

DILIGENT

2 Timothy 2:14-26

A diligent person is self-motivated and is also an excellent planner. A diligent person produces excellent work, is faithful in everyday tasks, and pushes through obstacles of all kinds. These five characteristics of what it means to be diligent were taken from an article written by a seventeen-year-old girl (named Audrey French who lives in Arizona and attends a home school). She used verses from Proverbs as her source material. She spends a majority of her time writing, reading, dancing, and teaching public speaking classes. Contrast that with so many teens who never take initiative except to destroy something, have no plans for the future, they never work, can't be counted on for anything and use any excuse to do nothing except play computer games or listen to the latest music fad.

If we are observant, we can see such contrast in nearly all areas of life. It is not only evident in groups of young people, we see it in what we generally call the "the work force" or people who are employed by businesses and government. The spectrum ranges from those who do not work at all to those who are enormously successful. We see a wide range of ideas regarding individual responsibility versus relying on a socialized welfare system that promises cradle to grave care without regard to accountability or responsibility.

Many times we discuss such things in terms of the extremes we see in various groups and our tendency is to divide the world and all the people in it into two camps that epitomize these extremes. We will usually find most people are somewhere in the middle of the extremes in what they believe and the way they behave. Even when we take an honest look at ourselves we can see attitudes and sometimes behaviors that are positive and negative.

In Paul's second letter to Timothy he encouraged Timothy to lead the people in the church at Ephesus in such a way that would help them move away from the negative aspects and move toward positive attitudes and actions.

Two Groups – 2:14-19

¹⁴ Remind them of these things, and solemnly charge them in the presence of God not to wrangle about words, which is useless and leads to the ruin of the hearers. ¹⁵ Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth. ¹⁶ But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness, ¹⁷ and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, ¹⁸ men who have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and they upset the faith of some. ¹⁹ Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness." 2 Timothy 2:14-19 (NASB95)

One of the top priorities for pastor-teachers is to teach people to get their priorities straight. In other words, we need to put first things first. When a pastor starts concentrating on things other than the word of God and gets into denominational or church politics and power struggles with other people, then the congregation suffers and the spiritual life in the church dries up.

Part of the reason for **straying** away from the word of God in teaching is that the pastor-teacher is **staying** away from the word of God during his study. Paul's remedy for that is given in the instruction to "study to show thyself approved unto God." I remember complaints in the past that sometimes pastors were more concerned about what the largest contributor thought than they were about what God thinks. I haven't heard anything even similar to that in the last several decades. It could be that the larger contributors no longer get involved in the church or that pastors are refusing to be influenced.

The influences we are seeing today that impact many churches seem to be more concerned about being politically correct and not declaring the full counsel of God because the decision makers do not want to offend a particular “cultural” group. Our teaching should be pleasing unto God. We have to be more concerned about a person missing out on God’s blessings or spending eternity in hell than being interested in whether a person feels good about the message.

I would think that some pastors would be embarrassed by the errors they put forth in the pulpit. I have heard preachers make statements that are absolutely contrary to the word of God. I have heard some give messages that completely miss the point of a passage of scripture. Again, the reason is lack of concentration on and in the word during their preparation time. Too many times, a person goes into a pastoral ministry as a profession rather than being called to it. As a consequence, his teaching ministry will suffer (as well as everybody that listens) because he does not have the spiritual insight to interpret the Scriptures in a straightforward way.

An example of failure to interpret the word in a straightforward manner is related to the phrase at the end of verse fifteen that says in several translations “rightly divide the word of truth.” We can find a lot of discussions that take that phrase and put interpretations with it that are totally unrelated to what the phrase means in the original text. There are multiple books written that go into excruciating details that put forth the idea that “dividing the word” is about seeing a distinction of old versus new covenant and which parts apply to Jews versus Gentiles, whether the four gospels are old or new testament books, and whether parts of the letter attributed to James applies to Christians or just Jews. This almost seems ludicrous when we realize that the Greek phrase simply means to “do a simple, direct, straightforward, correct interpretation.” The phrase simply means to “cut it straight” and has no implication of dividing anything. Because of a particular choice of words by a translator from the Greek to the English a whole body of doctrinal speculations developed that has caused unimaginable confusion among students of the Bible.

I have known of churches that are so concerned about who is the anti-christ that they try to determine by numerology if every world leader has a name that could be represented by the numbers 6 6 6. A simple straightforward interpretation of the passage in Revelation where this is mentioned shows that the context would clearly point to Nero as being the one related to those numbers. Others have spent untold hours trying to figure out when the Jews are going to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem because that (to them) will signal the start of events leading up to the Second Coming. Some groups will argue that there is no hell. Others claim that only 144,000 Jews will be in heaven, while others say that the 144,000 will be those who are in the millennial kingdom that is to be on earth in Jerusalem. Concentrating on such issues to the neglect of the necessity of knowing God and being transformed into the image of Jesus Christ and living under His Lordship so that we are being purified and made ready to live with Him forever prevents us from achieving the potential that God has for us.

