

2 Timothy 2:15-18

"Approved Or Ashamed?"

2 Timothy reminds us that we are a living link between generations. As a believer, you & me, we are to be both learners and teachers. We're to be learning from those who can teach us & we're to be teaching those who can learn from us. **In many respects we assume a dual role of both student & teacher, always seeking to learn & to grow in the ways & in the word of God, & then being faithful to teach to *others* those things that God has taught us.**

Earlier in this Ch Paul told Timothy, **"...the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."**¹ It's the mentor/student mentality, understanding that we've never arrived, always seeking to maintain a teachable spirit, yet realizing that we're responsible to entrust to others the insight, the understanding, the revelation & application of the word of God that God has entrusted to us.

It's a real time illustration & application of the last command of our Lord. Jesus said, **"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you;"**² Once we've been taught, it's our responsibility to teach, not always in a formal/pastoral role, but in a personal role... parent to child, spouse to spouse, pouring into friendships or other relationships. We're to make "disciples".

But Paul was clear, **it's not always gonna be easy, there will be difficulties, road bumps, trials & tough times along the way. People that want will be hostile toward you, or perhaps want to argue with you; avoid that. Over & over again we're told not to strive about words to no profit.** It doesn't edify man, it doesn't glorify God. To the contrary when we argue over the speculation & opinions of man it brings confusion, discouragement & disillusionment... We're not to argue over man's *opinion*, we're to stay focused & true to God's word. Notice; **Vs 15**

If you have a KJV, Vs 15 begins w/the word "Study". However the Greek word here really has nothing to do w/books & teachers (though as we'll see the context certainly allows for that).

¹ The New King James Version. (1982). (2 Ti 2:2). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

² The New King James Version. (1982). (Mt 28:19-20). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

The word literally means “to make haste”, “to work hard” “to exert oneself”, there is an urgency about this word, it means “Be diligent”. This word almost naturally implies that it’s not going to come easy. There’s almost a “no pain, no gain” type nuance going on here.

You might think of it like this; I can’t say “categorically” but certainly the majority of precious things, God has hidden them in such a way as to reward the diligent & disappoint the lazy. The pearl is hidden beneath the ocean waves, gold is imprisoned in the earth, or under the sea, or in rocky heart of the Mts. Precious gems are found only after you crush the rock that encases it. Soil only gives it’s harvest as a reward to the one who will labor for it.

Even so we need to seek the Lord w/all of our heart, we need to plumb the depths of God’s word w/diligence... Remember what the Lord said in Jeremiah 29:13? *“And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.”*³ When you go “all in”, when you’re “diligent” about it, focused on it. “Be diligent”. In the proverbs we read it like this, *“Apply your heart to instruction, And your ears to words of knowledge.”*⁴ I’m not going to say that a “surface” reading of the Word of God isn’t good or won’t help you. But what I will say is that the gold nuggets, the precious gems are buried a little deeper, you’ve got to work for them, dig for them. They’re there, be diligent.

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God.” What does that mean? It means that we are to be zealous, putting forth every effort to meet w/God’s approval upon our lives, our ministry, that we seek to be set apart to Him wholeheartedly. We’re not talking about legalism, but walking in wisdom, in a manner befitting of a child of a holy God... In the book of Romans Paul said it this way, *“And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments (weapons) of righteousness to God.”*⁵ To the Colossians he said this, *“And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight— if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard,”*⁶ You see once again adversity is implied w/in the context. There is nothing in this world that encourages you to continue in the faith, grounded & steadfast... It’s just the opposite.

³ The New King James Version. (1982). (Je 29:13). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁴ The New King James Version. (1982). (Pr 23:12). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁵ The New King James Version. (1982). (Ro 6:13). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁶ The New King James Version. (1982). (Col 1:21-23). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Everything is tugging on you, tempting you to move away from the hope of the gospel which you heard... “Be diligent to present yourself approved to *God*.” Or another way to understand that? Don’t worry about obtaining the approval of man, pastoral ministry or what you do in your life personally isn’t about being in a popularity contest, it’s about remaining faithful to God in what He’s called you to do.

What does this word “approved”, mean? It goes beyond a simple nod apart from understanding. It speaks of being reliable, trustworthy, tested in battle, it points to a proven worth... You could almost liken it to a new medicine that’s placed on the shelf. It doesn’t get there by someone telling people how it should work & they say, “Well, that sounds good, let’s get it on the market!” It 1st has to undergo rigorous testing, trial after trial, fit into stringent specifications & if it performs under every stress, meets every spec *then* the FDA will stamp it, “Approved”.

