

2 Timothy 2:24-26 “Dealing With Those Who Oppose You—As the Lord’s Servant”**

Main Idea: In 2 Timothy 2:24-26, we learn how to deal with those who oppose us. We must do so *as the Lord’s servant*. Specifically, we must focus on three things when we ministering to someone who opposes us.

- I. As the Lord’s servant, focus on your attitude (24).
 - A. Here’s what must NOT be true of us.
 - B. Here’s what must be true of us.
 1. We must be kind.
 2. We must be able to teach.
 3. We must endure without resentment.
- II. As the Lord’s servant, focus on your actions (25a).
 - A. When opposed, we must not be surprised.
 - B. When opposed, we must gently instruct.
- III. As the Lord’s servant, focus on your aim (25b-26).
 - A. We are after repentance.
 1. It comes from God.
 2. It results in a knowledge of the truth.
 - B. We are after recovery.
 1. The person is in the devil’s snare.
 2. The person is doing the devil’s will.

Make It Personal: Some questions to ponder when we’re being opposed...

1. How do I see myself?
2. How do I see the problem-people in my life?
3. How can I put the gospel on display in this situation?

Scripture Reading: 2 Timothy 2:22-26

The Lord who died in our place to rescue us from eternal destruction has commissioned us with an assignment. *Go, tell others what I have done, and make disciples of Me.*

And so, it’s our privilege to go. And as we do we encounter all kinds of responses. Some, whose eyes the Spirit opens, respond gratefully to the message of hope we share with them. And we rejoice! Others politely refuse. Others refuse but not so politely.

Frankly, some flat out oppose the message we bring. Our message doesn’t sit well. After all, we tell people that they’re sinners, that God is angry about their sin, that hell is coming and they can’t rectify this problem. And that there is but one solution, to repent and receive the One God sent to save them, Jesus the Christ.

That message offends the proud person.

And it’s not just the *unsaved* proud person either. There are many proud church-goers who resist the truth. Well, let’s be honest. Which of us wants to hear truth that confronts something that needs to change?

So here’s our challenge. We’re called to make disciples, which means we’re called to teach what Jesus said, to those who by nature do not want to hear what Jesus said.

I discovered this years ago when I tried to share Christ with one of my best friends. We were about 14 years old, and he was spending the night at our house. I wanted him to experience the joy I’d come to know through Christ, so I shared the gospel with him.

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

His response? “You make it sound like I’m a bad person,” he said.

The gospel is good news, yes, but first it’s bad and offensive news.

So here’s the question. How should we respond to people who oppose us? One tendency is to retreat and hide, and if my pride takes the form of the fear of man, that’s probably what I’ll do. Smile, and clam up. Or maybe frown, and clam up.

Another tendency is to take the offensive and try to argue them into the kingdom. If my pride takes the form of self-righteousness, that’s likely the course I’ll take.

God’s way is so much better. Today we come to a very practical and relevant section of His Word. It will help us relate to that guy at work, or that neighbor, or that family member that we’ve been struggling with.

In 2 Timothy 2:24-26, we learn how to deal with those who oppose us. We must do so, says our text, *as the Lord’s servant*. Specifically, that means we must focus on three things which we’ll consider in a moment.

But first, let’s back up for a minute. We’ve been studying 2 Timothy for two months now on Sunday mornings. Lest we lose sight of the forest for the trees, let’s set the stage for our study.

Why did God give us 2 Timothy? What’s its purpose? The Holy Spirit directed Paul to write this letter from prison in Rome. Paul’s execution was imminent, and he sent this letter to a man named Timothy who was leading the church in Ephesus.

Why? To encourage timid Timothy. One theme gripped the apostle’s mind and heart. THE GOSPEL. “What will happen to the gospel after I’m gone?” So he charged Timothy to do four things with the gospel.

Chapter 1--Protect the gospel (1:14).

Chapter 2--Participate and even suffer for the gospel (2:3, 8, 9).

Chapter 3--Persevere in the gospel (3:13, 14).

Chapter 4--Proclaim the gospel (4:1-2).

But not just personally. Timothy was to enlist others to join him in this fourfold gospel assignment. That’s the message of chapter two.

For the sake of the gospel, Timothy, do two things: Be a gospel minister, and train gospel ministers.

Verse 2, “The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.”

