

# Toward Theological Endurance

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Date: 18 February 2024

Preacher: Chris Oswald

- [ 0 : 00 ]     Amen. You can be seated. If you'll open your Bibles to the book of 2 Timothy. Children, you're dismissed to children's ministry. We're going to be in 2 Timothy chapter 2 this morning, verses 11 through 19 in particular.
- 2 Timothy 2, verses 11 through 19. I don't know if you've seen or heard about this story. It's kind of gone semi-viral about a soldier quite a long time ago who was called the unkillable soldier.
- Lieutenant General. This is the opening paragraph of his Wikipedia page. This is the best opening paragraph of any Wikipedia page I've ever read. Lieutenant General Sir Adrian DeWore was a British Army officer born of Belgium and Irish parents.
- He was awarded the Victoria Cross, the highest medal, decoration awarded for valor in the face of the enemy in various Commonwealth countries.
- He served in the Boomer War, the First World War, the Second World War. He was shot in the face, head, stomach, ankle, leg, hip, and ear.
- [ 1 : 14 ]     Was blinded in his left eye. Survived two plane crashes. Tunneled out of a prisoner of war camp. And took off his own fingers when a doctor declined to amputate.
- Describing his experiences of the First World War, he wrote, Frankly, I enjoyed the war. Today I want to talk to you this morning about theological endurance.
- How to develop theological endurance. What I mean is just a commitment to biblical doctrine that does not change when the culture changes.
- And does not change when your circumstance change. Doctrine that can endure many bullets. Bulletproof doctrine maybe would be another way to say it.
- We're talking about doctrinal or theological endurance. Charles Spurgeon summarizes what I'm getting at quite well in a letter that he wrote to his students. We must be ready to give up anything and everything for the sake of the principles which we have espoused.
- [ 2 : 24 ]     And must be ready to offend our best supporters. To alienate our warmest friends sooner than belie our consciences. We must be ready to be beggars in purse, off-scourings in reputation, rather than act treacherously.
- We can die, but we cannot deny the truth. The cost is already counted, and we are determined to buy the truth at any price and to sell it at no price.
- That's what I mean when I talk about theological or doctrinal endurance. Now, when I say doctrine, we tend to think of the biggies.
- The divinity of Christ. Justification by faith alone. Penal substitutionary atonement. So, when I say doctrine, we tend to think of the biggies. But friends, we are living in an age where many of the things that are being attacked are biblical doctrines.
- We just don't think of them as biblical doctrines. There is a biblical doctrine of gender. There is a biblical doctrine of marriage.

- [ 3 : 37 ] There is a biblical doctrine of conflict resolution. There's a biblical doctrine of biblical justice. So on and so forth. And the real trick, it seems, or at least one of them, in this particular time and place in which we find ourselves, is to develop a kind of theological resilience that says, yes, it's uncomfortable to hold these things, but hold these things I will.
- I have bought the truth, and I will sell it not. Now, it's very important to me as your pastor that you develop this kind of theological resilience.
- No matter how faithful or expansive a pulpit ministry you enjoy, and it's quite faithful and quite expansive. No matter how good I do, the truth is that you just can't possibly care for a congregation by teaching them about every potential error.
- There are too many errors out there than there are Sundays we have left in our lifetime. And so we've got to develop an approach to truth, an approach to theological fidelity, that isn't always kind of putting out bushfires here and there.
- But we develop a sort of strategy and a general understanding of some of the principles that lead to theological endurance. Now, we are already in chapter 2 of this little letter, and we have seen for sure that endurance in general is a key thing.
- [ 5 : 12 ] And I just want to review a little bit of that that we've seen so far in chapter 2. In verses 1 through 3, we see Paul instruct Timothy to do the following, You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.
- Their ability to teach, notice this, and you know this, friends, their ability to teach isn't inconsequential, but it is secondary to their faithfulness, to their capacity for endurance.
- Before we find men who are gifted in teaching, let's make sure that those men who are gifted in teaching are not flaky men, but are faithful men. An emphasis on endurance right at the beginning of the chapter.
- And then in verses 11 through 13, Paul passes on or mentions what was probably a hymn or a popular Christian saying at the time.
- He says in verse 11, And so Paul says, Not only do I want you to find men who are faithful and not flaky, but I want you to charge them with this known saying, all related to endurance.
- [ 6 : 45 ] And then he continues in verse 14 of 2 Timothy chapter 2, Remind them, these men who are not flakes, remind them of these things, and charge them before God, not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but ruins only the hearers.
- So we've seen the importance of endurance, and I think we've talked about this already to some extent. I would say the only differentiation from today and other conversations about this is that I think in the past, we typically talk about endurance and its practicality.
- We typically talk about practical endurance. Therefore, let us not grow weary in doing good, for at proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. And of course, we do want to make sure that behaviorally and in our lifestyles, we have endurance and faithfulness to the Lord.
- But let's not sleep on this idea of having theological endurance, of being doctrinally faithful. And that's what we're going to discuss today.
- And one of the things we see in our text, beginning in verse 15, is something I would just like to make you aware of in general. And that is simply the nature of human perception and its connection between what we believe and our desire for belonging.
- [ 8 : 08 ] Let me explain that. One essential to developing theological endurance is to know how you think and why you think the way you do.

