

RUF Bible Study – 1 & 2 Timothy
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2 Timothy 2:14-26

14 Remind everyone about these things, and command them in God's presence to stop fighting over words. Such arguments are useless, and they can ruin those who hear them.

15 Work hard so you can present yourself to God and receive his approval. Be a good worker, one who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly explains the word of truth. 16 Avoid worthless, foolish talk that only leads to more godless behavior. 17 This kind of talk spreads like cancer, as in the case of Hymenaeus and Philetus. 18 They have left the path of truth, claiming that the resurrection of the dead has already occurred; in this way, they have turned some people away from the faith. 19 But God's truth stands firm like a foundation stone with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his," and "All who belong to the Lord must turn away from evil."

20 In a wealthy home some utensils are made of gold and silver, and some are made of wood and clay. The expensive utensils are used for special occasions, and the cheap ones are for everyday use. 21 If you keep yourself pure, you will be a special utensil for honorable use. Your life will be clean, and you will be ready for the Master to use you for every good work.

22 Run from anything that stimulates youthful lusts. Instead, pursue righteous living, faithfulness, love, and peace. Enjoy the companionship of those who call on the Lord with pure hearts. 23 Again I say, don't get involved in foolish, ignorant arguments that only start fights. 24 A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but must be kind to everyone, be able to teach, and be patient with difficult people. 25 Gently instruct those who oppose the truth. Perhaps God will change those people's hearts, and they will learn the truth. 26 Then they will come to their senses and escape from the devil's trap. For they have been held captive by him to do whatever he wants.

Consider this quote from *Daddy's Girl* by L.T. Meade (1891), which is a part of a speech a father gives his daughter before going away on a trip: "Sibyl, just promise before I leave you that you will be a good girl, that you will make goodness the first thing in life. If, for instance, we were never to meet again – of course we shall, thousands of times, but just suppose for the sake of saying it, that we did not, I should like to know that my little girl put goodness first. There is nothing else worth the while in life. Cling to it Sibyl, cling tight hold to it. Never forget –"² I found that in a new book by Wendy Shalit: *Girls Gone Mild: Young Women Reclaim Self-Respect and Find It's Not Bad to Be Good*. I'm only in chapter two, so I can't give a full recounting, but the first two chapters are amazingly well-written and incredibly alarming.

I am a college pastor, so I see what is happening to young women all the time. And I have a thirteen-year-old daughter, so I try to keep up with her world. But whoa! We are in some different world, apparently. Maybe we're really sheltered, or out of touch with reality or watching television far less than the rest of the country. Shalit reports something that we all know – sex is everywhere. That seems pretty obvious. But the world thinks that is a good thing. More, more, more. And the world wants people to have sex younger and younger. Shalit tells story after story of parents telling their daughters to get it over with, because "virgin" is the last thing you want to have as a label. We're talking about 13 and 14 year old girls here. Not 18 year olds.

It's disturbing. I see it on campus. Women are being duped. It is cool to be "bad." It is super uncool to have morals, to say no, and to be "good." I bought my daughter Ruth a ring for her birthday, and asked her to wear it on her wedding finger. I asked her to give it to me someday when she has found the man she wants to marry. "It's a hard world out there," I told her. "There will be a lot of pressure out there for you to give in, to give your body to someone. But I want you to save it for your husband. And I'll always love you and be there for you, no matter what." Apparently that is oppressive to her. We live in a culture that is oppressive to innocence. I could go on and on, but I think you get the point.

This isn't a passage about virginity. But it is one about being good. Paul tells Timothy to be a good workman, one approved by God. He tells him to be a good vessel, one clean and useful. And he tells him to be a good person, one who flees from evil and pursues the good. It's not bad to be good. Is it?

Paul's instruction falls into three categories of goodness, one each for the paragraphs in the ESV.

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For this series, I used commentaries on 1 and 2 Timothy from Hughes, Stott, Knight, MacArthur, Ryken, and Clinton. The reader should assume that none of the ideas expressed are original to me.