Paul says, “Be diligent to maintain your course, be reliable, battle tested, trust worthy, stand up under the testing, under the trials, learn what it means to die to self that the power of the Holy Spirit might give you strength. That God would place His stamp of approval upon your life.” You guys we’re not talking about earning salvation, we’re talking about leading a life that’s set apart to God. It’s the “come out from among them, says the Lord, & do not touch that which is unclean” kind of principle at work in our lives.

You guys, all that we do in life; (if you were to liken it to a performance) is all & only for an audience of One, there’s only One whose approval you seek...

There’s a story told (if it’s true or not I don’t know, but it stresses the point) of a young boy in Austria giving his 1st violin recital. He’d studied hard for years under the tutelage of one of the greatest masters of all of Europe. He was incredibly talented, had learned every lesson w/accuracy. After each piece, the crowd exploded w/applause & yet he didn’t even seem to notice their expressions of approval... Finally when he’d finished the crowd responded w/a standing ovation, loud cheers, seeking an encore & yet he sat there expressionless looking up into the 2nd balcony to the Old man, the master teacher... Finally the teacher nodded; then the boy smiled. You see, his performance wasn’t for the crowd, it was for the master...

This is where so many guys like me, perhaps like you, can go wrong in ministry today, there can be a tendency, a temptation to perform for the crowd, looking for man’s approval, man’s acceptance. The call is to be a God pleaser, not a man pleaser.

What that means is that though it's not my heart to offend you I can't allow that possibility to thwart the message, but I've got to speak truthfully, w/clarity so that if you're doing well you might take heart, if you're in sin you might repent & turn to (or back to) the Lord.

You see, we want to be workmen who don't need to be ashamed *before* God, but rather those who've been approved *by* God. & In no small capacity the difference between a workman who is approved & a workman who will be ashamed lies in whose approval he is seeking. The one who will be approved will seek the approval of God, the one who will stand ashamed will be the one who seeks the approval of man...

You see, if I'm seeking your approval I'm liable to say most anything (much like a politician) in order to please you, make you feel better about yourself, keep you comin back. **But if I'm seeking God's approval I'm not going to deviate from the clear teaching of the Word of God, I'm not going to distort the truth in any way; I'm going to give you God's word in simplicity, w/integrity. Oh, I'll speak in love, but I'm not going to sugarcoat it or in someway twist it, I'll share it straight w/a view to converting the unsaved & strengthening the saved.**

Now in order for me to do that there's something that has to happen & that is this; I have to "rightly divide the word of truth" (a.k.a. the word of God). The word translated "rightly dividing" means "to cut straight". It's imperative that we handle God's word rightly, again w/accuracy, contextually.

There is structure to the word of God; it's a big bundle of truth, yet there's structure to that has to be observed as we go through it. There are divisions to it that we need to cut straight, we can't just lift out a verse here, choose to ignore that passage there; a lot of people do that & it's easy to do, but it's not appropriate & it's to handle God's Word in a manner that is inaccurate. (Now I'm not saying that topical studies are all wrong, I'm saying that we need to consider context when we're handling God's word).

It's imperative that we know God's Word & that we present it in a manner that's consistent w/the whole of scripture; we've got to have a grasp of God's heart; the spirit of the letter.

We've got to rightly divide God's word lest we be ashamed. It's one thing to be ashamed before man, its something altogether different to stand ashamed before God. Make every effort to ensure that you don't mishandle His Word...

Now I'm not saying that you should be afraid to employ the bible. I'm saying that you should do your very best to employ it *accurately*... & woe to the one who handles it *deceitfully*. Paul told the Corinthians, "*But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God...*"⁷

The bible is clear that our work will be examined before the Lord, it will be tested as by fire; the idea here is that of a workman who has no cause for shame when his work is inspected.

As children of God we do well to study the *word* of God. We're to recognize the difference between being under law & under grace & why we're under grace as opposed to law. Why did they bring animals to the temple to sacrifice under the law, but we don't do that today under grace? *These kinds of things are very basic to the understanding of the scripture; & we're to study it so we can know it & teach it to others. We're to "get it straight & give it straight."* (Hughes)

How many people have quoted these bible verses (no show of hands)? 1. Cleanliness is next to godliness." 2. "God helps those who help themselves." 3. "An honest confession is good for the soul." 4. "We are as prone to sin as sparks fly upward." 5. "Honesty is the best policy." However the only problem w/quoting those bible verses is that they're not bible verses! We're to get it straight & give it straight.

Allow me to say the same thing in a different way. The command to "rightly divide" obviously implies that there is a way to "wrongly divide" the word of truth. Not everyone who dissects God's word cuts it straight... Understand that biblical truth is not a matter of personal interpretation. There is a right way & a wrong way to understand the Bible; & perhaps more than anyone else a pastor needs to work hard to master the right interpretation...