There is copious amounts of psychological data that really kind of became prominent after World War II for obvious reasons.

There's a ton of data on this problem of groupthink. You guys know what I mean when I say groupthink, right? This way that desire to belong in a particular group can affect your perception.

Not simply your willingness to tell the truth, but actually your perception. And they're just study after study. And they'll put plants in these psychological studies and say, you know, hey, we're going to ask what color this blue ball is and I want you to say it's purple.

And then they'll have another person that they've hired and say, now you go next and you say it's purple. And essentially creating a belonging bias in the room that to be in this group means to see this ball as purple.

[ 9 : 16 ] And then they go to those particular subjects who have no idea what the game is here. And they've seen all these other people say that the ball is purple and they think it's blue.

But then they start actually thinking. Actually, I think it may actually be purple. See, there's this thing you need to know about yourself. You have an incredible need to belong.

And your beliefs are inseparable from that need to belong. Your ability to perceive reality as a human being is more relational than you realize.

Now, that's just studies related to factual things that are, you know, evidential things. I suppose you might say, you know, like, what color is this ball? But when we move into doctrines, we're talking about even more complicated ideas.

And I would just say this. If the data suggests that people have trouble distinguishing between colors based on group pressure, how much more so is it difficult to hold an unpopular doctrine?

[ 10 : 29 ] Not simply to hold it and express it, but to genuinely not become infected by the spirit of the age that just sees it differently. And to begin to think, well, maybe they're seeing it the right way.

Yeah, I think they are seeing it the right way. Your need to belong and the way it affects your beliefs is not a bug, by the way.

I think we tend to think of it that way. It's not a bug of fallenness. It's a feature that was completely compatible with God's original design for you because you were built to walk with God.

And your desire to belong in your belief system, so long as your desire to belong is to belong with God, these two things are not incompatible because God never lies.

So originally you were created, I was created to walk with God. And our need to be affirmed, our need to seek and receive approval, that was all vertically oriented.

[ 11 : 29 ] Like I need, I want God to approve of me. And there's never any tension between our desire for God's approval and our understanding of truth.

So this is something that we were created with that like many other things we were created with gets hijacked because of sin and because of the fall. But I just want you at this stage to recognize that this is just a part of who you are.

Your ability to believe something is in constant tension with your desire to belong. And how do we solve this? Do we solve this by pretending we're just more empirical than we are?

Do we solve this by pretending we are more logical than we actually are? Do we solve this by denying fundamental human nature? No, no, no, no, no, we can't. We simply solve this by seeking God's approval.