² Found in *Girls Gone Mild* by Wendy Shalit, 21

Good Work – The Word of Truth

The first good thing we should see is we are to be good workers. *15 Work hard so you can present yourself to God and receive his approval. Be a good worker, one who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly explains the word of truth.*

This section deals with good workers and bad workers. The analogy rests on the word “correctly” or “rightly” which means straight. If you want to be a good worker, you have to cut straight the Word of God. This means you can’t swerve. Think of cutting a board with a table saw. If the pieces are going to go together, they have to be cut correctly, cut straight. They can’t swerve around from the design.

It’s like a road or a path through the woods. We’re to cut a road across the country that is forested in a straight direction. Of course, when they build roads, they have to go around mountains, but they try as best as they can to cut the straightest path possible. Swerving is not considered good policy. Think of swerving through Kansas. You might get sick.

Chrysostom likens it to good farming with straight rows – plow a straight furrow.

There is a boy who mowed my yard this summer. He was all over the place, almost like he was mowing in circles. It took him forever to mow that way, and he would miss spots.

That’s what bad workers do. They swerve, they miss, they deviate. They moralize the text in front of them. They ignore the text and talk about whatever they want to talk about. They concentrate on only a few things over and over again, never preaching all of Scripture to you. They de-contextualize things, pulling them out of their context to make them say what they want it to say.

This image comes from verse 18: *They have left the path of truth.* They deviate and miss the target. This comes from irreverent babble, from quarrelling about words, and from saying the resurrection already happened.

People start debating, and they lose sight of what is truly important. They begin to argue about the meaning of this and that word, and they stop loving others. And Paul is dealing with a group of people who are saying the resurrection already happened. They don’t mean the resurrection of Jesus from the grave – for Paul would agree with them. They mean our bodies. We have already been resurrected, which means this is the new heaven and the new earth. Huh? That would be a serious, serious let down wouldn’t it?!

People teach this even today. I’ve met some (they’re called HyperPreterists if you’re keeping track), and they were big trouble. But the resurrection of the dead has not yet happened. But the resurrection of Jesus has happened. Paul has this in mind too, but really elsewhere like 1 Corinthians 15, where he insists on it. There are many today who would say Jesus did not raise from the dead. They are wrong. He did. It was a miracle.

Let’s not engage in godless chatter, nor in empty talk. Those things are like gangrene, or the NLT translates it as cancer. They are eating away at people. It’s wrong, disgusting and vile. It ruins people, and it leads them to ungodliness. People are going somewhere, but they’re moving forward in a wrong direction. That’s not what we want.

Let’s discuss things honestly and openly. Paul was controversial. He debated and discussed many things, and he wasn’t afraid to make people angry. But it dealt with important doctrines, ethics, church practice and most of all the belief and application of the gospel.

Godless chatter brings disease and death in the church. But God’s truth stands firm: *19 But God’s truth stands firm like a foundation stone with this inscription: “The Lord knows those who are his,” and “All who belong to the Lord must turn away from evil.”*

There is a foundational truth here in God’s church with his people. It is sure and secure. The Lord knows who are his. In John 10, Jesus says he knows his sheep and they know his voice. They are his. Over and over again, God talks about loving and caring for his children, his people. His promises are sure. This is speaking of what we might call the invisible church. The people and the leaders who are Christians, who are what God calls the elect. We cannot see this call. We cannot KNOW who is a Christian and who isn’t. Not really. But God does.

There is another firm truth. All of God’s children, those who belong to him, must turn away from evil. This means you must follow the law, you must know what God wants you to do and do it. If the first saying is private and invisible, this one is public and visible. You need to live the life of a Christian. This is the visible church, those who claim to be Christians. If you are in that group, then you should live like it. “There is no election apart from sanctification. Knowing the deep things of God demands deep things from us.”³

“It is only the Lord who knows and recognizes his own people, and can tell the true from the spurious, for only he sees the heart. But though we cannot see the heart, we can see the life, which is the one reliable evidence of the heart’s condition, and is apparent to all. Both ‘seals’ are essential, however, the divine and the human, the unseen and the seen. Together they bear witness to ‘God’s firm foundation,’ his true church.”⁴

What we really, really want is both of these to be true. Are you really a Christian? Do you hear God’s voice? Are you his? Does God know you? Are you one of his children, one of his sheep?

