

“The Body of Christ” 2 Timothy 2:11-21

The Body of Christ is another name for the church. In places like 1 Corinthians 12:27 we read these words addressed to the church, “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.” The Apostle Paul has this in mind as he writes to Timothy in the letter that bears his name. In this letter we learn much about Christian leadership, and church life.

Today we are in chapter two, looking at verses 11-21. **Stand as we read together.**

You may have noticed that there were many topics addressed in these few verses, but the one thing that ties them all together is that it is dealing with life in the church.

Verses 11-13 are very interesting in that they seem to be a portion from an early Christian hymn. Imagine singing the same song as the Apostle Paul sang in church!

What was the theme of this song? Living the surrendered life to Christ. It speaks of dying with Christ, so that we can live with him. It speaks of enduring hardships and persecution without failing God. It speaks of how even in our failure God remains faithful.

The theme of the hymn is suffering for Jesus. That may not be too popular today in a climate that tends to prefer health and wealth and happiness songs.

But note what Paul says in verse 14 – “Keep reminding God’s people of these things.”

Paul is convinced that being a faithful Christian means we will follow Jesus in the way of suffering, and if we are not suffering it may mean we are compromising with the world!

Paul next tells the church to stop quarreling about words. Do you know how many books would disappear if Christians took this to heart? I dare say there would be a great many YouTube channels that would be shut down as well.

Paul also seems to get tired of those who talk much and do little. If the world’s problems could be solved by talk, we should have had all troubles solved a long time ago. Christians are not meant to sit and talk about what should be done, but, like Jesus, we are to go out and when we see a need, do what we can in the power of the Spirit to meet that need.

There is a big difference between the church that says it should help its neighbours and the one who mows grass for the widow, or takes groceries and meals to the struggling family, or babysits for that tired, new mom. It is great for pastors and teachers to exhort the people to “love their neighbours as they love themselves” but when will the church stop talking about it and start doing something?

I read of a pastor who wanted to share Jesus with the people in a certain area of his city. So early each morning he would head to the MacDonalds and order five breakfast meals, and then he would drive up and down the streets to see to whom God would lead him. As he shared

those meals with strangers, he also shared Jesus. He was not content to talk about evangelism – he did something.

Paul goes on to talk about being a good workman, someone approved by God because they handle well the word of truth. These are people who know how to apply God's Word to their everyday life.

For instance, when scripture says, "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God" it is instructing Christians to be good employees. We give our very best at our jobs, all the time, not because of a paycheck, or because we are afraid we might be fired. We give our best because we are always working for God, whether we are selling cars, teaching children, working at the hospital or nursing home, or building houses.

Lise and I are having a hard time finding a house in Rocky Mountain House that suits us, and will be a good place to entertain people. One option we looked at was to have a house built. There is a company building a new development on the south side of town. Sadly, we heard that this company sometimes cuts corners to save themselves some money, leaving the house not as solid as it should be. When I heard this, do you know what my first thought was? "This sure isn't a Christian company!"

I remember when Peter first left home and was working up in northern BC as a welder. Besides hearing stories of working out in the bitter cold, he also told us that he was reading through the book of Proverbs. Sounding almost surprised he said, "There is a lot of good advice in that book!" Yes, there is Peter. It is called wisdom literature for a reason!

Of course, you cannot handle the word of truth well like a good workman if you never read it, or study it! Today there are so many great study tools to help you better understand the scriptures you simply have no excuse for not studying!

We are not quite finished with the topic of words. In the church we should avoid godless chatter. What do you think of when you hear that?

What comes to mind for me is how, even as the church gets ready for worship, people will chatter about sports scores, and the latest movie in the theatre instead of talking about Jesus. I know there is nothing wrong with sharing the baseball scores, but maybe there is a time and place for everything, as Solomon said in Ecclesiastes. If I want to get to know my neighbour, or even someone at the church better, it might be a good thing to chat about those Canucks! But when I gather at the church, maybe before service or maybe in the coffee room, hopefully I have more to talk about than simply saying, "What about those Canucks!"

Godless chatter may also include gossip, where we talk about other people. If that is where your conversation goes, then it is appropriate to say, "What about those Canuck!" No doubt as we tell stories of "how so and so hurt us," or how "that person missed the mark," or some other "did you know?" story, God just shakes his head and says, "godless chatter." Maybe a lot of what goes on Facebook could also be called "godless chatter."

