

Useful Instruments

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[0 : 00] Well, please keep your Bibles open at 2 Timothy 2 that Jas just read for us. There's an outline in your bulletin that you might find helpful as well. But why don't I pray for us before we get into it. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your word, the Bible. We thank you that through it that you speak to us and that what you have to tell us is still very much useful for us today.

So, Father, please help me to handle it correctly. Please help give us ears to hear and minds to understand and help us all to live in light of what we ask.

In Jesus' name. Amen. I was very excited last year when my son came home and said he wanted to learn a musical instrument. I was less excited to find out that it was the double bass, which barely fits into our car and is about the same size as my son.

So, I think I've got a slide of it here. Here he is playing it. Now, that's only a quarter double bass. Can you imagine a full-size one? In fact, he likes it so big that he likes to hide in the case on the next slide.

[1 : 11] Of course, he isn't the one who has to carry this huge and heavy thing up the driveway of the school each day. Michelle does that. But like other musical instruments, for this double bass to be useful and effective, it's important that it's firstly in tune.

Otherwise, it sounds off. It's also important that the bow is kept clean and oiled. You've got to use special wax or something or other for it to be useful. It's also important that it is played rightly.

Otherwise, you just get this deep screech. It's just... Anyway, I can't do it. I can't do it justice. But it's important for those things to happen if it's to be useful.

Now, instruments, of course, don't have to be just musical. An instrument is anything you use to achieve a purpose. And when it comes to guarding the gospel and growing God's kingdom, God's chosen instruments are, of course, people.

God uses people to guard his gospel and grow his kingdom. And like musical instruments, such as the double bass, Paul knows it's important that these people are in tune with the truth.

[2 : 19] Paul knows it's important that they are kept clean of sin and that they play or speak rightly. And so they're the three points we're going to be looking at tonight from this passage.

And so Paul begins by asking Timothy to make sure God's chosen instruments are firstly in tune with the truth, the importance of truth, point one, verse 14. Paul says, keep reminding God's people, Timothy, of these things.

Warn them before God against quarreling about words. It is of no value or literally use and only ruins those who listen. 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.

Avoid godless chatter because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly. Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus who have departed from the truth.

They say that the resurrection has already taken place and they destroy the faith of some. Here, Timothy is given by Paul four commands.

- [3 : 30] To remind, to warn, to present himself and to avoid. And they all have to do with the truth of the gospel, the importance of truth. In contrast to the false teachers like Hymenaeus and Philetus who have departed from the truth.

So take the commands to remind and warn in verse 14. Timothy is to remind them of these things. These things, I take it, refer to the things we heard of last week about persevering in following Christ as our commanding officer, you remember.

And being willing to suffer for the truth of the gospel. Even if Timothy was persecuted by these false teachers and rejected by their followers, Timothy was to stick to the truth of the gospel and persevere in pleasing the Lord Jesus, his commanding officer, rather than people.

You might remember that he was to do so though, verse 8, remember chapter 1 verse 8, he was to do so, persevere, remembering, verse 8, the risen Lord Jesus.

And he was to do so, remembering, verses 10 to 12, the glory to come. And so now Paul reminds Timothy, sorry, just as Paul reminds Timothy of these things, so now Timothy is to remind God's people of these things.

- [4 : 45] But there is a difficulty here. The phrase God's people is literally them. Timothy is to remind them, says Paul.

So who are the them? Well, I think Paul has in mind not so much the wider church members, but the teachers of verse 2. Do you remember verse 2?

Timothy was to entrust the gospel to faithful people who will stick to the truth and be able to teach the truth. Timothy is to remind them in particular, his fellow teachers, these things.

Now, why do I think it is a reminder for teachers in particular? Well, because in the rest of verse 14, there is a warning about not quarrelling about words because it ruins those who listen.

And so I take it, those who listen are the body of the church, like you're doing right now. And those who quarrel about words are people whose business is words, teachers.

- [5 : 45] And so I take it, Timothy is to remind teachers to persevere in following Christ and to be willing to suffer for the truth of the gospel. And he adds, warn them, these teachers, not to quarrel about words in the process.