What’s it take to be a gospel minister? Paul gives Timothy, and us, seven images in chapter two, seven images of a gospel minister or leader. He or she must see himself or herself as a: teacher (1-2), soldier (3-4), athlete (5), farmer (6), workman (15), vessel (21), and servant (24).

We’ve come to the seventh image today, and it shapes our perspective for the question we posed. How do you deal with people who oppose you when you’re trying to give them God’s priceless Word? Today’s text says, *as the Lord’s servant*.

Verses 24-26, “And the Lord’s servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.”

That's how we must see ourselves, and respond when opposed, as one who is thoroughly convinced that he or she is *the Lord's servant*.

If you're involved in ministry, you know this. At times there is opposition. Not just from the unsaved world, either, but sometimes from within the church.

Years ago when I was living in Grand Rapids, I poured my life into a young man named Jeff. He had a horrible past home life. He needed a lot of encouragement. We'd spent hours together. I was his RD. One day I passed him in the hall and he glared at me with an icy stare. I wondered what was bothering him. The next time the same--he could hardly speak to me. So I went to him. He was upset at me because of the way he thought I'd handled a situation involving another student.

It was all a misunderstanding, but it taught me this lesson. Sometimes the very people God has called you to minister to, that you pour your life into, that you help with problems, may later oppose you over something.

It happens to Sunday School teachers, youth workers, and of course, it happens to parents too. So how should I respond when people oppose me?

Though this text speaks especially to how to handle opposition in ministry, the principles apply to host of situations, like how to handle opposition from a obnoxious fellow-employee at work, or an obstinate neighbor, or a resistant child, etc.

As the Lord's servant, you must focus on three things.

I. As the Lord's servant, focus on your attitude (24).

Verse 24, "And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful."

Remember the context. Back in verse 23 Paul told the minister, "Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels."

Obviously, not all arguments are prohibited. When the truth of the gospel is at stake, Paul himself would develop an argument. Just read Galatians, for instance.

But that's not the issue here. We should avoid asking and answering three types of questions: those that are foolish, unlearned (uninstructed; NIV says 'stupid'), and those that breed strifes (NIV 'produce quarrels').

It's a fact of life that some people just love to argue. But this must not be the case for the minister of the gospel. And it won't be if we remember who we are.

The Lord's servant. He doesn't quarrel. Why not? His attitude is shaped by this fundamental reality. He is not the Lord, but the Lord's *servant*.

There goes incentive for all defensiveness. He is the Lord. I am His servant. I own nothing, and belong to the One who owns everything. My goal is always to represent Him well.

So how do I respond to someone that opposes me? First, as the Lord's servant, I focus on my attitude.

The servant of the Lord is a great Old Testament title. Moses was a servant of the Lord. So was Samuel. And David. And Isaiah. And of course, the greatest servant of all was the Messiah, Jesus (see Isa 53:11).

So Paul says, "Timothy, God has called you to join these ranks. As a gospel minister, you are first and foremost *the servant of the Lord*."

That's why I have a distaste for the title *Reverend*. Reverend means "worthy of reverence." There is only One who is worthy of reverence. I am His servant, and so are you.

So what should happen when someone opposes the servant of the Lord? Paul identifies the servant's attitude in verse 24, first in negative terms, then positive.

A. Here's what must NOT be true of us. "The Lord's servant must not quarrel." In the AV, "must not strive" = to fight.

Of course, because of our sin bent, that's our first instinct when someone opposes us, to retaliate, to make sure everyone knows we are right.

But it doesn't matter what others think of us, only of Him. He is the Lord, and we are His servants.

What must we not do since we are the Lord's servant? Strive, fight. Quarrel.

This is fundamental. Gospel ministers must fight for things at times, but we must not be known as *fighters*. Yes, we fight for truth, and unity, and souls. But even when we fight, we're known as *the Lord's servant*.

Let's probe the positive now.

B. Here's what must be true of us. "...instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful."

Notice carefully. There are three things that should be true of us when someone wants to argue with us, all of course, made possible by the grace of Christ (2:1).

1. *We must be kind.* "He must be kind to everyone." The AV says, "Gentle unto all men."

The fruit of the Spirit is kindness/gentleness (Gal 5:22). Paul elaborates on this quality in 1 Thessalonians 2:7, "But we were GENTLE among you, even as a nurse cherishes her children." The Lord's servant has a gentle spirit, even when people oppose us. Being vindictive? That's out. Getting even? That's out.

