

# 2 Timothy 2:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is  
Hymenaeus and Philetus;

## Analysis

**And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus.** Paul illustrates v. 16's warning with medical metaphor. "Their word will eat as doth a canker" (kai ho logos autōn hōs gangraina nomēn hexei, καὶ ὁ λόγος αὐτῶν ὡς γάγγραινα νομὴν ἔξει). Gangraina (γάγγραινα) gives us "gangrene"—necrotic tissue spreading infection, destroying healthy flesh. Nomē (νομή) means pasturage, spreading growth—the verb form means "to spread, to eat away." False teaching spreads like gangrene, consuming spiritual health, destroying faith.

This metaphor emphasizes several realities:

1. False doctrine is deadly, not merely mistaken.
2. It spreads progressively if not excised.
3. It destroys living tissue—genuine believers can be damaged.
4. Surgical removal (church discipline) is necessary to stop spread.

Tolerance of heresy endangers the entire body. Paul names two heretics: "Hymenaeus and Philetus" (Hymenaios kai Philētos, Ὑμέναιος καὶ Φίλητος). Hymenaeus appears in 1 Timothy 1:20 as excommunicated. Philetus is mentioned only here.

Naming names serves several purposes: warns believers to avoid these men specifically, provides accountability (public sin receives public rebuke), illustrates that false teaching has human agents, not merely abstract errors. Paul isn't being

uncharitable but protecting the flock. Shepherds must warn sheep about specific wolves.

## Historical Context

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Ancient medicine understood gangrene's deadly nature. Without antibiotics or surgical intervention, gangrene killed through sepsis. Amputation was often necessary to save lives. Paul's readers grasped the severity. Hymenaeus's reappearance (mentioned in both 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy) suggests persistent false teaching despite excommunication. This illustrated the difficulty of eliminating heresy once established. Church discipline was normal practice—unrepentant false teachers were identified publicly and removed from fellowship (Matthew 18:15-17, 1 Corinthians 5:1-13, Titus 3:10-11).

## Related Passages

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**Matthew 25:31** — Final judgment

**Revelation 20:12** — Judgment according to deeds

## Study Questions

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1. Do you take false doctrine as seriously as Paul does—treating it like life-threatening gangrene requiring immediate action?
2. How should churches today balance love and truth when dealing with persistent false teachers in their midst?
3. What false teachings currently spreading in the church need to be identified and removed before they cause more spiritual destruction?

## Interlinear Text

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καὶ	ὁ	λόγος	αὐτῶν	ὥς	γάγγραινα	νομὴν	ἔξει	ῶν
<b>And</b>	G3588	<b>word</b>	<b>their</b>	<b>as</b>	<b>doth a canker</b>	G3542	<b>will eat</b>	<b>of whom</b>
G2532		G3056	G846	G5613	G1044		G2192	G3739
ἐστὶν	Ἑμέναιος	καὶ	Φίλητος					
<b>is</b>	<b>Hymenaeus</b>	<b>And</b>	<b>Philetus</b>					
G2076	G5211	G2532	G5372					

## Additional Cross-References

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**1 Timothy 1:20** (Parallel theme): Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.

**Nahum 3:15** (Word): There shall the fire devour thee; the sword shall cut thee off, it shall eat thee up like the cankerworm: make thyself many as the cankerworm, make thyself many as the locusts.

**James 5:3** (Parallel theme): Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days.