

Exegesis of 2 Timothy 2: Professionalism in the Ministry

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We don't like to apply the word "professional" to ourselves. After all, we have a "calling" and not a "profession." And if the word "professional" calls to mind pictures of fat-cat lawyers driving up in their Mercedes or doctors who perform unnecessary operations to pay for their clinics, you will probably not like the use of the word "professional" in this paper. (But then, neither would a lot of doctors and lawyers if that's what the word "professional" meant to them).

But we are professionals. We received specific training for a specialized field. We work in this field full time. We receive our livelihood from our work. We are dedicated to our work. We fit almost every aspect of the dictionary definition of the word "professional." The fact that we are called does not make us "unprofessional." Rather, it makes our profession the most important profession of all. And because no work is more important than our work, we should demand of ourselves a "professionalism" unmatched among the professional fields of this world.

Paul is the seasoned pro — Timothy, his young protege. Paul passes on to Timothy a few important tips about the ministry before he goes into permanent retirement.

The Professional Prepares for the Future

vv. 1-2: "You then, my son, be strong in the grace which is in Christ Jesus. And these things which you heard me say (literally, "from me") among many witnesses, entrust to faithful men, who will be competent to teach others also."

In the first verses, Paul mentions two aspects of the pastor's work which can easily be neglected as he wanders through a maze of administrative tasks. The first is personal growth. The word ἐδυναμοῦ is present passive and denotes the day by day growth and strengthening that every pastor needs to receive from God through the Word. And that is not just true of the pastor in his rookie season. After 20 years of experience, some parts of the ministry get easier. But the challenges often become harder. If the veteran lets himself get out of shape for the task, he may not be ready for the challenge.

Please note that this strengthening is one "in the-grace which is in Christ Jesus." Paul is not talking about becoming a better administrator: having a bigger sermon file, or even a broader knowledge of Scripture. This is a personal growth of our personal relationship with our Savior. We need to lay aside our Savior's Word as a professional tool sometimes and pick it up as a personal treasure. The better we are at being Christians, the better ministers we will be.

The second oft-neglected aspect of the pastor's work is entrusting the Word to competent men so that there will be another generation of faithful pastors. In chapter 1:14, Paul told Timothy to guard the deposit that he had entrusted with him. Now he is to pass it on to others, who are capable of doing the same. True apostolic-succession is not in the laying on of hands, but in the finding and training of the future ministers. The word ἰκανοὶ literally means "large enough." In 2 Corinthians 3:5, Paul says our competency comes from God, not ourselves. The true ability to teach lies in the power of the Word, not in the person of the preacher. But at the same time, God wants us to provide material he can work with. The Lord's work deserves the most talented and spiritually dedicated people we can find.

That takes time. A sermon on the ministry here and there is not enough.- The sainted Pastor Otto Pagels from Ixonia used to take your exegete to football games at Northwestern beginning in the 2nd and 3rd grade to watch such renowned heroes as Marty Schwartz on the gridiron. He also spoke to that 9 year old's parents about

the ministry. If you wait until 8th grade to talk about the ministry to your capable young people, what chance do you have? The seeds must be planted early. The pulpits of tomorrow will be filled with the 8-9 year olds that you get excited for the Lord's work today.

A Professional Is Dedicated

vv. 3-7: "Suffer hardship (with me) as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one who fights as a soldier gets entangled with the affairs of this life in order that he might please his commanding officer. If anyone also competes as an athlete, he doesn't win the crown if he fails to compete according to the rules. The hardworking farmer must be the first to receive his share of the crops. Consider what I am saying. For the Lord will give you understanding in everything."

Paul goes on to encourage us in the ministry with three short illustrations in professions that also demand dedication and hard work. Our work is like that of a soldier. There will be hardships that we face as ministers of Christ (cf. 1:8). Remember that they are shared hardships (συγκακοπάθησον) Shared with whom? Certainly, with our brothers in the ministry, as Timothy shared in Paul's sufferings. It helps to know that we are not alone in our hardships. It helps even more to know that we have the privilege to share them for the sake of our Savior and commander-in-chief (cf. Romans 8:17).