And my wife and I have always had this running debate or quarrel over how you pronounce certain words. Is it distribute or distribute?

I won't tell you which way is which. Or when we moved to Melbourne, we had this little quarrel with some friends of ours, some Melbournian friends, who used the word cicadas. Cicadas?

What are they? I've never heard of cicadas. Oh, cicadas. Oh, I know what a cicada is. And so we'd have this joke over the pronunciation of that. Of course, it was all a bit of fun. And it's not the kind of quarrelling that Paul has in mind here over words.

In fact, it's not even the kind of quarrelling you get over some theological topics like baptism. Now, some say baptism is just, it could be sprinkling of infants, while others are passionate about saying that's just dunking adults.

- [6 : 49] But it's not even that kind of quarrelling Paul has in mind. It's actually more serious than that, I think. For notice what this quarrelling does. See verse 14 again? It is of no use, and it ruins or destroys, the word can mean the same thing, those who listen.

It can destroy those who listen. So I take it this quarrelling, it's not so much without each other, but over the truths of the gospel, which leads to speculation, and in turn leads people away from the gospel, away from salvation.

So for example, take Mormonism. They have a central truth, like God is the creator, but then they think, well, who created God? How did God get there?

And so they debate and speculate over this truth, and in the end, depart from it. And the official teaching, their official teaching, is that God was once a man on another planet, but made himself perfect, and became God our father of our planet.

Before long, there's even more speculation about these other planets, and who made them, and before you know it, you've left the gospel way behind. Now that's a very quick caricature, though it is what they believe.

[8 : 03] But the point is, instead of accepting the truth, and teaching it faithfully, they quarrel over what is the truth, and end up leading people away from the truth, and ruin them, destroy them.

And so Timothy is to warn his fellow teachers, not to quarrel over words, not to quarrel over the truth, but to accept it, and to teach it faithfully. Which is why Paul then goes on immediately, in verse 15, to tell Timothy to do just that.

You see verse 15 again? He says, do your best to present yourself, that's the command, present yourself to God, as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed.

Why? Well because he correctly handles the word of truth. Avoid godless chatter, he says, because those who indulge in it, will become more and more ungodly.

See Timothy is to handle the word of truth correctly, by not quarreling over it, but teaching it faithfully. And he's to handle the word of truth correctly, by avoiding all the godless chatter, or literally empty talk.

[9 : 06] Talk that is empty of the truth. Just like the false teachers were doing. Timothy is not to get involved with such speculation, or as verse 23 puts it, with foolish and stupid or ignorant arguments.

He's not to start thinking, well, no, that's an interesting point. God was a man who became perfect, and now got to be God of this world. So does that mean then, if I make myself perfect, I can be God of my own world, and people can worship me, and then he's run away with his other speculation.

And Timothy is to avoid such thought, because those who indulge in such thinking, actually become more and more ungodly. They start thinking, well, maybe people of my world will worship me then. which is the essence of sin, is it not?

Worship of self, rather than the true God. What's worse, such speculation, such teaching, spreads and destroys. Paul mentions destruction again, so have a look at verse 17.

He says, and their teaching will spread like gangrene. I don't know, I was actually going to show you a picture of gangrene, just to kind of, but I thought I'd better not do that. It's horrible.

[10 : 16] And this kind of speculation, this false, that's what it is. It's disgusting. It spreads though. It spreads fast. Among these false teachers are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have departed from the truth.

They say, for example, the resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some. Here the false teachers have quarreled over the truth of the resurrection, by which I think they've meant, the resurrection of everyone on judgment day, the general resurrection.

So instead of accepting the truth from Timothy and Paul, they've debated it and then moved away from it. And they say now, well, the resurrection's already happened. It's just a spiritual resurrection.

And so that means there's going to be no judgment day, when we're all, our bodies are raised, and we'll all face God. It means our future hope of living in a restored world though, is gone. It means what you do with your bodies now is not important, because they're not going to be raised.

We're not going to have to give an account for it. The resurrection's already happened. And it means, as verse 18 says, some people's faith is overturned or destroyed. You see, the truth is important.

