sup>22</sup> So flee youthful passions...

Now, when we think about “youthful passions”, we might think of it as “checking out the chicks” & “getting’ on the grog”, or “hooning on the streets”... And yes, those are youthful passions, but if we look at the context, and see what other advice Paul goes on to give Timothy here, I suspect the “youthful passions” (for Timothy) might be something a bit different.

Sometimes, “youthful zeal” expresses itself in an ugly self-righteous condemnation and judgment of others, over minor things. I’ve seen it happen where one person disagrees with another person on a minor/disputable point of doctrine, and they judge them, and they brand them as a heretic, all over something that isn’t an essential of the Christian faith...

**<sup>22</sup> So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.**

In other words, “Be a pure vessel, that fits well with the other pure vessels”... In the house of our Lord, you and I are part of a set of the good cutlery and the good crockery...

**<sup>V23</sup> Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels.**

Now, he’s already been told to “shun” the babblers of godless teaching... And Paul is always one to call a spade a spade... False teachings are ill-educated and senseless. That’s just the way it is. God’s word is the word of truth, and those who change it, don’t know anything, and it’s a nonsense that they’re trying to teach.

Now, to have nothing to do with these “controversies”, isn’t about “side-stepping” or “ignoring”... We know from the example of those 2 blokes **Hymenaeus and Philetus** — two blokes who probably never dreamed that their names would end up in the Bible,,. But their names are known for all the wrong reasons. In 1Tim 1:20, Paul tells us that he handed Hymenaeus over to Satan. That’s Paul’s way of saying, “I excommunicated him. He’s not welcome in the church until he learns not to blaspheme.”

That's pretty severe, and that's what it means to "avoid". But even a tough stand like that, has as its aim, for the person who's been in the wrong, to turn back to God – to repent, and be restored to the faith.

And so Timothy, as the Lord's servant, don't be quarrelsome. Be kind to everyone... Quarrelling over what we believe isn't going to do anyone any good. It just makes the church a very unpleasant place to be.

**"Teaching"**, is what's required. Good, sound, straight-cutting teaching.

**patiently enduring evil**

Now, **patiently enduring evil** doesn't mean "Putting up with it and letting it go on unchallenged"... because the next thing he says, is to correct your **opponents**, but do it **with gentleness**.

It's not the ugly youthful condemnation and judgment. Teach with integrity; correct with gentleness.

Because our aim (a Godly aim), is always, **always**, to take one from being an uninformed babblers of ungodly thought-bubbles, and to take them to a solid, straight-cut biblical understanding of God, the Gospel, and His Word...

It takes genuine repentance. And sadly, in my experience, rarely does it happen. Once a person commits themselves to ungodly babble, it takes a big change – it takes a miracle of God to set them on the straight and narrow again...

And the reason for that, is because there's a spiritual battle at play.

To get involved and to accept and to be party to Godless chatter, is a snare/trap of the devil. And those who embrace it – those who wander off from the straight-cut word of God, and babble on with godless teaching, have been captured by the Devil, to do his will.

You see, the Devil knows that he's going to cop-it. His fate is sealed. When Jesus returns, He's going to throw the Devil into the lake of fire, and that's where he'll stay.

But the Devil, is the ultimate spoil-sport. His aim, is to be a barrier to the good that God is doing. And he knows that a bit of godless babble, instead of the straight-cut word of God, will totally upend the faith of some, and cause a church to argue over words, and to descend into quarrels...

You see, it's not just "a difference opinion", and we cannot let crooked teaching go unchecked, because that is exactly what the Devil wants.

The answer? Correction, by sticking to teaching the straight-cut word of God.

But you know what??? Why would we want to change it anyway??? What the Lord has done for us in Christ Jesus: Let's embrace that with our whole hearts; Living day by day for Him.

And my prayer, I'm going to take from V20 & 21.

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father,  
amongst the Christian community,  
You have told us, that there are various vessels.  
Some for honourable;  
Some for dishonourable.

Oh Lord,  
You tell us to cleanse ourselves from what is  
dishonourable.  
But we know we also depend on You.

And so Lord, we do our bit:  
We repent.  
We repent of our sin;  
We repent of when we have entertained Godless  
thought-bubbles; and  
babbled on with godless teaching.

Forgive us, Lord we pray.

Cleanse us, that we would become vessels,  
for truly honourable use.  
set apart as holy;  
useful to our master;

ready for every good work.

This is our prayer,  
in Jesus' Name,  
Amen.