

Norman C. Schwab
Yacolt EV Free
January 24, 1999

Trivial Pursuit
II Timothy 2:14-19

This last week I read a story that illustrates how twisted and confused our world has become. A young woman had posed nude for a pornographic magazine. In her interview she related to the reporter that the experience had drawn her closer to God. To support her point from the Bible, she even had the audacity to quote the first half of James 4:8 which says "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you." She had obviously heard this familiar scripture somewhere but failed to read the second half of the verse, exposing her own spiritual shortcomings. The whole verse reads. "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. cleanse your hands you sinners and purify your hearts you double-minded."

It is one thing upon sin to confess, ask forgiveness and commit to repentance. It is entirely another to twist, distort and change the truth in an effort to justify the sin. It is becoming increasingly acceptable to hide behind semantical word games and legalese. Sin is no longer called sin. It is referred to as an unfortunate oversight. It is a lapse of thinking. It's an inappropriate relationship. It's a temporary insanity. It's an environmentally forced situation. But, no matter how glittery the clothes you try to dress sin up in..The Bible still says sin is still sin and sin brings shame.

OK. Most of us can see the twisting and falsehood that is distorting truth in our culture. We can see the religious glaze that people try to cover their sin with. We see Christian cults abounding. We have watched certain mainline Protestant denominations that once were on the front of championing the truth of the gospel that stated God's Word is inerrant and that saving faith is by grace through faith alone..but now are subtracting the wrong things and adding the wrong things. They have turned away from God's word and embraced human philosophies and pop psycho-babble and secular wisdom as truth. Professing to be wise they have exposed their own nakedness and foolishness, abandoning the central truths of biblical Christianity. We see them abandon the deity of

Christ, the Trinity, salvation by grace alone...while they embrace universalism, hedonism, self-works salvation, homosexuality, abortion, adultery..etc..etc.

This barrage of ungodly and false ideas that is invading our churches is frightening, but more terrifying still is the indifference and complacency to them. Our problem is not that we fail to get excited, but we end up defend the wrong things and get drastically bent out of shape over the little stuff. We think were doing well to throw out the dirty bath water, but don't even realize the baby is still in the tub. Personally, we may feel like we are unable to do much on a national level but we can certainly do something about ourselves and our own church. How can we keep our focus? How can we keep from being blown off direction by the winds of false doctrine that swirl about us? By the empty chatter of semantical debate that does little to spiritually encourage or move us closer to where God wants us? How can we keep on course?

I was talking with Rod DeSarrano this past week and he was explaining the virtues of a new tug boat that the company he works for, Shaver had recently put in service on the Columbia River. He said the guys who push the huge barges upriver love the new tug because of it's increased power, it's directional z drives and large keel-skeg. Going up the gorge the 50 mph winds blow against the empty barges which act like huge sails. The side wind forces are tremendous to overcome, yet the tug is a dream because the directional z-drive propellers are computer controlled, and able to angle the force of the thrust, adjusting against the force of the wind and the river. Take away the deep keel and the tug becomes very squirly. What is going to keep us cutting a straight line up the river of life. What is going to help us keep focus when the winds of false doctrine and waves of chatter threaten to extinguish our fire and focus for God?

Paul addresses this issue in a letter to his protégé' Timothy. Turn with me in your Bibles to the book of II Timothy chapter 2. It will be in the last 3/4 of your Bible. Here Paul challenges Timothy and us as well to keep focused on God. Maybe you have looked at your life and it seems you find yourself often bantered back and forth in your belief, behavior. How can we avoid swerving and instead keep a straight course for God. Paul gives us some direction in II Timothy 2:14-19 Read with me. (READ)

Paul begins this paragraph instructing Timothy to remind them, those who are in Timothy's church, those faithful ones who desire to follow God...remind them of what? these things. The things Paul has just written about. The important stuff. The central truths of God's Word. V.8 Remember Jesus Christ. Keep Christ the center and focus of everything. The actual physical resurrection of Jesus Christ. Upon which the gospel stands or falls. The resurrection insures power for our spiritual life right now. It affirms the efficacy of Christ's work on the cross. Remember the purpose, the mission. Remember why you are here on the earth. Remember you have died to sin and have been made alive to God. Remember you are significant based on being a child of God Almighty. Remember that you are connected with the One who is faithful even when you falter.

Then Paul goes on to instruct Timothy to "solemnly charge" those listening not to wrangle about words, because it's useless and leads only to the ruin of the hearer. That word for ruin in the Greek is catastrophe from which we get our English word catastrophe. Literally it means to "turn upside-down" Chaos. Paul goes on in verse 15 to exhort with a command imperative. Be diligent, or be zealous to present yourself as a workman approved to God who does not need to be ashamed. Anyone who ever wondered what AWANA means can see that it is an acronym. Approved Workmen Are Not Ashamed. AWANA. It is to remind us of the purpose of AWANA is to put spiritual and biblical tools into the hands of our little workmen, so that they will grow up as Master Craftsmen for Christ, accurately handling the Word. Literally the word Accurate handling means to "cut straight" Like a mason cutting bricks, a road builder cutting through the forest, a seamstress cutting out fabric. a tugboat heading upstream while fighting the things that would knock him off course. What will keep us on course for God?

Point number one. Be a doer..not just a chewer. What is a chewer? One who chews on food but never swallows it. Never puts to use the food he has put in his mouth. The threat here is that we take fine points of doctrine and chew on them so much they become empty of any spiritual value. We get lost in intelligencia. We become so concerned with a complete understanding of all knowledge before we can move that we never act, never move, never practice what we have learned...we just

stand around like a bunch of cows in a field and chew and moo, and chew and moo. Never ingesting...just wearing down our teeth.

Paul spoke to warn Timothy before about this issue in I Timothy 1:3-5 "don't teach strange doctrines, nor pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, (there is a Christian cult group that is still doing that today) What exactly some of those at Ephesus were involved in is not known, but it was indeed empty of any spiritual value and led to further arguments and speculation. These religious rabbit trails serve only to promote controversy rather than God's work. Human speculation always leads down blind tunnels that confuse and obscure God's truth. The goal is love, pure heart, sincere faith.

Paul says there is a threat that you become lost in your intelligencia. A chewer rather than a doer. So caught up in semantical debates and word games over nothing that is meaty spiritually. All debate..no action. All chewing, no doing. Never getting to the heart of what is really important, engaged in pious nit-picking that chips away at faith and wears everyone out.

The Screwtape Letters is a book written by C.S. Lewis. It writes from the perspective of an older demon attempting to train his junior demon protégé in how to best to tempt his assigned Christian into failure. He writes that many Christians have dozens of incompatible philosophies dancing in their head. They do not think of them primarily as being 'true' or 'false' but more as 'academic' or 'practical'. These people will be best persuaded with sound bites and popular jargon rather than by biblical argument or actual proof. If he doesn't look guilty..he must not be guilty. Let their minds get lost in their intelligencia and they will blindly follow a popular sound-bite belief. Let them ruminate and chew over the finest points of doctrine as long as they don't get close to the central truth and actually start to live out what they think they believe. Make sure they are totally content to chew and chew and chew...but do not let them do. You can see the threat to keeping on course. Be a doer, not just a chewer.

Point number 2. Engage in the eternally significant, don't bother with trivial pursuits. This is a slightly different side of being a doer not a chewer. The idea here is to keep the main thing the main thing and not get enamored with lesser things. v. 16 Avoid worldly and empty chatter for it will lead to further ungodliness. Godless chatter is that which

eliminates or minimizes any consideration of God's perspective. This is usually the core issue of those who are struggling with a critical spirit, bitterness and pride. They are unable to see others through God's eyes. They are unable to reach out in servanthood toward others because they are so caught up in their own agenda, expectations and problems they are totally blinded to any other persons perspective..let alone God's. godless chatter is destructive because it leaves out God. The more you leave God out the less space He will fill in your life.

The threats here to engaging in the spiritually significant. Being diligent and zealous to become a workman approved by God..is that we could become lost in our laziness. A lazy workman will not be approved by His supervisor..he will be demoted, or laid aside. We can be lost in spiritual laziness that has the idea spirituality must come to us by osmosis. That in time...something will click and it will happen all by itself, no effort on our part. Or we can become so overwhelmed when we look at our inability to be an approved workman for God that we remove ourselves from the game. We compare ourselves to other Christians and say, we aren't even close to their spirituality, we aren't even thinking of those questions, let alone coming up with the answers. I'm just sitting here hoping I can find the place where the sermon text comes from. We can get overwhelmed by what we see as our own inability, so we run to play trivial pursuit.

I believe Paul is warning Timothy. Watch out! It is dangerous when Christians leave the battle zone but stay in the church. They often will become dangerous nuisances, shooting each other because of ignorance or fear of exposure of their own shortcomings. All that energy that should be directed in fighting the enemy is wasted in talk. They are all talk and no walk. All chew, no do. May God deliver us from these people. Why? Because they are dangerous. Their talk and attitudes verse 17 spreads like an infection. Like gangrene. Their talk produces nothing of value. O may our committees and agenda's not be wasted wallowing in trivial nonsense, but instead focused on the light of accomplishing Biblical core priorities that God has for us. We can get so easily bent out of shape by some insignificant side issue. Just this last week, I spent way to much thought and emotional effort getting excited about an issue that just wasn't that big of a deal. I even told myself...in the scope of God's work in

eternity..this doesn't matter. Just let it go. It's amazing the freedom you find in the things you leave behind. May God rescue me from the trivial so that I can experience the joy of seeing the eternally significant.

Is debate wrong? No. Not necessarily. No it can be very healthy when two people coming in humility and civility are seeking what the Bible says and then desire to act on God's Word. But too often the focus gets subtly blown off course and they become more concerned with lifting up their own point than lifting up God Almighty. They become so concerned with being right that they slowly drift from being right-teous. Are you playing the game of trivial pursuit? Take the test. Ask yourself. Do I feel spiritually edified after I've left the debate? Do I feel encouraged when I've won a doctrinal battle? Is my drive toward better understanding or a subtle attempt to substitute practice for theory? Am I more concerned with being right..or being righteous. Am I more concern that my plan gets followed or that I follow God's plan? When we get just a little bit off focus...it can sometimes create a big mess.

A rebar manufacturing plant creates 1000's of feet a day. The still orange bar comes out of the metal extruding machine, shooting through a set of flying knives that cut the rebar to length. If that cutting machine gets just slightly off, in just a few seconds, it can make an incredible mountain size mess of tangled rebar spaghetti that then cools and hardens into place. It is totally useless and can only be cut out and remelted. Like gangrene if not quickly treated it must be cut out and removed. If you wish to keep on course, cut a straight path and avoid the wasteful swerves of falsehood. Don't bother playing trivial pursuit...engage in the eternally significant. Be a doer not just a chewer.

If you wish to keep on the straight course, Point number 3 Immerse yourself in the genuine..exposing the fake. We want to be approved workmen that are not ashamed. We need to spend time learning from the genuine and not waste our time with the fake. What does a great workman look like? skilled. He knows how to do his job. He is reliable...you can count on him to show up for work on time, give him a task and you know it will be done on time and done well. He has a great attitude, there is no hint of rebellion or critical spirit. he's honest, a team player. Accurate. Isn't it great to watch a workman who really knows his trade. No wasted moves, steady and confident. That is the

kind of spiritual workman we are called to. We have spent the time with the Master Craftsman. We have learned and applied his how-to book. We can handle his Word accurately and reliably. We follow his modeling and steps carefully. We know what our boss wants and we do it.