[11 : 26] It matters, doesn't it? And so Timothy is to avoid such godless chatter or empty talk. It's of no use. And in fact, it's dangerous. I said, he and his fellow teachers are to stick to the truth for people's very salvation is at stake.

It is serious. It's so serious that Paul adds an encouragement in verse 19. Do you see that there? He says, nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription.

The Lord knows those who are his. Here, Paul says God's foundation or the church, stand solid. Why? Well, because of that first inscription, the Lord knows who are his people.

This inscription is a quote taken from our first reading, where there was another quarrel between Korah and Moses, you might remember. And then Moses says to Korah, well, God knows.

God knows who his true people are. He knows which ones are holy. And tomorrow morning you'll see. And Paul applies this to the church in Ephesus, to encourage them in the face of false teaching, God knows who his true people are.

[12 : 33] Yes, false teaching is dangerous, but God is bigger. He can keep people firm to the end. And so the church, God's foundational building stands firm.

He will make sure his true people won't fall away because of the false teachers. But it's not just a one-way street. God saves his people and even enables them to repent, as we'll see later.

But his true people are also to respond. And the way they are to respond is by turning from wickedness and following Jesus. Did you see the rest of verse 19? It says, See, the Lord knows those who are his, and everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness.

See, that's what the people who are God's true people are to do. They are to turn from wickedness, including whatever wickedness came from the false teachers.

And with this second inscription here, we come to the second point and the importance of purity. You see, it's not just a Timothy who is to avoid empty talk and be faithful to the word of truth.

[13 : 40] So are the people. Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord, it says. Timothy, of course, is to be faithful in teaching it, but the people are to be faithful in living it.

They are to turn from wickedness. And that's the point of Paul's illustration in verses 20 to 21. They are to turn from wickedness so that they might be useful for God.

He says in verse 20, In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay. Some are for special purposes and some for common use. Those who cleanse themselves from the latter will be instruments for special purpose, made holy, useful to the master.

And prepared to do any good work. You see, if the instrument is not clean, it's not going to work very well. I like the bow for my son's double bass.

I like the medical instruments that Dr. Gupta used. In November last year, on the next slide, a doctor in India operated on 83 women in three hours, using rusty instruments.

[14 : 46] It's actually horrific because 13 died while dozens were hospitalized. You see, having pure instruments matters, doesn't it?

And Paul's words here, thanks, that's fine, here are, for all God's people, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord. If we are to be useful instruments for God, then our purity matters.

I mean, it's a bit hard to be a godly witness to people if you're not being, well, godly. Last year, there was a Chinese lady from our morning service, from the 1030 Chinese service, who used to bring another lady, a friend she met, along to church.

And then that led to this friend's daughter coming to church as well. And so there was three people, the Chinese Holy Trinity person, another Chinese lady, and her daughter. And when these two, the mum and daughter came, and saw how different we were, how different our lives were, how loving and caring we were, they decided that that's what they want as well.

And so they found out about Christ and became Christians. I baptised them last year. Here was a useful instrument of God, for God, this lady, who is pure, who loved, who cared, who sought to follow Christ.

[16 : 16] And so the encouragement for the church is that God knows who are his people. He will help them stand firm. But the challenge for the church is to be pure, that we might be useful instruments for God.

And this is true for Timothy as well, especially when it comes to how he will deal with these false teachers, which brings us to point three in verse 22. Paul writes, Here, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

Don't have anything to do with foolish and literally ignorant arguments because you know they will produce quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome, but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful, and on it goes.

Here, firstly, Timothy is to avoid the evil desires of youth, which it could be anything. Commentators are divided about this. It could be anything from, you know, lust and money and discontentment and so on.

But in the context of quarreling over words and dealing with false teachers, it probably more refers to arrogance, you know, youthful arrogance.

[17 : 31] I mean, I remember in my younger days at university, I was learning lots about the Bible, and I would come home and tell my parents how they were wrong and I was right.

It's the arrogance of youth. And I think, I'm not sure, and in the end it doesn't matter, but I think that's what Paul is getting at there. Timothy's a young guy. Don't give in to this youthful arrogance.

