

4. The Character and Work of the Bible Teacher

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 10 June 2012

Preacher: Edward Lobb

[0 : 00] And now we come to our reading from Scripture, and let's turn together to Paul's second letter to Timothy, chapter 2, and you'll find this on page 995 in our church Bibles.

A fortnight ago we read the first part of the chapter, verses 1 to 13, where Paul encourages Timothy, Timothy, my child, as he calls him in verse 1, to be strong, to be prepared to endure suffering as a good soldier of Christ, to remember Jesus, who though he suffered, was also raised. And you'll remember we have this great saying, this trustworthy saying in verses 11, 12, and 13 about faithfulness and endurance. So let's hear as Paul continues at verse 14, and I'll read to the end of the chapter.

So 2 Timothy 2, verse 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.

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.

[1 : 17] 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 those 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 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.

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

[2 : 28] 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.

This is the word of the Lord, and may it be a blessing and a strength to us this evening.

Well, shall we bow our heads for a moment of prayer? Amen. Lord God, our Father, it is your word and your word only that brings life to our hearts and clarity to our understanding.

And we pray, therefore, that you will bless us tonight and have mercy upon us. Help us to hear your voice, to know you better, and to have our faith confirmed. And we ask it for Jesus' sake.

[3 : 35] Amen. Amen. Well, do let's turn up 2 Timothy, chapter 2, once again. And you'll perhaps have seen from our printed bulletin that my title for tonight is The Character and Work of the Bible Teacher.

I hope that title well sums up our passage, 2 Timothy, chapter 2, verses 14 to 26. Now, the situation, just to remind you, is that Paul is writing to Timothy.

Paul is in prison. He knows that the end of his life is about to come. And he's writing to Timothy to encourage and enable Timothy to get on with the work after Paul himself has gone.

Timothy is a younger church leader, not by any means a novice, but still quite a young man. And Paul is giving Timothy, in typical forthright Pauline fashion, some clear instruction about Timothy's life, what his work is going to involve, and how his character needs to keep on developing if he is to do his work properly.

Now, of course, the character and the work are very closely tied up together. The work of Christian leadership and teaching cannot be done unless it is backed up by a life that is maturing in the right way.

[4 : 55] The work and the life go together. So that's our subject for this evening. Now, some of you might immediately say, but what has this to do with me? Because I'm not a person who's ever going to be a Christian leader or preacher or teacher.

And surely the majority of people who come to church on a Sunday are not going to be leaders or teachers either. So shouldn't a part of the Bible like this be kept for study in theological seminaries or ministers' training courses?

Why does the whole church need to study a passage like this? Well, the whole church does need to study and think about a passage like this.

And the reason is simple. Although the majority of Christians are not asked to be leaders or preachers, all Christians are led and preached to.

And all Christians need to have the right kind of people as their leaders and teachers. In a church like this, if the minister and the elders and other leaders began to spout heresy and began to lead the church up the garden path, the congregation would be dismayed and the work would quickly fall to pieces.

[6 : 03] We all need to know what good Christian leadership looks like and what it sounds like. And let me try and put it like this. Imagine this congregation in 25 or 30 years' time.

Willie Philip has retired and is living in Fife with a shock of white hair. Maybe Portugal, but somewhere else anyway, with a shock of white hair. And he's writing his six-volume commentary on the New Testament.

We look forward to it, Willie. And many of the older ones amongst us, the other older ones, will be by that stage on the brown side of the turf. Well, it is true, friends, isn't it?

And many of the younger ones, many of those who are perhaps 15 or 20 or 25 now, will be, if you haven't moved to some other part of the country, you'll then be the senior responsible leaders in the congregation.

And imagine the situation where a new minister is needed. What kind of man do you choose? If you haven't studied a passage like this, you will be clueless.

[7 : 09] The health of a congregation depends on having the right kind of leaders in place. So this kind of passage is very important for all of us, not just for the relatively small number who are current or future leaders.

We all need to know what a worker approved by God looks like. I take that phrase from verse 15. Well, let's put on our reading glasses and we'll turn to the text.

As I said a moment ago, Timothy's character and Timothy's work are very closely intertwined. It's not as though Paul gives Timothy a neat section of six verses on his character, followed by a neat section of six verses on his work.

The two are all tied up together. So we'll take the whole passage together. I won't attempt tonight to work through it consecutively, verse by verse. But I'll try to work out what Paul is saying under two headings, followed by an important final thought.

So here's our first heading. Timothy must be tough with himself, but kind to others. Now, that's not the whole story, but that's where we'll start.

[8 : 22] He must be tough with himself, but kind to others. Let's start with the middle paragraph, verses 20 and 21. Now, in a great house, says Paul, 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 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.

So in verse 20, Paul pictures a great house, the house of a wealthy landowner, somewhere like Killein Castle on the Ayrshire coast.

If you haven't been there, it's worth visiting. So he says, in your typical great house, there's a great variety of vessels. By vessels, he means pots and jars and mugs and cups.

Some, he says, are made of expensive materials like gold and silver, and they are for the best use, for honorable use. You bring out that sort of thing when the queen comes to tea, don't you?

[9 : 26] The best things. But other vessels are made of cheap material, wood or clay, and they are for what Paul calls dishonorable use, for waste bins, jars for storing boot polish, the little mug on the

kitchen sink that you put your used tea bags into.

And Paul is saying to Timothy, you and I, brother, are vessels. But what sort of use are we going to be put to? Will we just be used to store the spent tea bags?

Or will the master of the house prize us for honorable use and set us apart as holy and useful and ready for every good work? And what will make the difference between which category we fall into? Verse 21 tells us, If anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use. So the Lord's servant, the leader, the preacher, has got to undertake a lifelong program of cleansing himself, according to verse 21.

Now, somebody might say, But doesn't the Lord cleanse us? Don't we read in the first letter of John that the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin? Yes, we do indeed.

[10:41] And it's a glorious truth that the blood of Jesus shed on the cross utterly removes the penalty of human sin and its power to condemn us on the day of judgment.

But what Paul is teaching here is not contradictory to John. It's complimentary. Because we too have a responsibility to examine ourselves, to get to know the inside of our hearts, and to wage war on the sinful things, the dishonorable things that lurk inside us.

What dishonorable things, we might ask? Well, let's allow Jesus to remind us of the contents of the human heart. Out of the heart of man, he says in Mark chapter 7, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness.

That's the portrait of the inside of your heart and mine by nature. That's the grime within. Yes, the blood of Jesus sets us right with God and brings us complete forgiveness and a conscience at peace and a promise of life eternal.

But our job is to set about cleansing our hearts and minds, to cleanse the inside of the vessel from the things that are dishonorable. And in Timothy's case, when he does this, he will become useful to the master of the house.

[12:08] Now you'll notice that in verse 22, Paul then presses the point home, expands upon it. So he says, flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

So in verse 22, there is something to flee. Notice that verb. It's a strong verb. There is something to sprint away from. And there are other things to pursue, to sprint after.

Now try sprinting in two directions, two opposite directions at the same time. You can't do it, can you? It's youthful passions that Timothy is to sprint away from, to flee.

What are those? Well, typically, a young man will pursue drunkenness, sexual misbehavior, self-indulgence, vanity, selfish ambition, headstrong recklessness, arrogance, and obstinacy.

I'm not suggesting that the older people don't also have those problems, but that's particularly true of younger people. So Paul is saying to Timothy, still quite a young man, flee these things.

[13:18] Don't walk slowly away from them. Pick up your heels and run like a greyhound. And pursue, that's an equally strong word in Paul's Greek. It means run after something and hunt something down, as if chasing a quarry.

What is Timothy to pursue? Righteousness, faith, love, and peace. The hallmarks of godly progress and real growth in learning to live the Christian life.

So the Timothys, who lead and teach the Lord's churches, need to be people who are engaged in lifelong warfare with everything that is dishonorable.

Do let's pray, therefore, that our Timothys will be like that, because then the churches will be blessed. Now some of you will know that my main job is to lead the work of the Cornhill training course here in Glasgow.

And the Cornhill course exists to train students to be Bible preachers and teachers. And as the years have gone on, I've become increasingly aware that men and women, those who are training to be responsible leaders in the churches, need not only to develop skills in speaking and teaching, but need to be continually growing in godly living.

[14:32] Their speaking and their teaching is to a great degree authenticated by their way of life and its quality. So if they're still playing around with what Paul calls youthful passions, and if they're not actively pursuing righteousness, love, faith, and peace, they may speak with the tongues of angels, but they won't help the cause of the gospel.

