

**Leadership Principles & the Pastoral Epistles – 2015**  
**WEEK 5: HANDLE THE WORD ACCURATELY**

**Interpretive comments on 2 Tim. 2:14-19a**

What does it mean to “handle the Word accurately?” Paul contrasts two kinds of “road workers” here.

- *Orthotomeo* – “cut straight”
  
- *Astoecho* – “swerve”

How do we do this? The key lies in understanding that this command is synonymous with Titus 2:1.

“This compressed phrase indicates that two strands are to be interwoven in (our) teaching. On the one hand there is ‘the sound doctrine,’ the definite article . . . implying that an identifiable body of teaching is in mind. On the other hand, there are ‘the things which fit it,’ namely the ethical duties which the sound doctrine demands.”<sup>1</sup>

Titus 2:2-3:8 explains what these two “strands” are.

- “Sound” (*hugaino*) doctrine is the message of God’s grace through Jesus Christ (cf. 2:11-14; 3:3-8). The rest of the Pastoral Epistles confirms this understanding of “sound doctrine.”
  
- The “things that are fitting for sound doctrine” is the lifestyle of love toward others that Paul describes in the rest of this passage (2:2-10; 3:1,2).

Of special importance is the *relationship* between these two “strands”

- Titus 2:11b,12
  
- Titus 3:3,8

Although Paul does not use the terms “sound doctrine” or “the things fitting for sound doctrine” outside of the Pastoral Epistles, this is clearly the structure of his letters to the churches—beginning with the doctrine of grace and leading to the lifestyle of love (cf. Romans; Ephesians, Colossians).

John emphasizes these same two “strands”

- Jn. 13:1-17,34,35
  
- Jn. 15:9,12

---

<sup>1</sup> John R. W. Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), p. 185.

- 1 Jn. 4:16,19

SUMMARY: "Handling the Word accurately" is Bible teaching that consistently focuses on the central importance of receiving God's grace and giving away God's love to others.

### Why is this teaching focus so important?

Because this is the teaching focus that ignites genuine spiritual renewal and sustains healthy church growth (Col. 1:5,6).

"A wave of authentic revival sweeps over the church when three things happen together: teaching the great truths of the gospel with clarity, applying those truths to people's lives with spiritual power, and extending that experience to large numbers of people."<sup>2</sup>

Because, conversely, wandering away from this teaching focus always makes a church sick and weak. This can happen in two ways—either by succumbing to heresy or by focusing on doctrinal "tangents." Doctrinal "tangents" are emphases that may be non-heretical or even biblical, but not centrally focused on the gospel and holy love.

The Ephesian church warded off heresy, but became sick because it prioritized doctrinal orthodoxy and perseverance in ministry over these two priorities (Rev. 2:1-5).

"Imagine the evangelical church without the gospel. I know this makes no sense, for evangelicals are defined by the evangel. But try to imagine it for just a moment. What might our evangelicalism, without the evangel, look like? We would have to replace the centrality of the gospel with something else, naturally. So what might take the place of the gospel in our sermons and books and cassette tapes and Sunday school classes and home Bible studies and, above all, in our hearts? A number of things, conceivably. An introspective absorption with recovery from past emotional traumas, for example. Or a passionate devotion to the pro-life cause. Or a confident manipulation of modern managerial techniques. Or a drive toward church growth and 'success.' Or a deep concern for the institution of the family. Or a fascination with the more unusual gifts of the Spirit. Or a clever appeal to consumerism by offering a sort of cost-free Christianity Lite. Or a sympathetic, empathetic, thickly-honeyed cultivation of interpersonal relationships. Or a determination to take America back to its Christian roots through political power. Or a warm affirmation of self-esteem. The evangelical movement, stripped of the gospel, might fix upon any or several of such concerns to define itself and derive energy for its mission. In other words, evangelicals could marginalize or even lose the gospel and still potter on their way, perhaps even oblivious to their loss."<sup>3</sup> (ALSO: end-times speculation; biblical food diets; etc.)

"We must avoid the view that, while the Gospel provides a sort of escape ticket from judgment and hell, all the real life-transforming power comes from something else—an esoteric doctrine, a mystical experience, a therapeutic technique, a discipleship course, etc. That is too narrow a view of the Gospel. Worse, it ends up relativizing and marginalizing the Gospel, stripping it of its power while it directs the attention of people away from the Gospel and toward something less meaningful."<sup>4</sup>

### OTHER EXAMPLES:

<sup>2</sup> Raymond C. Ortlund, *Afterward* from *Passion for God* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> Raymond C. Ortlund, *Afterward* from *Passion for God* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1994).

<sup>4</sup> D. A. Carson, *For the Love of God*, Vol. 2, March 10.

Because this teaching focus is the best prevention against wandering away from the truth.

This does *not* mean that warning about and refutation of “wandering” is unnecessary (see New Testament letters), but that our *emphasis* should be on positive exposition and application of the gospel more than on refutation of theological error.

EXAMPLES:

Because only a steady diet of God’s grace enables Christians’ to persevere through the difficulties involved in genuinely loving lost people and one another.

“A lot of talk about . . . (ministry) focuses on excitement. It can result in people coming to serve who do not expect the suffering which will inevitably come. We must draw people into Christian ministry by speaking those unchanging truths . . . Foremost among those these is the content of the gospel itself . . . Such truths remain the same when there are problems and when things are going fine. When Christians come fired with passion for people based on such awesome, unchanging truths, they will not give up or get disillusioned when the going gets tough.”<sup>5</sup>

#### **Practical ideas on handling the Word accurately**

Be an *example* of one who is growing in God’s grace and loving others!

Provide a *consistent* and *balanced* diet of teaching that focuses on these two priorities.

What happens when we teach biblical love/ethics without rooting and nourishing them in God’s grace?

What happens when we teach grace without radical biblical love/ethics?

Expose your people to *other gifted teachers* who focus on these two priorities.

EXAMPLES:

Teach the New Testament *proportionately* more than the Old Testament.

---

<sup>5</sup> Ajith Fernando, *An Authentic Servant* (OMF International, 1999), pp. 13,14.

Teach the Old Testament with this focus.

When teaching the ethical (imperatives) sections of New Testament epistles, be sure to root them in God's grace (indicatives), and show how Christian ethics are ultimately describing a lifestyle of love.

When advocating ministry methods or structures, explain that their importance lies in that they facilitate these two priorities.

EXAMPLES: *Why* should we go consistently to CT? *Why* should we be welcoming to new people at CT/home group? *Why* should we get involved in Christian community?

When you reprove and rebuke (2 Tim. 4:2), don't address behaviors and attitudes only. Help people to see that their wrong behaviors/attitudes are a lack of love and (often) a symptom of ignorance or unbelief in some aspect of God's grace.

"This sounds like a lot of work!" Yes it does—that's why Paul says "Be diligent" (2 Tim. 2:15)! Laziness in this area will result in a shallow, unhealthy church. But diligence in this ministry will provide the spiritual environment for healthy evangelism and discipleship!