The godless chatter that Paul points out comes from a couple of characters called Hymeneaus and Philetus (I am sure their mothers can say their names). Hymeneaus was mentioned in Paul's first letter to Timothy and there he is causing trouble. It seems he has learned nothing. Now he is claiming that "the resurrection has already taken place." (v. 18) This is not the resurrection of Jesus that he is referring to. We know that already took place.

It is suggested that the claim was that at baptism, when we were buried with Christ in the waters and we were raised up out of the water to new life, we were resurrected. There was no future resurrection to look forward to.

Of course the Apostle Paul would go to great lengths in his letter to the Corinthians to explain how the hope of the resurrection is central to our faith. Paul would sum up his arguments saying, "If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied." (1 Corinthians 15:19)

It could also be that Hymeneaus and Philetus had got caught up in Stoic philosophy which believed the body was evil and only the soul was good. The Stoics would not want to have a resurrected body. They spoke of being incorporated into God, as a spark returns to the flame.

Paul would say, "Nonsense!" God created our bodies, they are good, and when we are resurrected, we will receive a new, glorified body that will no longer get sick, or tired, or die.

Paul says, watch out for godless chatter that will take us down paths that lead us from the truths of the faith. It is like gangrene to the soul.

Verse 19 takes us back to the truth that God's foundation stands firm. If God says something, you can count on it being true. Society gets itself in trouble when it tries to change God's Word, or argue that they have discovered a better way than God's way.

Then Paul reminds us of two truths that he takes loosely from the Old Testament (I say loosely because they are not direct quotes, but summaries of what the text was about). The two truths are these:

- God knows who are his.
- God's people turn away from wickedness (to live a holy life).

Now this leads to Paul's conclusion of this section. If the church is Christ's body, and God knows who are his, and those who are his have turned away from wickedness, how come there are still trouble makers in the church? Good question!

In Jesus' earthly ministry he told his disciples a parable about "wheat and tares" (weeds) (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43). He said that the wheat and tares often grow up together in the same field, and at first they look very similar. However, as the season progresses, the weeds look nothing like the wheat. At harvest time, they will be separated. This will be God's doing,

not ours. It is a message that even in the church there will be some who truly follow Jesus, and some who just pretend. They will not produce any fruit because they are weeds.

In Paul's letter to Timothy he likens Christians to pots and pans! How glamorous is that!

Paul says that in a house some dishes are made of silver and gold and are used for very special occasions. When special company comes, when you want to impress, you pull out the fancy dishes. If Jesus showed up at your house, these are the dishes you would want to use!

Some dishes are made of wood and clay, and are for common use. This is what you do your prep work in, or give to the kids, or leave the leftovers in. These are the dishes you don't mind putting in the dishwasher because if they get chipped they can easily be replaced.

The Christians who do not quarrel about words, who do their best to be the approved workman, rightly handling the truth, and who avoid godless chatter are people who "cleanse themselves." (v. 21) Those who are cleansed are ready for service for God.

First Paul sings a song about dying and suffering as followers of Jesus. Now he says that the more we live the right way as followers of Jesus the more work He will ask us to do! As God's people we are made clean and pure by the work of the Holy Spirit not so that we can sit and look pretty on the shelf, but so we can be of use to the Master.

Can you imagine the fun Timothy would have passing this on to his congregation?

Yet everything Paul says here is from God – inspired by him - for the benefit of the church.

So many things can divide and weaken a church. Paul picks up just a few things here, and will go on in his letter to list many more things. The church is the Body of Christ, a witness to the world of the reality of God, and His saving, life-changing power. But when the church is bickering, and divided, its witness is destroyed. So God inspires Paul to write this letter to warn the Christians of Timothy's day, and our day, to hold fast to Jesus, hold fast to the Gospel, and hold fast to one another.

It could be that this morning we have seen where we too have been lured down the wrong path. Maybe something Paul said to Timothy made us cringe a little because it was getting a little too close to home. Maybe there is a need for confession, and asking for forgiveness this morning.

We are about to come to the Lord's Table. I do not know about you, but if I am to sit at table with God, I want to come with clean hands and a pure heart. As we sing the next song, "Have Mercy on Me, O God," may it be your prayer as you prepare for Communion. Only God can make us clean, but in his mercy and kindness, as we confess our sin, he is faithful and just and will cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Let us prepare to come before the Lord's Table.