³ Hughes, 213

⁴ Stott, 70

If you say you are, if you are, are you living like one? Are you turning away from evil and turning toward good?

If not, then you must. You must repent and believe the gospel. You need to live a different way, and you have to have God's help to do this. Start today. Cry out to God to save you from your sin, and admit to him your neediness. Talk to God today, tonight and ask him to do a new work in you, a work of faith, love, hope. And make it a work in community, so that others can help you and be with you.

When I was living in Lincoln, Nebraska, I decided to build my own paperback bookshelf. The concept didn't seem too hard, so I went and bought the wood, stained it and took it down to the basement of our apartment complex. There, in the dark, with little space to work, I realized that it was extremely difficult to nail five-foot boards together at a right angle. I tried all sorts of methods to do this, and finally managed. Slowly, my bookshelf came into shape.

I carried the finished product upstairs, and showed Julie. Uh.... She was not impressed. It wasn't straight. It swerved. It wasn't strong. It wasn't good. We still used it, and books helped to cover some of its flaws.

Contrast that to the bookshelves that are in my home office now. PJ's shop built them and they fit exactly into the space we measured. Joe Keck painted them and then installed a molding around them so they look built in. They're beautiful. They're strong. They're good. Good workman, approved ones, built it.

God call us, as leaders in his church, to be good workman in regards to the truth, and the gospel. We need to know it. We need to practice it. We need to be mentored in it. We need to pursue the good things of it and in it.

May we be used by God in such a way, since we then become his instruments in his hands to do his work. God is at work. That's what the next part is about.

Good Honor – Vessels In God's Shop

20 In a wealthy home some utensils are made of gold and silver, and some are made of wood and clay. The expensive utensils are used for special occasions, and the cheap ones are for everyday use. 21 If you keep yourself pure, you will be a special utensil for honorable use. Your life will be clean, and you will be ready for the Master to use you for every good work.

Paul changes the analogy from talking about us as workman, to us as the utensils the workman is using. It makes sense to us – we have things in our houses that are special and things that are common. There is a difference between a toothbrush and a pearl necklace, between a spoon and the china from your wedding. Most people don't eat on their china every day, but they get it out for special occasions.

Or think of it like tools for a job. If you're going to paint a room, you can buy cheap paint or expensive paint. The more important the room or project, the better paint you should buy. The best paint is pure, or purer than the cheap paint. Which will you use? If the project is no big deal, then use the cheap, everyday paint.

God is telling us we can be used by him if we keep ourselves pure. God does use unclean vessels. You can read about many of them in the Bible. And of course, none of us is totally pure. We've all been stained by the world. We've all sinned.

But it's not bad to be good, as Wendy Shalit says. Why is the bad girl such a popular image today? Why is it cool to be bad? Why is it so uncool to be good? I agree with Shalit that much of this thinking comes from the Baby Boomer generation, but I think it is turning around with this new generation. Badness is getting a little boring. There may be a backlash, and you could start it.

At the end of one her chapters, Shalit offers this sample script to girls who are getting pressured from their parents to have sex early so they can get it over with:

"Mom, Dad, I know you love me and that you're concerned about me, and I appreciate it. I realize you think I'm a bit weird for not sleeping around and not taking advantage of the sexual freedom you fought for, but I've been noticing that a lot of my friends are just not happy after losing their virginity, or hooking up, and I really want to wait until marriage or wait until I meet someone I can trust and truly respect. I know it might be hard for you to believe, but this is really not because I have hang-ups. I've actually been exposed to more sex than you ever were in your day. I think of myself as being idealistic, and I hope that you can too. I also want to preserve my sensitivity for my future spouse, and not become jaded and cynical. There is so much pressure from the media and my peers to have casual sex, and your adding to the pressure really doesn't help me, even though I know you mean well. I hope that even if you don't understand my choices, you can respect my high standards – it would mean a lot to me to have your support until I find the special person I'm looking for. Thanks for taking the time to listen to me, and here, you can take back the condoms that you gave me – I won't be needing them."⁵