Don't go looking for a fight with these false teachers. Don't seek to put them in their place. In fact, don't even engage in their arguments and things like that, their baits of speculation.

Just stick to the truth. And instead, with all Christians, pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace. Now, that doesn't mean Timothy is to avoid the false teachers altogether.

He is still to instruct them in the truth. But it does mean that when he does instruct them with the truth, he's to do it with the right character, the right manner. So verse 24 again, You see, Timothy is not to be quarrelsome, but kind.

[19 : 02] He is to be patient with those who oppose him, to instruct them gently, with the hope that God may grant them repentance and knowledge of what is actually true. As Paul says elsewhere, Timothy is to speak the truth in love.

In fact, this is the character of all God's teachers. This is the character we're all to have, to instruct with patience and gentleness and love, hoping, praying, that God will even lead people, those false teachers even, to repentance and truth.

Now, obviously, there is a lot of, in this passage, that directly applies to preachers and teachers of God's word. But there's also application for us, generally, as well.

But before I get to some points of application, I just want to point out that there is such a thing as truth and falsehood. There are facts and not just opinions.

And I need to point this out because this world, our world, doesn't like dealing in truths because it means someone could be right and someone could be wrong. They like opinions. In fact, our daughter was learning about this in English the other week.

[20 : 13] And was it last night or the night before? She was overtired. And I said to her, look, you need to go to bed now. You know, you've had it. You need to go to bed now.

And she turned around and said to me, no, I don't. That's not a fact. That's just your opinion. To which I replied, actually, that's both my opinion and the fact.

She needed sleep. That was the truth, whether she liked it or not. You see, there are, there is such a thing as truth. And there is such a thing as falsehood. And as I said, society doesn't like this.

They prefer that everyone has their own opinion, that what is true for you is true for you. And what's true for me is true for me. And let's just all get on. And we do need to love and get on, but not at the expense of truth.

Truth matters because people's salvation is at stake. The truth of the gospel matters. And so in terms of application for us, then the first point is, do we think that?

[21 : 16] Do we think truth matters? Especially for us who do teach the Bible or the gospel. Does the truth matter to us? Does teaching it faithfully matter to us?

Do we seek to handle the word of God correctly? And for those who don't teach it, but listen to it, then do you test what we say as teachers against what you read in the Bible?

Because the truth matters. We can get it wrong, so you need to work it out as well. And more than that, do you pray for your pastors? I feel a bit selfish saying this, but if the truth matters, then that's an important thing to do.

Pray that we get it right for your sake. The truth matters. And the second point of application then is that purity matters. If we want to be useful for God, then we need to work at cleansing ourselves.

That is repenting and asking God for forgiveness. And so do you come before God in confession and prayer? Not just on Sunday.

[22 : 21] I notice we're going to do a confession in a little while. Not just on Sunday, but during the week. Do you pray that God might forgive you and ask him to help you live his way, that you might be useful to him?

Can I encourage you to keep doing that? I know there are some people who do that. See, we're to seek to be godly, that we might be ready to do the good works that he has prepared in advance for us to do.

And thirdly, character and manner matters. And again, this is primarily directed to Timothy as a teacher. His character and manner in dealing with the false teachers matters.

But it matters for us all, really, how we relate to each other. Okay, verse 22 said, flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord.

That's everyone. Every Christian, is it? Not. The truth matters, purity matters, character and manner matter. These things matter, that we might be useful instruments for God, that we might guard the gospel, that more people might be saved, and the Lord Jesus honoured.

[23 : 32] So let's pray that we might live out these things. Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we do thank you for the gospel of the Lord Jesus. We thank you that it is great news, that it is true that Jesus did really die for us, that he did really rise again, and that all those who believe in Jesus will really be right with you now and enter into heaven later.

Father, help us to pursue what is true. Help the truth matter to us. Help us to pray for those who teach it, and if we do teach it, help us to teach it faithfully.

And Father, help us also to be useful instruments for you by repenting, turning away from whatever sin is in our life and seeking to live for you, to be godly people, that we might be useful for you, to do the good works that you have prepared in advance for us to do.

Help us in this, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen.