

**THE GOOD FIGHT - PART 3:**  
**"A WORKER APPROVED BY GOD"**  
**2 TIMOTHY 2:14-26**

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**Personal Introduction**

Good afternoon everyone. I'm Jeff - one of the pastors at HMCC of Jakarta. And it's my privilege to preach the Word of God for us today!

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**Sermon Series Introduction**

We'll be continuing with Part 3 of our sermon series called "The Good Fight" - where we're going through the letter of 2 Timothy together.

The title of today's sermon is "A Worker Approved By God."

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**Introduction**

Now, imagine that you're a worker hired to build a new house.

And imagine that it's almost time for inspection, and then you realize, "Uh oh... the floor has cracks, the roof is leaking, and the walls are painted the wrong color!"

How would you feel going into this inspection?

- Not confident, right? Maybe a bit embarrassed... Because you know that there's no way that the owner is going to approve of your work.

But imagine if everything looks great and sparkling, and you know that you did exactly what the owner asked for.

How would you feel?

- You'd feel great! Because you know that you have no reason to be ashamed.
- You know that when the owner comes in, he's going to love it.

Now, not all of us here are house builders, but none of us want to do our jobs poorly. We all want to do a good job

- We want our supervisor to look at our work, and say, "That's really good work. Approved!"

And similarly, in our passage today, Paul instructs Timothy (and instructs all of us here) to strive to be workers approved by God...

- That if God was to look at the work that we do for Him, He would say, “That’s really good work. Approved!”

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### **The One Thing**

Strive to be a worker approved by God.

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### **Scripture Introduction**

If you have your Bibles with you, please turn to 2 Timothy 2:14-26.

For context:

- This is Apostle Paul’s final letter, and it’s written to his dear friend Timothy, who’s now a pastor at the church in Ephesus.
- In the previous passage, Paul tells Timothy to not keep God’s Word to himself but to entrust it to other faithful men - those who will be able to continue preaching and teaching God’s Word even after Paul and Timothy are gone.
- And then Paul tells Timothy to always remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead... For if we have died with him, we will also live with him...

That’s where we’re at today. I’ll read for us 2 Timothy 2:14-26...

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### **2 Timothy 2:14-26 (ESV)**

**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. **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. **16** But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, **17** and their talk will spread like gangrene. 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. **19** 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.”

**20** Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. **21** Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.

**22** So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. **23** Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. **24** 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. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, **26** and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

This is God's Word.

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## **Overview**

How should we strive to be a worker approved by God?

- I. Rightly handle God's Word (vv. 14-19)
  - II. Rightly handle yourself (vv. 20-26)
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## **I. Rightly handle God's Word (vv. 14-19)**

Let's begin by looking at verse 15 - And here Paul makes it very clear in terms of the kind of work that Timothy is to do for God... And notice how this work involves the word of truth.

- Now I'm not sure if that's what you think about when you think about the work that you do for God. But the work that we do for God always revolves around His Word.
  - When we disciple, we teach other Christians about God's Word.
  - When we evangelize, we teach Non-Christians about God's Word.
  - And when we do other kinds of good work, we do so because we trust and obey God's Word.
  - Christian work is Word-centered work.
    - And even though the work of teaching God's Word is primarily for pastors, we know that God actually commanded all Christians to teach one another His Word (that's Colossians 3:16).
    - And so this work of teaching is not only for pastors, but for all Christians. And this work is Word-centered.
- And Paul tells Timothy that if he wants to be a worker approved by God, then he's to handle the Word of God rightly.
  - And what does that imply? That there's also a way to handle God's Word wrongly.

And so verses 14-19 is about Paul teaching us about the difference between rightly handling and wrongly handling the Word of God.

First, let's take a closer look at the right way...

- Look down to verse 15 - Do you see the words "rightly handling" there?

- In the original language, “rightly handling” can also mean: “to make something straight.”
- This same word could be used to describe someone creating a straight path.
- And so if we imagine someone making a straight path, what they made is the clearest and most direct way of getting from one point to another point.
- In the same way, rightly handling God’s Word is to make the clearest and most direct way between God’s Word and its hearers.
  - Which means that the job of a teacher of God’s Word is to deliver the meaning of a passage to the church just as God intended (without twisting it or misinterpreting it).
  - Not along unnecessary turns, but along a straight path...

Because here’s the thing, there’s no multiple meanings. When Paul wrote this letter he had a specific intention and a specific message in mind. And when the Holy Spirit divinely authored God’s Word through specific people, God also had a specific message in mind.

- It’s not about what we think or what we feel God’s Word says, but it’s about what God’s Word truly says.

So how can we make sure that we’re handling God’s Word rightly and going along this straight path?

- Well, this straight path can be called many things. One of the things that it’s been called is “Inductive Bible Study.”
- Because “Inductive Bible Study” helps create a straight path from God’s Word to its readers.
  - It consists of 3 parts (going in order): Observation, Interpretation, Application.
    - (1) Observation - What does the text say?
    - (2) Interpretation - What does the text mean?
    - (3) Application - How should I live in light of what the text means?
- That’s the straightest path possible.
  - If you try to interpret what the text means before observing what the text says, that’s not a straight path.
    - You risk misinterpreting what the text means.
  - If you try to jump straight into application before observing what the text says, that’s not a straight path.
    - You can misapply what the text means in your life.
  - I know we wouldn’t want this to happen, but if you’ve done Inductive Bible Study with others before, you know that this can easily happen...
    - When the group is trying to observe what the text says, someone can say, “I think it means this...” or “I heard from someone that this is what it means...” or “I’m reminded of this one time...” or “I think this means I should do this...” But hold on... you try to help them to go back to the text... “what does the text say?” or “Where do you see that in the text?”
    - We try to stay on this straight path - Observation, then interpretation, then application.

And this will require work. That's why Paul tells Timothy to "do your best."

- And church, this is why your pastors are doing their best to commit to expositional preaching.
- Expositional preaching is basically pastors presenting our observation, interpretation, and application.
  - In expositional preaching, the main point of the sermon is the main point of the passage.
  - Pastors are not to deliver their own personal message or anecdote, but we're to deliver God's message accurately.
- And church, as you listen to a sermon, your goal should be to understand what the text means.
  - And it's going to be very helpful for you if you've read the sermon passage in advance, and if you have your Bible open during the sermon, so that you can follow along.
    - And if you understand the text, even if the preacher is only able to suggest a couple of application points, then you can think of many more for yourself.
  - Now this all may sound obvious, but I think oftentimes what we want from a sermon is more to feel something. And that's not necessarily wrong, (and hopefully you will feel something) but just be aware that feelings can be manipulated. Even by public speakers.
    - But when Jesus revealed that all of Scripture was about him, the 2 disciples who were with him said, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?"
    - It's about understanding God's Word first, and then from the mind to the heart, allowing God's Word to cut straight into our hearts.

So this is what we're striving for together as Christians to teach and understand God's Word rightly.

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Now, let's look at what Paul says about handling God's Word wrongly...

Let's look at verse 14 - to mishandle God's Word is to quarrel (or to fight) about words.

- And we need to note that Paul talks about 2 kinds of quarrels in this passage:
  - Later in verse 24, he talks about one kind of quarreling in the context of our interpersonal relationships with one another. Fighting about one another's words.
  - But what he's talking about here in verse 14 is actually a different kind of quarreling in the context of our personal relationship with God. So not about our

horizontal relationships, but our vertical relationship. Not fighting about one another's words, but fighting with God about His words.

We see Paul describing this in 2 more ways (a second time in verse 16, and then a third time in verse 18), but each time, he's referring to the same thing. It's just reworded.

- Look at verse 16 - quarreling with God is reworded here as "irreverent babble." It's mishandling God's Word in a way that it's irreverent (or disrespectful) to God.
- And in verse 18 - quarreling with God is reworded here as swerving from the truth.
  - It's when God's Word is clearly saying something, but then you're swerving away from it, fighting against what God means.
  - And when you're fighting about something that God has already made clear in His Word, then you're quarreling with God Himself.

Now, I know none of us would dare to quarrel with God Himself. But this can happen whenever we personally just don't like what God's Word has to say.

- For example, God's Word is clear that followers of Christ are not to be in relationship with Non-Christians (2 Corinthians 6:14-15).
  - That's what the text says, and that's what it means if we make a straight path from observation to interpretation.
    - But we may say, "I don't think that's what it means" (because we don't like how the application of that would look like in our lives).
- Or we may say, "people are generally good and even if they don't believe in Jesus, they're good enough to go to Heaven." Because we don't like the idea of people going to Hell.
  - But God's Word is very clear that no one is good - all have sinned and fallen short of God's perfect righteousness (Romans 3:23), and because of our sins, what we justly deserve is eternal punishment in Hell (Romans 6:23).
  - God's Word is very clear in these matters.
    - And when we treat God's Word as if it's unclear, then that's irreverent & disrespectful to God.

This would be a great discussion to have with other brothers and sisters over lunch or dinner - What's something you're struggling to understand or accept in God's Word? Then look at the passage directly from the Bible.

- Am I struggling to understand it because I need to study the passage more?
  - Then, you can do Inductive Bible Study.
- Or is it because I just don't like it...
  - If it's because you don't like it. Don't quarrel with God's Word, but quarrel/wrestle with yourself - why don't I like it? What is that revealing to me about my heart?
- That'd be such an edifying discussion to have.

And if you haven't put your faith in Jesus, please talk to me or others around you, we'd love to study the bible with you and answer some of the biggest questions that you have about Christianity.

For those who've already received Jesus, we want to be serious in our handling of God's Word because the consequence of wrongly handling God's Word is very serious.

- Verse 14 - It ruins the hearers.
- Verse 16 - It leads to more and more ungodliness.
- Verse 18 - It upsets (or destroys) the faith of some.
  
- And look at verse 17 - Such talk will spread like gangrene.
  - Gangrene is death of tissue (fingers and toes literally turning black, decaying while the rest of the body is still alive). But it doesn't stay in one spot; it spreads. It kills more tissue until it kills you.
  - In serious conditions, to save the rest of the body, the infected body part is amputated and cut off.
  
- Similarly, false teaching must be cut off to stop it from spreading in the church. That's why it must be dealt with seriously. Look at verse 17 - Paul is not afraid to name names. These men - Hymenaeus and Philetus are spreading false teaching.
  - Hymenaeus' name is already mentioned in Paul's first letter to Timothy (1 Tim. 1:20) - he was excommunicated and cut off from the church.
  - But unfortunately, it seems like he hasn't repented and continues to spread false teaching.

Brothers and sisters, the responsibility is yours to teach one another God's Word and to correct false teaching.

- We're to strive to rightly handle God's Word.
- Because what's at stake is someone's salvation and eternal life.
  - Because when we're talking about God's Word, it's not only a matter of life and death, but of Heaven and Hell.
  - And mishandling God's Word can destroy someone's faith. Some people may tragically believe that they're saved when they're actually not.

For Timothy, it may be discouraging to see false teachers destroy the faith of people he knows.

- But look at verse 19 - Paul comforts him.
  - Even if it looks like the church is falling apart and people are being led astray, God's firm foundation (His church) still stands.
    - And it's because the Lord knows those who are His.
      - His knowledge of His people is like an invisible seal that secures His church even amidst times of trial.
    - And if His knowledge is an invisible seal, there's a visible seal that can help Christians see for themselves who God's true people and teachers are.
      - That visible seal is that everyone who truly knows the Lord will depart from iniquity. You can tell who truly belongs to God by the way they flee from sin and by the way they handle themselves.