And notice Paul says, "to everyone" [AV "unto all men"]. Some people are easy to show kindness.. Others, at least at times, have personalities like sandpaper, meaning they rub you wrong. They grind you. That doesn't excuse them, of course. But I'm not responsible for the other person's personality. I'm responsible for my attitude.

We must be *kind*, and kind *to everyone*. Here is another reason why we need a Savior, for when Jesus saves us He then sends His Spirit to make us *kind* people.

2. *We must be able to teach.* Lit. "apt at teaching." There are other passages that talk about the need to be "teachable" (eg--2 Tim 2:2 "you have HEARD from me"--Tim had to learn before he could teach). A leader must be teachable. But he must also have a God-given aptitude for teaching others.

I Timothy 3:2 "An overseer then must be...able to teach." And not just the overseer. So also the person who is opposed for what he believes. He too must be *able to teach*.

Why would that be? Because though he refuses to quarrel, the Lord's servant is interested in persuading other people with the Lord's Word. And to do that he must be able to teach.

Being able to teach is a gift, yes, but it also requires work. Work to study God's Word so you can defend what He says accurately. But also, work to study the person

you're talking to, so you know how he thinks, what his objections are, and what kind of communication best reaches him.

3. *We must endure without resentment.* "Not resentful," says the NIV. "Patient," says the AV. Paul uses a strong word that means "to endure evil; to be ready to bear evil treatment without getting ticked off." "Tolerant," says the NEB.

We can't be thin-skinned if we want to reach people who oppose us. Some people are paralyzed by resentment. They're still ticked off by what someone said to them months or even years ago. So any meaningful discussion quickly degenerates into quarreling.

But the Lord's servant refuses to succumb to this. He or she is *not resentful*.

You say, "I struggle with this. I hold grudges. But I want to change. I truly want to be the Lord's servant. What must I do?"

The fact this is your desire is a wonderful evidence of His grace, and a vital first step. To change we must first admit we *need* to change.

We find practical counsel in Ephesians 4:31-32. "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger... Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ, God forgave you."

There's the remedy. Choose to put off and then put on. Ask the Lord to help you *replace*—that's the key word, not just stop being resentful, but *replace* it with something, namely three actions. With being kind, being compassionate, and forgiving. Ask the Lord to help you put on these three replacements. And to treat the other person just as God has treated you, for Christ's sake.

The Lord loves to answer that prayer. He will break the resentment, and enable you to replace it with kindness, compassion, and forgiveness for the person who has opposed you. And He may use it to change the other person too.

He did in Paul's life. Remember, Paul himself opposed Christians one time. He was convinced they were wrong. But God used, among other things, the gracious response of Stephen to get his attention. When Paul saw the stones hitting Stephen, he heard this amazing response, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them (Acts 7:60)."

So for the Lord's servant, it starts, not with the other person, but with *you*.

How's your attitude towards people who oppose you? How do you respond when someone crosses you? Are you a gentle person? Are you a gracious teacher? Are you someone who endures without resentment?

II. As the Lord's servant, focus on your actions (25a).

Notice verse 25, "Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth..."

Can I confess something to you? This is a hard passage. Not hard to understand, but hard to *live*. And here's why. When somebody opposes us, we want to focus on *them*. What's *their* problem? Why are *they* so obstinate?

But Paul turns it around. He says...

A. When opposed, we must not be surprised. Nor attack. Nor retreat. Nor get upset. But rather...

B. When opposed, we must gently instruct. "Those who oppose him he must gently instruct."

The phrase “Those who oppose him” comes from one long Greek word, 17 letters in fact, *antidiatithemenous*.¹

I hope you love the church. But I hope you love it the way it is, with dragons.

That’s the analogy Marshall Shelley uses in a book he wrote thirty years ago, *Well Intentioned Dragons: Ministering to Problem People in the Church*. I read it soon after entering the ministry, and found it very eye-opening, story after story of encounters with well-intentioned dragons. Here’s how Shelley introduces his book:

Within the church, they [well-intentioned dragons] are often sincere, well-meaning saints, but they leave ulcers, strained relationships, and hard feelings in their wake. They don’t consider themselves difficult people. They don’t sit up nights thinking of ways to be nasty. Often they are pillars of the community—talented, strong personalities, deservedly respected—but for some reason, they undermine the ministry of the church. In most cases, they are not naturally rebellious or pathological; they are loyal church members, convinced they’re serving God, but they wind up doing more harm than good...

