

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD
Arlington Presbyterian Church (PCA)

Keeping the Saints Focused

2 Timothy 2:14-18 (591)

January 13, 2002

“Focus” seems to be a popular concept these days. When I hear the word “focus” I think first of things having to do with vision. I remember turning the little knob to focus the microscope I played with as a kid. How many thousands of times did I *focus* my old Yashica 35 mm camera? I remarked to Julia the other night about my need for a new prescription for eyeglasses. The world, especially at night, is just not in as sharp a *focus* as I’d like. In these examples focus refers to a position in which something must be placed for clarity of perception.

Olympic athletes are *focusing* time and energy on preparation for their various events at the Salt Lake Winter Games next month. In these times of uncertainty, financial advisors counsel investors to stay *focused* on their long-range goals. Educators and parents urge students to *focus* on their studies. In these examples, focus means to concentrate one’s attention or effort. This is the idea behind what is being urged by Paul in **II Timothy 2:14-18**.

Remind them of these things, and solemnly charge them in the presence of God not to wrangle about words, which is useless, and leads to the ruin of the hearers. Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth. But avoid

worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, men who have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and thus they upset the faith of some.

From the very beginning of this letter Paul has been urging Timothy to endure with integrity and courage all that lies before him. In **2:14** the emphasis shifts from perseverance to priorities. Paul speaks to Timothy about one of his primary responsibilities. Here's the point: the pastor's responsibility is to keep the saints focused. Like the coach of a team playing for the national championship, the commanding officer of a unit preparing to go into battle, the CEO of a corporation making a strategic business decision ... it's Timothy's job to make sure the saints concentrate their attention on the right things. The pastor's responsibility is to keep the saints focused. Now I want to explore this idea using four questions answered by the text.

The first question is this: **What does it mean for a church to be focused?** Being focused means that a congregation in its faith and practice remains tethered to the truth. The correctness of this answer is confirmed in **verse 18** where Paul cites the negative examples of ***Hymenaeus and Philetus***. They have done precisely the opposite. They ***have gone astray from the truth (2:18)***.

When I was growing up, the kids in our neighborhood loved to play tetherball. Tetherball is a game played with a ball suspended by a rope from an upright pole. The object is for each player to wrap the rope around the pole by hitting the ball in a direction opposite to that of the other player. No matter how hard you hit it, the ball would never get further away from the pole than the length of the rope. Most of us have had pets which we “tethered” to a stake so they wouldn’t wander away. During seminary our family would often walk around at Town East Mall. David had a tendency to wander so we would tether him to one of us with little velcro wrist bands connected by a swivel phone cord. The community of faith is to be attached to the truth in such a way that we never range very far from it.

In general terms the *truth* here is that body of apostolic teaching *once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3)*. In more specific terms we’re talking about the gospel. The *truth* in **2:15** and **18** is the same thing as *the standard of sound words* in **1:13**. If you will indulge me for a moment I want to go back to my sermon on **1:11-14** to review briefly the glories of the gospel.

The gospel, in terms of the raw **historical** facts, declares *that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures (I Cor. 15:1-4)*. The gospel, in terms of its **occasion**, is revealed on account of sin. *“And she will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21)*. The gospel, in terms of its **efficacy**, is the God-ordained means by

which sinners are saved. *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes (Rom. 1:16).* The gospel, in terms of its **Biblical emphasis**, declares an objective, substitutionary transaction which propitiates the wrath of God. *He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross (I Pet. 2:24).* The gospel, in terms of its **theological heart**, declares that *now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested ... even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe ... for we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the Law (Rom. 3:21-22, 28).* The gospel, in terms of its **design**, is intended to humble the pride of man. *For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe (I Cor. 1:21).* The gospel, in terms of its **demands**, requires that men repent and believe. *“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15).* The gospel, in terms of its **promise**, offers eternal life to men dead in trespasses and sins. *“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life” (John 5:24).* The gospel, in terms of its **exclusivity**, declares that *there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12).* The gospel, in terms of its **priority**, is **the** central message of the church.

Because of these excellencies, we conclude that the message of the cross, the gospel, is the main thing. *For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God (I Cor. 1:18)*. This gospel in all its fullness is that stake to which the saints must remain tethered. It is that sight upon which the saints must remain focused. It is the responsibility of the pastor to make sure the saints concentrate your attention on this, the main thing. Got it?

Now here's the second question: **How can we lose our focus?** We do so as we give ourselves to **wrangling about words** in **verse 14** and to **worldly and empty chatter** in **verse 18**. These refer to essentially the same thing. Ironside says, "It is so easy to become occupied with minor details in regard to the Christian message, which, after all, have nothing to do with the great fundamental issues" (p.193). Philip Towner says this refers to quarreling over "disputable doctrines" (p.181) ... in other words, doctrines which may legitimately be called into question. William Hendriksen calls this "investigations into ... [theological] drivel" (pp.261-62). Drivel is saliva which dribbles from your mouth. Drivel is theological nonsense, gibberish ... tommyrot.

Let me give you two examples of this. In the late nineties a man named Steve Munson introduced the "Jubilee Year" teaching (Lev. 25). Taken up by several TV preachers, they promise prosperity, increase, a "Jubilee anointing" where debt's are canceled ... that blessings will overtake you and miracles will come

your way. Then there's the "Hidden Code" teaching. Last year a former Washington Post and Wall Street Journal reporter and confirmed agnostic Michael Drosnin announced his discovery that a higher intelligence encoded the Hebrew Bible with secret codes. He proposed that these codes are so complex, so mathematically advanced, that no human mind could have authored the code. The codes reveal the names and events of the future – the Wright Brother's airplane, Kennedy's assassination, the Oklahoma bombing, the earthquake in Kobe (Japan), a comet hitting Jupiter. His book, *The Bible Code*, became an overnight best seller. The teaching has been further popularized by the movie *The Omega Code* (www.letusreason.org/Current3.htm and Wf18.htm).

The drivel being taught by certain men in Paul's day was that ***the resurrection has already taken place (2:18)***. We lose focus when we emphasize the extraneous over the essential; the fantastic over the fundamental.

"During the course of [Phillips Brooks'] famous lectures over a century ago, [he] urged his audience to take up their Sunday newspapers and check the list of titles that the ministers of any great city were announcing for their sermons the next day. You can readily detect, he said, what small and fantastic bits of truth congregations are getting from their preachers. You will find there, Brooks insisted, striking evidence of the little preaching coming from little pulpits. 'The quality our preaching most lacks is breadth. I mean largeness of movement, the great utterance of great truth, as distinct from the minute and ingenious treatment

of side issues of the soul's life, the bric-a-brac of theology' " (*The Big Idea of Biblical Preaching*, pp.100-101).

The third question is this: **What is the danger in losing our focus?** Driving at night ... in the rain ... in town is dangerous enough when one has 20/20 vision. But when things are out of focus it gets real hairy out there. Streetlights, traffic lights, signs, headlights, and taillights can hardly be distinguished from their reflections. It can get so confusing that it becomes very dangerous. You can get yourself killed out there. So it is important to maintain focus. When you as a Christian lose your focus you are in similar spiritual peril. Your spiritual perception is blurred. You lose your sense of direction. You become disoriented. It's like driving at night, in the rain with bad eyesight. You can hardly tell the real thing from its reflected image.

Take a look at the text with me. In **verse 14** *wrangling about words* is ***useless and leads to the ruin of the hearers***. The Greek word for "ruin" here is *KATASTREPHO* ... English, *catastrophe*. 9/11 provided an unforgettable mental image of a catastrophe. In **verse 16** *worldly and empty chatter* leads to ***further ungodliness***. You see, folks are deceived into thinking that by embracing something new they are making spiritual progress. And they are ... in the direction of ungodliness.

What we're talking about here is taking the Word of God and interpreting it according to foolish, personal, usually self-serving speculation. Putting new spins and twists on the clear meaning of Scripture. On our trip to New Mexico we were driving west on Highway 380. About five or ten miles out of Brownfield, Texas Lydia said, "Aren't we supposed to be on 380? The last few signs I've seen say 385. Sure enough, somewhere in Brownfield we had taken a wrong turn and instead of going due west on 380 we were headed south on 385. That's what these guys had done. They had *wandered away*. They had deviated from their proper objective. "Like travelers who never reach their destination because they have taken the wrong turn and have failed to look for the familiar signs along the road. The path these people have taken is not even a detour. It is more like a dead-end street beyond which lies a swamp ... a no-man's land ... a dreary marsh ... a quagmire [from which there is no escape]" (Hendriksen, p.63).

In **verse 17** this error will spread through the body like some sort of cancer (*gangrene*). Biblical and theological error is a foul, smelly disease which will consume you and spread to others. In **verse 18** giving attention to misplaced emphasis and outright error will ***upset the faith of some***. No matter how you color it, this is not a pretty picture.

Now the fourth question: **How is the pastor to go about tethering the saints to the truth?** One way is for me to ***be diligent to show myself approved unto God, handling accurately*** [or correctly] ***the word of truth (2:15)***. To keep you

guys focused I must possess a clear vision myself. As your pastor I need to make sure that I myself *accurately* teach and *properly* apply the Word of God. Hendriksen says, “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, doing this for the glory of God, the conversion of sinners, and the edification of believers” (p.263).

Another way is to ***charge*** [you] ***in the presence of God not to wrangle about words and to avoid worldly and empty chatter (2:14,16)***. Negatively I do this by not tolerating persistent arguing over minor details and by discouraging preoccupation with matters which in the long run are, relatively speaking, minor details. Positively, I do this by encouraging you to give yourselves to the great fundamental issues of the faith.

A third way is cited in **verse 14, *Remind them of these things***. I keep you focused through constant repetition of the main things. One of my children developed the habit of leaving the cap off the toothpaste tube. I have reminded this particular child to put the cap back on. I have been reminding HIM for years now but he just doesn't get it. We are sluggish. We are prone to forget. We are easily preoccupied and distracted. We need to be constantly reminded of what God has done for us in Christ.

LORD'S SUPPER #6

Arlington Presbyterian Church (PCA)

January 13, 2002

Paul writes to Timothy, *Remind them of these things (II Tim. 2:14)*. In other words, "Timothy, keep the saints focused on the truth through constant repetition of the main thing." Jesus Himself said, *"Do this in remembrance of Me ... for as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death" (I Cor. 11:24,26)*. Beloved, the Lord's Supper is one divinely-ordained means by which we keep the main thing before the people of God. It is God's prescribed way of reminding you that Christ satisfied divine justice by His suffering and death in the place of sinners. It is that cord which keeps us tethered to Christ and His saving work on the cross; the cord which keeps us from straying or wandering very far from the heart of gospel truth. The sacrament is that great preventative to worship being reduced to *wrangling about words* or to *worldly and empty chatter*.

This is one of the main reasons that we at Arlington Presbyterian administer the sacrament to the people of God each Lord's Day in public worship. God has designed it as "a great utterance of great truth." And we love it. Because each Lord's Day we may leave this place reminded afresh that *Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit (I Peter 3:18)*.

INSTRUMENTAL INTERLUDE TO PREPARE FOR THE LORD'S SUPPER

Instructions on partaking of the elements.

Fencing of the table and prayer of thanksgiving.

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THE POINT: the _____ responsibility is to keep the saints _____
... to make sure the saints concentrate their attention on the _____ things.

FOUR QUESTIONS:

#1 ... What does it mean for a church to be focused?

Being focused means that a congregation in its faith and practice remains tethered to the _____.

Because of these excellencies, we conclude that the message of the cross, the gospel, is the _____.

#2 ... How can we lose our focus?

We do so as we give ourselves to *wrangling about words (2:14)* and to *worldly and empty chatter (2:18)*.

#3 ... What is the danger in losing our focus?

#4 ... How is the pastor to go about tethering the saints to the truth?

One way is for me to *be diligent to show myself approved unto God, handling accurately* [or correctly] *the word of truth (2:15)*.

As your pastor I need to make sure that I myself *accurately* _____ and *properly* _____ the Word of God.

Another way is to *charge* [you] *in the presence of God not to wrangle about words* and *to avoid worldly and empty chatter (2:14,16)*.

Positively, I do this by encouraging you to give yourselves to the great _____ issues of the faith.

A third way is cited in **verse 14, Remind them of these things.**

I keep you focused through constant _____ of the main things.

LORD'S SUPPER INSTRUCTION

Paul writes to Timothy, **Remind them of these things (II Tim. 2:14)**. In other words, "Timothy, keep the saints focused on the truth through constant repetition of the main thing." Jesus Himself said, "**Do this in remembrance of Me ... for as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death**" (I Cor. 11:24,26). Beloved, the Lord's Supper is one divinely-ordained means by which we keep the _____ before the people of God. It is God's prescribed way of _____ you that Christ satisfied divine justice by His suffering and death in the place of sinners. It is that cord which keeps us _____ to Christ and His saving work on the cross; the cord which keeps us from straying or wandering very far from the heart of gospel truth. The sacrament is that great _____ to worship being reduced to *wrangling about words* or to *worldly and empty chatter*.

BAPTISM INSTRUCTION

God has always condescended to relate to humanity **covenantally**. In the Covenant of Grace God has pledged Himself to _____ His people - "all who put their trust in Christ" (R. C. Sproul, *Essentials Truths of the Christian Faith*, pp.71-72).

The _____ of those who have so trusted Christ have an interest in this covenant relationship (**Acts 2:39**). God deals with families as units. The _____ of the family in covenant relationship to God is still in force.

THIS SOLIDARITY OF THE FAMILY IS EVIDENCED IN AT LEAST FOUR WAYS IN BOTH TESTAMENTS:

First, God instituted marriage and the family (**Gen. 2:18-25; Eph. 5:22-23**). **Second**, the _____ of God extends to the children in the covenant family (**Gen. 17:10; Acts 2:29; I Cor. 7:14**). **Third**, the _____ of the members of a family are bound up together (**Ex. 20:5, 34:7; I Tim. 3:4-5,12**). **Fourth**, the family is the primary vehicle for the transfer of _____ within the covenant community (**Deut. 6:1-15; Eph. 6:4**).

Rather than being strange occurrences which we find awkward and difficult to fit into a baptistic scheme, isn't it more likely that the baptisms of the households of *Lydia* (**Acts 16:15**), the Philippian *jailer* (**Acts 16:33**), and *Stephanas* (**I Corinthians 1:16**) were simply _____ of the normal _____ already established in the Old Testament?

Those raised in a Baptist tradition often find it strange that we would so integrate infants and small children into the community of faith. Let me point out something which, given careful consideration, may prove helpful to you. Consider the fact that the _____ of infants in His covenant relationship with men began with _____ Himself.

God was pleased to include them. Theirs was the privilege and blessing of **external connection** to the people who possessed the covenant promises of God.