So Timothy needs to be tough on himself. And yet, says Paul, he needs to be kind to others. In fact, if you look onto verse 24, you'll see the phrase is even stronger than that.

He's to be kind to everyone. And when you look at verses 24 and 25 together, it's striking to see how Paul places so closely together the ideas of kindness, patience, and gentleness.

Now, the context in which Paul uses these words is a context of controversy, difficulty, and opposition. And we're coming onto that in a moment. But it's good to see how Paul uses these ideas of kindness and patience and gentleness.

In verse 24, the Lord's servant, that is Timothy, must not be quarrelsome, but rather kind. So if a Christian leader ever comes to somebody and begins a sentence by saying, I've got a bone to pick with you, you might suspect that he has cut verse 24 out of his Bible.

[16:03] There's a kindness in good Christian leadership which our Timothys need to develop. As for the patience required, Paul says, patiently enduring evil.

Therefore, when opposition comes and harsh and perhaps unjustified criticism are thrown at the Christian leader, he needs to learn to endure these things patiently.

He doesn't put arsenic into his opponent's coffee. He doesn't go around to their house and put a brick through their front window. He patiently endures their calumnies and their smears.

Now, it's very encouraging to know that Paul speaks of Christian leadership like this. Paul never suggests that good Christian leadership will sail through life unscathed.

In fact, quite the contrary. Good Christian leadership will attract enemy and enmity and fierce opposition because what is truthful and good will always attract the attentions of the devil.

[17:02] Paul assumes this everywhere. After all, he had had bucket loads of experience of exactly the same thing. For him to be a Christian leader was to be in great trouble with many people a lot of the time.

So Timothy is to endure evil patiently. And in verse 25, as he engages in discussion with his opponents, he is to do so with gentleness.

And don't these ideas of kindness and patience and gentleness stem from the example of the Lord Jesus himself? Do you remember how Jesus describes himself as gentle and lowly in heart in Matthew chapter 11?

The prophet Isaiah speaks of the Lord's servant as one who will not break a bruised reed or quench a dimly burning wick. There's something delightful about the strong Christian leader who is deeply convinced of the truth of the Bible, engaging gently with his opponents as he seeks to correct them. He opposes what is wrong, but he bends over backwards to be courteous while he does so. So there's the first thing. Timothy is to be tough on himself, but kind to others.

[18:14] He's got to declare lifelong warfare on sin in his own life, but he's to engage with opponents gently and courteously. Well, now secondly, Timothy's teaching is to be clear and courageous.

Clear and courageous. You'll see that phrase in verse 24, able to teach. That's an important phrase in Paul. You'll find that exactly that phrase comes in both Titus chapter 1 and 1 Timothy chapter 3, where Paul is describing the character of the Christian leader.

Able to teach. I want to come at this from three different directions, but let me say this first. It's worth reflecting for a moment on the fact that the Christian leader is above everything else, a teacher.

A farmer is not a teacher. His job is to cultivate the soil and produce food. Now, he may have an apprentice under his wing from time to time and do a bit of teaching, but it's not his job.

A cabinet maker is not a teacher. His job is to make beautiful furniture to brighten up people's homes. But a Christian leader's core function is to teach the Bible, the gospel, and the Christian life.

[19:31] And because the Christian leader is a teacher, the tools of his trade are words. And this comes out very clearly in this passage. Look, for example, at verse 14.

Remind them. Well, how is he to remind people? By speaking. He's got to use words. Still in verse 14. Charge them. Well, how is he going to do that?

Again, he must use words. Then verse 15. Timothy is a worker who must rightly handle the word of truth. How does he do that? By using words.

We'll come back to verse 25. How is Timothy to correct his opponents with gentleness? Well, there's only one way. By speaking to them and by explaining to them how they're wrong.

So Timothy, the teacher, is to use words well. But this passage also shows us how destructive words can be when they're used wrongly. So look at verse 14 again.

[20 : 35] If people quarrel over words, it does no good. It only ruins those who are listening to them. Or look at verse 16. If people engage in what Paul calls irreverent babble, it leads people into ungodliness.

And, verse 17, their talk, their words wrongly used, will spread like gangrene. Gangrene, I'm sure you know, is a rotting of the flesh which causes death if it's not stopped.

