

Be a worker unashamed

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Preacher: Brian King

[0 : 00] Indeed, let's keep that word of truth open in front of us.

To Timothy 2, verse 14 to 26, an outline is there to help you along as well. Let's pray.

Amen. Heavenly Father, indeed today we pray that through the preaching of your word, you would reveal your will and your character.

Will you help me indeed to be a worker who correctly handles the truth, who does not need to be ashamed, but help me to be able to bring out the meaning of the passage today, so that we might obey you and indeed do what you want us to do, and that in this way you might also protect and strengthen your church.

All this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. Now for the past year, which aeroplane do you think has been the most featured in the news?

[1 : 12] Which aircraft has become infamous? I think the answer has to be the Boeing 737 MAX. Almost a year ago now, Lion Air flight 610 left Jakarta and almost immediately began behaving erratically, oscillating up and down before finally crashing into the Java Sea, killing 189 people.

And then just five months later, Ethiopian Airlines flight 302 left Addis Ababa, and almost immediately after takeoff, the pilot sent out a distress call and asked to turn back.

But they never made it back, crashing just six minutes after takeoff, 40 kilometers from the airport, killing 156 people. So in both cases, the planes were almost brand new Boeing 737 MAXs.

What happened? Well, investigations are still ongoing, but the picture we're getting so far all seems to point to one basic fact. The plane was certified fit for purpose and approved for commercial flight when it shouldn't have.

In many ways, the Boeing 737 MAX is an impressive plane. It's bigger, more powerful, and has more efficient engines than previous Boeing 737 models.

[2 : 44] It can fly further and carry more people. But in order to achieve this, Boeing had to move the engines just a little bit further forward, which meant that sometimes the nose of the plane in flight would be pitched a little too high, and that's potentially dangerous.

As for why, your physics teacher can probably explain to you better than your pastor can. But anyway, they tried to install some software to keep that from happening.

But basically, what happened was that if the software received wrong information from the sensors of the plane, it would then cause the plane to go into a dive.

And that seems to be what happened. And the pilots were not adequately briefed, trained, or prepared for this worst-case scenario. Well, that's all the technical detail.

But the basic point is, because the plane was approved and certified fit for purpose when it shouldn't have, it caused a deadly crash, and many lives were tragically lost.

[3 : 56] And this morning, Paul is going to show us that there is also a spiritual parallel to the Boeing 737 MAX. Now, last week, if you were here, I mentioned that Satan has a two-fold strategy for sinking the Church.

One is through persecution. And Paul does allude to it from time to time in this letter. But if we were to look more closely at 2 Timothy, we would soon realise that Paul doesn't think of that as the biggest danger to the Church.

For him, it isn't what comes from outside the Church, whether that's external persecution, or the increasing godlessness of society, or unfair government legislation.

That's his biggest concern. No. Rather, he thinks that the biggest concern doesn't come from outside, but from within the Church.

False teaching. Now, don't forget, this letter is his final words to Timothy. And from chapter 2, verse 14 onwards, it's interesting that Paul chooses to use his final words to concentrate a little more on

this matter of false teaching.

[5 : 15] Now, I think we're usually the opposite, aren't we? Today, probably many of us will complain and lament about how society's standards are slipping or becoming more anti-Christian, or how the authorities don't really have the best interests of Christians in mind.

But we don't seem too worried about the presence of alternative teachings within the Church. Perhaps we just take an apapunboleh attitude, or simply think that every perspective is equally valid, even if it contradicts one another.

But not Paul. Why? Because he knows that false teaching and false teachers are like Boeing 737 Maxes.

They shouldn't be approved or certified fit for purpose, because if they are, they lead to deadly crashes and loss of life.

If you look at the end of today's passage in verse 26, you would notice that false teaching is actually called the trap of the devil. Satan wants to bring as many people crashing down as he can, and this is one big way he does it.

[6 : 38] And so false teaching should be a key concern for the Church as a whole. So what does Timothy do? Well, all throughout this letter, he's been wanting to encourage Timothy, but not only that, he wants to warn him as well.

Don't follow in the footsteps of these false teachers, Timothy. Don't present yourself to God as one who is not approved. Well, how then should Timothy present himself to God?

And how should a Church, any Church, including our Church, know who is approved by God? Well, to that end, Paul today lays down some criteria.

For what an approved worker looks like. And so this morning, we're just going to explore that criteria so that we know which plane to board and which plane to avoid.

