

Under-fire but Undeterred

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[0 : 00] But we're going to turn now to our reading this morning and Josh is going to be leading us in the study that he began last week in Paul's second letter to Timothy.

So second Timothy and we're reading this morning chapter two. And if you need a Bible, there are some church Bibles out in the foy. Do just ask one of the stewards. I'll be glad to get one for you on those Bibles. It's page nine, nine, five.

I'm going to read together the whole of the chapter, chapter two of second Timothy. Paul says to Timothy, but you then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses and trust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.

[1 : 13] It's a hardworking farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops. Think over what I say for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal.

But the word of God is not bound. Therefore, I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

The saying is trustworthy. For if we have died with him, we will also live with him. If we endure, we also will reign with him.

If we deny him, he also will deny us. If we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself.

[2 : 12] Remind him of these things and charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good but only ruins the hearers. 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.

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

Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some. But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal.

The Lord knows who are his. And let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity. 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.

Therefore, if anyone cleans himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, and ready for every good work.

[3 : 36] So flee youthful passions, and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies. You know that they breed quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome, but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness.

God may perhaps grant them repentance, leading to a knowledge of the truth. And they may escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him, to do his will.

Amen. And may God bless to us his word this morning. We'll do open once again to 2 Timothy chapter 2.

Now, Lindsay Vaughn has been in the news this past week. She's an Olympic downhill skier.

[4 : 43] And she competed this week, despite having torn her ACL only days earlier. An injury that in sport would normally end your season.

And yet, there she was, lining up to compete, laser focused on what she has shaped her whole life to do. To compete for the medal, and to be crowned the champion.

Unfortunately for her, it didn't end well. She crashed and suffered a horrific leg injury. But, that kind of single-minded resolve is a picture Paul picks up in our passage.

Last week, we saw the setting for the whole letter. Normal gospel work, ministry under pressure, and yet, unashamed. Paul has been preparing Timothy for the post-apostolic age.

The apostles will pass. Paul was soon to die. But the apostolic gospel must and will continue to rule the church. And so, Timothy must follow the pattern of the sound words that Paul has passed on to him and guard the good deposit, declaring it with salvation in view.

[5 : 55] And as he does, so trusting God's power to enable him to endure. All the while, confident in God's promise of life. In chapter 1, we saw climaxes with Onesiphorus, the man who was not ashamed of Paul's chains.

He was loyal, refreshing, steadfast. And so, what does it look like to be an Onesiphorus 9? And what does it mean and require to guard the gospel when the apostles are gone?

These are the questions Paul answers in our passage for Timothy. This chapter is structured with three opening illustrations, verses 1 to 7. We see the soldier, the athlete, and the farmer.

But we also have three more illustrations, verses 14 to 26. Verse 15, there's the workman. Verse 20, the vessels.

Verse 24, the servant. And then right in the middle, verses 8 to 13, they give us Paul's rationale for why the work is hard and how the hardness of gospel work is bound up with real and lasting fruit.

[7 : 15] And so notice, verse 1, Paul carries straight on from Onesiphorus and says, you then, my child, be strengthened in Christ's grace and get to work.

And in chapter 2, verse 2, he picks up the command from 1.14 and he explains what guarding the gospel looks like. It's passing it on from generation to generation.

That's the true line of apostolic succession. Not through an office, but through the gospel. Paul says, the gospel you've heard from me, entrust it to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

That's how the gospel will be guarded long after the apostolic era is over, long after Paul has been executed. And for that task, there is a requirement for Lindsay Vaughn style laser focus.

And that's what we see firstly in verses 1 to 7. We see the priority of training and temperament. The priority of training and temperament. Real gospel churches must give genuine priority to raising up gospel workers who wholeheartedly serve the advance of the gospel.

[8 : 28] Look again at verse 2. Paul has in view four layers of people here. He says, what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses. Timothy has received the gospel from Paul.