Paul named names of some false teachers who were causing confusion in the early churches by teaching that the resurrection had already happened. It is thought likely that the teaching that the resurrection had already happened was a claim that limited resurrection to what happened to Jesus two thousand years ago. Some claimed that it was simply a reference only to dying to self and being born again when a person is saved and was not related to a reuniting of soul and spirit with the now dead body that Paul advocated in 1 Corinthians 15:12 (and following) in his arguments against those who were saying there was no resurrection. Part of the controversy is linked to Greek thought versus Jewish thought. It was this very issue that caused

the Greek philosophers to stop listening to Paul when he presented the gospel at Mars Hill.

Let's assume that we do know the exact nature and all the fact of what bodily resurrection is about and understand it thoroughly. How would that influence how you treat your family members, your neighbors, and even your own self? There are many things that we DON'T know and will never know until it has happened and then we can't do anything about it.

If we accept this truth and ask the question of what really matters, then we find the answer that Paul gave Timothy in verse nineteen which tells us that "God knows His own and that all who belong to Him are to live in holiness." If we will simply operate from this straightforward basis and be diligently faithful to those truths, then all the rest will take care of itself. Who was it that said "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all the rest will be added to you?" It was God Incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ! We know that we can depend upon what He says.

Notice that this is a single seal on the foundation of faith. While there are two ideas expressed, these should never be separated. The first part is a promise and represents God's involvement and second part should be seen as a commandment which represents our response to what God has done. The nation of physical Israel wholeheartedly embraced the idea of what God had promised to them. They were God's chosen people. However, they miserably failed (in most cases) to embrace (even halfheartedly) their part of this foundational seal. The historical record shows that they failed to enter into the joy of the Lord and suffered because of their disobedience and failure to embrace holiness in their lives.

Is the church (which is made up of individual Christians) making the same error today? We wholeheartedly embrace ideas related to "God knows His own" such as "once saved, always saved" or what might be better stated as "security of the believer." In the earlier part of this letter in verse thirteen, we see the words "if we are faithless, He will remain faithful, for He cannot disown Himself." What about our response to the second part of what constitutes the foundational seal? The best proof that we do belong to Jesus Christ is our living the life of plain, practical righteousness, and putting away from ourselves everything that is evil.

Two Vessels – 2:20-22

²⁰ Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. ²¹ Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work. ²² Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. 2 Timothy 2:20–22 (NASB95)

The metaphor of different vessels in a household that Paul interjected here must be applied in the context of the larger overall message to Timothy. There may be a tendency to associate this metaphor with the idea of there being many parts of the body that all have different uses and all are to be given honor and respect. In the context of the message in this letter about false teachers, the honorable vessels are those teachers (or members) who teach truth and live righteously. The dishonorable vessels would be the teachers (or members) of false doctrines who conduct themselves according to worldly standards.

Paul gave a formula for turning a dishonorable vessel into an honorable one. The simple, straightforward solution is to turn from the false doctrines and live in a way that characterizes holiness. The presence of sin in the life of a Christian hinders his or her usefulness to God. Every Christian should want to be all that God wants him to be. We should want to be useful and pleasing to God. If we are not, then we miss the fullness of the blessings of our salvation in Christ Jesus.

Notice where the responsibility lies with regard to purifying or cleansing: In verse twenty-one the message is clear that to accomplish the purification that it takes personal effort and involvement and it not something that just happens. For those who are in Christ, we have help in carrying out this responsibility – it is God Who is at work in us both to will and to do of His good purposes. There are deliberate choices that each of us makes and these choices have consequences.

To accomplish this desirable situation we should follow the same advice Paul gave in his first letter to Timothy (6:11) and that is to flee or run away and avoid certain things that would harm us and to pursue those things that make us more like Christ. The call to ministry carries with it great responsibility for righteous living. We should run away from certain things because temptations can be very strong. On the other hand, there are many good virtues to cultivate in our lives. Righteousness is simply right standing with God. It is a result of having been declared righteous by God because of the redemption bought for us by Jesus and of letting Jesus live His righteous life through us. Faithfulness implies integrity and being trustworthy. Love (Charity in KJV) is self-sacrificing love which, when applied to life's situations with integrity and with the wisdom that comes from the presence of God in our lives, will bring peace to us and those with whom we interact.

Two Approaches – 2:23-26

²³ But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels. ²⁴ The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, ²⁵ with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, ²⁶ and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will. 2 Timothy 2:23–26 (NASB95)

If there is to be strife in a church, then it should be about something truly significant rather than over issues that do not really matter. The question that we should ask in such situations is “Does God really care about that?” If it doesn't matter to God, then it shouldn't matter to the serious Christians in the church.

We might be so bold as to argue that foolish and ignorant speculations grow out of failure to make use of simple and straightforward belief in what the Word of God actually says. If the word of God says that “these things must shortly (soon) come to pass,” then we should look for the fulfillment in a matter of years or decades rather than thousands of years. If Jesus said that “this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place,” then there doesn't need to be speculation about the events happening two thousand years later. When someone raises a question regarding whether the church will go through “the tribulation” meaning a seven-year period of persecution and trouble for Christians, then we should realize that there is no basis to even raise the question based on what is written in the Scriptures.

We should not take sides in such foolish arguments but keep concentrating on the truth. In this way, those that have gotten themselves entangled in such matters can eventually see the light and escape from the trap that the devil set to sidetrack the real work of the church.

We don't want to miss the point that each of us has responsibility to teach others about Jesus and God's plan of salvation for every person. We should also help each other grow into the fullness of Christ Jesus by sharing with and teaching each other.