

PAUL'S SWAN SONG

Accurately Handling the Word

2 Timothy 2:14–19



LET'S BEGIN HERE

“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me” is childish folly. Long after broken bones have healed, broken spirits remain broken. Words are powerful things. With them, we can lead people to life-freeing truth or life-imprisoning falsehood. Words are dangerous, especially in the mouths of charlatans and the duplicitous. That’s why Paul was concerned about certain men in the church who had “gone astray from the truth” (2 Timothy 2:18). They were teaching lies, and Timothy needed to counter both—the men and the lies—by presenting himself as an approved workman of God, “accurately handling the word of truth” (2:15) and always remembering that God is building a “firm foundation” (2:19).



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. Seeing the Big Picture

Paul didn’t know about cotton candy, but he did know preachers who peddled something very much like cotton candy—a false gospel that “upset the faith of some” (2 Timothy 2:18). Before we look at the details of what Timothy was to do about these false teachers, though, let’s get an overview of 2 Timothy 2:14–19.



Quotable

*An approved
workman of
the Word will
always do a
self-evaluation
in the Word
before preaching
the Word.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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2. Explaining the Role of Accurate Messengers (2 Timothy 2:14–15)

Paul was a practical preacher; he expected Timothy to be a practical preacher. So to deal with Christian charlatans, Paul instructed his young protégé to focus on the two most important aspects of his ministry: the public proclamation of the truth and the personal mastery of it.



GETTING TO THE ROOT

To Cut a Straight Road

The Christian workman's primary responsibility in public is the careful exposition of God's Word. But his primary responsibility in private is to practice what he preaches.

Most scholars interpret the verb *orthotomeo*, which translates to “accurately handling,” as a reference to preaching, since the object is “the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). Ancient Greek usage by Sophocles supports this interpretation.¹ But *orthotomeo*, which literally means “to cut straight,” was typically used by Greeks to describe a straight path cut over valleys and hills or how a farmer plowed a straight furrow in the ground.

Used in the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament, *orthotomeo* conveys the idea that submission to God results in the Lord's straightening out the pathways of life (Proverbs 3:6). But also, righteous behavior clears the way for life, allowing the righteous one to walk a straight road (11:5). With this understanding, we could translate 2 Timothy 2:15: “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, *getting the word of truth straight in your preaching and straight in your practice.*”



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3. Exposing the Wrongs of False Teachers (2 Timothy 2:16–19)

We all must balance our books before God. For those engaged in ministry, the ledger will either read “approved” or “unapproved.” The former, like Timothy, need not be ashamed. The latter, like Hymenaeus and Philetus, need to be deeply ashamed.



LET'S LIVE IT

It'd be nice to think that heretics and heresies were the stuff of the first-century church. But “worldly and empty chatter” and “wrangling about words” continues today, often disrupting the faith of many. But like Timothy, we have two promises from God, guaranteeing that despite heretics and phonies, the foundation of His church stands firm and cannot be destroyed.

First, *the true church consists of those who belong to the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Second, *the true church is filled with those who abstain from wickedness.*

Do you belong to Christ? If so, how did you come to Him?



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As one who belongs to Christ, how can you keep from wickedness, according to the following passages?

Psalm 119:9

1 Peter 3:14–17

ENDNOTE

1. The Greek playwright Sophocles used the word *orthotomeo* to mean “expound soundly.” See Kenneth S. Wuest, “The Pastoral Epistles in the Greek New Testament,” in *Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 135



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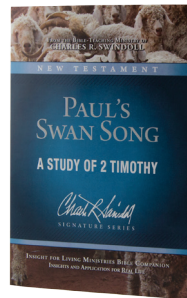
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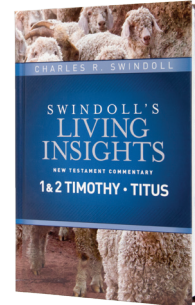
Tools for Digging Deeper



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