But then notice layers 3 and 4. What you have received entrust to faithful men, layer 3. And that is faithful men who will, layer 4, teach others also.

Paul's great concern is to embolden, encourage, equip, and envision his spiritual son for ministry in the era after Jesus and the apostles. Timothy was to guard the good deposit entrusted to him.

And he was to do that by entrusting it to faithful men who will do likewise. Now when we normally talk about guarding something, protecting something, we mean locking it away under locking key or keeping it safe behind sentries, behind guards.

But it's important that we get this. The gospel is not protected by keeping it out of sight. By keeping it quiet and private, by keeping it away from listening ears, by keeping it just inside the church.

[9 : 36] Quite the opposite. The gospel is like a roaring lion that needs to be let loose. Guarding it is unleashing it, seeing to it that it runs truly unchained.

That's the idea Paul uses later on in verse 9. The word of God is not bound. But Paul is clear there needs to be intentionality about this.

the survival and the thriving of the gospel in the era in which we find ourselves now will happen as the gospel is poured into people with the express purpose that they will pour it into others, who will pour it into others, and so on.

A conveyor belt, a pipeline of gospel workers, gospel servants. And that is never a concern that a church can shrug their shoulders at or assume that somebody else will take responsibility for it.

Where will the leaders of God's church tomorrow come from? The answer can only ever be from God's church today. Remember Jesus' own words as he sent out the 72 disciples, a picture of him sending the gospel to the world.

[10 : 50] He said, the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.

not a side part of the task, but key to it. Now, I give thanks to the Lord that this is a church that has taken their responsibility in this seriously.

Our partnership with Cornhill Scotland and the presence of people training for ministry with us here is not an appendage. It's a vital component. Scotland has a dire need for gospel workers, and that need is only going to increase in the next decade.

And so this cannot drop off the radar. And that has implications for all of us, doesn't it? As a church, it means we bear the cost, continuing to pour our pounds into training people for ministry, investment in future generations, in future generations, investment in seeing our church here and others in our presbytery and beyond continue to be a bold witness for the Lord Jesus.

It means learning to love having young men in particular learning ministry in our midst, bearing with their mistakes, allowing them to find their feet as preachers, even if it means working a little harder to listen, being encouragers.

[12 : 16] It means growing to love, giving away people dear to us, as we've done with Andrew and with Stephen, and praying that we might send more.

And for some, it means being willing to be trained or being willing that sons or grandsons forego promising careers in order to take up ministry.

Now, whilst we want to make and keep this a priority, notice what Paul goes on to say. He has said Timothy must entrust the gospel to faithful men. And then he gives three illustrations, the soldier, the athlete, and the farmer.

And it's worth noticing, amidst the clamor for training, this can be missed. Paul speaks straight away of matters that relate to character, to temperament.

Normal ministry is costly, it's hard. And he says the same again, verse 3, share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. Because the Christian life and ministry and service in particular is warfare.

[13:25] Do you notice the language? It's the dominant imagery here, verse 3, soldier. Verse 4, soldier. Later, Paul will say, chapter 4, verse 7, I have fought the good fight.

And so, key to ministry is not first rhetorical skill or sharpness of mind, but steadiness of heart. it's steel in the spine, settled conviction and devotion to the Lord Jesus above all.

So that when the pressure comes on, the soldier stands firm and endures cost for the task at hand. But before we start talking as if this is just some sort of stoicism or to do with our constitution, Paul won't let us.

Do you see verse 1? He says, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus. This temperament isn't something that we can manufacture or summon up from just within ourselves.

It's strength from outside of ourselves, resting in Christ, trusting in him, taking hold of his power, power that enables suffering, power that grants love and self-control, power that comes from, 114, his spirit within us.

[14:42] And so these three images convey various aspects of the same character or temperament that God's spirit can work within us. Look at what it costs here.

Look at what it takes. Verse 4, the soldier. It's a picture of single-minded devotion, not waylaid by civilian concerns, not part in the battle and part out of it, not a part-time soldier, not in the reserves, but given wholly to the one he's serving.

And Paul tells you why. His aim is to please the one who enlisted him. Pleasing Christ is not one consideration among many.

It's first. And so when it comes to other concerns, the question isn't simply, is this allowed? But the question is, is this entangling? Is it dividing my loyalties?

Is this quietly pulling me away from costly gospel work? The second image, the athlete, verse 5, an athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules, that is, unless he finishes the race.

[15:52] The goal is to be crowned, and that takes ruthless discipline, training day after day, pushing through pain barriers, choosing hard obedience, cost, and sacrifice.

There were some Olympic medal winners from close to where I grew up, and they would train every single day, not even a break for Christmas Day. Everybody else was tucking in, they were toiling.

Verse 6, next image, the farmer, once again, devoted graft, hard work, and commitment that yields a harvest. Paul's point is simple, fruitfulness comes through labor.

Gospel work is hard, it's war. And to be fruitful in passing on the gospel, to be the kind of faithful men, the kind of faithful church, who have received the gospel and are able to teach it to others also, that requires determination, discipline, and devotion.

And at this point, some backs may well go up, it's too big an ask, too drastic a calling, it's too black and white, but Paul's not embarrassed by the sharpness of his images. Soldier, athlete, farmer, war, training, graft.

[17:10] And so we need to take Paul seriously. It's very easy to domesticate this, but the whole point of war is to do battle with the enemy. And in the Lord's service, there is no retired soldier.

The temperament Timothy needs and ought to be looking for in others is one that's prepared to endure difficulty, disciplined, not soft, diligent, not self indulgent.

Paul's message is that fruitful gospel service requires our faith to be more than just a part of our lives, more than even just a significant part of our lives, where it competes with other responsibilities and desires.

It must sit above all else, driving and shaping everything else. Listen to James Philip on this. He says, the athlete relegates other interests and concerns to the background, not because they are wrong or bad in themselves, but because they are likely to militate successfully against his chance of winning the race.

But many Christians do not get beyond asking rather curiously, what wrong is there in this for the Christian? There's nothing wrong in it. God has given us richly all things to enjoy, but you do not run a race with your coat on.

[18:26] There are Christians who will never make very much of the Christian race simply because they are cluttered up and encumbered with other things. There's truth in that for the Christian life and service in general, but how much more those who have been ministers and leaders in Christ's church?

It isn't wrong for us to have responsibilities, other responsibilities, but we must take Paul seriously. Nothing must become an entanglement that diminishes our service. Every good thing mustn't have such a hold on us that we're rendered of little use.

And so very often that is what comes to men in particular who are blessed with families. Family becomes an entanglement that massively diminishes their gospel usefulness.

Family becomes the driving priority in life over and above or even just equal to Jesus and his church and his service. rather than letting service of Jesus drive family life.

We'll have one final look at these three pictures. Because there's something else in common to them all. Each one focuses on a collective purpose, receiving a reward. Do you see it?

[19:37] The soldier seeks a commendation to please the one who enlisted him. He wants to hear the well done, good and faithful servant. The athlete seeks a crown, glory, that last day when they won the race and the farmer seeks a crop, a harvest.

And that's a theme throughout this whole letter. With all that will be endured in normal gospel work, clarity about the future must be fixed in the minds of gospel servants. The promise of life, the immortality brought to light through the gospel must be fixed in their minds.

And it's why Hymenaeus and Philetus' error is so toxic. They pull into the present things that belong in the future. They pull in the crown, the commendation on the crop into this life.

But no, there is a real reward. There is a prize and a promise big enough to hold all of our griefs, big enough to contain what we might need to forego in this world, big enough to sustain the single minded devotion required to see the gospel bear fruit for generations to come.

But it's a future hope. Well, notice again, Paul anchors this in verse 1, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus so that the wooing of the world, the hearts of the devil and the fancies of the flesh are met with the expulsive power of our greater affection, a love for Jesus above all else, a love for what he's promised at the last day, so that truly the overarching aim and concern of our lives is to please the one who's enlisted us.

[21 : 34] Priority of training and temperament. But secondly, Paul then shows us the pattern, verses 8 to 13, the pattern that suffering brings salvation, suffering brings salvation.

The cost and challenge of gospel work is not an obstacle to its fruitfulness, the cost and challenge of gospel work is what enables more and more people to obtain salvation. Verses 8 to 13 explain why Timothy must, verse 3, share in suffering.

With the gospel, hardship is not a surprise deter, it's the normal road by which the message advances. Suffering is part of a normal pattern that has its apex in Jesus himself.

Do you see verse 8? Paul says, remember Jesus Christ. And notice what he emphasizes, raised from the dead. But you see, to be raised from the dead, he first had to die, didn't he?

Paul is reminding Timothy that gospel ministry is shaped by the pattern of Jesus himself, suffering, then vindication, death, then life.

[22 : 48] And yet, Jesus is more than just a model to be copied. His suffering actually won salvation. Through it, he really did abolish death and bring life and immortality to light through the gospel.

Of course, Paul's chains do not add to that salvation. Christ alone purchased it, but Paul's chains are a means by which it spreads. Verse 10. Do you see, he says, I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus.

Christ suffered to purchase salvation. Paul suffers to proclaim salvation. And notice verse 8, also sets Jesus in the context of King David, the offspring of David.

that anchors this gospel in God's long promised plan. Jesus is the promised king and his resurrection is the father's vindication of him. The throne comes by the cross.

It's always been the plan. And so Timothy and us are not to misread present suffering, present hardship. It isn't failure and it isn't an obstacle to genuine gospel ministry.

[23 : 59] the pattern seen in Jesus is suffering now and then hope of life, future hope of glory. And that's what drives Paul and that's what he wants to drive us.

And even in Jesus you can see what Paul has been illustrating in the soldier, the athlete and the farmer. Jesus was looking to the future beyond the present. We read that for the joy that was set before him he endured the cross and is now seated at the right hand of the throne of God, David.

He desired above all to do his father's will even if it meant drinking the cup and he endured all this to gather a harvest, drawing in a magnificent crop.

And so the rationale for suffering begins with Jesus and has its apex there but it is also a pattern adopted by Paul. He preaches the dying and rising saviour verse 8 and he himself is suffering for it, you see, bound as a criminal.

Do you know there's only one other place in the New Testament where the word criminal is used? And it's at the cross. Paul is aligning himself with the sufferings of Jesus so tightly, showing us that he's so bound up with Christ that it's as if he's like the criminals there on the cross at his right and his left.

[25 : 20] Notice Paul doesn't win salvation with his suffering. That was the role of Jesus alone. But look at what Paul's suffering does do. It means verse 9 that the word of God is not bound.

His willingness to endure suffering means the word of God is not bound. Of course there's a literal sense in which that's true. Paul's chains birthed a number of the New Testament letters. Chains didn't stop his ministry.

They didn't stop his apostolic gospel from spreading through the millennia. But Paul's point is bigger than the literal. It's theological. The messenger can be chained but when he is the message cannot.

Martin Luther put it memorably during the reformation. He simply preached and root God's word and then while he slept or even drank Wittenberg beer with his friends God kept advancing the gospel.

I did nothing. The word did everything. Paul may be bound but the word is not. And so verse 10 Paul will endure everything for the sake of the elect so that they obtain salvation.

[26 : 26] The rationale for suffering is that salvation was bought through suffering and the gospel bears fruit through suffering now. As its ministers, its messengers, its churches endure all manner of things to declare the gospel and to see it heard.

We can easily think that that's actually a signal for us to stop, to ease back. But what Paul is saying is that the price of ministry and the produce of ministry are tightly bound up.

And what an encouragement that is to those of us who have borne cost for the sake of the gospel. When our name has been dragged through the mud, when we've been ridiculed,!