If I had a dime for every time I heard someone say, "Well, that's just your interpretation." The idea being, "You interpret it your way, I'll interpret it my way." They're saying that no one can really know what it means so don't judge me w/your Bible verse.

Listen, there's only 1 interpretation to scripture, it only means what it means & nothing more & nothing else. There may be many *applications*, but there's only 1 *interpretation*... It doesn't simply say whatever someone wants it to mean; but people try to twist the scripture to justify their own ends; wrongly dividing the word of truth...

⁷ The New King James Version. (1982). [2 Co 4:2]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Listen, if you have the right interpretation of scripture it will be consistent w/what the bible is saying in the passage you're taking it from as well as the entire message of the Scriptures. There is continuity throughout the Word of God & if what you're saying doesn't fit w/the entirety of the bible, it's not that the bible contradicts itself, it's that you don't understand the bible. You're wrongly dividing the word of truth...

How many times have you heard someone say, "Judge not!" As a means to say, "You have no right to judge my behavior or anyone else's behavior!" Yet if that we're the correct understanding Jesus broke His own commandment all the time; He was constantly telling people that their behavior was wrong in the sight of God... But if you'll just read the next verse the context becomes clear, *"For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you."*⁸ He's simply warning against a hypocritical standard, recognizing that we'll be held to the same standard that we hold others to. **To recognize right from wrong is only to agree w/the word of God; but don't think that you're above someone because you may struggle w/their sin, they may not struggle w/yours... Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy...**

Now I'm not saying that we all understand every nuance of God's Word perfectly, but we're to strive to rightly divide it, keep it clear & keep it straight.

Vs 16-18

This is what happens when people lose focus, cease to cut God's Word straight, the faith of some is overthrown...

When he's talking about profane & idle babblings he's talking about anything that takes the focus off of the gospel, off of God's Word. Godless chatter leads to ungodliness. We're not talking about friendly conversation, we're talking about entertaining those speculations, & opinions, human theories & philosophies that take our attention off of the plain teaching of God's Word.

We're to stand in firm opposition to those subtleties or those theories that cause us to deviate from what God's Word says. It's a message that will spread like cancer, (or more literally gangrene) death is in that kind of message. False doctrine spreads through the body of Christ like gangrene spreads, infects & kills other tissue. The infection has to be exposed & removed.

It's amazing how long it can take to implement & stabilize people in the truth & how fast false doctrines, rumors & lies can spread.

⁸ The New King James Version, (1982). (Mt 7:2). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Paul says that Hymenaeus and Philetus are guys like that; w/a poisonous, infectious message that will destroy the faith of those who take it in. He's already brought up Hymenaeus once in 1st Timothy, here he mentions him again; he had a message full of profane & idle babblings. Saying that the resurrection was already past & they were leading people astray; causing them to stumble & stray away from Christ.

Evidently they were at one time right on, they strayed concerning the truth & were now leading others down the same destructive path. We don't know the core of their teaching. Perhaps they were spiritualizing the resurrection saying that it's what happens at baptism as we come out of the water identifying w/the resurrection of Christ (which is in part true) but they were possibly saying that, that was the extent of it, there will be no physical resurrection, what you get is what you got, it's past...

But to undermine the bodily resurrection is to undermine the message of the gospel itself (Write it down look it up 1 Cor 15:35-55).

You see it comes back to being a worker who doesn't need to be ashamed, who has rightly divided the Word of truth. The good shepherd will feed his sheep, tend to them, take care of them as to where the hireling is just lookin to it for what's in it for him...

Now... let me turn this real quick. We will all be either approved, or ashamed. Yes, the interpretation of this lands at the pastor's doorstep. But certainly the application is for us all... You do well to know the word of God, because if you know it you won't be led astray from it. Search the scriptures, make sure that what you're being taught is really what the bible teaches.

Be zealous to find yourself not ashamed *before* God, but approved *by* God...

Prayer Points:

Father may we be diligent students of Your word. We want to get it straight, & give it straight, we don't want to stand ashamed before you, we seek your approval. Help us that we not get sidetracked & concerned for man's approval, help us to seek Your approval & Yours alone. We want to seek You w/all of our heart, we want to know Your Word & know Your ways, that we might know You...

The 1st step in being approved *by* God is to give your life *to* God. The bible teaches that we've all sinned and fall short of the glory of God; we're separated from God because of our sin. But Christ came to give us new life, He took our sin upon Himself & paid the price that God requires of our sin upon the cross that by faith in Him we could be forgiven of our sin & become a new creation. Come to Jesus today, surrender to Him that you might be made right in the sight of God by grace through faith in J.C.