Verse four speaks to us as full time ministers of Christ. We've been enlisted like a soldier. A soldier should only worry, about fighting and carrying out his orders. He must not let himself be entangled in the-affairs (ταῖς τοῦ βίου πραγματείας) of this life. The phrase could refer to civilian affairs, i.e., interests outside soldiering. Or it might just mean the every day concerns, about where the next meal is coming from. An obvious application is that the full time minister is called into the ministry and called out of all other professions. His business is the Lord's. But we can broaden the application. We easily become "entangled" in our congregation's "business," which has little to do with ministering. So the pastor, becomes the secretary, janitor, bus mechanic, etc. A doctor hires a whole crew to staff his clinic so he can spend more time with his patients. Congregations must be trained to keep "busy" work away from their pastor instead of piling it on. Certainly, the congregation should also provide adequate support so that a pastor doesn't have to worry about the next meal.

The second illustration is that of an athlete (v. 5). The conditional sentence is not difficult to understand, especially if you render the double negatives as a positive. "If anyone also competes as an athlete, he wins the crown only if he competes according to the rules." It's really a condition within a condition with the same apodosis for both.

But then, as our Greek gets rusty, we wonder about the subjunctive. Does it mean something special? A good rule to remember is that the indicative in the protasis talks about reality (determined) and the subjunctive in the protasis about unreality (undetermined). This is not a "real" statement because it is an imaginary situation with an undetermined, though probable outcome (Robertson, 1019). Maybe one of our Greek scholars could come up with a chart of conditional sentences and what they signify, with a cross reference to the different jargon used by different grammars.

But to the point. A runner who steps out of bounds is disqualified. Athletic competition has rules. So also, in the ministry God's Word gives us rules to run our ministry by. We are to preach the truth, avoid those who teach false doctrine, exercise discipline in love, and so forth. An undisciplined minister is like an undisciplined runner. They both go nowhere fast.

The third picture is that of a hard working farmer. There are a couple of ways you could interpret it. Some say that the minister should receive his compensation because of his labors in a congregation Another is that, the minister receives the first share of the spiritual harvest produced by the Word he preaches because that Word first had a chance to work in his own heart. The latter is probably the one our experience tells us is correct. The teacher usually learns more than his students from his teaching. One word we should not ignore in

this word-picture is κοπιῶντα, “hard-working.” Growing up on a farm can teach you a valuable lesson. Like farmers, we don’t punch a time clock. The work is done when it’s done. That doesn’t give us an excuse to be workaholics or neglect our families, however. Even the farmer goes fishing on a rainy day.

In verse seven there is an interesting contrast between νόει and σύνεσιν. First you put something into your head (νόει) and, then God gives you the ability to put those facts together so that it makes sense (σύνεσιν). You’ve no doubt experienced that in your sermon writing. You study the text early in the week. The facts are all up here in your gray matter. And somewhere in the middle or the end of the week, they begin to fall together and you can write your sermon. Paul was confident that the Lord would help Timothy “make sense” out of what he was writing.

A Professional Knows What to Expect

vv. 8-13: “Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, from the seed of David, according to my gospel. In connection with this gospel I am suffering to the point of being chained as a criminal. But the word of God is not chained. Therefore I am enduring everything for the sake of the elect, that they also might obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. The saying is trustworthy: ‘For if we died with him, we shall also live with him. If we endure, we will also reign with him. If we will deny him, he will also deny us. If we are faithless, he remains faithful - for he is unable to deny himself.’”

Paul’s summary of the εὐαγγέλιον he preached is similar to his summary in Romans 1:1-3. The resurrection proclaimed Jesus to be true God. His ancestry from David proved him to be true man. “From the seed of David” is a phrase full of Messianic significance (Mt. 22:41-46) to a man like Timothy, whose roots were first in the Old Testament (1:5).

Timothy, like Paul, was connected with (ἐν ᾧ) the gospel of Jesus Christ. So are we. We will get no cooperation from the world - just opposition. How frustrating it must have been for Paul, the itinerant missionary, to be confined to his cell in Rome. The devil still looks for ways to confine our activities today - from bureaucratic governments which restrict the work of expatriate missionaries to budgetary shortfalls which handcuff the mission efforts in our synod and our congregations.

But we do well to remember that God’s Word is never bound (οὐ δέδεται). The present is durative. Forever and ever, God’s Word is not bound. In Philippians 1: 12-14 Paul tells that during his confinement the gospel was made clear to the whole palace guard and that the brothers were encouraged to witness more boldly. And this was not “in spite of” his chains but “as a result of” his chains.

A real professional does not give up in the face of a little opposition and a few setbacks. Excuse the cliché, but when the going gets tough, the tough get going. It sure beats wringing our hands in despair and doing nothing.

Paul continues in v. 10 with “therefore” (διὰ τοῦτο). Knowing that God’s Word is not bound gives us the hope we need to hold out bravely under hardship (κακοπαθῶ). We keep on going because we know that our labors are not in vain. We are not beating our heads against the wall. It may *seem* that way at times when we see little visible result in our congregation or in a specific counseling case. So we are tempted to throw in the towel. But we cannot let appearances fool us. God’s Word is not bound. It pays off to endure.

But pays off to whom? First to the elect. We persevere in preaching God’s Word for their sakes (διὰ τοὺς ἐκλεκτούς) so that they might obtain salvation in Christ. What’s the point? Paul is not saying that we must endure because if we don’t, the elect might not obtain their salvation. God’s elect will be saved (Re 7:1-4, Ro 8:28-30) with or without us. The ἵνα clause is best interpreted as an actual result, as in 1 Jn 1:9 (Robertson, 982). The point is this: God is using us to fulfill his holy purpose of gathering his elect, and the outcome is guaranteed. Giving up is only for those who don’t think their work serves a good purpose and for those who don’t think their work can succeed.

Paul also shows us what we can expect for ourselves. The faithful saying (πιστὸς ὁ λόγος) that he quotes may be his own, or taken from a liturgical hymn. I love the way Lenski feels he must prove one or the other. The conditions themselves express reality. “If we died (aorist) with him, we will also live (future) with him.” The death is not the death of a martyr but the death we experience through baptism. (Ro 6:4, Ga 2:19). Otherwise, Paul could not speak as though he had already experienced it. The future tense of “will live” covers a period from this moment forward through eternity.

“If we endure, we shall also reign with him.” Endure is a durative present (which makes sense). But enduring is only for this present life. It does not embrace our future life in heaven. That’s why the future is more appropriate for “shall reign.” We are reigning already (1 Pe 2:9 *et. al.*). But there will be a day, when our race is run and our fight has been fought (2 Tim 4:7), in which our enduring will be over. But we will continue to reign only in heaven instead of on earth.

“If we will deny him, that one will also deny us.” The future indicative is used in the protasis. It hasn’t happened, yet, but it is a real possibility. And if it did happen, the result is certain. He (emphatic) will also deny us (see Mt 10:33).

“If we are faithless, that one remains faithful, for he is unable to deny himself.” Both verbs are present, because it is a general rule that always applies. Lenski says (Lenski 796) that this means that Christ must be consistent on Judgment Day and condemn the unbeliever. To suddenly relent and go back on his Word would be to disown himself. But note the comparison here with Romans 3:3-4 “Will their lack of faith nullify God’s faithfulness? Not at all! Let God be true and every man a liar.” Also Romans 9:6: “It is not as though God’s word had failed.” Our unfaithfulness does not prove the God of faithful grace to be unfaithful, or his grace ineffective. It is not Christ who changes his attitude towards the sinner, but the sinner towards him. Unfaithfulness only proves that Christ is just if he must disown the unfaithful on the last day. If we are unfaithful, he is still faithful - both to his grace and to his justice.

‘This is what separates us from the professional of this world. We are not in this business (and it is a business, our Father’s business) of preaching for monetary rewards or earthly gains. Though we receive a living from the gospel we preach, our real rewards are spiritual and heavenly.