Right? Seeking God's approval. And if we are satisfied in God's approval, then this tension is resolved. And that's what Paul's saying to Timothy in verse 15. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

[ 12 : 45 ] So the image here is of an apprentice. And he is doing his work. And some of you work in the trades and know how this goes. He is doing his work for an audience of one.

He is an apprentice. He's learning how to blacksmith. He's learning how to put in air conditioning. He's learning how to do plumbing. And he is, as an apprentice, is looking to one person to evaluate whether or not he's doing a good job or not.

His teacher, his instructor, his boss. Often in that ancient world, it was his dad. And he's trying to please this one teacher.

So Paul is giving a very simple kind of plan for us to engage in theological endurance or to have theological endurance. Make sure you are seeking to please God.

And when you do that, this tension between belief and belonging is no longer an issue. But if you don't do that, it is almost certainly going to become an issue. And that's what we see in verse 16.

[ 13 : 52 ] Look at verse 16. But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Already we're getting sort of a preference cascade as they describe groupthink dynamics.

We're already getting sort of a new truth that's spreading relationally. Their talk will spread like gangrene. We'll get into that a little bit more in a moment. And then it says, Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened.

They are upsetting the faith of some. Now, I plan on posting a podcast this week on some of the theological stuff about resurrection. As you might have noticed, resurrection figures heavily into 2 Timothy.

So we'll talk about that later. We don't really need to think too much about what their heresy was. It's really not the point of this particular passage. But I would like to just explore one aspect of it that informs this line of thinking we're exploring.

Here's the deal. There were many resurrection heresies during that day. I don't know which one this was. There's no evidence to tell me which one this was.

[ 15 : 06 ] But let me just give you a few that were floating around. So one was a popular Jewish idea that the resurrection was associated with the coming of the Messiah.

And so you can imagine, for instance, how Jews would deny that Jesus was the Messiah because, look, the resurrection hasn't happened. And then there may be some kind of clever theological accommodation that says, well, no, in some respects it has happened.

And here's the examples and so on and so forth. So if that's what is going on in this church, I think it's just worth noticing that for a minute, okay? If what's going on in this church is essentially a group of people are now adopting a Jewish belief about the resurrection or integrating it into the Christian message, well, it's worth noting because the Jews were, at the time, the religious bullies in the new Christian world.

Why does that matter? Because what you've got then, in this case, is a slight adaptation of the faithful Christian message to something that harmonizes better with the people who are constantly trying to beat you up.

Do we see that at all in the world today? Do we see a desire to slightly modify and smooth out the rough edges, the offensive pieces of our doctrines because the rainbow mafia is standing over there with a look of menace, right?

[ 16 : 58 ] Sparkles and menace. So that's why if you don't seek the Lord's approval, you will seek approval.

That's going to happen and it will affect your beliefs. Another possibility is that it wasn't this Jewish heresy. It was a Gnostic heresy.

The Gnostics were kind of rising during this time and the Gnostics were just, they would just spiritualize everything. And they would have said that the resurrection already happened because it wasn't actually physical.

It was intellectual or it was a sort of enlightenment. You've achieved a gnosis. It's the Greek word for knowledge. You've achieved a resurrection.

You were dead in your thinking and now you're alive in your thinking. You could see how you could play with this stuff, right? You could, you've all seen people do this. So let's suppose that that's what's going on here. And what, what the doctrine that had begun to be taught in the local church was something like this Gnostic view.

[ 18 : 02 ] Well, the Gnostics were the intelligentsia in every city and in every local church. Their entire religion was built on intellectual pride.

Their entire religion was built not only on themselves having intellectual pride, but the reason that religion even spread was because people like to think of themselves as smart. Now, who are the intellectual cool kids of our day?

And how might we, in a desire to belong, shift our beliefs? See, this, this tie, this, this desire to belong really will affect our beliefs.

And I want to be clear here. Initially, it may be conscience that you're changing what you believe to fit in, but at some point, you will genuinely believe you've simply arrived at a new conclusion.

You will genuinely believe that you have reached a new conviction, walked with many people through this, friends, and the fact that it just so happens to put you on better terms with the glitter mafia or with the intellectuals just so happens to happen, but that's not what happened with you, trust me.

[ 19 : 16 ] Now, what happened with you is you just arrived at a new understanding. No, no, you are a human being. Your ability to think is tied deeply into your desire to belong. Boy, I heard about, if I was the CEO of this company, I'd have some words for the IT department, but let me tell you this story that happened just last week on Valentine's Day.

You guys know about phishing, right? P-H-I, phishing. So, you know, bad actors elsewhere in the world send emails out to already bored corporate drones hoping to entice them to click on something in an email and thus give the, you know, the hackers access to corporate data and so on and so forth.

That's what phishing is. And it's become such a problem that IT departments proactively send out phishing emails to their own people so as to catch the most gullible and boomer-like amongst their...

So, last week on Valentine's Day, an IT department in what sound like a decent-sized company sent a phishing email out to all of its employees to this effect.

You have a Valentine's delivery waiting for you in the lobby. Click this button and head downstairs. Now, this is why I'm not down with this.

[ 20 : 48 ] These poor people all had a moment where they thought someone loved them. Right? These poor people all... Think about this.

There were some who were thinking, you know, I'm sure my husband forgot. And then they see this link and they're like, oh my goodness, he didn't forget. And they click. There are others who thought, I have a secret admirer.

Like, no one was on their radar but suddenly the idea, like, I have a secret admirer. And they click as well. And can you imagine, like, all of these people just having this sense of hope and joy and I am loved and they get downstairs and like Kyle from IT is down there with his dry shampoo face, you know, ready to tell like all these people how terrible they are?

I just think I was just, no, Kyle, I appreciate your zeal, Kyle, but no. Friends, the point in sharing that is just to make and underline the point.

The part of you that wants to be loved and appreciated, that part of you does affect your judgment. And so we have to do as Paul says, we have to set our faces to the one whom we know whose approval matters the most and who is always on the side of truth.

[ 22 : 13 ] And that's what Paul says in verse 15. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved. A worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

Now, that's the first idea I wanted to pass on to you. You don't misunderstand. You're a belonging-centered thinker. The second point is this, that the nature of ideas, the nature of ideas that I would want to underline here is that they bite back.

Look at verse 14. Remind them of these things and charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers.

I'm just going to walk you through very quickly all the negative words associated with falling away here because I think they're all mistranslated to some degree, which I'm not a translation snob typically.

My Greek isn't strong enough for that, but here I just think, boy, there's better words for this. When it says that these false doctrines ruin the hearers, the Greek word, the actual Greek word is just catastrophe.

[ 23 : 19 ] So I would just say, is ruin strong enough? Or should we have just used catastrophe? In verse 15, do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth, but avoid irreverent babble.

We're going to go back to that. For it will lead people into more and more ungodliness. Fine translation. Their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus.

Gangrene. Friends, do you know how serious gangrene is? When someone in a hospital develops anything approaching gangrene, or even something somewhat less serious as MRSA, which is, you know, an antibiotic-resistant staph infection, essentially.

Do you know when these things emerge on a patient, the entire interaction changes? They wear different things. They act differently.

You got your own room for one thing immediately. You got your own private room, so on and so forth. These things are taken very seriously. Now, that's what Paul is saying is going to happen when our doctrine starts to get out of control, when it starts to depart from biblical faith.

[ 24 : 41 ] And then he says that Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened, they are upsetting the faith of some. And this is the word that I have the most problem with.

The word upset, it just sounds so pearl-clutchy to me. The word upset is the exact same word used to describe Jesus overturning tables. So, whatever you want to think of there, this isn't just upsetting their faith, you know.

This is overturning their faith. This is a faith now infected with a flesh-eating necrotic bacteria. This is, this is, the ischemic tissue of their flesh is now being eaten by gangrene.

They're about to be catastrophized and turned upside down. So I just think it's worth noting that the language there is like pretty, pretty grave. Okay. And I want you to know that because one of the things that we need to think about more carefully is this, this phrase, avoid irreverent babble in verse 16.

