Bible Nerd Guide: 2 Timothy 2:22-26

2 Timothy 2:22-26 is a short paragraph about how the Lord's servant responds to people teaching error. It says more about the person doing the correcting than about the person being corrected. This guide places the paragraph in its setting, works through it phrase by phrase, and follows its connections into the rest of Scripture, especially Colossians 4:5-6.

The Setting

A farewell letter from prison

2 Timothy presents itself as Paul's last letter. He is in chains (1:8, 16; 2:9), probably in Rome (1:17), and expects to die soon (4:6-8). Timothy seems to be in Ephesus (1:18; 4:12; compare 1 Timothy 1:3).

The letter reads like a farewell testament: an older leader handing responsibility to a younger one. Scripture has other examples, such as Moses commissioning Joshua (Deuteronomy 31) and Paul's goodbye to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:17-38). In that speech Paul warned that some of their own people would rise up "speaking twisted things" to draw disciples away (Acts 20:30). 2 Timothy shows that warning coming true.

Who wrote it?

1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus are often grouped as the Pastoral Epistles. (Since the nineteenth century, many scholars have argued that a later follower wrote them in Paul's name. They point to differences in vocabulary, style, and church structure.) I fall into the camp that defends Pauline authorship, allowing for a secretary's role, and note how personal and situation-specific 2 Timothy is (4:9-21). Some propose a middle position, such as a close associate writing soon after Paul's death, but that is unsatisfactory to me.

The flow of chapter 2

- **2:1-7.** Be strengthened by grace. Entrust the teaching to faithful people (2:2). Pictures of a soldier, an athlete, and a farmer.
- **2:8-13.** Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead. Paul suffers for the gospel. A "trustworthy saying" ends with "if we are faithless, he remains faithful" (2:13).
- **2:14-19.** Avoid quarrels about words. Be a worker "rightly handling the word of truth" (2:15). Two named false teachers. God's firm foundation.
- **2:20-21.** Vessels in a great house.
- **2:22-26.** The Lord's servant and his opponents.

Chapter 3 continues with a warning about "the last days" (3:1). Timothy is told to "avoid such people" (3:5), so these "last days" include Timothy's own time. That fits the wider New Testament pattern, where the last days begin with Christ and the Spirit (Acts 2:16-17; Hebrews 1:2).

The error at stake

Hymenaeus and Philetus were saying that "the resurrection has already happened," and they were "upsetting the faith of some" (2:18). We know their slogan, not their whole system. A common reconstruction is that they spiritualized the resurrection. They may have claimed believers had already been raised in baptism or spiritual experience, so no bodily resurrection was coming.

Paul could say believers have been raised with Christ (Romans 6:4-5; Colossians 2:12; 3:1). He also insisted on a future bodily resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:12-23). The error took something true about the present and used it to cancel the future. Paul faced a similar distortion in 2 Thessalonians 2:2, where some claimed the day of the Lord had already come.

Paul says their talk "will spread like gangrene" (2:17). The word γάγγραινα (*gangraina*) is a medical term for tissue decay that keeps spreading. Hymenaeus also appears in 1 Timothy 1:19-20, where he is handed over "to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme." The verb there, "learn," is παιδεύω (*paideuō*), the same verb translated "correcting" in 2 Timothy 2:25. Even severe discipline aims at training.

God's firm foundation (2:19)

Right before our passage, Paul quotes an inscription on God's foundation: "The Lord knows those who are his." This matches Numbers 16:5 in the Greek Old Testament almost word for word. There Moses responds to Korah's rebellion, a dispute about who has the right to lead and speak for God.

The second line, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity," is not an exact quotation. It resembles Moses' command to separate from the rebels' tents (Numbers 16:26) and language in Isaiah (26:13; 52:11).

The Korah story frames what follows. Moses does not win the argument by force. He falls on his face (Numbers 16:4) and leaves the verdict to the LORD (16:5). Paul doesn't spell out the parallel. Still, the Lord's servant in 2:24-26 shows a similar posture: he speaks, and he leaves the final outcome to God.

Vessels in a great house (2:20-21)

A large house holds gold and silver vessels and also wood and clay ones, some for honorable use and some for dishonorable. Paul says that whoever "cleanses himself from what is dishonorable" will be "useful to the master of the house." The Greek says literally "from these" (ἀπὸ τούτων), most likely meaning the false teachers and their influence.