A Professional Keeps His Cool in a Controversy

vv. 14-17a: “Keep reminding them of these things, testifying to them before God not to get into word-battles, which have no benefit, but which do work to destroy those who listen. Make every effort to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who is not ashamed, who correctly handles the word of truth. Avoid unholy noise. For they [those who indulge in such] will progress further in ungodliness and their message will spread like gangrene.”

Evidently, Timothy had some leadership among the churches and was in a position to remind his fellow workers about how to conduct themselves in the face of controversy in the church. He was to remind them about “these things,” the clear message of the gospel as Paul spoke, in 1-10 and 2:3, avoiding the godless controversies which might divert attention away from the gospel.

Paul against “word-battles” (λογομαχεῖν). In Tm 6:3-4, he says that such word-battles are characteristic of those who teach false doctrine. It is the arrogant mind that stands in judgement on God’s Word and loves to argue, to prove a point. Perhaps we could think of the rabbis and their endless arguing over trifling matters. Or we could think of the Gnostics and their emphasis on knowledge. “Where the teaching office becomes a wordy, speculative, disputatious purveying of knowledge to a select coterie of initiates, it is bound to become corrupted; it appeals to the pride, selfishness, and mercenary instincts of men, and the teacher becomes that ghastly, demon-ridden caricature of the true teacher Paul has described in I Ti 4:1-2” (Franzmann, 217). An example of such today would be the endless arguments and controversies that arise from the historical-critical

method of interpreting Scripture. Read a commentary which takes that approach and you will see how they love to argue their point.

Paul isn't saying we shouldn't oppose such. But the professional does better to stay away from such people than to get into a word-battle with them. For what is the result of endless arguing? 1 Tm 6:4-5: "He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and arguments that result in envy, quarreling, malicious talk, evil suspicions, and constant friction." Finally, you have to resolve an argument. You cannot let it go on and on, or it becomes destructive to those who listen. It gives the false prophet a forum and an audience, and it causes people to become distrustful of both sides, even those who would preach the truth. So the gangrenous infection is given room to spread. It is better in such a case to cut off the infection and avoid further complications.

Another possible interpretation *λογομαχεῖν* is "arguing over a single word," in other words, letting trivial and unimportant arguments and controversies get in the way of preaching the gospel. Finally, you avoid such arguments because if you honor them, you make them more important than they are. The first seems to fit the context best because the teaching of Hymenaeus and Philetus doesn't seem that "trivial."

The minister of Christ is not so concerned to prove himself right in every argument because it's not how he measures up to others that counts. He strives to make himself *δόκιμον* or "approved" of God. He wants to be *ἐργάτην ἀνεπαίσχυντον*, a workman who doesn't have to be ashamed of his work. Many today complain of shoddy work done by carpenters who only want to get the job done and take no pride in their work. The minister of Christ cannot afford sloppy workmanship because God and God's people deserve only our best efforts.

Much has been said and written about the phrase *ὀρθοτομοῦντα τὸν λόγον*, literally, "cutting straight the word of truth." There are two schools of thought on this phrase. Some take this as properly "dividing" law and gospel (cf. KJV "rightly dividing," Luther -"recht teile"). Prof. Habecck said, "A more vivid application results if we stick with the root meaning. So much is contained in the Word that it is impossible to use all of it in a given situation. It takes skill to determine which portion of the Word is to be applied to people in the changing circumstances of life. So to look upon this passage as calling for the proper distinction between law and gospel is warranted" (Habecck, p. 25). But that seems narrower than the context would indicate. Hendriksen has a good paragraph on this phrase: "The man who handles the word of truth properly does not change, pervert, mutilate, or distort it, neither does he use it with a wrong purpose in mind. On the contrary, he prayerfully interprets Scripture in the light of Scripture. He courageously, yet lovingly, applies its glorious meaning to concrete conditions and circumstances..." (Hendriksen, p. 263).

Our calling demands that we use God's Word properly. We cut it straight and carefully, not into hundreds of pieces to prove our point or to suit our needs as so many do today. You can teach any personal philosophy you desire if that is how you handle God's Word. But to use God's Word correctly requires diligence and study on our part, for every sermon and every Bible class and yes, every counseling session. The best medicine against infections of false doctrine is the preventative medicine of a well-taught laity by a diligent clergy.