Belittled, targeted. That isn't a reason to stop. In fact, those who look on and see that even under pressure will press on with the truth, doesn't that strengthen the message?

That it's so real and so good that it's worth enduring everything that people might obtain salvation. And what an encouragement this will be if maintaining a gospel witness in this country gets harder and harder.

[27 : 35] If anti-conversion laws and all the rest continue to try to muzzle God's workers, well, God's word will never be muzzled. It's a consistent thread throughout church history that suffering and persecution do not curtail the church's growth, they cultivate it.

Because ours is a suffering saviour and ours is an abandoned and imprisoned apostle and so ours is an unchained gospel. And then Paul seals the point with this trustworthy saying in verses 11 to 13, it spells out the same economy of Jesus kingdom.

Death leads to life and endurance leads to glory. If we have died with him, we'll also live with him. If we endure with him, we'll also reign with him. Death, life, glory, that's the pattern.

But I do think the focus of this little saying is the second half in verses 12 to 13 because Paul is about to go on and talk about unfaithful men who misteach.

Men who are not like on a cipherous. And so whilst there is great encouragement for those who do think over these things, who press into Christ's gracious strengthening so that they might share in suffering, there is also a solemn warning to those who would abandon Paul, those who would be ashamed of the gospel of Jesus.

[29 : 02] Do you see Paul's language shifts from verses 8 to 10 where he says I we, to verses 11 to 13 where he says we. He's pressing it on to all of us.

If we deny him, and I take it that abandoning Paul and his gospel is denying Jesus, if we deny him, then Jesus will deny us.

You can't claim Christ while disowning the Christ-shaped pattern of gospel ministry, and you can't love Jesus while being ashamed of the gospel. And yet, even that warning comes with a stabilizing reassurance.

If we are faithless, he remains faithful. Those who abandon Paul, those who go off to teach fanciful and false ideas, will not derail God's purposes.

He remains faithful. He cannot deny himself. His word cannot be bound. And even there, the warning is laced with grace, because God's faithfulness extends to offering grace even to those who failed and failed and failed again.

[30 : 11] His grace extends even to those who have done great harm to him, done his church great harm. You could say it extends even to the chief persecutor of the church, even to someone like Paul.

So even those listening in at Ephesus might, in hearing these words, be brought to repentance, pulled back from desertion to devotion.

And still today, if our service of Jesus has been on the drift, if the easier way has been what we've been lured into, if we've been growing ashamed of Paul and his gospel, repentance is still possible.

It's possible, verse 21, to be cleansed from being dishonorable to being useful to the master. fear. So, brothers and sisters, in the midst of ministry, we mustn't misread hardship as a signal to step back, and we mustn't let fear harden into shame.

Paul is clear. In our service of Jesus as a church, we must not deny Jesus, but endure with him, trusting that the word of God cannot be chained, no matter the cost.

[31 : 23] For God's faithfulness will not fail. And so we've seen the character required for ministry, and we've seen the rationale for the cost of ministry, but finally, Paul makes clear to us the content of such ministry.

And that's what we see in verses 14 to 26. We see proclamation ought to rise righteousness. Proclamation ought to rise righteousness. Genuine gospel ministry is marked by the Bible being faithfully unleashed so as to produce godly character and not garish competition.

Not all preaching and teaching is profitable. There are many pious sounding words that are verbal poison. Paul uses another three illustrations to press whom his overarching point here.

We have verse 15, the worker, one approved by God and rightly handling the word of truth. One who stands in contrast to those who, verse 14, quarrel about words.

To those, verse 16, whose teaching is irreverent babble. In verse 17, those whose words spread like gangrene. And we have the vessels, verses 20 to 21, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable.

[32 : 43] But it is possible to become an honorable vessel. Cleansing is possible, but it is only through cleansing. That one can be made ready for every good work.