Paul then, in verse 17, names and shames two men, Hymenaeus and Philetus. Sometimes naming and shaming has to be done. And these two men have swerved from the truth.

How? By saying, by using words that say that the resurrection has already happened. And what does their false teaching do? It upsets the faith of some.

Look on to verse 23. Words, again, are being misused. They're creating foolish, ignorant controversies which breed quarrels. And then look at verse 26.

[21 : 39] Where do wrong words and false teaching lead people to finally? They lead them into the snare of the devil. So this is a key Bible passage about the use of words, the power of words for good or evil.

So words wrongly used bring, verse 14, ruin. Verse 16, ungodliness. Verse 18, upset to people's faith.

Verse 23, quarrels. Verse 26, capture by the devil. So this is why Timothy, verse 15, must be somebody who rightly handles the word of truth.

Now this means that the picture Paul is painting is a rather alarming picture. He's describing a scene where there is a great deal of talk going on and it's religious talk.

The people who are ruining their hearers and upsetting the faith of some are people who are closely involved in the life of the churches. This is not godless talk somewhere far away in the wide world.

[22 : 43] This is godless talk that is spoiling the Christian fellowships for which Timothy is responsible. So Timothy has to be rather like a lighthouse on a rock amidst the swirling seas of ungodly Babel.

So let's notice various, three aspects of what he needs to do to be an able teacher, able to teach. Here's the first thing. He must know the truth.

He must know the truth. And this will always involve drawing firm lines between truth and error. So look for example at verse 18. Hymenaeus and Philetus have swerved from the truth.

Now Paul can only, and Timothy, the two of them can only know that these men have swerved from the truth if they know what the truth is themselves, the truth that is to be swerved from.

Now in this particular case the heresy was that the resurrection had already happened. That's what they were teaching. It's impossible to be absolutely certain what slant their teaching took.

[23 : 44] It may even be that they were taking Paul's own teaching and twisting it. Because you'll remember that Paul teaches that in one sense, at one level, because Jesus is risen and because his people are united with him in his death and resurrection, his people are risen with him.

So Paul says, for example, in Colossians 3, verse 1, if then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above where Christ is. So Paul does teach that in principle Christians already share the resurrection of Christ.

But Paul is equally firm that the resurrection of our bodies is a future event which will only happen after the return of Jesus to the earth.

You and I, friends, are not yet resurrected. And as I look around this congregation, it is very obvious that we are not yet resurrected. If we were, we wouldn't need to be going to the doctors this week.

But the fact is we're falling to pieces. We're not yet in the new creation. The resurrection is future. Now there are all kinds of variations on this false theme that there is no future resurrection.

[24 : 54] Even John Lennon's song, Imagine. Imagine there's no heaven. It's easy if you try. Even that is a way of saying that there is no future resurrection. But one of the glories of the Christian gospel is that the new creation lies ahead of us.

The best is yet to be. And that's why Christian people don't despair as we begin to lose our hair, our shape, our youthfulness, and our ability to run the 100 meters in 10 seconds.

If we ever had that ability. I never did, but some of you did. I bet you did, didn't you? Anyway, just looking at a man who was obviously a great athlete in his youth. Now the point of verse 18 is that Timothy and we need to know the truth if we're to realize what it is to swerve from it.

If Timothy is to be a true teacher, he needs to know where the line is drawn between truth and error. But one of the characteristics of the Western world in the last 20 or 30 years is that not only are we

growing unwilling to draw lines between truth and error, we are losing the very capacity to draw such lines.

Today's world says to us, don't draw lines between truth and error. Please don't. There's no need. Everybody's viewpoint is so interesting and so relevant and so valid. On the World Wide Web, there is room for almost every view on everything.

[26 : 24] Only one or two subjects are taboo. How to make bombs, how to seduce children. Those are off limits. Almost everything else is welcome.

And this irresponsible indifference to truth and error can very easily influence a Christian leader today. So for example, you might have a group Bible study taking place.

Perhaps a study on a passage from the Bible about the resurrection. And somebody sitting in the groups speaks up and says, you know, I've always been rather drawn to the idea of reincarnation. I think those Eastern religions have got something there. I mean, the idea of returning to the earth as a gorgeous red admiral butterfly is just so attractive, isn't it? Now, what does the group leader say?