Verse 22 then turns from the picture to practice. The ESV's "So" translates a light connective, δέ (*de*). The logical connection is real, but it comes from the flow of thought more than from a strong Greek conjunction.

Verse 22: Flee and Pursue

> *τὰς δὲ νεωτερικὰς ἐπιθυμίας φεῦγε, δίωκε δὲ δικαιοσύνην πίστιν ἀγάπην εἰρήνην μετὰ τῶν ἐπικαλουμένων τὸν κύριον ἐκ καθαρᾶς καρδίας.*
>
> *"So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart." (ESV)*

"Youthful passions"

The adjective νεωτερικός (*neōterikos*, "youthful") appears only here in the New Testament. It means "characteristic of the young." The noun ἐπιθυμία (*epithymia*) means strong desire. It is not always negative: Jesus uses it for his own longing to eat the Passover (Luke 22:15), and Paul uses it for his desire to be with Christ (Philippians 1:23).

Readers usually take "youthful passions" in one of two ways:

- **Sexual desire.** This is the most familiar reading in English, and it is a natural part of the phrase.
- **The impulses typical of younger people.** These include impatience, ambition, a hunger to win, and a taste for argument or novelty.

The surrounding verses favor including the second meaning. Paul warns about quarreling over words (2:14), "irreverent babble" (2:16), and foolish controversies (2:23). The two readings don't exclude each other. In this setting, though, a passion for winning arguments is hard to miss.

A related Greek noun, νεωτερισμός (*neōterismos*), could mean "innovation" or even "upheaval." That is suggestive, but a related word cannot decide what this adjective means here. Context has to do that work.

As for Timothy's age, Paul had told him not to let anyone despise his youth (1 Timothy 4:12). By the time of 2 Timothy he had worked with Paul for many years (Acts 16:1-3). In the Greco-Roman world, "youth" could stretch into a man's thirties. Timothy was not a teenager, and the warning is not only for teenagers.

"Flee... pursue"

Both verbs are present imperatives, so they describe an ongoing practice more than a single decision. In Greek they sit side by side in a crossed pattern: "youthful passions flee, pursue righteousness..." (object-verb, verb-object). The arrangement puts the two directions in sharp contrast.

Paul gives Timothy the same pair in 1 Timothy 6:11: "flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness." That earlier list ends with gentleness, which is where our passage lands in verse 25. Paul also tells believers to "flee sexual immorality" (1 Corinthians 6:18) and "flee from idolatry" (1 Corinthians 10:14).

The verb διώκω (*diōkō*, "pursue") can also mean "persecute." Paul uses it for his violent zeal against the church (Philippians 3:6). A few verses later he uses it for pressing on toward Christ (Philippians 3:12, 14). The same energy that once chased people down is now aimed at Christlike goals. That is a lexical observation, not a claim that Paul intended a wordplay in 2 Timothy.

Righteousness, faith, love, peace

Peace comes last in the list, right before the warning about quarrels in verse 23. "Pursue peace" is a familiar biblical idiom:

- Psalm 34:14: "seek peace and pursue it." The Greek Old Testament (Psalm 33:15 LXX) uses the same verb διώκω.
- 1 Peter 3:11 quotes that psalm.

- Romans 14:19: "let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding."
- Hebrews 12:14: "Strive for peace with everyone," again with the same verb.

Whether Paul has Psalm 34 consciously in mind here is uncertain. The idiom was clearly part of the church's shared vocabulary.

"Along with those who call on the Lord"

The phrase μετὰ τῶν ἐπικαλουμένων (*meta tōn epikaloumenōn*) can attach to the verb "pursue" (pursue these things together with others) or to "peace" (peace with others). The ESV takes the first option. Either way, Timothy's growth is not a solo project.

"Calling on the Lord" is an Old Testament phrase for worshiping and depending on God (Genesis 4:26; 12:8; Psalm 116:4). Joel 2:32 promises that "everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved." Paul applies that promise to Jesus (Romans 10:9-13) and describes Christians as people who "call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 1:2). In 2 Timothy, "the Lord" usually means Jesus (1:2, 8; 2:7). So language once used for worshiping Israel's God is used for calling on Jesus. Scholars have argued that this pattern says a great deal about early Christian worship of Jesus.

