

Powerful Words 2 Timothy 2:14-19

(Show slide 1 as soon as the sermon starts)

Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me.

We all know that **pithy little proverb** is complete nonsense.

Sticks and stones certainly cause a lot of damage, however, words are not puny and irrelevant.

Change to slide 2 Words are **powerful** and **transformational**. That is, they cause things to happen, whether for good or bad.

Let me offer a few **examples**.

- The dinner is ready
- The scan is clear
- Your performance is inadequate
- You have failed the test

This section of **2 Timothy** is about the importance of words. In particular, the focus is on how we respond to the words of God that together make up the Bible.

There are **four truths** I want to highlight this morning. We are to...

- Abandon pointless words (Vs 14)
- Communicate accurate words (Vs 15)
- Avoid godless words (Vs 16-18)
- Obey holy words (Vs 19)

First, abandon pointless words (Vs 14)

Change to slide 3 Look at verse 14. **Read verses 14.**

The apostle Paul is warning us against having a particular type of conversation that is as useful as attempting to fill a bathtub with water but leaving the plug on the side. It is completely pointless.

In fact, it's worse than that. We're told that the conversation in question **ruins** those who listen.

You may or may not like visiting old ruins. Some love it and some dread a day out to see the historic buildings. Regardless of your eagerness to view a ruin, there is a difference between seeing one and living in one.

We don't want our homes to be in a ruined state. **We certainly don't want our lives to be like that either.**

If that's true, Paul says **abandon** a particular type of conversation.

It's what he calls **quarrelling about words**.

Notice he doesn't say quarrelling **with** words but **about** words.

We human beings have the ability to quarrel about anything. That's not good for us. However, at this point in **2 Timothy** the danger is not about quarrelling in general but about being consumed by the theoretical meaning of words with an attitude that isn't interested in responding to what they mean.

This is different from a careful and precise investigation of a word in order that its meaning becomes clearer and our ability to respond becomes more obvious.

No this is about a love for **obscurity** and **intellectual ambiguity** that leaves the listener confused and paralysed.

How does this ruin those who listen? Ultimately it shakes our confidence in the clarity and usefulness of the Bible. When that happens we stop listening with an attitude to learn and change. The result is a life lived according to our personal values that we have cobbled together from a whole variety of places.

Many of you will know that we run small groups at this church where Christians gather to read the Bible, pray and encourage each other. Many of these small groups are called Life Groups rather than Bible Study Groups. **Why?** Two reasons. We are sharing life together **and** we are also pursuing a changed life together. It's not wrong to call a group a Bible study as long as we realise that these groups are not places for discussing the theoretical meaning of words. No, they are places where we humbly gather to get clarity on what the Bible says in order that God will transform us through his word by his Holy Spirit. Let's abandon pointless conversations and instead come with the attitude that wants the word to change us for the better!

Second, communicate accurate words (Vs 15)

Change to slide 4 Look at verse 15. **Read verse 15.**

This is a brilliant summary of what anyone who dares to hold out the Bible to others should be seeking to do.

Our **aim** should be to become a worker approved by God who correctly handles his precious word.

Let's unpack the different parts of that description.

First, a worker. There are some jobs that we associate with hard work and getting physically tired. Being a pastor isn't one of them! However, Paul uses the language of being a workman to those whose task it is to handle the word of God rightly. Let's get our expectations right. It's hard and tiring work.

Second, they are to be a worker approved by God.

Approval rating matters in so many aspects of life. Whether it's the politicians in the seat of power or the Amazon review scores, what people think makes a difference to what we do.

What about teaching the Bible? Whose opinion matters most of all? The temptation will always be to say what those in front of us and all around us want to hear. We see their smiles and their frowns straight away. However, it is the view of the unseen God that should ultimately matter.

Here's the reality. There will often be truths of the Bible that are out of alignment with the culture around us. Frequently, our wider society will respond with laughter and derision. No one likes to feel ashamed in a group of people. But here's our choice. Will we choose to be ashamed before God or before people?

Third, the Bible teacher should aim to be a worker approved by God who correctly handles his word.

In fact, that's how we become an approved worker. We make sure we communicate accurately what God has written down.

When it comes to words there is such a thing as **authorial intent**. In some English departments this has been replaced by what's called **reader response**.

What's the difference? Reader response is when we stress the effect of the words on the person reading or hearing then whereas authorial intent is when we stress the purpose of the original writer.

Let me give you an **example** to make it clear. Suppose I say to one of our staff, make sure you clean up our upstairs unit as it's a mess. Do this by the end of the day. What if I check later and it's still a mess? How should I respond if their explanation is? "Well Lee I heard your words and they inspired me to ponder the concept of cleanliness so I've been sitting all day listening to music and pondering how we can make the world a cleaner place." That wasn't the purpose of my words.

If we want to be workers who correctly handle the word of God then **our aim must be to discover the author's intention for the words that are before us**. Or put differently, as God is the ultimate author of the Bible, our aim is to discover his purpose in what he has written in a particular place.

This is the big meaning behind the original phrasing that is translated as correctly handling the word of God. **The literal meaning is to cut a straight path for the word of God**. That is, present it in such a way that the original purpose of God travels directly to the ears of the hearers.

To help make this what we do in our preaching we practice what is called **expository preaching at Trinity**. We preach through different books of the Bible from Old and New Testaments and our desire each week is to discover God's purpose and hold it forth. If you ask me on a Monday what I will say on a Sunday, I probably won't have any idea.

Each week we trust that God's purpose is exactly what all of us need to hear!

Third, avoid godless words (Vs 16-18)

Change to slide 5 Look at verse 16. **Read verses 16 to 18.**

Godless chatter is to be confused with gossip.

Godless chatter is when the teaching we receive is characterised by two things:

- The words don't come from God
- The words don't have God at the centre

This type of teaching is described like gangrene. It slowly spreads and produces spiritual death to more and more people.

In **verses 17 and 18**, Paul gives a real life example of godless chatter. Two individuals are mentioned. Hymenaeus and Philetus. In Paul's day they were engaged in dangerous teaching that didn't come from the mouth of the Lord.

Specifically they were teaching that the resurrection had already happened. This wasn't a reference to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. That had definitely already happened. No, it's likely that they were teaching that there was nothing more in the future for Christians to wait for. Everything is available now.

In order **to make this credible** they had changed the meaning of the word resurrection. In their teaching it didn't refer to a future physical resurrection for the followers of Jesus but to a spiritual new life that had already started. They were clever in that they still used the same word but filled it with completely different content.

The same kind of godless chatter still gets peddled in churches around the world. It may not be identical in every detail but the big fundamentals will continue to be taught.

Watch out for teaching that uses the same words but fills them with different content. Islam and Jesus.

Watch out for those who collapse the future promises of God into the present.

- Sickness
- Sin

Fourth, obey holy words (Vs 19)

Change to slide 6 Look at verse 19. **Read verse 19.**

This is a welcome verse following what we heard in **verse 18** about the faith of some being destroyed.

How can we be sure of our faith? How do I know if I'll make it?

Two complementary answers are given.

- The Lord knows who are his
- Everyone who confesses the name of the LORD must turn away from wickedness.

God will keep his people safe. The genuine believer will respond in obedience and seek to live a holy life.

Let's not separate what God has joined together. Both statements are true. They are designed to **encourage us** and **motivate us**.

Let's pray.