

Ready! Set! Go!
Persevering is Hard Work
2 Timothy 2:14-26

June 15, 2014

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Text Introduction: We are going through this wonderful book called 2 Timothy which is actually a letter from Paul to Timothy. Paul writes from prison. He is preparing Timothy to take the mantle of leadership. His general theme is a call to perseverance. I am calling this series: Ready, Set, Go. We have learned of a basic foundation of perseverance. We said you must know what you believe, build upon what you believe, and guard what you believe. We learned how that faith is passed on from one generation to another. In fact, we said that it is life's highest calling. We have spoken about some not so obvious keys to perseverance including listening to reliable teachers, leaning on those who refresh us, and learning to reproduce in others what we have learned. We noted some word pictures of perseverance—a soldier, an athlete, and a farmer. Then, in a crescendo-like way, Paul dropped the exclamation point by urging Timothy to "Keep in mind Jesus!" In our persevering, remember Jesus!

Now, in our text today, we see Paul's continuation of solid urging that we persevere, especially because of the abundance of false teachers.

Text: ¹⁴ Remind them of these things, charging them before God not to fight about words; this is in no way profitable and leads to the ruin of the hearers. ¹⁵ Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who doesn't need to be ashamed, correctly teaching the word of truth. ¹⁶ But avoid irreverent, empty speech, for this will produce an even greater measure of godlessness. ¹⁷ And their word will spread like gangrene; Hymenaeus and Philetus are among them. ¹⁸ They have deviated from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and are overturning the faith of some. ¹⁹ Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, having this inscription:

The Lord knows those who are His, and
Everyone who names the name of the Lord
must turn away from unrighteousness.

²⁰ Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver bowls, but also those of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. ²¹ So if anyone purifies himself from anything dishonorable, he will be a special instrument, set apart, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work.

²² Flee from youthful passions, and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. ²³ But reject foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they breed quarrels. ²⁴ The Lord's slave must not quarrel, but must be gentle to everyone, able to teach, and patient, ²⁵ instructing his opponents with gentleness. Perhaps God will grant them repentance leading them to the knowledge of the truth. ²⁶ Then they may come to their senses and escape the Devil's trap, having been captured by him to do his will.

Introduction: Back in the beginning of chapter 2, we saw Paul employ the use of three word pictures—a soldier, an athlete, and a farmer. After an interlude in verses 8-13 regarding the very important matter of remembering Jesus, the Word of God, our purpose, and our reward, Paul goes back to the use of some word pictures. In our text today, we have three more word pictures—a hard worker, a vessel, and a servant. Lessons related to all of us seem to emerge from these word pictures.

Work Hard at Protecting the Truth!

From the first analogy, a worker, we get this truth that we must work hard to protect the truth. Bible scholars and historians have guessed at the exact kind of worker that Paul was referencing. The main idea of the worker is one who cuts straight. All kinds of people have been guessed—a road maker, a farmer plowing straight, a worker of mason cutting stone straight, a surgeon cutting straight, and Old Testament era priest cutting evenly the meat ready to be sacrificed, even Paul's occupation of tent-making, and finally, especially for this father's day, a father slicing bread evenly for his children.

Again, the main thing to glean from this analogy is the idea of cutting straight. This truth is especially important in light of the false teachers that are prevalent.

- Every generation is going to have particular challenges to the truth.

In Paul and Timothy's day, at least on this occasion, it was the matter of the resurrection. Some were teaching that the resurrection of the body into eternal life was figurative of baptism. Some were even suggesting that any reference to the resurrection was only related to the fact that one's legacy lived through his children. Not at all the hope of the resurrection that Jesus came to bring. With truth, Paul knew that Timothy must stand against this false teaching.

We have our own challenges to the truth.

- That's why we must discover truth in the unchanging Word of God.

So, with so many challenges, we have His Word, and His Word is unchanging.

- So, we must cut straight and avoid catastrophe.

Two words add great clarity—*katastrophe* (translated in verse 14 as “ruin of the hearers” and *orthotomein* (translated “correctly teaching” in verse 15). Hear any English Word there? Words like catastrophe in our English come to mind. When the Bible is not taught correctly, catastrophe follows. *Orthotomein* shows us the opposite. What do you hear? What about a word like orthodontics or orthopedic? You get your teeth straightened out or you get your broken leg straightened out. This is the precise work of handling the Word of God.

Stay Useful by Protecting the Heart!

We get this from the analogy of the vessel in a household. We might say container.

After UL beat Mississippi State in the Regional Baseball tournament a couple of weekends ago, Coach Tony Robichaux told them among other things, “Don’t get arrested!” Somebody remarked that this was an unusual comment. Not really when you consider one of their team rules. Anyone who gets arrested is immediately off the team. It’s Coach’s way of saying, “Stay useful by staying clean!”

That’s what Paul is saying here. We can have right theology, but if we do not match that right theology with right behavior, we are just as much in error. In order to be useful, the container must be clean. Verse 22 is particularly helpful to us in understanding how to stay clean.

- Run from sin. “Flee youthful passions.”
- Run to the Savior. In sin’s place, we pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace. This only happens as you pursue the Savior.
- Run with other saints. And you do these things with others who want also these things—those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

D. L. Moody , a preacher of another generation, once said, “The only way to keep a broken vessel full is to keep it always under the tap.”

That’s who we are—broken vessels, needing to be kept under the tap of the Holy Spirit.

Model Servanthood to Protect the Harvest!

Last, we come to the servant. It is an important piece to add. From the servant we learn two things.

- Be careful about arrogant words. No one likes a know-it-all, even if you know-it-all. Be gentle in your knowledge.
- Be careful of arrogant ways. No one likes someone that always holds up his or her holiness while at the same while criticizing those who are not as holy.

You can believe the right things and live a holy life without being obnoxious about it. In fact, when you are obnoxious about your knowledge and holiness, your attitude destroys all the good of right belief and right behavior.

Conclusion: This is hard. None of this is easy. We do not crave any of this on our own. This is why perseverance is hard work.

As a father, do these things for your children. As a fellow pilgrim of the Lord, strive for these things by God’s grace.