Some dragons are openly critical. They are the ones who accuse you of being (pick one) too spiritual, not spiritual enough, too dominant, too laid-back, too strict, too lenient, too structured, too disorganized, or ulterior in your motives.

These criticisms are painful because they are largely unanswerable. How can you defend yourself and maintain a spirit of peace? How can you possibly prove the purity of your motives? Dragons make it hard to disagree without being disagreeable...

Sightings of these dragons are all too common. As one veteran pastor says, “Anyone who’s been in ministry more than an hour and a half knows the wrath of a dragon.” Or, as ministry veteran Harry Ironside described it, “Wherever there’s light, there’s bugs.”²

We won’t love the church as we ought if we’re surprised by the dragons (or let’s be honest, when we see ourselves acting like dragons, which most of us do at times).

Let me give you some helpful quotes I gleaned from Shelley’s book...

Stuart Briscoe offers three qualifications for a pastor: the mind of a scholar, the heart of a child, and the hide of a rhinoceros.³

Jonathan Edwards said, “Resolved: that all men should live for the glory of God. Resolved second: that whether others do or not, I will.”⁴

Charles Spurgeon said, “Get a friend to tell you your faults, or better still, welcome an enemy who will watch you keenly and sting you savagely. What a blessing such an irritating critic will be to a wise man, what an intolerable nuisance to a fool!”⁵

General Dwight Eisenhower reportedly would not make a tactical decision until he found someone who strongly opposed it. He wanted to see any weaknesses before proceeding.⁶

¹ It means “to set oneself in opposition.”

² Marshall Shelley, *Well Intentioned Dragons*, pp. 11-12.

³ Marshall Shelley, *Well Intentioned Dragons*, p. 35.

⁴ Marshall Shelley, *Well Intentioned Dragons*, p. 49.

⁵ Marshall Shelley, *Well Intentioned Dragons*, p. 107.

⁶ Marshall Shelley, *Well Intentioned Dragons*, p. 79.

And I find this so helpful. “The goal in handling dragons,” says Shelley, “is not to destroy them, not merely to disassociate, but to make them disciples. Even when that seems an unlikely prospect.”⁷

That’s what Paul said in our text. “Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth...”

Again, our natural inclination when someone opposes us is to ignore them, to avoid them, to stay away from them, to wish they’d get out of our lives. But that’s not an option for the Lord’s servant. The Lord put that person in my life, and He’s up to something, for that person’s good, and mine, to His glory.

So how does God say I should treat someone who opposes me? With right actions, namely this one.

We must gently instruct. The AV says, “In meekness instructing those that oppose.” Paul actually uses a word that has to do with rearing children, “to chasten, to correct”; Phillips “to gently correct.”

That’s how you deal with a dragon, like a good parent deals with a child that’s not buying what he’s hearing. You don’t kick the child out of the house, or brow beat him, or belittle him, or ignore his problem either. You instruct him, gently, firmly, patiently, again and again if necessary.

Timothy, do that with those who oppose you in the church. Go to them, but go in meekness. Then gently instruct them. Give them truth. Yes, listen, and find out what they’re thinking. And if they are thinking wrongly, keep giving them truth, not your opininos, but the truth of God’s Word.

I think the word “gently” includes tact and timing. Some people have very little tact and timing when they criticize. They may be right, but they lack meekness and gentleness.

So what’s the point of these conversations? That’s the third focus of the Lord’s servant. In dealing with people that oppose you, focus on your attitude, your actions, and...

III. As the Lord’s servant, focus on your aim (25b-26).

Verses 25b-26, “...in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.”

What is our aim? What is our hope? It’s not to write people off. It’s not simply to prove them wrong and ourselves right. We’re after two results.

A. We are after repentance. “...if God perhaps will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth” says the AV.

So being patient with those who oppose us does not mean we excuse their behavior. If they’re resisting God’s Word, they are wrong. And what they’ve done is likely painful to us. So what do they need to do?

To *repent*. To have a change of heart, mind, and life. And that’s our first aim. To see that change take place.

Notice two things about repentance.

⁷ Marshall Shelley, *Well Intentioed Dragons*, p. 34.

1. *It comes from God.* “In the hope that *God will grant them repentance.*”

This is why we don’t give up on people. God may grant them repentance.