I think it's great to say something like that against the pressure. Shalit also offers advice to speak against getting "sexiled." This is what happens when you come back to your room and your roommate wants to or is having sex and you get kicked out. You can start something like "Take Back Your Room" and put pressure on the administration to reinstate visiting hours from 7pm to 11:30pm. After that, everyone has to be out so people can study and sleep. "Don't let your administrators off the hook if they insist that they are only 'letting the students decide.' Point out that without the support of the administration, you are powerless to enforce your right to live in your own room, and you after all, are paying tens of thousands of dollars a year for this privilege." You will then be able to say something to your roommate that is right and true. If

⁵ Shalit, 50

you don't have this kind of support, you are the bad sport if you say anything. I hear of many girls whose roommate's boyfriends sleep in their dorm room every night or many nights a week. But they never say anything. Say something.

Let's pursue righteousness together. We can pursue chastity together. Let's think about and honor our bodies and honor the bodies of each other. Let's keep sex in its right places – marriage, and keep the things that go with sex, like nakedness and oral sex, and much more, in that category as well.

Let's pursue modesty together. It's amazing to me on Halloween how many women dress up in sexy costumes. Sexy nurse. Sexy waitress. Sexy devil. But I suppose it's like that on campus almost every day. We can be modest. We don't have to make a big deal out of it, but we can be modest together.

We can be honest together. Don't cheat on your tests. I know it's tempting, but it's wrong.

Let's pursue good doctrine together. Let's have good minds, thoughtful and full of the things of God. Let's read good books and talk about them together.

We can be good together. Let's try. Let's be clean vessels. If we get dirty, let's confess our sins and get forgiven and try again with God. Let's not give in to wrong and evil. Let's not get rusty, dirty and un-useable by God. "No higher honor could be imagined than to be an instrument in the hand of Jesus, to be at his disposal for the furtherance of his kingdom, to be available whenever wanted for his service."⁶

Good Runners – Fleeing Youthful Passion

22 Run from anything that stimulates youthful lusts. Instead, pursue righteous living, faithfulness, love, and peace. Enjoy the companionship of those who call on the Lord with pure hearts. 23 Again I say, don't get involved in foolish, ignorant arguments that only start fights. 24 A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but must be kind to everyone, be able to teach, and be patient with difficult people. 25 Gently instruct those who oppose the truth. Perhaps God will change those people's hearts, and they will learn the truth. 26 Then they will come to their senses and escape from the devil's trap. For they have been held captive by him to do whatever he wants.

This is really a continuation of what we were just talking about. We pursue righteous living, faithfulness, love and peace. We ask for forgiveness when we do the wrong thing – blessed are the peacemakers. We mean what we say and we say what we mean. We should be careful about our words and be slow to over commit (just this week I've been dealing with a girl whose heart is crushed by her boyfriend saying I love you and then breaking up with her two months later). We love each other as friends. What is the best for him? What is loving for me to do for her? This is instead of using people for our own purposes. We pursue righteous living.

And that means we flee youthful passions. It seems like Paul is talking mostly about sex and anger. We've been talking about sex already with Wendy Shalit's book in mind. Fleeing sexual immorality means that the question "How far is too far?" is really the wrong question. We should flee from too far. "How close can I get to dropping my daughter into the Grand Canyon?" is not a good question, because I just might find out.