Thank you, Clarence. Thank you so much. That's a most intriguing and unusual insight. I must remember that and ponder it. No. If the leader has learned the ways of Paul, he says, Clarence, you are a delightful human being, but you're wrong.

[27 : 30] The Bible's teaching on the resurrection is incompatible with the idea of reincarnation. And that's what the faithful Bible study group leader must do. The leader needs to know the truth and lovingly insist on the truth in the Bible study group.

In the 1990s, Don Carson, who's a very fine Bible teacher from North America, published a big book called *The Gagging of God*, subtitled *Christianity Confronts Pluralism*.

And one chapter of that book has this title on drawing lines where drawing lines is rude. I think that's a great chapter title.

Rude, I think, was spelt with a capital R on drawing lines where drawing lines is rude. Modern secular society thinks that it's rude to draw lines between truth and falsehood, but it's unloving and divisive and insensitive to people's feelings to say, this position is right and that position is wrong. But the Bible's view is quite the opposite. It is the most loving thing to do to draw lines between what is true about God and man and what is false about God and man.

[28 : 45] In fact, it's only if we draw lines as the Bible draws them that we can truly get to know the Lord and help others to know him as well. So to get back to verses 17 and 18, Paul and Timothy are only going to be able to recognize that Hymenaeus and Philetus are wrong if they know the truth.

If Timothy is to teach the truth, he must know the truth. But secondly, Timothy must also be courageous.

It's not enough for Timothy to know the truth. He's got to insist that the truth should reshape the life of the congregation. Look at verse 14.

Now what is verse 14 going to mean for Timothy? What would he think when he first read this? Remind them of these things and charge them before God not to quarrel about words which does no good but only ruins the hearers.

What's it going to mean for Timothy to respond to that instruction? It's going to mean that he calls a meeting of the church or it may need to be a series of meetings over time in which he says to the people, I have to charge you, my friends, before God to stop this quarreling about words.

[30 : 05] It does no good. In fact, it's ruining the faith and the understanding of other people who are listening to your endless arguments. So in verse 14, Paul is calling Timothy to insist that the congregation changes its behavior.

Now friends, who wants to be at Timothy if that is part of the deal? Courage is required because when the Christian leader insists on the truthfulness of the truth, there will always be opposition. When Timothy read verse 14 for the first time, I can only think that his heart sank. He must have said to himself, I must do what Paul asks me to and I will do it, but it might be like stepping into a snake pit when I do because some people will oppose me fiercely if I confront their bad behavior like this.

So do you see, it's not enough for Timothy to know the truth or even simply to preach the truth from the pulpit. The truth, if I can put it like this, has to be pressed into the life of the congregation as you press the polyfiller into the cracks in the wall.

When I was a parish vicar in England, I had many moments when my heart sank as I think Timothy's must have sunk when he read verse 14. Let me just give you one or two examples of situations that I had to deal with.

[31 : 25] This was nothing unusual for me. Lots of people have had similar things. Edward said somebody to me one day, I'm sorry to have to tell you this, but Mr. So-and-so and Mrs. So-and-so, naming two of our youth leaders, have started an adulterous relationship.

My heart sank. I knew I had to grasp a nettle. Here's another one. Edward, I'm sorry to pass this on to you, but did you realize that Mr. So-and-so, naming a man who had quite a high-profile position of leadership in the church, is living with another man in a same-sex relationship.

I didn't know about it. My heart sank. I knew I would have to grasp the nettle. Here's another one. It was about a week, perhaps even five days, before the church annual general meeting which involved the election of church officers, office bearers.

Now, you may know a Church of England church has two church wardens, and they are the most senior lay members of the church. Now, a particular man had been nominated for the post of church warden.

Somebody came to me just a few days before the meeting and said to me, Edward, did you know that Mr. So-and-so is an active Freemason in the local Freemason's lodge? I did not know that he was.

[32 : 41] My heart sank again. I knew that I had to grasp the nettle. Because when you look carefully at the philosophy that underlies Freemasonry, you realize that it's not compatible with the Bible Gospel.

I can tell you we had a big furore over that business, and we lost three or four church members. But in the long run, it was a very helpful episode. It helped to clarify the truth.

Now, the Timothys of this world have got to grasp these nettles. I know when I was a minister, I found it very difficult. I'm not a particularly thick-skinned person. I'm not a bull-in-a-China-shop kind of person.