"From a pure heart"

The phrase ἐκ καθαρᾶς καρδίας also appears in 1 Timothy 1:5: "The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith." Behind it stand Psalm 24:3-4 ("who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart") and Jesus' beatitude in Matthew 5:8. A pure heart means undivided motives, which matters when verses 25-26 ask what we actually want for an opponent.

Verse 23: Refusing the Wrong Fight

> *μωρὰς δὲ καὶ ἀπαιδεύτους ζητήσεις παραιτοῦ, εἰδὼς ὅτι γεννῶσιν μάχας.*
>
> *"Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels." (ESV)*

"Have nothing to do with"

The verb παραιτέομαι (*paraiteomai*) means to decline or excuse oneself, as you might turn down an invitation. Paul uses it for "irreverent, silly myths" (1 Timothy 4:7) and for a divisive person after repeated warnings (Titus 3:10). Timothy isn't told to run away in fear. He is told to decline a certain kind of conversation on purpose.

"Controversies"

The noun ζήτησις (*zētēsis*) comes from the verb "to seek." It can be neutral: in Acts 25:20 it simply means an inquiry. In the Pastoral Epistles it consistently describes debates that go nowhere:

- 1 Timothy 1:4: "myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith."
- 1 Timothy 6:4: "an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words."
- Titus 3:9: "foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law."

The problem isn't asking questions. The problem is a kind of debate that feeds itself and never arrives at truth or love. 1 Timothy 1:5 gives the opposite goal: "love that issues from a pure heart."

This does not mean every serious disagreement should be avoided. In the same chapter Paul names Hymenaeus and Philetus and calls their error what it is (2:17-18). Refusing foolish controversies takes judgment. It is not a policy of silence about truth.

"Foolish, ignorant"

Μωρός (*mōros*) means foolish or senseless.

Ἀπαίδευτος (*apaideutos*) appears only here in the New Testament. It is built from παιδεία (*paideia*), the word for training, instruction, and discipline, with a negative prefix. So the word means "untrained" or "undisciplined" more than "lacking information."

Two verses later Paul says the Lord's servant must be παιδεύοντα (*paideuonta*), "correcting" or "training" his opponents. The contrast is easy to hear in Greek. Untrained controversies produce fights. The servant offers patient training instead.

"They breed quarrels"

Γεννῶσιν μάχας (*gennōsin machas*) means literally "they give birth to fights." The word μάχη (*machē*) means a fight or battle. Its root runs through the whole section:

Verse	Greek	Meaning
2:14	λογομαχεῖν (*logomachein*)	to "word-fight," quarrel about words
2:23	μάχας (*machas*)	fights, quarrels
2:24	μάχεσθαι (*machesthai*)	to fight, to be quarrelsome

Controversies produce fights, and the Lord's servant must not be a fighter. The repetition ties verses 23 and 24 tightly together.

James traces fights to their source: "What causes quarrels and what causes fights (μάχαι) among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?" (James 4:1). He continues, "You desire and do not have" (4:2). James is not quoting Paul, and his word for "passions" differs. But the movement is the same as 2 Timothy 2:22-23: disordered desire comes first, and the fight follows.

Wisdom background

Proverbs gives Paul's instruction a long background. These are thematic parallels, not quotations:

- Proverbs 17:14: "The beginning of strife is like letting out water, so quit before the quarrel breaks out."
- Proverbs 20:3: "It is an honor for a man to keep aloof from strife, but every fool will be quarreling."
- Proverbs 26:4-5: "Answer not a fool according to his folly" and then "Answer a fool according to his folly." The two sayings sit side by side on purpose. Wisdom isn't a rule to apply mechanically. It is discernment about when engaging helps and when it only feeds the folly.

Titus 3:9-11 gives the practical sequence: avoid foolish controversies, warn a divisive person once and then twice, and after that have nothing more to do with him.

Verses 24-25a: The Lord's Servant

> *δοῦλον δὲ κυρίου οὐ δεῖ μάχεσθαι ἀλλὰ ἤπιον εἶναι πρὸς πάντας, διδακτικόν, ἀνεξίκακον, ἐν πραΰτητι παιδεύοντα τοὺς ἀντιδιατιθεμένους*
>
> *"And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness." (ESV)*

"The Lord's servant"

Δοῦλος (*doulos*) means a slave or servant, someone who belongs to a master. Paul often calls himself a servant of Christ or of God (Romans 1:1; Galatians 1:10; Philippians 1:1; Titus 1:1). In the Old Testament, "servant of the LORD" is an honored title for Moses (Deuteronomy 34:5), Joshua (Joshua 24:29), and David (the heading of Psalm 18).

Some readers also hear Isaiah's Servant in this verse, and the comparison is worth making:

- Isaiah 42:2: "He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice." Matthew 12:19 renders it, "He will not quarrel or cry aloud."
- Isaiah 50:4: "The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary."
- Isaiah 50:6: "I gave my back to those who strike."

Paul's vocabulary does not match Isaiah's closely; Matthew's "quarrel" uses a different Greek verb. Treat this as a thematic comparison, not a demonstrated allusion. Still, the Christian reader knows who the Servant finally is. Timothy's posture follows the path of the Servant who suffered.

"Must not be quarrelsome"

Δεῖ (*dei*, "must") expresses necessity. It is the same word that opens the qualifications for overseers: "an overseer must be above reproach" (1 Timothy 3:2). The overlap goes further. Overseers must be "able to teach" (διδακτικός) and "not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome" (1 Timothy 3:2-3). "Not quarrelsome" there is ἄμαχος (*amachos*), literally "no-fighter," from the same root as μάχεσθαι here.

The passage applies first to Timothy as a church leader. But "servant of the Lord" describes every believer's identity, and Titus 3:2 asks the same temperament of all Christians.

"Kind to everyone"

Ἤπιος (*ēpios*) means gentle or kind. In the New Testament it appears only here and possibly in 1 Thessalonians 2:7. In that verse the manuscripts divide between ἤπιοι ("gentle") and νήπιοι ("infants"), so translations differ. Either way, Paul follows it with the picture of "a nursing mother taking care of her own children."

"To everyone" (πρὸς πάντας) echoes a theme that runs through the Pastoral Epistles. Christians pray "for all people" because God "desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth"

(1 Timothy 2:1-4). Titus 3:2 calls believers "to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people." The next verse gives the reason: "For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray" (Titus 3:3).

"Able to teach"

Διδακτικός (*didaktikos*) appears only here and in 1 Timothy 3:2. It means skilled in teaching, not just holding correct opinions. Earlier in the chapter Paul describes the approved worker as "rightly handling the word of truth" (2:15).

That verb, ὀρθοτομέω (*orthotomeō*), means literally "to cut straight." Its precise image is debated. It may picture cutting a straight road, plowing a straight furrow, or cutting material accurately. The Greek Old Testament uses it for God making a person's paths straight (Proverbs 3:6; 11:5). Teaching well means handling Scripture accurately enough that others can walk the path too.

"Patiently enduring evil"

Ἀνεξίκακος (*anexikakos*) appears only here in the New Testament. It combines "to bear with" and "evil": a person who can endure wrong without becoming resentful or retaliating.

The related noun appears in a striking passage from the Wisdom of Solomon, a Jewish writing preserved in the Greek Old Testament Apocrypha. The ungodly plot to test a righteous man with insult and torture, to find out how gentle he is and to try his forbearance (Wisdom 2:19, paraphrased). "Forbearance" there is ἀνεξικακία (*anexikakia*). That passage shows how the word was heard: as the patience of the righteous under abuse.

The placement in 2 Timothy matters. "Patiently enduring evil" comes right before "correcting his opponents." Paul expects correction to be met with hostility, and he prepares Timothy to absorb it.

"With gentleness"

Πραΐτης (*praûtēs*) is gentleness or meekness. Its biblical history is rich:

- **Moses** was "very meek, more than all people" (Numbers 12:3). The Greek Old Testament uses πραΐς. Yet Moses confronted Pharaoh and rebuked Israel.
- **The meek** "shall inherit the land" (Psalm 37:11), which Jesus takes up in Matthew 5:5.
- **Jesus** calls himself "gentle and lowly in heart" (Matthew 11:29). Matthew 21:5 quotes Zechariah 9:9 about the king coming "humble" (πραΐς) on a donkey. A few verses later the same king overturns the money-changers' tables (21:12-13). Biblical gentleness does not mean passivity.
- **Paul** appeals "by the meekness and gentleness of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:1). Gentleness is part of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23).
- **1 Peter 3:15-16** asks believers to answer anyone who asks about their hope "with gentleness and respect."

The closest parallel is Galatians 6:1: "if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted." Like 2 Timothy 2, it pairs gentle correction with watchfulness over yourself, and it aims at restoration.