I just want you to know how serious this is because I want you to know that ideas bite back. So the ancient world at that particular time was very similar to our world in this respect.

[ 25 : 58 ] There was a kind of intellectual pride that like promoted a kind of high degree of openness to new ideas and, you know, we see in Acts 17 the Athenians are gathered to discuss anything new.

You know, there was this prize to intellectual openness that was sort of a boasting point and one of the, I'm a pretty intellectually open guy, I like to think about things, but one of the concerns that this kind of culture, and I think we're here now, one of the concerns of this kind of culture is that it can create a kind of casualness toward thinking.

a kind of casualness and irreverence that is inappropriate when thinking about the things of God. When it comes to thinking about theology, you can never be fully relaxed.

Trust me, this might be the first time anyone's ever told you this, but pastor with a lot of miles, with a lot of shipwrecks in the back, you know, in my past, trust me on this, you do not want to be casual in a proud way when you begin to think about theology.

You don't want to be irreverent. We don't need to be fearful, but you do need to be careful. People don't seem to understand that the ideas they think about are powerful forces.

[ 27 : 27 ] There's power in these ideas. Have you ever seen one of those videos where someone working near a fighter jet gets sucked into the engine? You ever seen that? Google that when you get home.

It's great. It's surprisingly clean. Anyway, friends, I've talked to many people who were honestly kind of just foolish and undiscerning in the amount of time they spent online looking at, you know, internet atheists.

At first as a peculiarity and a novelty, and then here's how I put it. Thinking about theology is not like going to the zoo to look at lions.

Thinking about theology is not like going to the zoo to look at lions. That whole situation is fake. Those lions are, you know, well fed. There's a wall that he can't climb.

Some liability insurance company has vetted this entire operation already. So when you go to the zoo to look at a lion, you can stand there in your flip-flops and your overpriced slushie and just be casual.

[ 28 : 39 ] That's not what theology, philosophy, metaphysics, that's not what's going on. Don't be lulled into a false sense of security or even a false sense of objectivity, a false sense of discernment.

friends, I could talk to you about atheism, but I mean, even just like, there's just blogs and blogs and blogs. You know, I see people get radicalized over the dumbest stuff.

And it often happens with this undiscerning, unafraid, intellectually proud attitude in which they think that when I think about ideas, it's like me going to the zoo to look at lions.

Now, when you think about theology, it's more like going to the African Savanna to look at lions. you can do that. I hope you get the chance to do that at some point.

When you think about theology or philosophy or metaphysics, you need to understand that these ideas consume people. That's how this whole world works. Ideas are what's moving things.

[ 29 : 45 ] Ideas are the engines driving everything. You don't look at it like a lion in a zoo. You look at it like, okay, I would like to think about this, but let me be smart.

Let me keep my head on a swivel. Let me be sober-minded. Let me make sure I have a good guide. This idea of irreverent babble appears a lot in the New Testament.

I think it's just this hands in the pocket, you know, aw shucks, what's the worst that could go wrong way of thinking about theology? It's like, don't go there.

These ideas have power. Now, we're almost done. I didn't want to promise a short sermon because I feel like I always break that promise, but you're going to get a short, I can promise now. We're almost done.

We're at verse 19, and it says, but God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal. The Lord knows those who are his.

[ 30 : 45 ] Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from his iniquity. These statements are almost certainly a reference to a story recorded in the book of Numbers, chapter 16, often referred to as Korah's rebellion.

Korah's rebellion. Now, both in Jewish literature and in New Testament literature, Korah's rebellion is often used as kind of like a reference point to talk about grave theological departure, something like that.

Schism, I think, is probably the best way to talk about it, really. It's often kind of a shorthand reference back to the whole story, which is itself just a total debacle, and I want to end today by just telling you that story and asking why does Paul reference this here?

So, this is all taking place in the wilderness. Israel's in the wilderness with Moses, and Korah was a Levite. He was a priest, and he attended to the sacrifices and the tabernacle, and he was a man of some importance.

And he began to be dissatisfied with Moses' leadership, with Aaron's leadership, and he fomented amongst the people an acute sense of dissatisfaction toward these leaders.

[ 32 : 10 ] And the text actually says, I didn't write the verse down here, but the text actually says, they assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron and said to them, you have gone too far for all in the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them.

Why do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord? So, this is the usual charge of the rebellious. They always like to allege a level of abuse at the leadership level that they themselves would be guilty of if they had that power.

I want to speak just really quickly about that. Of course, all kinds of abuse are real, including the abuse of leadership. I do want to be clear though that the number one allegation to begin the Bible coming from the devil's own mouth was that God was abusing his leadership.

And there certainly are cases where it's true. There are many cases where the serpent is actually fully involved. So Korah is on team Satan at this point.

Hope that stands out. But no one else knows that. And Moses does a very wise thing. He says, the Lord knows who are his. That's where we get this first statement from Paul to Timothy in verse 19.

[ 33 : 30 ] The Lord knows who are his. And he says, here's what we'll do. Let's all gather before the Lord and let him sort it out.

just great wisdom. I'm not going to defend myself. Let's just gather before the Lord. Let's see what God does.

And so they gathered before the Lord and God whispers to Moses and Aaron, step aside, I'm going to kill them all. And Moses and Aaron immediately fall to their face and say, no, please, don't kill them all.

there's just a few bad apples. Punish them, but don't kill them all. And so then God says, well, you'd better tell the people to move away from Korah and his gang.



And so Moses tells the people, and that's where we get the second line in 2 Timothy 2.19. Let everyone depart from iniquity. Let those who are his depart from iniquity. It's in Numbers 16.26.

[ 34 : 38 ] It's kind of like, let all those who are the lords depart from the iniquitous ones or something. It's essentially when God says to Moses and Aaron, tell everyone who doesn't agree with Korah to step away from Korah.

And so Moses and Aaron tell the people that, and they do, they separate from Korah, and the earth opens up and swallows Korah and all of his people, and then there were about 250 co-conspirators who were also standing there, and they were consumed by fire.

Now, all things being equal, that went as well as it possibly could. It appears to. It was about as surgical a strike as you'll see in the Old Testament, right?

It was a great negotiation from Moses and Aaron. Like, hey, can we reduce the punishment? I think we'll see why God had that intention to begin with.

And so you think the story's done. it appears that the gangrenous toe has been amputated and that we're okay.

[ 35 : 46 ] But some gangrene had gotten into the bloodstream, and so the very next morning after Moses and Aaron, without the people's knowledge, had really fought to save their lives, all of the people rise up against Moses and Aaron the next day.

they say, you have killed the people of the Lord. And God says to Moses and Aaron, stand back, I'm going to kill them all.

And Moses and Aaron plead again. God sends a plague of judgment on the people, and it's funny because you need to try to get this in your imagination if you can.

You guys just picture, you know, tons of people on an open plain, and the image of the text is that the plague starts here, you know, and it's spreading across to the whole population.

And again, out of the love that only God can give a leader, Moses and Aaron want to intercede for the people, and so Aaron grabs some fire from the altar of God, the holiest of all the fires, and he puts it in his censer, and he burns some incense, and he goes, and the image is pretty astounding when you get your mind around it, he's facing the death with a smoking censer in front of him, all dead, thousands of dead, behind him, thousands and thousands of people alive, and he's doing the you shall not pass with this death, and he's standing in between life and death to save these people, and so at the end of that story, you know, because of Aaron's quick thinking, only 12,000 people died.

[ 37 : 36 ] So what's the point of this story? Why is it alluded to in this passage? First of all, we just need to appreciate the artfulness of God's word, the way that Paul would, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, talk about gangrene, and ideas spreading like plagues, and rebellion and rejection of God, and so forth, and then make this a beautiful allusion to this Korah story, but it's just all very artfully kind of done.

Like, one of the ways I could talk, Jordan Peterson talk for a minute, be like, one of the pictures of this story is something like, Korah was standing on shaky ground, you know, he had rejected first principles, he had rejected fundamentals, and therefore, the ground that he was standing on was not as stable as the ground that Moses was standing on because he was part of first principles and transcendent truth, you know, something like that.

I mean, that's all true at some level, it doesn't make the story false, but it's a beautiful allusion to bring in at this particular moment when Paul is talking about Hymenaeus and Philetus.

And then you ask, well, why is this story so popular throughout Judaic and New Testament writings to reference this problem? And the common take is that, well, because, you know, Moses is a stand-in for whoever God's leader is at any given time, and Korah is a stand-in for whoever is rising up against Paul or rising up against Timothy or whatever.

Fine, but it definitely goes deeper than that because Moses is actually just a stand-in for the word of God. That's a legit way of seeing this.

[ 39 : 23 ] Moses is God's word, personified, in many respects. And so then we can look at the story like this. Moses is God's word, Korah is you leaning on your own understanding.

That's the idea. And you think you have a legitimate beef with the word of God, and you think that God's word is unfair or unloving to these kinds of people, or this or that, or overly rigid, or overly prescriptive in this gender role, or that, or so on and so forth.

You are standing, you think, on the moral high ground. You're standing on ground that will open up and consume you. Promised, promised today from me to you, that's what happens when you rise up against the word of God.

When you stand up and say it's unfair, it's cruel, it's unwise, it's foolish, it's old, it's ancient, you will get swallowed. You think you're on the moral high ground, ground, you're not.

You're on the most shaky of all ground. I think that's why Paul says in verse 19, but God's foundation stands fast. Because there's one place to stand in the world that won't give, and it's on God's word.

[ 40 : 37 ] And every other place to stand is just other Korah type land. And so what I have to invite you to do this morning is, who are you going to stand with?

Moses and Aaron told the people, if you're not with Korah, you might want to move away from Korah. Well, where are we moving to when we're moving away from Korah?

Hopefully not another Korah. What's the answer there? Move to the Lord, man. Do your best to be as one approved by God.

So let me just summarize. You are a relational perceiver. Your beliefs are always somewhat mixed up with your need to belong. You solve this issue by desiring to belong to God.

As James says, friendship with the world is enmity with God. So do your best to present yourself to God as one approved. Number two, ideas have power.

[ 41 : 42 ] When you're thinking about theology, you're not at the zoo, you're on the savannah, avoid irreverent babble. Number three, you versus the word. Never a good idea.

And that's what we're talking about after this at our Theological Leaders Program, which you're welcome to stay and talk more about. When it's you versus the word, you're never on the right ground.

Therefore, trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. in all your ways, acknowledge him and he will direct your paths.

Now, just to introduce communion briefly, this gnarly, you know, Tolkien-esque picture of Aaron standing between the plague, death in his front, and life behind is itself a picture of Jesus, the great mediator, who said, on our behalf, to the sin that would consume and kill us, you shall not pass.

Death will not have its grip on this one, on that one, on this one. I am standing in the gap, I am standing as the mediator to ensure that this one, though he deserves to die, will not perish eternally.

[ 43 : 06 ] Fire in Aaron's incense represents throughout all biblical symbology judgment. And the incense is what pleases God. And so we can say that Jesus Christ, his judgment upon the cross, him being the propitiation for our sins, him being our offering, is the thing that pleases God, so that we are no longer stuck in our sins.

And if Jesus can stop the death, the actual spiritual death that work in us, then Jesus can also stop the theological death. We need to ask, above all, above all the insights and ideas that are presented today, we need to ask the Lord Jesus to say, for us and on our behalf, in our weakest moments, and our most susceptible to compromise, Lord Jesus, stand between me and error, and tell that error you shall go no further.

Romans 5, 17-18 says, for if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. So if you're a follower of Jesus Christ and your faith is placed in him standing between you and life and death, would you come and partake of this table today?

Amen.