

2 Tim 2: 13ff

Anecdote from Tom Wright.

Paul is passing on words of advice to young Timothy. In the tough task of leading the church, Timothy needed his wits about him. There are dangers and trap falls a plenty that he could easily fall into and get eaten up.

This next bit of Paul's letter takes a firm aim at the theme of words. Paul knew words have power and so being careful with them is so important. There's the old phrase, "Sticks and stones..." but it's garbage. Words, wrongly used, have the potential to cause an enormous amount of harm, way more than sticks and stones. If stick and stones are the weapons of choice, words are what starts the war.

So, lets have a look and we're going to quick-fire go through them.

V.14 and 16 – warn people about quarrelling about words and avoid Godless chatter. I'm sure we've all met the people who love a good argument. They love to take what you've said and twist it slightly. It's just like Tom Wright's story. But it's dishonest and doesn't do anyone any favours. As they'd say up North, "call a spade a spade" Be straight with what you mean, but twist people's words, act in love.. Pauls' warning is that such pointless quarrelling only ruins people. And the Godless chatter, he doesn't mean avoid talking about anything other than God – that's a bit puritanical, rather he is taking aim at those who want to spend hours discussing new and novel teachings. I knew someone who wanted to spend a long time talking about near death experiences and reincarnation. There was an unhealthy fascination. But they only start to serve as unhealthy things that draw us away from God's truth.

v.17-18 Avoid false teaching. In Paul's day, there were those who said that the resurrection had already taken place. I struggle to understand how they could think and believe this myself, it seems to go against logic. You have to die to be resurrected. But it probably links into the twisting of words that Paul has already mentioned. It still happens in different ways. "God is love and so all that matters is love" people will say and to a degree I'd agree. But scripture reveals there are deeper levels behind it and about the true nature of what love is. The word love is an easy one to be manipulated The only way to avoid false teaching is to immerse yourself in right teaching and testing what someone says against scripture.

V.23 Stay away from stupid arguments that only lead to quarrels. It's a conversation that starts small, one person mishears another and rapidly nothing becomes something, voices are raised and ears are shut down. A mark of leadership in this situation is to be able to step back, show grace and humility but to be firm in what you believe the truth is and know how to communicate it. How often are arguments about absolutely nothing, but it just demonstrates the power of words. I remember the first argument that I had with Jill... marriage prep... One person having the humility to step back is what's needed. It's not about being a doormat, but it is about showing love.

So why are these things important for Paul to pass on to Timothy? Paul reminds Timothy that we are in the Last Days. The Last Days simply means the time between Jesus' ascension when he went back to heaven and his return at the last judgement. Jesus told us, and Paul reminds us, that these are going to be times of chaos and disorder. People will go their own way in life and decide for themselves what they want to do. Paul wants Timothy and the church to instead be a lighthouse shining out into the world showing a different way to live. It is all too easy to get sucked into the world's way of doing things and a form of behaviour that goes against God. And the power of words

is often what gets us into trouble. This is about making a stand, how we use words and how we speak should mark us out as different. As James says in his letter, the tongue may only be small, but it is like the rudder for a boat. It will either lead you to safety or get you into trouble. Always best to control it and so lead others to safety.