

Firm Foundations

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- [0 : 0 0] And if we could, this evening with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read, 2 Timothy chapter 2.
- We're looking at the last part of chapter 2. 2 Timothy chapter 2, but if you're reading it at verse 19. 2 Timothy 2 at verse 19.
- Where Paul writes, But God's firm foundation stands, bearing the seal. The Lord knows those who are his, and let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.
- God's firm foundation stands, bearing the seal. The Lord knows those who are his, and let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.
- Now if you're anything like me, then I'm sure that you've had occasions in your life where you've said something without even thinking.
- [1 : 1 2] And it left you feeling completely embarrassed, maybe even awkward. And to the point that you made the remark, maybe to someone or to within yourself, you said, I was wishing that the ground would just swallow me up.
- I don't know if you've ever said that, but I've said it a few times. I was wishing that the ground would swallow me up. And you know, in many ways, that's the context to this verse, verse 19.
- Because when Paul states that God's firm foundation stands bearing this seal, the two seals that he's speaking about are God's firm foundation.
- The two seals, as he says there, are, The Lord knows those who are his, and let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.
- And those two seals, they are two quotes. They are two quotes from the book of Numbers, and chapter 16. And you can read Numbers chapter 16 when you go home this evening.
- [2 : 1 2] But Numbers 16, it's a fascinating chapter in the Bible that describes the occasion when there was no firm foundation. And the ground did swallow people up.
- But the ground swallowed people up, not because they were being ridiculous, like I often am, but because they were being rebellious. They were being rebellious against the Lord and against the Lord's servant.
- In Numbers chapter 16, we're given the account where there's three men. There's Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. And they rebel and they revolt against their leader, Moses.
- Moses, as you know, was the man of God. And because Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, because they questioned and queried the integrity and the authority of Moses, Moses commanded them to gather at the tabernacle with their families the following morning.
- And it was there that Moses asserted and he affirmed to all the Israelites who gathered with them, he asserted and affirmed that he is God's ordered and ordained man to lead them.
- [3 : 1 8] Moses said to the people of Israel, he said to them, And we read that as soon as Moses had finished speaking, The ground under Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, it split apart.

And them, along with their families, were told that the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up. They went down alive into the grave and the earth closed over them.

And they perished in the midst of the assembly. And, you know, it was a solemn moment in the history of the Lord's people where the ground literally swallowed them up.

But, you know, you come to 2 Timothy chapter 2 and you have to see that the reason Paul refers to such a serious and a solemn passage in Scripture is because he wants to emphasise and to re-emphasise to Timothy this need to have a firm foundation.

Because he says the church of Jesus Christ is God's house. That's what he's saying here. The church of Jesus Christ is God's house. And God's house, as we'll see, he says, is a holy house and a happy house.

[4 : 47] God's house must be a holy house and a happy house. That's what he says in these verses. So there are headings this evening. A holy house and a happy house.

So first of all, a holy house. God's house is a holy house. He says in verse 19, God's firm foundation stands bearing this seal. The Lord knows those who are his and let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.

Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honourable use, some for dishonourable. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonourable, he will be a vessel of honourable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.

So by recalling and reminding Timothy of the revolt and that rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, Paul wanted to exhort and encourage Timothy to know what it was like for Moses.

To remind Timothy that just like it was for Moses, there are going to be those who will come to him and they will question and query his integrity and his authority as a minister of the gospel.

[6 : 06] But Paul is saying to Timothy, Timothy, you must remember that you are the ordered and ordained man of God. You've been called and commissioned and commanded to lead the people of God here in the church at Ephesus.

Therefore, Timothy, in order to have a faithful ministry, you must have a firm foundation. Because he says, Paul is saying to Timothy, Timothy, the sign and seal of a faithful ministry is having a firm foundation.

A firm foundation based upon the gospel of Jesus Christ. Now what Paul is saying isn't something new. Paul has been emphasising and re-emphasising this to Timothy throughout his letter.

As you know, Paul has exhorted and encouraged Timothy to fan into flame his gift as a pastor and a preacher of the gospel. And he's not to be ashamed of the gospel. He's to guard the gospel.

He's to glory in the gospel. He's to be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus. As we read at the beginning of the chapter, he's to do it with the devotion of a soldier and the discipline of an athlete and the diligence of a farmer.

[7 : 25] He's to remember Jesus Christ so that he will pass on the gospel baton to the next generation. Because this gospel, says Paul, it is the power of God unto salvation.

And even as we saw last week, Paul was defining success. He was defining what a successful ministry looks like. And he depicted and he described for us an approved worker of the gospel and an appalling worker of the gospel.

And of course, as a pastor and preacher of the gospel, Paul said to Timothy, Timothy, you are to study and show yourself to be an approved worker of the gospel by rightly dividing the word of truth.

And that description was in complete contrast to an appalling worker of the gospel, like Hymenaeus and Philetus, who are named. These men who swerved from the truth and were leading the Lord's people into godlessness.

And their godlessness, as Paul says, was spreading like gangrene. But Paul says here, God's house, the house you work in, God's house is to have a firm foundation.

[8 : 39] And in God's house, there stands these two seals. The Lord knows those who are his and let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity. In other words, Timothy, God's house is to be built upon the firm foundation of this gospel.

Because as Jesus said, upon this rock, I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

Therefore, Timothy, build the house. Build the congregation in Ephesus. Build the congregation in Barvis. Not by building on the shifting and sinking sands of secularism.

No, Timothy, build on the solid rock that is the gospel. The gospel of Jesus Christ. Because even as we saw on Sunday evening, this gospel rock is Christ.

The gospel rock is Christ. And you know, I'll be honest with you. When I have down days, and they do happen now and again.

[9 : 43] Times when I actually wonder. There are days I'd love to go back on the tools. I'll be honest with you. I want to walk away and give up altogether. And, you know, the only thing I can do is go back to my call.

My call to the ministry. My call to this congregation. Where the Lord said, as he said to the prophet Haggai, in Haggai 1 verse 7, Build the house.

Build the house that I may take pleasure in it. That my name may be glorified. Build the house. And, you know, that's what Paul is saying to Timothy. He's saying, this is God's house you're working in.

So build the house. Because God's house has a firm foundation. And God's house must be a holy house. God's house must be a holy house.

He says in verse 20. He says, In these verses, verses 20 and 21.

[11 : 01] Paul gives us this image and illustration of vessels of service. And he calls them holy vessels of service. I thought this was really interesting.

Because if you remember, after Paul's conversion. You have it in Acts chapter 9. Paul is converted on the Damascus road. And he sees a bright light. He sees the Lord.

And he's blind for a time. Until a man named Ananias lays his hands on him. And of course, Ananias, as a man, he's terrified to go near Paul. Because Paul was, before that conversion point.

He was the great persecutor of the church. But you remember what the Lord said to Ananias. The Lord said to Ananias, Go to Paul, for he is a chosen vessel unto me.

Go to Paul, for he is a chosen vessel unto me. And now here's Paul. The once passionate persecutor of the church of Jesus Christ. But he's a chosen vessel of the Lord.

[12 : 03] He's chosen and he's been chosen to be a passionate preacher. In the church of Jesus Christ. And he's writing here in this final farewell letter. He's writing in his dark and damp and dismal dungeon.

And he's exhorting and he's encouraging Timothy to be a vessel. A vessel of honourable use. Timothy, you too are a chosen vessel unto the Lord.

Timothy, you're a chosen vessel unto the Lord. And you know, the contrast that Paul is making here between the vessel of honourable use and dishonourable use. It's a contrast between the faithful pastor and preacher.

And the false pastor and preacher. A faithful pastor and preacher says Paul is an honourable vessel. Like a vessel of gold and silver. But a false pastor and preacher is a dishonourable vessel.

Made of wood and clay. And Paul is saying to Timothy, Timothy, you're to be a faithful preacher and pastor. You're to be an honourable vessel for the Lord.

[13 : 08] Why? Because you've been cleansed from sin. And you've been called to serve. You've been sanctified and set apart for service. You've been ordered and ordained to serve the Lord in this congregation.

Therefore, you're to be a holy vessel unto the Lord. You're to be set apart as holy, he says in verse 21. Holy, useful to the master of the house. Ready for every good work.

You're to be holy, useful and ready. You know, it was a 19th century young Scottish preacher and pastor.

He was the minister at St. Peter's Church in Dundee. Robert Murray McShane. Before he died at the age of only 29. He said, My people's greatest need is my personal holiness.

And you know, I find those words terrifying. My people's greatest need is my personal holiness. McShane knew that his congregation, what his congregation needed most, wasn't his giftedness, but his godliness.

[14 : 17] They needed him to practice what he preached. They needed him to live a sanctified and set apart life for the Lord. They needed him to be a faithful preacher and pastor.

They needed him to be a holy vessel of honourable use. But of course here, Paul isn't just addressing the preacher and pastor in the pulpit.

He's also addressing the people in the pew. That's why he said to the church in Rome, he said to them, I appeal to you, present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God, which is your spiritual worship.

You know, Paul's message for us in these verses, it's simple and straightforward. He says, God's house is a holy house. Therefore, God chooses to use holy vessels.

So be a holy vessel. God's house is a holy house. God chooses to use holy vessels. So be a holy vessel. Which means, as Paul says here, we must be set apart as holy.

[15 : 28] We must be useful to the master. And we must be ready for every good work. We must be holy, useful and ready for service. But how do we do that?

There's the question. How do we do it? Paul, you're telling us to be useful and holy and ready and honourable. But how do we do it? Well, Paul says, it's all about what you flee from and what you follow after.

It's all about what you flee from and what you follow after. Verse 22, So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

Now, as you know, Timothy was a young minister. He was around my age. This is why I find this so applicable. He was 35. Which is why Paul says, flee youthful passions.

Flee youthful passions. But what are youthful passions? Youthful passions, according to one commentator, are power, position, pleasure, possessions, porn, and promotion of self.

[16 : 42] And promotion of self. And Paul says, flee from these things. Flee from these things.

But you know, you read this and you think, well, this isn't actually the first time Paul has said this. He's told Timothy this before. Because if you remember back to the end of his first letter to Timothy, Paul exhorted and encouraged Timothy to flee all these things.

He said, flee all these things. He said it back then in his first letter. Now he's saying it again. And when Paul uses this word flee, he's using that Greek word fugo.

We mentioned it before when we looked at the first letter. The Greek word *fugo*, which is where we get the English word *fugitive*. And as you know, a *fugitive* is someone always on the run.

Therefore, in order to be set apart as holy, says Paul, in order to be useful to the master of the house, in order to be ready for every good work, in order to be men and women who are holy, useful and ready to serve, in order to be holy and honourable vessels for the Lord, Paul says, you need to be a *fugitive*.

[17 : 57] You need to be on the run. You need to flee sinful and selfish desires. You need to flee worldliness and worthless things. And if necessary, you need to put up protective barriers and preventative boundaries.

Timothy, flee youthful passions. Flee youthful passions. But it's not just what we flee from. It's also what we follow after.

It's also what we follow after, because he says, pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

Again, it was the young Robert Murray McShane who said to one of his students, he said, it's not great talents that God blesses, so much as great likeness to Jesus.

A holy minister is an awful weapon in the hand of God. And you know, I read these words and I just think, man, it's not me.

[19 : 04] A holy minister is an awful weapon in the hand of God. But this is what Paul is saying is, flee youthful passions, pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

Timothy, God's house must be a holy house. But he also says, God's house must be a happy house. That's what we see secondly, and more briefly.

God's house must be a happy house. So a holy house and a happy house. A happy house. Look at verse 23. Paul exhorts him, he says, have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies.

You know that they breed quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome, but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness.

So as Paul brings the chapter to a close, he's actually in danger of repeating himself, but for good reason. He's repeating himself because he said there in verse 14, if you go back, he says, remind them of these things, charge them before God not to quarrel about words.

[20 : 20] And then he says, verse 24, and the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome. So he's in danger of repeating himself, but for good reason. Because as you know, this isn't the first time Paul has mentioned quarreling.

He's mentioned it elsewhere in this letter and also in his previous letter. But for Paul, this is such an important and integral subject for both pastor and people.

He says, have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies. You know that they breed quarrels.

Paul thought that the subject of foolish, ignorant controversies was so important and so integral to the life of a congregation that he mentioned it not only to his young apprentice, Timothy, he also mentioned it to the other apprentice, Titus.

Titus, as you know, he was serving the Lord on the more rural setting on the Greek island of Crete with us. Timothy, he's in the urban setting of the seaport city in Ephesus.

[21 : 26] And yet, regardless of their location, regardless of where they're serving the Lord, the exhortation is exactly the same. Avoid foolish controversies.

Avoid genealogies. This is what he says to Titus. Avoid dissensions and quarrels about the law for they are unprofitable and worthless. Paul's concern was that both pastor and people, he was worried that they would get into heated discussions and debates over things that have no bearing upon the preservation or the proclamation of the gospel.

Of course, Timothy and Titus as ministers of the gospel, they were to stand firm upon the truth. They were to fight the good fight of faith. But as Paul highlights here and in the letter to Titus, he says there's a right way to do it and there's a wrong way to do it.

He says in verse 24, the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness.

So when it comes to conflicting and controversial conversations, Paul is saying it's often not what you say but how you say it.

[22 : 48] Because if the conflicting and controversial conversation has an angry or aggressive or argumentative tone, it will escalate. It will escalate to explosion.

But if, as Paul says here, if the conflicting and controversial conversation is dealt with in a quiet spirit of humility, which is always hard, rather than a quarrelsome spirit of harshness, it will prevent the conflict and the controversy becoming a childish conversation where people are walking out of meetings and leaving the church altogether.

together. You know, you read it and you think, well, Paul is saying to Timothy, don't put your nose into something where it's not wanted.

Don't intrude or interfere into things that are of no benefit and no blessing to your ministry. Keep your head down, Timothy. Keep moving in the direction of the call of God upon your life.

because sometimes you'll serve the Lord and the Lord's people better by what you don't say rather than what you do say. Timothy, as a preacher of the gospel, as a pastor to God's people, it's far better for you to be in the quiet group than in the quarreling group.