So let's see what God's Word has to say to us this morning. Firstly, We see that straight away in verse 15.

[7 : 49] Let me just read it. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, and who correctly handles the word of truth.

Now, notice straight away how Timothy as a pastor is described. He's a worker, not a slacker. This ministry isn't for the faint-hearted, as the images of the soldier, the athlete, and the farmer last week also showed.

But what is his work? Notice the main tool of his trade. It's the word of truth. It's the scriptures which contain the good deposit of the gospel.

And his main work is to correctly handle it so that he can correctly teach and apply it. Now, that's what you want in general from any worker, don't you?

You want him to use his tools well. So, if you have an electrician doing rewiring works in your house, you want to make sure that he's correctly handling all the cables and fuse boxes and so on.

[8 : 58] Otherwise, your house could be in danger. If you're about to move into a new house, you want to make sure that the building contractor has done a proper job so that you don't have to live in a place where there are cracks in the wall and the floor is uneven and the toilet bowl is sinking, you want good workmanship.

And so that's what you want from a pastor. You want him to be working hard at understanding the scriptures better and working hard at understanding how to teach and counsel and apply that word to people.

After all, as we'll see later on in 2 Timothy 3, this tool is powerful. It brings us salvation and then it trains us in righteousness to live for God.

Now, why might a pastor or a full-time worker be tempted not to utilize this tool if it's so powerful? Because it's hard work and sometimes it appears fruitless.

In Colossians 1, for example, Paul talks about the work of teaching and proclaiming Christ as something that he has to struggle and strenuously do.

[10 : 15] Handling the work can be exhausting. And as Jesus reminds us, when you scatter the seed, not all of it will produce fruit that will last.

So it's hard work and looks fruitless. And so as a result, a pastor or full-time worker can easily be tempted to use alternative tools like entertainment, or books on leadership principles, and so on. You see, we can be tempted to be ashamed of God's word. And so if you see a ministry worker being tempted to no longer depend on the scriptures as his main tool to disciple his people, well

then encourage him again with the words of verse 15.

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved. A worker who does not need to be ashamed, but correctly handles the word of truth.

And of course, if you're involved in any act of teaching the Bible, whether that's doing a home fellowship group Bible study, or Sunday school, or a parent simply trying to bring up a child, well, you can take these words to heart as well.

[11 : 33] Now notice too, that God assumes that there is a right and wrong way to handle the word of truth. In other words, it isn't a case of, you have your interpretation, I have mine.

It isn't a case of, oh, this is what the Bible means to me, and it could mean something completely different to you. Sometimes you attend a cell group, and you go around the members, and one by one, somebody might say, oh, to me, verse 23 means X.

And then the next person says, oh, to me, verse 23 means Y, which is wildly different from the previous person, but both are simply accepted without comment.

But this cannot be. Well, just imagine if you apply these same rules to basic communication. You shout at your teenager, clean your room, and your teenager replies, to me, what you just said means I should keep playing computer games.

And by replying that way, your teenager is not just disregarding your communication, but disrespecting you. And it's the same when we come to God's word.

[12 : 56] When we handle the Bible like that, we are not just willfully misunderstanding God, we're disrespecting him. You see, the false teachers were quoting the Bible and claiming to be biblical.

Later on in verse 18, we learn that some of them were teaching about the resurrection. That's obviously in the Bible. But the question is not whether they were quoting or using the Bible.

The question is how they were handling it. In a moment, we'll see that they were handling the doctrine of the resurrection wrongly. And so Paul wants Timothy and every Christian worker to correctly handle the word.

And so I try to do that by showing you the context and flow of thought in a passage to help you arrive at its meaning and then to try to work out its application for our lives.

And my hope is that you can also see, at least sometimes, not just what a passage means, but how I arrive at those main points. And so it's a work that is done with plenty of fear and trembling.

[14 : 13] I heard of a very famous preacher who often, when he stepped out of the pulpit, said to God, I'm sorry. He felt that he had done a poor job.

And I completely understand that sentiment for who feels adequate to handle God's word at any time. And so last week's words, in chapter 2, verse 1, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus is so needed all the time.

We always need his help. So how should a congregation respond to verse 15?

Well, a congregation can apply these words, of course, by desiring to receive correctly handled teaching that is probably the most straightforward application.

You want the word to be handled correctly. But also, you can apply this verse by learning to be discerning whenever you hear any speaker.

