

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 7/26/92

II Timothy 2:24-26 "How to Deal With People That Get Under Your Skin"

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Intro: Do you know people that get under your skin? How do you deal with them?

Illust:

Q: How can we learn to respond in a right way to people that rub us wrong?

A: That's the issue II Timothy 2:24-26 addresses.

We'll investigate that in a moment. But first, let's back up for a minute. We've been studying II Timothy for 2 1/2 months now on Sunday mornings. Lest we lose sight of the forrest for the trees, let's set the stage for our study.

1. The Big Picture of II Timothy

Why did God give us the book of II Timothy? What is its purpose? Paul wrote this letter. From prison in Rome. His execution was imminent. He sent it 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 Tim to do 4 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).

2. The Thrust of Chapter 2

For the sake of the gospel, do 2 things Timothy: Be a Leader! And train Leaders. What kind of leaders do churches need? In ch 2, Paul illustrated with 7 images of a leader. Paul told Timothy a leader must see himself as a: Teacher (1-2), Soldier (3-4), Athlete (5), Farmer (6), Workman (15), Vessel (21), Servant (24).

Q: Why are we so careful in the study of II Timothy? What are we taking so much time? Didn't we study the entire book of Joshua (24 chapters) in less than 4 months back in 1988? Yes. And didn't we study Zephaniah in 3 weeks in 1989? Yes. Why then are we devoting so much time to II Timothy, a book of only 4 chapters?

A: Two reasons come to mind.

1. Too often we "gloss over" familiar verses.

Do you remember how many stop signs you passed on the way to church? Wives, which side of his face does your husband shave first? We tend not to be very obervant of things we see all the time. We do that with books like II Timothy.

2. II Timothy is so critical for us!

WBC is growing! PTL! But why are we here? What is our purpose? II Timothy tells us--to protect the gospel, to participate in the gospel, to persevere in the gospel, to proclaim the gospel. And another thing. As this church grows, what do we need more and more of? Leaders? What kind of leaders? II Tim tells us.

Now back to the question...

Q: How do you deal with people that get under your skin?

If you get involved in ministry, you'll soon discover this. There will be opposition. Not just from the unsaved world, but from within the church. Some people will oppose and even criticize you.

Illust: Sometimes it's funny--Corn chips in bed in Quincer

Illust: Sometimes it's not so funny. It hurts. I'd poured my life into one student named Jeff. He had a horrible past home life. He needed a lot of encouragement. We'd spent hours together. I was his R.D. 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 spend time with, that you help with problems, will later oppose you over something.

Illust: It happens to SS teachers, Awana workers, Nursery workers, etc

Q: How should I respond when people oppose me?

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

Proposition: II Timothy 2:24-26 tells us to focus on 3 things when we minister to someone who opposes us.

I. Focus on your Attitude (24).

- A. Negatively--What must NOT be true of us
- B. Positively--What must be true of us

II. Focus on your Actions (25a).

III. Focus on your Aim (25b-26).

- A. Repentance
- B. Recovery

I. Focus on your Attitude (24).

Remember the context.

V 20 "In a great house there are...vessels..."

Two kinds of ministers, two kinds of leaders, two kinds of Christians. One brings honor to God, the other brings dishonor (23).

V 23 "But foolish and unlearned questions avoid..." (questions = debates, arguments)

Obviously, not all controversy is prohibited. When the truth of the gospel is at stake, Paul himself would engage in controversy. But that's not the issue here. We should avoid asking and answering 3 types of questions: those that are foolish, unlearned (uninstructed), and that breed strifes.

But it's a fact of life that some people love to argue about questions just like that. They traffic in the trivial. How do we deal with people like that? Paul says, "Avoid getting involved in those kinds of debates and arguments." Why?

Vv 24-26 "And the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle..."

Q: How do I respond to someone that opposes me?

A: First, v 24 says focus on your Attitude.

V 24 "And the servant of the Lord must not strive..."

What strikes me first is the title "servant of the Lord." That's a great OT title. Moses was a servant of the Lord. So was Samuel. And David. And Isaiah. And who was the greatest servant of all? The Messiah Jesus (see Is 53:11)!