The Professional Doesn't Compromise the Truth

vv. 17-21: "Hymenaeus and Philetus are among them. They have missed the mark as far as the truth is concerned, saying that the resurrection has already happened. And (thus) they are destroying the faith of some. Yet the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal: "The Lord knows those who belong to him," and "Let all who confess the name of the Lord stand away from unrighteousness. In a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and clay. Some are for honor, while others for dishonor. Therefore, if anyone thoroughly cleanses himself from these, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the master, prepared for every good work."

No doubt, this is the same Hymenaeus Paul mentions in I Timothy 1:20, who had shipwrecked his faith and whom Paul had handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme. There, Alexander is mentioned as his partner and here it is Philetus. Were they the same man with two different names? More likely, it was another. Perhaps Alexander had learned his lesson. And like most false prophets, Hymenaeus found someone willing to back his cause.

We are left in the dark as to exactly what these men were teaching. Probably, they insisted that the “resurrection” was a spiritual resurrection, and not a physical resurrection. Greeks scoffed at the resurrection of the body, and looked upon the material, which includes the body, as being inherently evil. But by denying the reality of the resurrection, they were teaching a useless faith (I Cor 15:14). They were not unlike the many today who feel compelled to “demythologize” the resurrection of Christ from the grave. They also “miss the mark” when it comes to the truth. And by making fiction out of the resurrection, they in fact teach only pious fiction. Certainly, all false doctrine is destructive of faith. But some like, making fiction out of the resurrection, will destroy a faith quicker than others.

We cannot tolerate such false prophets in our midst. To do so is to compromise our own faith and principles. There was a time when doctors would not put up with quacks in the field of medicine and lawyers would not put up with sheisters in the field of law. The image we have of these professions has been tarnished because of a lack of discipline in their ranks. Ministers have followed the same pattern. No one really cares what anyone else is teaching. In fact, toleration is touted as a measure of Christian love. We cannot afford to let that happen in our circles. The Bible shows us what disciplinary action must be taken: “avoid” (v. 16), “stand away from” (v 19), “cleanse himself from” (v. 21).

We come, then, to the oft-quoted passage in v 19. It’s important to see the context. Hymenaeus and Philetus must have gained a substantial following. The problem was not one that would just “go away.” Timothy must have been concerned about the welfare of God’s church. Will God’s church be destroyed from within by false doctrine? So Paul reminds him that God’s “foundation” is sure, What foundation? We think of I Corinthians 3:11: “No...foundation...other than...Christ.” And Matthew 16:13: “The gates of hell will not overcome it.” Because the foundation is sure, the church built over it is also sure. A few false prophets (or even many false prophets) will not undermine God’s church.

It has this “seal.” There is an interesting and comprehensive article in the February issue of *Bible Review* about seals (pp. 20-27). The basic use of the seal was legal. It marked ownership. It protected the contents of what was sealed from being tampered with or in any way altered or changed. So God’s church cannot be tampered with. As Jesus said, “No one can pluck them out of my hand” (Jn 10:29).

We come, then, to the well-worn proof passage in v 19, “The Lord knows those who belong to him.” The aorist, ἔγνω, is *gnomic*, which gives an axiom that always holds true. The word itself means more than just to know. It means to know intimately by name, as a shepherd knows his sheep (Jn 10:27). The fact that they are his means that he will also care for them until they are safely gathered into his fold. So God not only foreknows, he predestines, then calls, then justifies, and finally glorifies (Ro 8:29-30).

The passage is used most often to prove that the Holy Christian Church is invisible. We cannot judge hearts, only God can. But it is not its invisibility, but its invincibility, that is being taught here.

That is only half the seal, however. The other half says, “Let all who name (confess) the name of the Lord stand away from unrighteousness.” It is true, God knows the hearts of men. He knows who belongs to him. Nor should we ever presume to judge a man’s heart. But that does not mean we do no judging at all. He has entrusted to us the ministry of the keys. We can identify ἀδικίας, unrighteousness, whether it be in the form of sinful teaching, as in this case, or sinful living, as in the case of the immoral brother in 1 Corinthians 5. To tolerate either in our midst would be giving tacit approval and would compromise our Christian faith and life.

The double “seal” has its origin in Numbers 16 and the story of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (see the LXX). The rebellious Levites rejected Moses and Aaron’s leadership. Moses proposed to let the Lord show whom he had chosen, because God knows the hearts of men. He knows who belongs to him. When they came

before the Lord the next day, God told the Israelites to step away from the tents of these Levites and they were destroyed.

We have to remember to show people both sides of the coin. To teach the invincibility of God's church without warning to avoid false prophets may lead to carelessness and complacency in the church. Similarly, to teach election without warning against temptation will lead to the same in a Christian's life.

Paul uses an illustration to bring the point home. In a home, there are vessels of gold and silver, but also some of wood and clay. Paul is not talking about a variety of gifts, as in I Corinthians 12. Otherwise he would say we should treat the lesser with special honor. Rather, Paul is telling Timothy that in the church on earth, the visible church (the larger house), he can expect people like Hymenaeus and Philetus. We shouldn't let such people bother us. Instead, we are to cleanse ourselves from those who dishonor God and prove to be useless for service. If we do, we will be better suited for serving God ourselves.

The Professional Doesn't Lose Sight of his Goals

vv. 22-26: "But flee youthful passions. Instead, pursue righteousness, faithfulness, love, and peace with those who call upon the Lord out of a pure heart. But beg off foolish and unlearned questions, because you know that they spawn quarrels. A servant of the Lord must not quarrel. Rather, he should be gentle towards all, apt to teach, putting up with the bad, with meekness instructing those who contradict him, (with the hope that) God may give them repentance to the full knowledge of the truth, and that they might sober out of the devil's trap, captivated by him (devil) against his (God's) will."

In the midst of a controversy, so much time and energy can be consumed with the troublemakers that a faithful pastor might lose sight of his goals. The first goal is personal. Flee from the evil and pursue the good. A Christian's life (and a pastor must set himself as an example of such) must be consumed by doing both. You can't just get rid of the evil and leave a vacuum. You have to replace the evil with the good. That's what Christ was talking about in Matthew 12:43ff when he told the parable of the man who had an evil spirit come out of him, only to have it return with seven more. Unless we fill the empty house with a godly life, the evil will return. The verbs are durative presents. We keep on fleeing and keep on pursuing.

What are the "youthful passions" (τὰς δὲ νεωτερικὰς ἐπιθυμίας) Paul was talking about? To cite a few: laziness, boastfulness, lust for power, false ambitions, pride, love of money, and especially sexual immorality. Note that Timothy was probably 35-40 years old at the time. The LCA pastor in Prior Lake was closer to 50 than 40. His counseling of a younger woman didn't produce a solution to her problems, but it did produce a child. It pays to stay in shape in the "fleeing" department, even if you are over 40.

Instead, Timothy was to pursue righteousness, faithfulness, love, and peace. Those four pretty well sum up the whole of a Christian's life. The word "pursue" calls to mind an interesting word picture. Picture a hound in hot pursuit of the elusive fox. The closer he gets, the more he exerts himself. So must we as Christians pursue the goal of a godly life Christ has set before us.

This is especially true for the Christian pastor. As the shepherd of his flock, he sets the example for his people. That is his second goal, which he dare not lose sight of while he is dealing with a controversy in his flock. He cannot forget that there are many in his congregation who still τῶν ἐπικαλουμένων τὸν κύριον ἐκ καθαρᾶς καρδίας. If he does, he will be like Elijah, who let Ahab and Jezebel make him lose sight of the 7,000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal (1 Ki 19:18).

Perhaps a comment or two on the single preposition μετὰ is in order. Do we sometimes give our people the impression that we are more than a sinful, weak human being who must depend on God's grace for strength in our day-to-day pursuit of a godly life? It's important that we work with our people towards this goal - not for them or them for us. It is to their benefit if they can see not just the victories, but the sweat and the tears, the

struggles and defeats that litter our pursuit of a godly life. After all, Jesus became one of us so he could be our Shepherd. We do well to follow the same course as we shepherd our people.

The third goal to remember is the patient instruction necessary to bring about a change in the hearts and minds of those who are opposing the truth. It would seem that Paul is advocating a different course of action than he did in 1 Timothy 1:18-20, where he handed Hymenaeus and Alexander over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme, or in v. 17 above where he said such godless chatter should be avoided. But in every controversy, there is also a good number undecided, hangers-on who might well be brought about by patient instruction. In the heat of an argument, unprofessional and unpastoral behavior might well push such people over to the other side instead of winning them for Christ.

Of what does such patient instruction consist? First, Paul says that the foolish and unlearned questions should be avoided. They don't deserve an answer. Such questions are often bred in the heat of an argument and only deserve to breed more arguments. Those who passed through the fire of the fellowship controversy in the 50's no doubt could call to mind many such questions, like, "You mean now I can't pray with my Missouri Synod grandmother at our Thanksgiving dinner?" Such questions are spawned in ignorance, spoil for a fight, cloud the issue at hand, and are best avoided (unless asked in genuine concern). When Luther was asked what the Lord was doing before he created the world; he replied, "He was out cutting sticks to beat the backs of those who ask such foolish questions." Luther could have used a little more tact at times, and the patient teacher must exercise tact. We don't have to use "fighting" words. Even Michael held his tongue when disputing with the devil and said, "The Lord I rebuke you" (Jude 9). "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Pr 15:1).

Paul gives a good definition of ἡπιον in 1 Thessalonians 2: 7: "But we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children." Gentleness, however, doesn't preclude firmness. The mother's hand is both gentle and firm at the same time. Jesus is the epitome of such a gentle touch. He would not break the bruised reed or snuff out the smoldering flax (Mt 12: 20).

You have probably had a person in your adult class who came with a chip on his shoulder, more intent on proving you wrong than learning. His questions are often foolish and spoiling for an argument. You're tempted to show him up for the ignorant fool he is. That's when gentleness needs patience as a partner, ἀνεξίκακον, a willingness to put up with the bad.

Being apt to teach, διδακτικόν, is more than just having the ability to teach the truth. It's being able to teach the truth to a variety of people in a variety of situations in such a way so that they will accept it.

Finally, add ἐν πραΰτητι (meekness) to the pastor-teacher's list of professional qualities. It's more than humility. It's not flaunting your rightness. It's a willingness to see the other person point of view. It's saying, "I understand what you're saying, but.." instead of "You're crazy, the Bible says..."

Yet, no matter how good a teacher you are, you may or may not convince that person. And if you do, it's not your διδακτικόν that won him, but God's grace, which caused a "change of mind to the full truth." You never cease to wonder at that miracle. Like Terry, who came to the first adult classes loaded with loaded questions, spoiling for an argument. Then, somewhere in the middle, a change took place. His questions changed from the argumentative to the inquisitive. After the classes were completed, he convinced the husband of the woman who invited him to church in the first place to take the course. He even attended the classes with him to make him more comfortable. And about the fifth lesson, he said, "You know, at first all you want to do is question and doubt. But there comes a time when you just stop questioning and start believing."

Can we forget the last verse? That wouldn't be very professional, would it? The problem lies with the pronouns. The first phrase is easy enough. "And they will sober up out of the devil's trap." Depending on what you see as antecedents to the pronouns, the last could be: "captivated by the devil for the devil's will"; "captivated by God for God's will"; "captivated by God against the devil's will"; or "captivated by the devil against God's will." The last seems to make the most sense. The preposition εἰς can mean for or against (Arndt-Gingrich, p. 228, 4c). And the two different pronouns would seem to indicate two different antecedents. By the way, let's not forget that reclaiming the lost is mission work, too.

Like the term or not, we are professionals. God expects us to be “professional” in our work, dedicated like the soldier, savvy like the athlete, diligent like the farmer. We cannot afford rookie mistakes. We need to handle ourselves coolly and professionally in difficult situations, as workmen approved by God, remembering the goals God has set for us. May such “professionalism” always be a mark of our ministry!

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