[15 : 20] Whenever you hear someone, don't just look at his string of qualifications or his international reputation. don't be impressed just because he can quote Bible verses.

The question is not the quoting, but is he correctly handling it? Is he taking the verses wholly out of context? In the end, does what he say point you to Jesus?

Or does it make you and me the big deal? Well, those are all red flags to pick up. But why is this so necessary?

Is this just nitpicking? No, Paul says, because remember, false teaching is like the Boeing 737 MAX. It can look impressive, but its impact is nothing less than disastrous.

Look, for instance, at verse 16. avoid godless chatter because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly.

[16 : 26] Those who consume false teaching become less and less like Jesus. Isn't that sobering? It's not just that you've downloaded wrong information.

It's more like you've downloaded a virus. Consuming false teaching leads you to be less loving, less patient, and less God-centered.

That's the kind of virus it is. It's like a spiritual disease robbing you of your spiritual health. And maybe that's why Paul uses the analogy of verse 17.

Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Gangrene is what happens when body tissue dies and can result in infection and even death.

My late grandmother had gangrene and it didn't look good at all as her foot became blue and black. They had to amputate part of her leg to make sure that the infection didn't kill her off.

[17 : 31] And in Paul's day, when surgical techniques were less advanced, getting gangrene is almost like a death sentence. That's how bad false teaching is.

It's infectious and even life-threatening. Just look at the end of verse 18 and notice people's faith can be destroyed.

And if you have no faith in Jesus, you've lost your life. You're dead. I think many of us are tempted to think of false teaching as something harmless, something you might not agree with but over which we can agree to disagree.

Well, that is just not true. I've seen firsthand, up close and personal, how having wrong theology can shipwreck people's lives.

And so if you're exposing yourself continually to the words of speakers like this, you're putting yourself in danger. And so that's why Timothy is to avoid godless chatter.

[18 : 39] smooth words that do not seek to glorify God are of no use. And instead, verse 14, he needs to keep reminding people of these things, that is, the words that are trustworthy, such as those we saw last week in chapter 2, verse 11 to 13.

Now, at this point, I just want us to spend a bit more time on the false teaching that Paul seems to be addressing here, because I think it's just as relevant to our context in Sarawak.

So let's look at how Hymenaeus and Philetus, named in verse 17, have departed from the truth. Just look at verse 18.

They say that the resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some. Huh? That sounds strange.

Of course, the resurrection of Jesus has already taken place, right? Isn't that what Paul has been laboring to show? Remember Jesus Christ risen from the dead, he said last week? But these teachers are not talking about the resurrection of Jesus.

[19 : 58] Rather, they are talking about the resurrection of believers. They seem to be saying that all the blessings that a Christian would enjoy in the future was all available right now.

They were teaching, we've experienced resurrection in such a way that everything is ours in Christ right now. Now, we don't know the exact details of what Hymenaeus and Philetus were teaching, but we can find a parallel example from the second century, just a few decades after 2 Timothy was written.

There was another teacher called Menander, who taught that disciples, upon being baptized, have experienced the resurrection in such a way that they would never grow old and die.

And so what Menander is doing here is this, he's taking a future blessing that Christians indeed do have, immortality and resurrected bodies, that's a promise for us in the new creation, but he applies them wrongly by saying that we can experience those immortal resurrected bodies fully now, without ever dying.

And so whenever you apply future blessings that Christians have, inappropriately into the here and now, you've fallen into error.

[21 : 35] Theologians have a name for it, it's called over-realized eschatology. Now, you'll be thinking, well of course we don't believe that today.

And you're right, probably none of us here share Menander's beliefs that we will never grow old. But a lot of errors today are forms of over-realized eschatology.

So take for instance, the teaching that we can experience perfect health now, if we have just enough faith and become an overcomer. That's also a form of over-realized eschatology.

It's taking a future blessing, perfect health in the new creation, and inappropriately applying it to today, by saying that if we just declare that the sickness is gone, it will be gone.

Now, that's not to say, of course, that God cannot heal today. In his kindness, he can heal if he chooses. But his promise of perfect health is for the future, in the new creation, and not a promise for today.

[22 : 50] If he heals, praise him. He has done a good thing above what he has promised in the scriptures. But if he doesn't, we can still praise him, because we know he is still trustworthy.

It is not that he has failed to keep his word. Perhaps it's because God has decided that we needed to learn a different lesson, perhaps about perseverance or joining with Paul in suffering.

An over-realized eschatology can be pastorally damaging. Imagine a person with cancer who has been taught that God has promised to restore her back to full health as long as she does XYZ, or has this amount of faith.

Now imagine if she sincerely believes that. And what happens if she is not healed? She is left to either conclude that she didn't do the right thing or have the right amount of faith, or that God is not good after all.

He doesn't keep his promises. Well, either way, her faith is destroyed. And that is a tragedy because what she has been taught is not the word of truth.

[24 : 14] Now all this talk about the danger of false teaching could have us worried because it sure seems like we're very fragile. And so Paul moves to reassure us just before he makes his next major point.

Now look at verse 19. Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription, the Lord knows those who are his, and everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness.

The foundation here refers to the church, since Paul uses a similar picture in 1 Timothy 3, verse 15, to also refer to the church there.

And on this church, God has placed his seal to say that the church still belongs to him, not to the false teachers and certainly not to Satan.

And the seal takes the form of two quotations, which both seem to refer to the same event in the book of Numbers. Now you might remember the story of Korah's rebellion from our series in Numbers a few months ago, where Korah, a Levite, along with some other leaders, told God that his election process was wrong.

[25 : 38] He said Moses wasn't fit to lead the people, he was. And so Moses said in Numbers 16, verse 5, the Lord will show who belongs to him.

The Lord will show who is true and who is false. And then later on in Numbers 16, verse 26, God tells the people to move away from these wicked men.

And so Paul seems to be applying this lesson to Timothy and saying, look, God knows who are his true appointed leaders and he will vindicate them.

So don't be anxious. But at the same time, be ready to turn away from the wickedness of these false teachers. And that's a mark of staying faithful.

Correctly handling the word of truth also means turning away from the wrong handling of the word. When we do that, we can be sure that we're standing on firm foundations.

[26 : 50] So that's our first criteria. Let's move on to our second. Secondly, be a worker unashamed to become a vessel fit for use.

In verses 20 to 21, Paul paints another picture for us. In a large house, he says there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay.

Some are for special or noble purposes, and some for common use. Those who cleanse themselves from the latter will be instruments for special purposes, made holy, useful to the master, and prepared to do any good work.

So in this house, there are two kinds of articles distinguished by their purpose. There's your special plates and cups, used only on special occasions when special people visit, so that's when you only bring out your golden china and your silver plates and so on.

And then there's your everyday coffee mug and your rubbish bin for common use. And here's where we shouldn't push the metaphor too far, but Paul seems to be making one basic point.

[28 : 11] You can move from being a rubbish bin to being that special plate if you cleanse yourself. So what is Paul really trying to say here?

Well, Paul is still talking about the church. That's what the house refers to. But the question is, what are the articles or vessels as they can also be translated?

What are they? Again, the clue seems to be in verse 21. Remember, the point that Paul is making to Timothy is that he can become a useful instrument to the master, not just a common rubbish bin if he cleanses himself.

So it would be very unlikely that these articles refer to church members. Otherwise, that would mean that Timothy has to get rid of certain church members. And that doesn't seem to make sense

either of the picture or the wider context.

After all, Timothy is meant to teach, remind, and warn God's people, not get rid of them. And he's meant to clean himself, not God's house.

[29 : 25] Rather, it makes more sense if we understand these articles to refer to two kinds of teachers. One that is pleasing to the Lord, and one that isn't.

And so for Timothy to cleanse himself, he has to make sure that he is not like Hymenaeus and Philetus. He should ensure that he is not coming under their influence, even if subconsciously. And if he does so, he would become a vessel fit for use. He would be one that is set apart, used personally by God, and able to do his good work by his grace.

And so Timothy needs to cleanse himself. But cleansing himself from the influences and teachings of men like Hymenaeus and Philetus isn't just about purity of doctrine, it's also about purity of deeds.

It's not just about the content of your teaching, it's about what you do with your words. And so that's what Paul encourages Timothy to consider in verses 22 to 26.

[30 : 45] To become a vessel fit for use, Paul says, well, you need to have this kind of character to be a faithful and loving peacemaker.

Now, how do you go about doing that? Well, here are a few things for you to do, Timothy. First of all, Paul tells Timothy, flee, verse 22, flee the evil desires of youth.

Now, Paul is probably thinking here about a lack of self-control. In Titus 2, that seems to be what he thinks the young men are susceptible to, and so he advises them to practice self-control.