Watch this. Paul says, "Timothy, God has called you to join these ranks. As a leader, you are actually a servant of the Lord. You are called to serve.

Note: That's why I have a distaste for the title "Reverend." It's not a biblical term for a minister. Reverend means "worthy of reverence." There is only One who is worthy of that title. We are called servants. I personally like the biblical title "pastor" because it connotes one who serves and cares for the sheep.

Q: Acc to v 24, what must be true if I am to be a servant of the Lord?

A: I must have a certain attitude towards people that oppose me. What kind?

A. Negatively--What must NOT be true of us

V 24 "must not strive" = to fight

What's our first instinct when someone opposes us? To retaliate.

But what must we not do if we are to be a servant? Strive, fight. This is key. Churches need leaders who are not "fighters." Deacons. Trustees. SS teachers. Awana workers. Youth leaders. If there's one thing we must fight for it's this--fight to promote unity!

It's the time of year when we nominate officers to lead our church. Listen. A person may be a successful leader in the business world, and do so by his ability to outsmart and outwit and outscrap his opponents. But God has clear instruction for us about those who are qualified to serve in church leadership positions.

I Tim 3:3 "A bishop (lit. overseer)... not violent...not a brawler..."

Tit 1:7 "For a bishop...not soon angry...not violent..."

Listen. Hotheads are not qualified to lead in God's church.

Illust:

B. Positively--What must be true of us

V 24 "but..."

There must be 3 qualifications we must meet if we are to be the Lord's servants:

1. Gentle unto all men

Gentle. The fruit of the Spirit is gentleness (Gal 5:22). Paul elaborates on this quality in I Th 2:7, "But we were GENTLE among you, even as a nurse cherishes her

children." We must have a gentle spirit. Even when people oppose us. Being vindictive is out. Getting even is out.

And notice Paul says, "unto all men." Some people are easy to love. Others have sandpaper personalities. They rub you wrong. They grind you. That doesn't excuse them. But listen. You are not responsible for the other person's personality. You are responsible for what? Your attitude.

2. Apt to teach

Lit. "apt at teaching." There are other passages that talk about the need to be "teachable" (eg--II Tm 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 God-given aptitude for teaching.

I Tim 3:2 "A bishop then must be...apt to teach."

Some people know truth, but can't communicate truth. We've all sat through sermons and SS lessons where that was true!

Challenge to those who teach (including myself): Spend time preparing not only WHAT you will say, but HOW you will say it. A good teacher does both. A teacher must know more than merely what the Bible says. He must know how to communicate that truth in a way that will get through to his people.

Suggestions: Don't always lecture. That's the easiest method of teaching for the teacher, but the least productive for the student. Ask thought provoking questions. Illustrate. Use visuals. Jesus did. He was the Master Teacher.

3. Patient

The English word "patient" doesn't do justice. The original word Paul used is strong. It means "to endure evil." "To be ready to bear evil treatment without getting ticked off." (NIV = "not resentful")(NEB "tolerant")

Tragic: Some Christians are paralyzed by resent. They resent what someone did to them 20 years ago. They're bitter. They can't change the past, but they're bitter about it.

Eg--Some may have been victims of child abuse, even sexual abuse

Eg--Some have been shafted when applying for job promotions

Remember this. You can't change the past. You are not responsible for the wrong the other person has committed against you. You are responsible for this--your attitude towards that person.

Illust: You say, "I hate that person..."

Key: A bitter, resentful attitude will paralyze us from effective service for Christ.

Q: How's your attitude towards people? How do you respond when people cross you? Are you a gentle person? Or do you have a reputation as being a fighter?

Illust:

Tran: How should you respond when someone opposes you? First, focus on you attitude. Second...

II. Focus on your Actions (25a).

We've been talking about people outside the church that hurt us. Sometimes people inside the church may oppose us. What will a servant do then?

V 25 "In meekness instructing those that oppose him..."

Step #2--Focus on YOUR actions, not the other person's. Can I confess something to you? This is a hard passage. Not hard to understand, but hard to live!

"those that oppose him"--one long greek word; 17 letters!

= to set oneself in opposition

Illust: Book "Well Intentioned Dragons: Ministering to Problem People in the Church."