But I knew that the health of the church depended on those nettles being grasped by the senior leaders of the church. This is why I am so glad and so grateful to God that in this church, our elders and our minister are willing to grasp the big nettle that is having to be grasped at the moment.

Really, it's more like a viper than a nettle. Grasping nettles and vipers takes courage. You younger ones who are the Timothys of the future, do learn the lessons from what our church is going through at the moment.

[33 : 51] this will stand you in such good stead. Leadership that is faithful to the Bible, that resists the agenda of the godless world, will sometimes be very costly.

But the consequence of such costly leadership is joy, health, and vigor for the congregation. Whereas if the nettle is not grasped, the congregation becomes confused and weakened, and in the end is like sheep without a shepherd.

So to be an able teacher, Timothy must know the truth and he must be courageous in applying it. And then third, looking to verse 15 here, he must rightly handle the word of truth.

Let me read verse 15 because really it's the key verse in this passage. 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.

Now let's notice first the simple fact that he's a worker. Anyone who seriously prepares to lead a Bible study group or to speak to a youth group or to preach a sermon in church has to engage in hard labor.

[35 : 08] The scriptures will not yield their treasures to chance inquiry. Christian work and leadership is at heart all about handling the word of truth rightly. It is hard work but it's glorious work because you know that good Bible teaching builds up other Christians and brings great strength and encouragement and clarity of understanding to them.

But verse 15 also shows that Timothy must be a worker who has no need to be ashamed before God of the quality of his work. If he's lazy in his preparation for example or if he lacks the courage to press home the implications of the passage that he's preaching he may have cause to be ashamed. But if he will do the hard work and grasp the nettles he'll have no reason to hang his head in embarrassment at the end. And let's notice what this work is in verse 15.

It is rightly handling the word of truth. As Christian teachers and leaders grow more experienced they have to learn to handle the Bible. And the Bible is a big and complex book.

Of course its big themes and its big message are plain if we have ears to hear and eyes to see but it's easy to mishandle the Bible. So the Bible teacher has to learn for example to see what is the big thrust and purpose of the passage that he's teaching.

[36 : 36] You've got so to speak to drive your golf ball down the fairway and not fiddle around in the long grass. You've got to drive a straight shot. So if you're preaching on the prodigal son it's no good spending three quarters of your sermon on bean pods and pigs.

There's something more important going on in the story of the prodigal son. When you're teaching something from Paul's letters what you have to do is to try to think Paul's thoughts after him.

You have to ask why is Paul writing this in this way to this church or this individual? If the Bible teacher can feel Paul's heartbeat and unearth Paul's pressing concerns he begins to understand what are God's pressing concerns.

Well I haven't time to say more about rightly handling the word of truth but it's Timothy's task it's Timothy's work it's the task of all our Timothys. So friends if you ever see one of our Cornhill students looking a bit baggy eyed and harassed it may be because that student is struggling to come to terms with this glorious but demanding task.

Well let me finish with a final thought which I hope will encourage all of us as we think of the development of Timothy's character and as we think about his work and it's this. Timothy's work while it is obviously being done in the sight of men and women is primarily and ultimately done in the sight of God.

[38 : 05] look again at verse 15 whose approval is it that Timothy must seek? Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved approved by him.

You see if Timothy does his preaching and teaching so as to be approved by men he will come unstuck because he'll be serving his own reputation or his own acceptability he'll really be serving himself but if his concern is to be approved by God he will then say whatever needs to be said even if it incurs the hostility of men.

Look on to verse 24 Timothy is the Lord's servant now of course it's true that he's also serving the congregation he's serving the people entrusted to his care but his primary service is to the Lord. Look back to verse 4 in this same chapter do you remember the aim of the soldier of Christ is to please the commanding officer who enlisted him and that is the Lord Jesus it's this feature of Christian leadership and teaching which sustains the leader through times of exhaustion and trial and fierce opposition before ever he is the servant of men he's the servant of the Lord and if he keeps remembering that fact day after day he will be sustained and the church will be blessed let us pray dear God our father how we thank you that the truth is so clearly taught taught in the scriptures and we pray for all of us not only the timothys of this world but for all of us that you will give us a great love for the truth a willingness to distinguish it from what is untrue and the courage to hold on to it to be unashamed of it and we ask it in Jesus name amen vo for and we to