[24 : 08] It's far better for you to distance and detach yourself from maybe all these frictions and factions and fights and fallouts and instead focus upon fellowship and fulfilling your ministry by being gentle, Timothy, by being godly and gracious towards God's people.

Because, you know, and I'm sure you've heard it before, ministries are often ruined by conflicting conversations and controversies and even chaos, the chaos that ministers cause.

But ministries are also ruined by conflicting conversations and controversies and chaos caused by elders or deacons or members too. Which is why Paul stresses to Timothy, he's saying to Timothy here, always keep your Christian character, conduct and conversation in check.

And that applies to all of us. Always keep your Christian character, conduct and conversation in check. but you know, what's also important to the integrity of a ministry is that if there is friction and faction and fallout and fights, then you know, be the first to seek repentance, reconciliation and restoration.

it's always good not to allow things to escalate or become exaggerated or even to become embittered because the truth is most conflicts and controversies can be rectified and resolved either by speaking or simply saying sorry.

[25 : 51] Most conflicts and controversies can be rectified and resolved either by speaking to one another or simply saying sorry.

Timothy, God's house is to be a happy house and it will be a happy house when the pastor and people in God's house are quiet, not quarrelsome, when they're patient, not patronising to one another, when they're meek and not moody, when they're gentle, not grumpy, when they're trustworthy, not temperamental.

You know, Paul's teaching here for both pastor and people, it's based, it's all based upon Jesus. Paul knew that his great example, our great example is the true servant, Jesus Christ.

Because as you know, Jesus, he embodies, he epitomises the ideal pastor and the ideal illustration for his people. And in his commentary, John Stott, he gave this beautiful description of Jesus as our example.

And with this, I'll close. John Stott, he writes, he's got a brilliant commentary on 2 Timothy, and he writes, he says about Jesus, he says, so meek was Jesus in his ministry, that he would never shout or make a noise.

[27 : 16] And so sensitive that he would deal gently with people whose courage had been bruised and whose faith burned low. He would never break a bruised reed or quench a smoking flax.

And when people rose up in opposition to him, he did not resist or retaliate. He gave his back to the smiter, his cheeks to those who pulled out his beard, his face to those who spat on him.

And eventually he allowed himself to be led like a sheep, silent and unresisting to the slaughter. Such was Jesus of Nazareth, the Lord's servant, par excellence, he says.

Such was Jesus of Nazareth who described himself as gentle and lowly in heart. This same meekness and gentleness of Christ, says Stott, it must be characterised by all who claim to be the Lord's.

This same meekness and gentleness of Christ must characterise all who claim to be the Lord's. Timothy, God's house has a firm foundation, but God's house is to be a holy house.

[28 : 31] And God's house is to be a happy house. God's house is to be a holy house. And God's house is to be a happy house. Well, may the Lord bless these thoughts to us.

Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to thee for the teaching found in thy word. We thank thee, Lord, that thy word addresses every area of church life and even of the Christian life.

And we thank thee, Lord, that thy word challenges us and it calls us to examine ourselves and consider where we stand as we look into the mirror of thy word.

Lord, that thou wouldest teach us, teach us to be more like Jesus, teach us to imitate and emulate a wonderful saviour, but not only a saviour, a wonderful servant, one who humbled himself and was obedient unto death, even death of the cross.

Lord, bless us, we pray, watch over us, we ask. Remember us as a congregation. Remember especially those who are laid aside, those who are sick, those who are suffering, those, Lord, tonight who are dying, that thou wouldest minister to each and every one, that they would know the presence of the Lord and how the psalmist says that the angel of the Lord encamps and round encompasseth all those about that do him fear and then deliver it.

[29 : 59] Lord, do us good and we pray, watch over us, we ask, for we ask it in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen. We're going to bring our service to a conclusion this evening by singing in Psalm 127.

Psalm 127 it's in the Scottish Psalter, page 420. Psalm 127 and we're singing the whole psalm.

Except the Lord do build a house, the builders lose their pain. Except the Lord the city keep, the watchmen watch in vain. Tis vain for you to rise betimes or late from rest to keep.

To feed on sorrow's bread so gives he his beloved sleep. We'll sing the whole psalm to God's praise. children are God's heritage, the womb's fruit, his reward.

The sons of youth, the sorrows are for strong men's hands prepared.

[31 : 22] For strong men's hands prepared. For strong men's hands prepared.

For strong men's hands prepared. The sons of youth, the sorrows are For strong men's hands prepare.

Oh, happy is the man like that, His quiver filled with those, They are not shimmied in the gate, Shall speak unto their foes.

Shall speak unto their foes. Shall speak unto their foes.

They are not shimmied in the gate, Shall speak unto their foes.

[32 : 55] The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, The love of God the Father, And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, With you all, now and forevermore. Amen.