I heard a few preachers illustrate that πραΐς was a technical term for a trained warhorse, "strength under control." Greek writers could use the word family of calm or tamed animals as well as people. But I

could not find ancient evidence for the specific warhorse definition, and that illustration should be used with caution. The word's biblical use is clear enough: gentle, considerate, not harsh, and often paired with humility.

"Correcting"

Παιδεύω (*paideuō*) comes from παῖς (*pais*, child). It means to train, educate, or discipline. Stephen says Moses "was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians" (Acts 7:22). Paul was "educated at the feet of Gamaliel" (Acts 22:3). Hebrews 12:5-11 uses the word family for God's discipline of his children. 2 Timothy 3:16 says Scripture is profitable "for training (παιδεία) in righteousness."

The most striking use is Titus 2:11-12: "the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training (παιδεύουσα) us to renounce ungodliness." Grace itself is the first trainer. The servant who corrects others is passing on the kind of training he has received.

The word points to correction aimed at growth. Paul is not describing a verdict meant to end a conversation.

"His opponents"

Τοὺς ἀντιδιατιθεμένους (*tous antidiatithemenous*) is another word found only here in the New Testament. It describes people who set themselves in opposition. The King James Version renders it "those that oppose themselves," taking the middle voice as reflexive: people working against their own good. Most modern translations read simply "opponents."

In context they are most likely church members drawn into the false teaching, and perhaps the teachers themselves. Paul is not describing outsiders here; Colossians 4:5-6 addresses that relationship.

Verses 25b-26: The Hope of Repentance

> *μήποτε δώῃ αὐτοῖς ὁ θεὸς μετάνοιαν εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν ἀληθείας καὶ ἀνανήψωσιν ἐκ τῆς τοῦ διαβόλου παγίδος, ἐζωγρημένοι ὑπ᾽ αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸ ἐκείνου θέλημα.*
>
> *"God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will." (ESV)*

"May perhaps"

Μήποτε (*mēpote*) often means "lest" in the New Testament. Here it expresses a cautious hope: "if perhaps," "in the hope that." Luke 3:15 uses it the same way, when people wondered "whether perhaps" John might be the Christ. Manuscripts vary slightly in the form of the verb "grant" (δώῃ or δῷ), but the meaning is the same.

The tone matters. Paul gives Timothy real hope without a guarantee. Timothy's gentleness cannot produce repentance on demand.

God grants repentance

The New Testament speaks of repentance as God's gift in several places:

- Acts 5:31: God exalted Jesus "to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins."
- Acts 11:18: "to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life."
- Romans 2:4: "God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance."

In the very same sentence, though, the opponents themselves "come to their senses and escape." The text holds God's gift and human turning together without explaining how they fit. Readers who want to settle wider debates about election and human freedom will need more than this verse. It is enough here that the servant's work depends on God's work.

Μετάνοια (*metanoia*) literally suggests a change of mind. In biblical use it carries the Old Testament sense of turning (Hebrew שוב, *shuv*): a reorientation of the whole person, not just a revised opinion.

"A knowledge of the truth"

Ἐπίγνωσις ἀληθείας (*epignōsis alētheias*) is a stock phrase in the Pastoral Epistles:

- 1 Timothy 2:4: God "desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."
- 2 Timothy 3:7: some are "always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth."
- Titus 1:1: "the knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness."

The phrase means more than correct information. In Titus it is tied to godliness, and in 2 Timothy 3:7 people can learn constantly and still never arrive. Repentance leads to a knowing that changes a life.

"Come to their senses"

Ἀνανήφω (*ananēphō*) appears only here in the New Testament. It means "to become sober again," to wake from a stupor. The image matches other New Testament warnings about sobriety and the devil: "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around" (1 Peter 5:8). Paul tells Timothy, "always be sober-minded" (2 Timothy 4:5).

The younger son in Jesus' parable "came to himself" (Luke 15:17). The Greek wording differs, but the picture of a person waking up to reality is similar.

Paul's images combine here: someone dazed and caught in a trap wakes up and gets free. That picture invites pity for the person caught, not contempt.

"The snare of the devil"

Παγίς (*pagis*) is a trap or snare for birds and animals. Paul uses "the snare of the devil" for the danger facing church leaders (1 Timothy 3:7). He uses "a snare" for the desire to be rich (1 Timothy 6:9). The trap is not only for false teachers. Leaders and ordinary believers can walk into it too.

Psalm 124:7 celebrates rescue in the same image: "We have escaped like a bird from the snare of the fowlers; the snare is broken, and we have escaped!" That is a thematic comparison, not a quotation.

"Captured alive"

Ἐζωγρημένοι (*ezōgrēmenoi*) is a perfect passive participle of ζωγρέω (*zōgreō*). The verb combines "alive" and "catch": to take captive alive. The perfect tense describes an ongoing state of captivity.

The only other New Testament use is Luke 5:10. After the miraculous catch of fish, Jesus tells Peter, "from now on you will be catching men" (ἀνθρώπους ἔσῃ ζωγρῶν). The devil catches people alive and holds them for his purposes. Jesus sends his followers to catch people alive for life. This is a lexical connection worth pondering. It doesn't show that Paul had Luke's story in mind.

Whose will?

The last phrase has a real puzzle. Paul writes ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ ("by him") and then εἰς τὸ ἐκείνου θέλημα ("to that one's will"). He uses two different pronouns, which raises the question of whether they refer to the same person.

Reading	"By him"	"His will"	Sense
1	the devil	the devil	Captured by the devil to do the devil's will. This is the most common reading; the NIV makes it explicit.
2	the devil	God	They escape the devil, who held them captive, and turn to do God's will.
3	the Lord's servant	God	Captured alive by the servant for God's will. This is a minority view, though it fits the Luke 5:10 use of the verb.

Greek writers often used ἐκεῖνος (*ekeinos*) for a more distant person, which keeps readings 2 and 3 alive. But Koine usage was not strict, and reading 1 makes good sense of the flow. Whichever you choose, the hope is the same: release from a captor and a life given over to God's will.

A needed limit

This language describes people caught in a real departure from the gospel (2:18). It is not a label for everyone who disagrees with us on secondary matters. The same snare threatens the one doing the correcting (1 Timothy 3:7). That is one more reason for gentleness.

Connected Passages

Colossians 4:5-6: speech toward outsiders

> *"Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person." (ESV)*

2 Timothy 2 deals mainly with opponents inside the church. Colossians 4 turns outward, to τοὺς ἔξω (*tous exō*), "those outside." Read together, the two passages cover both directions.

- **"Making the best use of the time."** Τὸν καιρὸν ἐξαγοραζόμενοι means literally "buying up the opportune moment" (compare Ephesians 5:16). Καιρός (*kairos*) is a fitting moment, not just clock time.

- **"Gracious."** The Greek is ἐν χάριτι (*en chariti*), "in grace." Χάρις is the same word Paul uses for God's grace. The phrase can mean pleasant and winsome, and it may also suggest speech that carries the grace believers have received.
- **"Seasoned with salt."** The image is debated. Greek and Latin writers could use "salt" for wit and liveliness in speech. Scripture uses salt for preservation and for the covenant (Leviticus 2:13). Jesus says, "Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another" (Mark 9:50). Most interpreters see at least the idea of speech that is interesting and worth hearing rather than bland or sour. The verse doesn't require choosing only one meaning.
- **"Each person."** Ἑνὶ ἑκάστῳ (*heni hekastō*) means "each one individually." Answers are fitted to the actual person, not pulled off a shelf.

The verses just before give the order: prayer first. Paul asks the Colossians to pray "that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak" (4:4). Then he tells them how they "ought to answer" (4:6). Both verses use δεῖ (*dei*, "ought, must"), the same word that begins 2 Timothy 2:24: the Lord's servant "must not be quarrelsome."

1 Peter 3:15-16: gentleness and respect

> *"...always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience..." (ESV)*

"Defense" is ἀπολογία (*apologia*), a reasoned answer. "Gentleness" is πραΰτης, the same word as 2 Timothy 2:25. Peter writes to believers who are being slandered. He doesn't tell them to stop answering. He tells them how to answer.

2 Timothy 4:14-16: harm, limits, and forgiveness

> *"Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message. At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them!" (ESV)*

In three verses, Paul does several things:

- He names the harm honestly.
- He warns Timothy to protect himself.
- He leaves repayment to the Lord. "According to his deeds" echoes a common Old Testament phrase (Psalm 62:12; Proverbs 24:12).
- About those who abandoned him, he prays that it will not be held against them. That echoes Jesus (Luke 23:34) and Stephen (Acts 7:60).

This fits Romans 12:17-21: "Repay no one evil for evil.... never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God." Patient endurance of evil (2 Timothy 2:24) does not mean pretending harm didn't happen or giving a harmful person unlimited access. It means refusing to retaliate.

This Alexander may be the same man as in 1 Timothy 1:20, but the name was common, so that can't be confirmed.

John 21:15-19: Jesus restores Peter

Jesus' conversation with Peter after the resurrection is a model of correction aimed at restoration:

- **The setting.** Peter denied Jesus beside a "charcoal fire" (John 18:18). Jesus restores him beside a "charcoal fire" (21:9). The Greek word, ἀνθρακιά (*anthrakia*), appears only in these two places in the New Testament.
- **The questions.** Jesus asks three times, "Do you love me?" Many readers see this as matching Peter's three denials. By the third time Peter is "grieved" (21:17). Jesus does not avoid the failure.
- **The outcome.** Each answer is followed by a commission to care for Jesus' sheep. The conversation ends with "Follow me" (21:19).

A common teaching contrasts the two Greek verbs for love in this passage, ἀγαπάω (*agapaō*) and φιλέω (*phileō*). Many scholars doubt that the switch carries the weight often given to it. John uses both verbs for the Father's love for the Son (3:35; 5:20), and he varies vocabulary throughout this passage (lambs and sheep, feed and tend). The restoration is clear without a theory built on the verbs.

Matthew 5:22 and calling someone a fool

Jesus warns that "whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire" (Matthew 5:22). "Fool" there is μωρέ (*mōre*), from the same word Paul uses for "foolish" controversies in 2 Timothy 2:23.

The comparison is instructive, but it needs care. Jesus himself calls the scribes and Pharisees "blind fools" (μωροί, Matthew 23:17), so the word isn't banned. Matthew 5 is about contemptuous anger toward a brother, and it goes on to urge reconciliation (5:23-24). Paul's instruction moves in the same direction. Calling an argument foolish and declining it is different from writing off the person as a fool.

Theological Threads

Grace comes first

Chapter 2 opens with ἐνδυναμοῦ (*endynamou*), "be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2:1). It is a present passive imperative: Timothy is commanded to keep receiving strength, not to produce it. The trustworthy saying in 2:11-13 grounds everything in Christ's faithfulness: "if we are faithless, he remains faithful."

Titus 3:2-7 makes the logic explicit. Believers show "perfect courtesy toward all people" because "we ourselves were once foolish" and "the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared." Gentle correction comes from people who have been corrected and forgiven themselves. Paul appeals "by the meekness and gentleness of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:1). The shape of Jesus' own self-giving love becomes the shape of the servant's speech.

The already and the not yet

The error in 2:18 collapsed the future into the present: the resurrection had "already happened." Paul's gospel holds both together. Believers share Christ's risen life now, and they await the resurrection of the body and the renewal of all things.

That tension shapes how the servant handles conflict. Final vindication belongs to the Lord, "the righteous judge," on "that day" (2 Timothy 4:8). Paul tells the Corinthians not to "pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes" (1 Corinthians 4:5). The servant must tell the truth now. He does not have to secure the final verdict now.

Truth and gentleness together

Paul doesn't make the error sound harmless. He names the teachers, quotes their claim, and compares their talk to gangrene (2:17-18). The passage never treats gentleness as a substitute for truth. Gentleness is the manner in which truth is handled, which is close to what Ephesians 4:15 calls "speaking the truth in love."

Knowing what kind of claim you're making

"Rightly handling the word of truth" (2:15) includes being honest about the level of a claim. Paul models this in 1 Corinthians 7. In 7:10 he says, "not I, but the Lord," citing Jesus' teaching. In 7:12 he says, "I, not the Lord," giving his own apostolic instruction. In 7:25 he offers "my judgment." A teacher who can tell the difference between what Scripture says, how he interprets it, and how he would apply it is better able to correct without claiming more authority than he has.

Correction and contempt

The difference lies in what we want for the other person. Correction seeks restoration: "restore him in a spirit of gentleness" (Galatians 6:1). James adds that "whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death" (James 5:20). Contempt finds satisfaction in the other person's humiliation. Proverbs 24:17 warns against even that inner satisfaction: "Do not rejoice when your enemy falls."

Verse 25's hope that God "may perhaps grant them repentance" disciplines our desires. It is hard to pray for someone's release while hoping they lose badly.