What if you hired someone to build your home. You handed him a blueprint that you wanted built. Yet, suppose part-way into the project he decided to go ahead and make some changes without consulting you. You would fire him. He might argue and say that his ideas were better and made better use of the space or were more practical or pleasing to the eye. But you would reply, That's not what I wanted. I don't care whether you thought it might be nicer for me or easier for you, that is not the way I want my home built.

How can we become an approved builder, useful for the master? By knowing more what He wants and doing less what our selfish nature would pull us to do. Give God more space so there is less room for the empty and worthless and worldly. Immerse yourself in the genuine so you can spot the fake. This Monday I took a pile of scrap aluminum down to Cliff-Koppe metals. I had to remove all the screws and fasteners to get the best price. And I thought I had removed them all. But the guy who was buying my metal looked at this large pile and immediately began pulling out dirty aluminum, and other metal pieces that looked like aluminum but were not. I mentioned he was great at spotting the fasteners and non-aluminum. He replied. I've been doing this for 20 years. When you've been here that long you can spot the fakes in an instant. And if there is any question I just use this..he pulled out a magnet..you can tell the magnet will not stick to the aluminum.

Isn't that good. What a great encouragement. Spend 20 years immersed in the genuine and you are going to easily spot the fake and worthless, and if there is any question go and apply the Bible to see if it sticks to truth or is exposed as garbage. Being approved by God is a metal forging term. It refers to the refined metal that is left after the dross or waste is burned off. What is going to be left when your metal gets burned away? All our works will be burned and only the spiritual and eternal will be left before God and our reward.

Consistent study of god's word is not optional..it's essential. Wherever you find a dusty and neglected Bible, you will find a defeated

and fruitless life, prone to error and becoming blown off track. We can keep our lives on focus, cutting a straight course, when we immerse ourselves in the genuine. What are you filling your mind with. Philippians 4:8. Whatever is true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, good repute, any excellent things, anything worthy of praise. let your mind dwell on these things. The things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace shall be with you. Model your life, thoughts, behavior after the Great Master Craftsman and you will become trained and tooled as a good and useful workman. Truth is most easily seen wrapped up in a person. Jesus invited us to look and follow, when He said, "I am the way the truth and the life. No man comes to the Father..but through me." Jesus is truth, genuine truth. The more we can immerse ourselves in the genuine the more easily it will be for us to see and expose the fake for what it is.

Guess what kind of person God uses to fulfill His special purposes? He is going to use not a chewer but a doer. Not one who is lost in playing trivial pursuit but one who is engaging in the eternally significant. One who is so immersed in the genuine, he can easily see and expose the fake rip-off. Verse 19. The firm foundation, God's church has this seal placed on it by God. It says. Don't lose heart if many are distorting truth, even men like Hymaneaus and Phylatus saying that the resurrection of Jesus was only a spiritual thing and not a physical actual event. No God has put His seal on the true church that declares God's decree and man's responsibility. God knows those who are His. and if you claim His name..then live like it. Don't lose heart, Some may move away, but His true church is firm. That seal was much like a Roman engineers seal on a building that verified the integrity based on who designed it. God created and designed the church and He is faithful to maintain what He has started.

What are you going to pursue this week to become an excellent and approved worker for God? Do you need to spend more time with the master craftsman How-to book..the Bible? Maybe there are some steps you need to take to avoid empty chatter and word wrangling. Maybe an amputation of certain conversations, attitudes need to happen. Maybe you need to beware of the temptation when you get around certain people. Ask yourself. Am I just a talker..or am I a worker? Am I just a

dangerous nuisance to my church, or am I becoming a dangerous threat to hell with my face plastered on the gates of hell most wanted dangerous Christians list? Am I happily riding my doctrinal hobby horse back and forth down the down the canyon ruts of inteligencia and theory, or am I excited about God and his purposes willing to be rescued from the trivial so that I can see God at work in my life. That's what I want in my life. I pray that is where God is drawing you. God rescue us from the trivial, enamor us with the eternal.