And then the third illustration, the servant, verses 22 to 26. The Lord's servant who, verse 22, flees immature passions. Verse 23, who refuses foolish controversies and instead is able to teach patiently and endure evil and correct with gentleness and seeks to bring about repentance.

Verse 25, a servant marked by righteousness, not rivalry, by love, not loquaciousness, by peace, not pettiness.

Paul is dealing here with the faithfulness and fruit of Bible teaching. His concern is for a Bible teaching ministry that bears good fruit, not poisonous fruit.

And there are two main threads through these illustrations, a harmful teaching ministry and a healthy teaching ministry. So firstly, the harmful teaching ministry, this is a ministry that quarrels over words.

[33 : 53] Verse 14, it's full of irreverent babble. Verse 16, and it's engrossed in foolish, ignorant controversies. Verse 23. And there are at least two ways that such quarrelsome ness plays out.

First, it can blunt the word of God. So that any time God's word might be confronting or challenging, the response is, oh, but you haven't quite applied that in the exact right way there.

Your understanding of that one verse is just ever so slightly wrong. And so it becomes a way to dodge the force of scripture. It's the kind of thing that comes out perhaps when someone like Dave Brennan is unveiling the harrowing realities of abortion and calling the church to serious response, only to be met with, hmm, I'm not sure that's what that verse is quite talking about.

I'm not sure that the primary application of that is to contend for human life in that particular way. Quarreling over words. Many other examples besides where minutiae obscures far bigger concerns and challenges that are as plain as day from the scriptures.

Or second, it can bash people over the head with the word of God. Where insistence on every minute doctrine as a first order issue, insistence on total clarity about every last matter so that even the mysteries known only in the mind of God become touchstones for orthodoxy.

[35 : 22] A kind of spiritual virtue signaling. Look at my credentials. I'm orthodox in all the right ways. I remember when I was at Bible college, someone once introduced themselves with their name, followed by how many points of Calvinism they held to, which position they took in the millennium, their understanding of the sacraments, what their church polity was.

Here are my spiritual credentials. But there's more to harmful teaching than quarreling. There is teaching that has clearly swerved from the truth, verse 18.

Teaching that makes false promises. That pulls the future into the present, that reimagines theology to fit what we want from life. No, no, Timothy.

Now is not the time to suffer. We've been set free from that. Jesus suffered so that we don't have to. With Jesus, we can have our best life now. That's the message of Hymenaeus and Philetus.

Or perhaps swerving from the truth in other ways. While the Bible's millennia old and couldn't have foreseen the progress society would make. So we need to listen to the spirit today who would call us to bless genuine loving relationships, even between two men or two women.

[36 : 41] But notice what shoes these things up, this quarreling and this false teaching. Paul says, look at what it produces. Verse 14. It's teaching that does no good.

It ruins the hearers. Verse 16. It leads to progress. Yes. But progress towards more and more ungodliness.

Verse 18. It's ministry that upsets real faith. Paul calls it what it is. He says it's gangrene. It's not just let's have a difference of opinion on this.

It doesn't agree to disagree. He says such teaching is deadly. Spreads through the body, the church. And as it's spread, it kills. And with gangrene, you don't negotiate.

You cut it out. Verse 19. You depart from iniquity. So Paul says, look at the fruit. What does a ministry, a preacher produce in the hearers?

[37 : 43] That's why it's such a danger to take hook, line and sinker, the teaching and applications of those who are very far away from us. With the internet, it's possible to swallow almost whole a ministry on the other side of the world.

And I think that's very rarely helpful. All manner of problems come from aping pastors detached from our own setting, importing their controversies and their pressures and treating their cultural applications as if they were gospel.

And from such a distance, it's very hard, nigh on impossible to see the character of the ministry. Whether it does patiently endure evil, whether it is marked by righteousness, by love and peace.

Whether it is kind to everyone. Friends, these are the things to look for in the fruit of Bible teaching. And I have to say it is again, very often young men, impressionable men, or men of certain personalities and dispositions who become avid readers of theology and who can become sucked into foolish and ignorant controversies that breed quarrels.