I've told before about my friend who was getting rides home from class from a woman in her late twenties. One night, at a stop sign, she reached over and put her hand on her knee. She looked into his eyes. He could have had her right there. But what did he do? He opened the car door and ran away. Uh... that's awkward. But it's a great picture of fleeing. It's reminiscent of Joseph, who was tempted by Potipher's wife but he ran away. Run away! Call me, and I will pick you up. Have someone to call when you're in trouble and you need help.

You can say, "I need to go home." Or you can make it a policy to never lie down together. No touching up or down or through clothing. No clothing comes off. I'm not sure what your rules should be, but fleeing youthful passions means you should have some. These are loving, peaceful, faithful, righteous things Christians should do.

But Paul also talks about anger, another youthful passion. He says we shouldn't get involved in foolish disputes and controversies. We shouldn't be quarrelsome. Paul has talked about this before, even in this passage. Let's be easier to get along with, but still hold fast to the trust. I personally find that a difficult thing to manage. I can get too worked up about things. I can hold my ground too long. I can stand up for something because of "the principle of the thing." That almost never is good. Too often we're quick to be offended and slow to forgive. Instead we should be quick to forgive and slow to be offended.

Other youthful passions might be impatience, harshness, contentiousness and a competitive spirit.

Paul says we should instead be pastoral. Remember Paul was controversial, but he still was pastoral. We are to be gentle and love people. Our greatest example of this was Jesus. Of course we can't really imagine it, but what would it have been like to be him? To be sitting in the synagogue week after week, hearing wrong doctrine. To go to the temple month after month and see them talking about him, but not getting it? All the time people were trying to bait him into arguments, to trap him into mistakes. Oh – and they wanted to kill him. And they spat on him and abused him. He was not easily angered. Yet he did speak up for the truth. He was pastoral. He loves his sheep.

Some of us just aren't doing well with all of this. Maybe you've realized you've been or you are a bad workman. Maybe you are just now seeing that you aren't a good tool, and God isn't using you. You've become dirty. And maybe you

⁶ Stott, 72

haven't fled youthful passions. Instead you've befriended them. You've tolerated them. What now? What do we do with our dirty lives, our bad work, our wrongly directed passions?

You have to have help. Paul tells us that the devil has captured you. He has you trapped. You have to come to your senses. The word Paul uses there means to become sober. The illustration is that Satan has trapped you and drugged you. You're woozy. You aren't thinking straight. You can't get away. This is a scary thought. It's being slipped a date rape drug in your drink and being talked into going home with a guy. It's being caged and steadily drugged so you can't get away. John Stott calls it a "diabolical intoxication."

That's what it's like to live wrong. To believe wrong. To be trapped and unable to get out.

So how can we get out? How can you get out if you're drugged?

You have to be rescued. God saves people. Paul tells Timothy about this in the way of a pastor. Perhaps God will save them. It's true. God doesn't save everyone. Some people love living the lie. Some people won't listen to the truth. But God saves some. Some do listen. Some do want to hear the truth of the gospel. Some hunger and thirst for righteousness. And they get saved. God is a rescuer God. He is a redeemer. He is a Savior. He is a Warrior King. He breaks the bonds of evil, releases the captives and sets them free to live a life in his kingdom by his rules for his glory.

Do you want that?

Do want to be able to say this:

*Long my imprisoned spirit lay,
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray;
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.*

For some of you this needs to happen and soon. You need saving. And God promises he will do it for those who cry out to him. He hears the voices of his people. He hears the cries of his sheep. Do you hear his voice calling to you?

And do you know how he's going to do this great work? He'll use other people. Your friends. Your family. Your church. Your pastor. Your small group. This message tonight. And some of you need to be that person, the one God is using.

There is spiritual work to be done. Done and done to. Let's be about the work of God. Let's see some rescuing happening. Let's rescue some folks. God will use us, as we live godly, clean, righteous lives. Not self-righteous. But believing in the promise of the Gospel that God saves sinners like me. That God rescues those trapped, and he does it by the truth of the gospel that Jesus Christ came do live and die and he rose again and he will come back for his people (but that hasn't happened yet).

Let's be about that work, the work of the Gospel. It is good.