And then Paul transitions to his next point.

So how should we strive to be a worker approved by God? First, rightly handle God's Word. And second...

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## **II. Rightly handle yourself (vv. 20-26)**

In verses 20-26, Paul now expands on what he meant that God's true people will depart from iniquity...

- First, in verses 20-21 - he's going to share an illustration.
- Then in verse 22 - he's going to explain what that means for Christians.
- And then in verses 23-26 - he's going to explain what that specifically means for teachers of God's Word.

Let's first look at Paul's illustration in verses 20-21...

Imagine a big house. In that house, there are bound to be all kinds of vessels (and a vessel is a hollow container like pots and jars).

- Some are going to be made out of gold and silver, and some are going to be made of wood and clay.
- Some will be for honorable use and some for dishonorable use.
  - What's an example of honorable use? Some vessels will be saved for special occasions (for the most distinguished guests to use) or for decoration (because it looks so beautiful it makes the entire house look better).
  - What's an example of dishonorable use? Some vessels are going to be used for trash or human waste.
    - Because back in those days, people would have to go to the bathroom into a pot. And then when it's time to get rid of the dirty and smelly content, sometimes they'd just throw everything away along with the entire vessel.

So it's clear from the illustration that we'd rather be a vessel for honorable use rather than dishonorable use.

- Paul then shares what he means (in verse 21): If you want to be a worker approved by God, then you're to keep yourself clean from what is dishonorable and be ready to do good work.
- In other words, us being a worker approved by God is inseparable from our holiness and how we handle ourselves.

And isn't this something that we often overlook?



- We often think that our usefulness merely depends on what we do for God or for His church, but we can overlook that how we handle ourselves also matters.

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Let's look at verse 22 - Paul is going to explain what this means for Christians.

- We're to flee something and pursue something...
  - Flee youthful passions (or run away from your uncontrolled, fleshly desires).
  - And instead pursue... righteousness, faith, love, and peace.
- And don't try to do these things alone, but do it with the church - along with others who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

So let's try to collect the pieces that we have so far:

- Us being a worker approved by God is inseparable from our holiness and how we handle ourselves.
- And then our pursuit of holiness is inseparable from the church.

So I think a very clear application from this is to work and rely on one another as a church family to be workers approved by God.

- As brothers and sisters in Christ, we can keep watch over one another's lives - sharpening one another, helping one another to be vessels ready to do good work for God.
- So a good question to ask yourself is:
  - Is someone discipling you (helping you to live out God's Word)? And are you discipling someone?
  - If not, who can you reach out to for discipling?
    - Think of some people who you can study the Bible with or someone to have lunch/dinner with so you can talk about this passage with them.
- Let's not think of ourselves as an isolated vessel.
  - But we're all vessels of the same house.
    - We're to keep watch over one another as members of the same spiritual household.

So if you're a professing believer, but are not part of a local church, please come talk to me or to anyone around you, and we'd love to talk to you more about the importance of church membership.

Now, let's look at verses 23-26 - Paul is going to explain what this specifically means for teachers of God's Word.

- And remember, even though the primary responsibility of teaching is for the pastors, all Christians are also to teach one another God's Word.
- So this is also applicable for:
  - A church member teaching God's Word to another member.
  - Building Blocks teachers to the Building Blocks children.

- Parents to their children.
- Husband to wife, wife to husband.
- Or teaching God's Word to your family members, friends, co-workers, and even strangers.
- And Paul is telling teachers of God's Word that they're also to flee something and pursue something.
  - What we're to flee from is foolish, ignorant controversies - because they lead to quarrels.
    - And remember, this is the other kind of quarrels that we're talking about here - this is interpersonal quarreling between one another.
  - And instead they're to pursue (4 things):
    - (1) kindness to everyone.
    - (2) being able to teach.
    - (3) patience in enduring evil.
    - (4) gentleness in correcting opponents.
      - In other words: teachers of God's Word should strive to teach with kindness, patience, and gentleness.

This is what it looks like for God's teachers to handle themselves rightly.

But notice how Paul calls us to still be bold in confronting our opponents (we're still to correct false teachers or those with misunderstandings).

- The fact that we're not to be quarrelsome doesn't mean that we should avoid defending God's Word. We definitely should.
  - But We're to do it with kindness, patience, and gentleness.

And here we see the difference between teaching God's Word and being quarrelsome about God's Word.

- The difference is in how we view our opponents.
  - Do we see them as vessels to be destroyed or vessels to be cleansed?
- Teaching God's Word is about seeing the other person not as an enemy, but as someone who's lost and in need of help in understanding God's Word (just as you're once lost and in need of help).
  - Teaching God's Word is about building others up.
- But being quarrelsome about God's Word is about seeing the other person as your enemy that you have to defeat in a debate. It's no longer about helping them understand God's Word, but it's just about winning an argument, so that you'd be the victor.

And if we're honest with ourselves, haven't we been in a situation like this before?

- Maybe at first, it did start as you wanting to help someone else understand God's Word better. But then as they don't seem to get it and start arguing with you... it frustrates you. And makes you want to just prove them wrong.
  - Our hearts are sinful - we can quickly go from a godly intention to a sinful one very quickly.

- And as you start to lose control of your emotions, you aggressively attack them with the truth from God's Word - But imagine what's happening in that moment...
  - What you're saying may be biblical truth, but would God approve of how you've handled yourself as you're teaching?
  - No.
    - Because if we lose our temper or emotions while we teach God's Word, we've undermined God's message of love, grace, and mercy.
    - And we can be a stumbling block to others.

And think back to how you came to understand the Gospel and how you understand God's Word more and more...

- Was it because someone was yelling at you?
- Or was it because someone was patient in helping you understand?

We need to remember that we're here to help build one another up (It's by God's design that we're gathered as a local church).

- So the next time we may be in a quarrel with a fellow Christian, take a step back and breathe, and remember that we're speaking to a fellow vessel in need of help.

And when we share the Gospel to Non-Christians, even if they argue back aggressively, remember that they're not our real enemy.

- Look at verse 26 to see who the enemy is... The devil has them trapped (it doesn't excuse them from their own sinful reactions). But they're tragically being used by the devil to do his will.
- As God's people who are to be used for God's will, we're to show our Non-Christian neighbors sympathy. And try to teach God's Word to them with patience and gentleness.

And brothers and sisters, you just never know how God would use you...

- Look at verses 25-26 - "God may perhaps grant them [your opponents] repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will."
  - You just never know how God would use you to bring even your opponents to repent of their sins and turn to Jesus.
  - Or you just never know how God would use you to help other Christians to understand the Bible better and grow in their faith.

HMCC JKT/TGR, as we're about to celebrate our 10th/16th anniversary next week, I hope that God would continue to do good work through our church, spreading the Gospel throughout Indonesia, as we rightly handle God's Word and rightly handle ourselves.

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## **Conclusion**

As we conclude, let's fix our eyes on our Lord Jesus...

Jesus is the Word of God made flesh (fully God and fully man).

And he came into the world, and accurately taught God's Word, and revealed that all of Scripture was about him.

And when he was on Earth, people quarreled against him, were irreverent and disrespectful towards him, mocked him, and cursed at him.

Yet he did not revile them in return, he patiently endured evil, continued to teach them, and corrected them with gentleness.

Jesus perfectly handled God's Word and he perfectly handled himself.

Yet for the sake of his people, he endured shame and was beaten and crucified on the cross. And he died, so that his people may live.

This is the Gospel that we've received and been entrusted to protect and to teach.

May we strive to be workers approved by Jesus, and may God use us and our church to do His will.

Let's pray.