

2 Timothy Lesson 4 Articles

The warning against disputing about mere words, and wasting time in hair-splitting arguments, is repeated in verse 16 where Paul describes it as ‘godless chatter’. He clearly had in mind certain people in Ephesus who liked to play with religious ideas and words in the way that a small boy plays a game of marbles. They speculated about God and wove high-sounding theories about Christianity until they reduced it to some kind of meaningless and vague philosophy.

We still have to contend with a similar kind of thing today; you can meet such people in the church. They spend a lot of time talking and arguing about the Christian faith instead of living it. They are not really soul-searching for the truth, but are toying with the gospel, speculating about marginal issues which do not help themselves or others to grow in faith.

Dr Johnson was a great conversationalist and described himself as, ‘a man who loves to fold his legs and have his talk out’. For that reason he could not understand the sense of purpose and commitment that drove John Wesley. He said to Boswell on one occasion, ‘I hate to meet with John Wesley, the dog enchants me with his conversation, and then breaks off to go and visit some old woman’⁵. Johnson was a man of talk, but Wesley was a man of talk and action, and helped to change the face of England for the kingdom of God.

There are also those in our churches, who may not be great talkers, but they are forever getting caught up in the latest fad or novelty on the Christian scene, instead of getting down to some solid Bible study that will inform their minds and deepen their understanding of those essential truths of which Paul reminds Timothy.¹

M. Dibelius and H. Conzelmann say, “The best medicine against the disease of ‘disputes about words’ is Timothy’s good conduct itself.”³ This good conduct included three features. First, Timothy was to make it his supreme ambition to obtain God’s approval (“Try hard to show yourself worthy of God’s approval,” NEB).⁴ Second, he was to be a workman with no reason to be ashamed. The term “workman” is frequently used in reference to an agricultural laborer (e.g., Jas 5:4), but here Paul used the term to describe a laborer for God. Paul was urging his Christian friend to work with such diligence that he would have no fear of shame for poor quality work. Third, this same workman (specifically, Timothy but by application today all believers) was to be accurate in delivering the message of truth. The truth is the gospel. Paul showed concern that Timothy would present the gospel without perverting or distorting it. He was not to be turned aside by disputes about words or mere empty prattle.²

⁵ Leslie F Church, *Knight of the Burning Heart*, Wyvern Books, p.122

¹ Williams, P. (2007). *Opening up 2 Timothy* (pp. 55–56). Leominster: Day One Publications.

³ M. Dibelius and H. Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 111.

⁴ The KJV’s translation of “study” has led many English-speaking Christians to think wrongly that Paul was urging a diligent preparation of academic assignments. Paul’s focus was on showing diligence to win divine approval. The verb (σπουδάζω) expresses an ardent striving in Eph 4:3; 1 Thess 2:17. Paul had earlier described the heretics as only concerned about personal gain (1 Tim 6:6–10), and he wanted Timothy to seek only God’s favor.

² Lea, T. D., & Griffin, H. P. (1992). *1, 2 Timothy, Titus* (Vol. 34, pp. 214–215). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.