Do you know what our natural inclination is to do to someone who opposes us? We want to ignore them. To avoid them. To stay away from them. To wish they'd get out of our lives. But a servant can't do that...

Q: How does God say I should treat someone who opposes me in the church?

A: I must have the right actions. What are they?

V 25 "In meekness instructing those..."

Paul told Tim to "instruct" those that oppose him (instruct = a term used to describe rearing children; "to chasten, to correct"; Phillips "to gently correct").

Here's the setting. As a minister, Tim obviously had people that opposed him. That's inevitable. They opposed his message. Maybe they didn't like his preaching. They criticized style. So what was Tim to do? Throw in the towel on them? Brow beat them? Get even with them? No.

Keep "instructing" them Tim! Gently correct them. Go to them, and carefully point out their fault. Go to them. How? In "meekness" (power under control).

Illust: Bridle on a powerful horse

Problem: Some people have no tact when they criticize. They may be right, but they're not meek.

Illust:

Listen. In the church, our goal is always to restore, not to retaliate, to build up, not to tear down, to heal, not to wound. Even when a brother falls into false teaching. And even when a brother opposes us.

I am responsible for my actions.

Illust:

Tran: You say, "Why do that? Why should we patiently instruct critics? Thirdly, we have an aim. In dealing with people that oppose us, focus on your attitude, your actions, and..."

III. Focus on your Aim (25b-26).

Q: What is our aim? Why not write people off? What is our hope?

A: Our aim is to see 2 things happen.

A. We aim to see Repentance (25b).

V 25 "if God will perhaps give them repentance..."

Please remember something. Being patient with those who hurt us does not mean we excuse their behavior. They're wrong. What they do is painful to us. What do they need to do?

"Repent" = to have a change of heart and life

That's our first aim. To see change take place. Not surface change either.

Q: How is it possible that such a change will occur?

A: GOD may "give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth"

We serve a gracious God. He's not like us. He doesn't deal with people as they deserve. By His grace, He convicts people of sin (Jn 16:8). He changes people from what they are to what they should be (II 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.

Q: How do you know when a person has truly repented, truly changed?

A: V 25 When they have what? "Acknowledged the truth"

Repentance is not merely shedding a few tears, or just feeling sorry or remorseful about what you did (eg--Judas Iscariot did that). Genuine repentance demands that I acknowledge the truth. I must say, "Yes, I was wrong. I was wrong. I have disobeyed God. I need His forgiveness."

That's our first aim--Repentance.

Illust:

B. We aim to see Recovery (26).

V 26 "And that they may recover themselves..."

Illust: As a child I had a fear of being held down, especially under a blanket! Whenever it 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. They are 2 things:

1. In the snare (=trap) of the devil
2. Taken captive by the devil to do his work (=to catch alive)

Just think of it! 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 Evil One. He's held captive by the devil.

Q: What does that person need?

A: God's Recovery Program

V 25 "recover" (=to return to soberness; to regain one's senses)

Sin is like alcohol. It deadens a person's senses. It puts them out of touch with reality.

So here's our second aim--We aim to see recovery.

Illust:

Conclusion:

When I stop and think about the 3 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 resent. Perhaps I'm talking to you.

Have you been wrongly treated? Have you been an innocent victim? Are you bitter and resentful? If you are, you're hurting 2 people. First, yourself. Do you know how? By refusing to let go of the past and experience God's healing. And secondly, you're hurting our Lord. How? You're disqualifying yourself from effective service by harboring that bitterness.

Challenge: If you have been wronged in the past, I challenge you to take specific action today to give that resentful attitude to God. Acknowledge to Him that you've been wronged. But also confess that you've been wrong for your bitter spirit. Ask Him to cleanse you. He will make you whole.

You object, "I can't. I can't have that kind of attitude, action, and aim. It's too hard!" I can relate. People have hurt me in the ministry. I've received critical letters, critical phone calls, endured critical conversations. My first reaction is to retaliate.

Do you know what? If you think what we've talked about today is too hard, humanly impossible, guess what? You are right. You and I can't do what vv 24-26 demand...on our own strength. It all hinges on 2:1.

2:1 "Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus."