

## Charge #4: What to Do When Everyone Around is Arguing 2 Timothy 2:14-3:9

Sermon in a Sentence: To see God move *around* you, pay attention to what's *in* you.

### ME

We've all had fights - some healthy, some messy, some downright ugly. When was your last good quarrel with someone, your last good argument?

**STORY:** Getting in a fight on the playground over a recess soccer game

*Transition:* I was passionate about that soccer game and ended up throwing a few punches because of it. And while I haven't been in a fist fight for a long time (hopefully, most of us haven't), I have noticed something...

### WE

While people aren't throwing punches much any more, society has gotten really good at throwing around put-downs, pointing the finger, or just posting when provoked.

You've seen the social media posts - and then the string of comments - that just seethe anger and division. Maybe you've posted them. Maybe you've commented and fueled the fire. Pick your controversial issue - or anything political - and you have a recipe for outrage.

The problem is this. Just like my punches on the soccer field did nothing to affect the score of the game, our vitriolic outrage does next to nothing in moving the ball forward on the issues we're most passionate about or that matter the most. In fact, most times our huge emotional responses are directed at what doesn't matter as much as we think. Our responses just say more about us than the issue.

Here's why this matters. We've been in a series looking at a letter written by a mentor to a young leader, and the truth is we are all leaders - of yourself, if no one else. But most of us are leading families, teams, a ministry, or a business. So what's charged to a young leader is really for each of us. And, today, we see how a leader is to engage with controversial issues.

Business owners, you are setting a culture for your employees, defining how your company makes a mark. Parents, you are setting the standard as your kids watch you and learn how to respond. Students, you are setting the example for your friends reading your feed. If we could get this right, it would change the way we engage with the most important issues of our day and even the outcome. Go with me to **2 Timothy 2**.

### GOD

As a reminder, Paul is writing this from prison before his impending death. He has the wisdom and perspective of age.

Adults, think back to one of your opinions in seventh grade. What were you defending? Has your position on that changed at all? And that's the point - Paul recognizes better what matters and what doesn't having lived, served, suffered, and, now, about to die for the gospel - the Jesus story that changed his life.

In fact, he's just written this incredible paradox that "if we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him." Doesn't that just sound like a wise, battle-tempered soldier who knows what's good? So, Paul continues...

14 Remind them of these things, and charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers. 15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. 16 But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, 17 and their talk will spread like gangrene.

Listen to that language! Quarrels about words. Ruining the hearers. Irreverent babble leading to ungodliness. Spreading like gangrene. These are strong images that Paul uses to teach Timothy - and us - the importance of how to engage in issues. And right in the middle of it Paul turns a spotlight on how to do this - not a look around, but a look in. In fact, here's what we'll see as he lays this out:

**To see God move *around* you, pay attention to what's *in* you.**

First, he says this: "Timothy, care most about maintaining a clean conscience before God." How? By rightly handling the word of truth. In other words...

**Any effective engagement begins with the Word not your words.**

God's Word is not to be weaponized, but worn as a lens. It gives perspective, Paul tells Timothy. It gives perspective on your enemy, whom Jesus loves and gave his life to rescue. It gives perspective on the issue at hand. So, to lead yourself, your teams, ministry, family, company - know the Word. Let it be *in* you. Otherwise, you'll be like those who spread disease. Paul gives an example...

Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, 18 who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some. 19 But 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."

Remember: **It's not human perception but God's perspective that matters most.**

So we begin not with our words but with the Word. This, Paul explains, forms our walk.

20 Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. 21 Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from

what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.

And we're going, "I want to be useful. I want to be ready for every good work." How?

22 So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

**To see God move *around* you, pay attention to what's *in* you.**

Remember, Paul's telling a young leader how to engage with people and the world. And his focus isn't on strategy but the state of the leader's heart. Managers, parents, spouses, students, there are important issues you need to engage in. Here's how to do it.

23 Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels.

24 And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, 25 correcting his opponents with gentleness.

Is what's in you a quarrelsome, angry spirit? Or is it kindness?

**Kindness is not condoning.** You can be kind while disagreeing. You must be ready to patiently endure evil. Sick of violence? Sick of the news feed? Sick of unhealthy sexual attitudes everywhere? They aren't going away. But if you are going to effectively engage them, be patient as you endure evil. And, when you get the opportunity, correct with gentleness. This is only possible when the leader looks at his own or her own heart and pursues righteousness, faith, love, peace in community. Here's why it matters...

God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, 26 and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

This outcome is worth it!

**To see God move *around* you, pay attention to what's *in* you.**

Paul makes sure to give a warning. This won't be easy. You'll want to be pulled into controversy, quarrels, babble, and empty talk. In fact, the din of disagreements will only get louder. Here's how he describes it:

But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. 2 For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, 4 treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5 having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power.

Wow. So how - again - should we engage? **Avoid such people.**

Don't get sucked in. It's more important to look in.

6 For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, 7 always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth. 8 Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith. 9 But they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all, as was that of those two men. **2 Timothy 2:14-3:9**

What two men? Jannes and Jambres - the names of the Egyptian sorcerers who tried to copy the plagues that God sent in the days of Moses. Here's what Paul is saying - they were on the side of Pharaoh, the enslaver and oppressor. Equally, the false teachers in Ephesus burdened, enslaved, and oppressed people by diluting the gospel because the gospel rescues and sets people free: free to patiently endure evil, free to disagree while showing kindness, free to correct with gentleness.

## YOU

Ultimately, this is why we need Jesus. He, the most effective leader, shows us how to engage when everyone around us is anxiously arguing. In the midst of Roman occupation, over-taxation, and all kinds of social problems, he did not listen to the loudest voices but listened to God and walked accordingly. That walk led him to the cross - not to free his people from Roman oppression or over-taxation but what mattered most - to rescue his people from their own evil. His death brings us life.

And he is the Living Word. So, if we want to see God move *around* us and that depends on what's *in* us, then is the Living Word within you? Is Jesus the leader of your life?

Here's what I want you to do this week. As you think about or hear about a raging debate over a contemporary controversial issue, ask yourself - **What's going on in me?**

- Are you being formed by the Word?
- Is your walk aligned with the Word?
- Are you fighting for the freedom of the gospel in people's lives?

Because **to see God move *around* you, you've got to pay attention to what's *in* you.**

## WE

Imagine what might happen if we all led this way? If before our knee-jerk reactions, our scathing posts, our angry monologues in our head or out loud, we took a moment to look in? This would change the way you lead yourself, your family, your ministry, your teams, your business. The way we handle conflict would be so counter-cultural, it would draw attention. And maybe - just maybe - like the early followers of the Way of Jesus we could "turn the world upside down" (Acts 17:6) again.