And that would also make sense with the rest of what he's about to say, which has a lot to do with controlling your tongue. And so Timothy, Paul says, don't let the situation consume you in such a way that you lose self-control.

Flee from the evil desires of youth. Instead, verse 22 again, pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace.

[31 : 59] Don't chase after the latest hot teaching or signs and wonders, but seek the fruit of the Spirit. And as you do that, remember that there are others who are on the same team as you.

Flee the evil things and chase the good things along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. And when you remember that you're on the same team, it will help you to be a gentle peacemaker.

Look at verses 23 and 24. Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments because you know they produce quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful.

Now, Paul is returning to a theme that he touched on earlier in verse 14. Warn them before God against quarreling about words. We're being warned against getting into futile arguments.

Now, Paul isn't saying that we shouldn't pay careful attention to the meaning of words. That's what we've been doing this entire sermon. But I'm sure that you know that there is a kind of discussion which is started sometimes not with the purpose of trying to humbly learn what the Word of God is really saying, but because the person simply wanted to score points and show how right and smart he is.

[33 : 36] And so if Timothy was conducting Q&A; in his congregation and a member wanted to start a theological fight by majoring on some minor sub-point, well, Timothy shouldn't get sucked in because a prolonged argument might distract the congregation from Jesus and the main point that the scriptures want to make.

Instead, a servant of God is to do two things. For those who by personality are more confrontational, who enjoy a good verbal fight, who want to show that they are full of zeal for the truth of God, well, Paul says to them, the servant of God is not to be quarrelsome, but to be kind and gentle.

For remember, our Lord Jesus himself is gentle. to the immoral woman of Samaria, he offered the living water of eternal life.

He offered her a wonderful gift before her sins even entered the conversation. for when we are quarrelsome and lack gentleness, we actually give people an excuse not to listen.

We might have the right teaching and the right content, but we are not actually helping them by making our demeanour a barrier between them and the truth.

[35 : 12] And if we do that, we are not helping them escape the snares of the devil. And so we need to be kind and to think charitably of our opponents.

For if they are really calling on the Lord out of a pure heart, then they would be humble and teachable and open to correction. However, for those of us who by personality prefer to avoid conflict, Paul says to us, you need to be able to teach, you need to instruct your opponents. With gentleness, yes, but you still need to instruct them. In other words, it's easy to say, oh well, never mind, let's just forget about it, let's keep the peace and harmony.

But Paul says, no, no, no, no. Remember, false teaching is like that Boeing 737 Max, it's leading people to destruction.

You don't stay silent if you know that people are going to board a plane which is 100% guaranteed to crash. And so you need to have courage. You need to be able to teach the word of truth even when people might not like it and it leads to conflict.

[36 : 38] You mustn't be quarrelsome but you mustn't be quiet. And you do so because you care for them. You prayerfully hope for God to grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth.

You don't want them to be captive to lies. That's more important than maintaining an artificial harmony. So church, what does an approved worker look like?

He's unashamed to correctly handle the word of truth. His teaching will lead you in the direction of godliness not of ungodliness. He will not be one who is long on smoothness but short on substance.

Full of Christian cliches but empty of Christ. He will remind people of the gospel. These are the people you should listen to, the people you should read, the people you should encourage.

And don't listen to the people who are the opposite of these things. If you keep doing so, you are boarding a plane that will crash. And an approved worker wants to become a vessel fit for use.

[38 : 07] He's not perfect, he knows his doctrine can always be sharpened, he's not right on everything, and he knows that he is not perfectly kind and gentle, but he is making progress on these things.

And he wants to cleanse himself from the influence of false teaching that leads to him becoming more ungodly. And he wants to have courage to gently instruct those going along the wrong way. And so these are the people you should look to as examples. Our church camp speaker this year, Reverend Andrew Chia, I think, is one such person who fits both criteria.

He's an example to me. He is someone to be imitated as he imitates Christ. Because ultimately, this picture is one of Christ, is it not?

A gentle shepherd who is not afraid to chase off the wolves and speak the truth. And because Christ is the shepherd of this church, while we also need not be anxious, for God's solid foundation stands firm.

[39 : 20] He knows the sheep that belong to him. And so as his sheep, let's keep praying for our under shepherds, for all those in Christian ministry, to be certified fit for purpose, and for the flock, for ourselves at KEC, for our denomination BEM, for all churches in Zahra and in Malaysia, to turn away from wickedness to his words of eternal life.

Let's pray. Amen.