We serve a merciful God! He's not like us. He doesn't deal with people as they deserve. By His grace, He convicts people of sin (John 16:8). He changes people from what they are to what they should be (2 Cor 3:18). He gives a repentant heart to people.

That's key. Never forget that when a person repents, it's because of God's gift.

And how do you know when a person has truly repented?

2. *It results in a knowledge of the truth.* Repentance is not merely shedding a few tears, or just feeling sorry, or being remorseful about what you did (like Judas Iscariot). Genuine repentance results in a person acknowledging the truth.

“Yes,” says the repentant person. I was wrong. I have disobeyed God. I do need His forgiveness, and yours, for what I’ve done.”

That's our first aim, *repentance*. But it doesn't stop there. Secondly...

B. We are after recovery. “And that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.”

Notice a couple of things about this person who is opposing the Lord’s servant.

1. *The person is in the devil’s snare.* He’s in the trap of the devil and needs to escape. What’s more...

2. *The person is doing the devil’s will.* The devil has taken him captive, says Paul, “to do his will.” That’s strong language, and a terrible predicament.

Sort of reminds me of a scene I dreaded as a child. I had a fear of being held down, especially under a blanket. Whenever that happened, I would scream out, "Let me go! Let me go!"

That's the very condition Paul says a person is in who opposes God's work, and refuses to acknowledge the truth of His Word. They are in the clutches of the devil and doing his work.

What a horrible, helpless, frightful condition! Do you know why it's so hard to restore a critic? Because though he doesn't realize it, he is a pawn in the hands of the ultimate critic of God.

What does this person need? To come to his senses and escape, says Paul. Sin is like alcohol. It deadens a person's senses. It puts him out of touch with reality. He needs to escape and may not even know it.

But we know it. And that’s what we’re seeking to facilitate, this person’s *recovery*.

It’s possible this person isn’t a believer. That’s why he’s so resistant. Our aim is to see him cry out to Christ for salvation that he might escape the devil’s clutches.

But believers resist truth at times too, don’t they? Yes. Paul says to believers in Ephesians 4:26-27, “In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.”

In Matthew 16 Jesus told the disciples He was doing to Jerusalem to suffer and be killed and then raised to life. Peter began to rebuke Him, “Never, Lord!” But Jesus said to him, “Get behind me, *Satan!* You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of man (Matt 16:23).”

That’s it. “Those who oppose you [including believers like Peter] gently instruct, that God may grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and that they

may come to their senses [and stop thinking like the world does about the Messiah], and escape the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.”

That’s our aim, repentance and recovery.

When I stop and think about the three verses we’ve studied this morning, I can’t help but say, “Wow, what a relevant text!” Obviously relevant for those who need to repent and be recovered. But I don’t want to apply this to you. You know what you need to do. I want to talk to those who’ve been hurt.

There are many bitter, angry, resentful Christians sitting in pews today. They are hampered in their effectiveness for service for Jesus Christ because of their resentment.

Have you been wrongly treated? Have you become bitter and resentful?

If you are, you’re hurting two people. First, yourself, by refusing to let go of the past and experience God’s healing. And secondly, you’re hurting the Lord. You are His servant, and He has things He wants to accomplish through you, perhaps in the recovery of the person who’s opposed you. But you’re in the snare of someone else.

If you have been wronged in the past, I urge you today to confess your bitterness to God and experience His forgiveness and cleansing. Yes, acknowledge to Him that you’ve been wronged. But also confess that you’ve been wrong for your resentment and refusal to live as *the Lord’s servant*. Jesus died for your sins. Ask Him to cleanse you, and help you start serving again.

You say, “You don’t know how deeply I’ve been hurt.” No, I don’t. I know my pain, for people have hurt me in the ministry. I’ve received critical letters, critical phone calls, endured critical conversations. And I know that my natural reaction is to retaliate, and become bitter.

But I know that when I ask Him, Jesus helps me. And He will help you too, if you will humbly ask Him. No wonder Paul began this chapter, “Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus (2:1).”

Make It Personal: Some questions to ponder when we’re being opposed...

1. *How do I see myself?* Am I seeing myself as *the Lord’s servant*?
2. *How do I see the problem-people in my life?* Are they hindrances to me, problems I wish would go away? Or God-sent opportunities, people in a trap that He wants to set free using me?
3. *How can I put the gospel on display in this situation?* That’s what every well-intentioned dragon gives me, and opportunity to experience the power of the gospel and put it on display to the glory of our Savior.