People who relish nothing more than a good theological argument to correct the room, to spout off. And it isn't uncommon that such men pursue ministry and long to be preachers who will stick it to their theological opponents and show the world who's clever.

[39 : 16] And they become the kind of Christians, or heaven forbid, the kinds of ministers who seek above all to convert Christians. Setting to right those who do not have their neatly tied in a bow theological framework is the barometer of orthodoxy.

Paul's saying that is harmful teaching ministry. Well, let's look at healthy teaching ministry then. Paul wants Timothy to press on with a ministry that is both competent and godly.

And so first it seeks God's approval and not man's. Verse 15, do your best to present yourself to God as one approved. It isn't spiritual virtue signaling, it's concern to be approved by God.

To please the one who's enlisted you. And such a thing has no need to be ashamed because it's a ministry carried out in a way that rightly handles the word of truth.

The picture there is of cutting straight to the heart of the Bible's message. The word handling is literally to guide along a straight path. That is the very heart of ministry.

[40 : 28] And this is why devotion is required and a steely spine because there's nothing more important than that the word of God is rightly handled. That is what will either build up or destroy a church.

And that is as much a character thing as it is a competence thing. Because temptation will abound to swerve from the message to seek the approval of the world.

But it does also take competence. Genuine Bible ministry must cut a straight path from the Bible's message to the hearers.

That's the whole reason that Cornhill exists. That's why we partner with them so closely. To train people, men in particular, to have the tools to draw the heart of the Bible's message and to bring it to bear on the life of the church.

There are all manner of ways to handle God's word unhelpfully. But it takes graft and toil to rightly handle it. As has been said, God's word will not yield its treasure to chance inquiry.

[41 : 32] And so a genuine gospel church will protect time for its ministers to rightly handle the word of truth. So that that is truly what gets priority in a week.

In every week. Faithful Bible ministry. Faithful Bible teaching. But secondly, healthy ministry aims at righteousness, not rivalry.

Verse 22. It isn't given to immature desires. It isn't. It is concerned not merely with being right, but with being righteous. You see, the fruit, the evidence of real Bible teaching is seen as much as it is heard.

It looks like people becoming more whole, more wholesome. It looks like Christ being formed in people so that they cannot help but pour out love. It looks like doctrine that blesses relationships expressed through lives that are peaceable and righteous.

And it isn't interested in point scoring or theological one-upmanship. Rather, verse 24, it's able to teach and actually benefit hearers. It teaches with patience, even having to withstand evil, even having to withstand desertion and detention.

[42:50] And when it needs to confront and correct, it does so with gentleness. With a desire to bring about repentance. And that matters because verse 26, Satan has his claws into many a man who would profess to be a teacher in God's church.

But cleansing is possible. Dishonorable vessels can be redeemed to be useful for the master. And so a healthy teaching ministry cannot settle for just being right.

It must always aim for repentance, for righteousness, for love. And in such a ministry, even though it will be costly, look at what Paul gives Timothy in verse 19 as a firm foundation.

He says, the Lord knows you're his. It's an echo of Numbers chapter 16 where God's people faced a rebellion undermining God's appointed ministry.

But God knows you're his. And so when there is harmful teaching around, when it is costly to maintain a healthy ministry, we're assured that God knows, he sees, and he will keep his church.

[44:03] And so in a world filled with false ministries and poisonous teaching, the future of the church in the apostolic age, in our age, is that the church identifies, trains, and submits to men who have a steely devotion to the Lord and a determination to unleash the word of the Lord no matter what it might cost.

And for that task, for our task, Paul says be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we marvel at what Jesus has not only accomplished, but modeled. And we marvel at what your grace is capable of.

And so we ask that you would grant us such grace that we would be concerned above all to please you. And concerned as a church to invest the gospel in generations to come.

So be at work in our hearts, we pray, that we be pleased to continue bearing the cost of this. Because we love you above all else.

[45:32] We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Thank you.