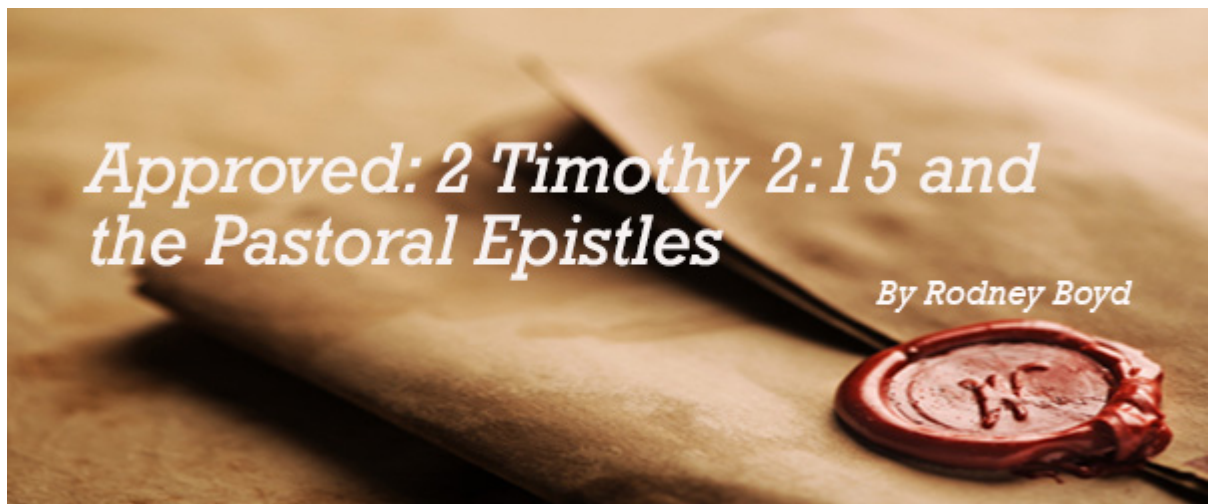


Approved: 2 Timothy 2:15 and the Pastoral Epistles

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“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.” –2 Tim. 2:15 (ESV)^[1]

Globalization with free trade has resulted in flooding the world market with goods that raise doubts about the authenticity of brands and the true quality of the products being sold. Because of this, now more than ever, manufacturers recognize the importance of assuring the genuineness and quality of their products and communicate that to the consumer. The famous *seal of approval* means that the product is not only authentic but also has met the standards of quality that their brand symbolizes. Two thousand years ago, the apostle Paul faced similar problems. False teachers had infiltrated the church, attempting to *sell* an inferior product. Paul address his concern about this important them in the pastoral epistles (1 & 2 Timothy and Titus), writing to Timothy and Titus, two young “sons in the faith” with his counsel and advice. In the middle of these chapters we find 2 Tim. 2:15, a fulcrum verse that provides a actionable solution to the problem. It’s a verse that merits full attention and profound study, even more for those in the ministry.

KJV | Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.^[2]

NIV | Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.^[3]

NLT | Work hard so you can present yourself to God and receive his approval. Be a good worker, one who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly explains the word of truth.^[4]

Work hard. The apostle Paul exhorts Timothy, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved.” The King James translation, “Study to shew thyself approved” is not the best rendering of the phrase. The new contemporary translation, the New Living Translation (NLT) correctly utilizes the word combination “work hard.” The Greek word (σπουδασον from σπουδάζω | spoudazō) suggests “being eager and zealous” and “making every effort.”^[5] It carries with it the ideas of striving and diligence along with haste and priority.^[6] It conveys the sense of doing something with persistent fervor.^[7] Every pastor, teacher and minister should be motivated, disciplined, and committed to strive for and fulfill the required standards of the One who calls and evaluates us. This means that presenting ourselves to God is not automatic. On the contrary, it requires us to do our part, not leaving everything in His hands.

Receive God’s Approval. God is the One that approves us. He is the One who calls us to be pastors and teachers. He is the One who establishes the standards and the requirements for ministry. The word approved (δόκιμος | dokimos) also suggests

verified. It means to subject oneself to the process of verification with the purpose of receiving approval, and, when the person or thing complies with the indicated specifications, to put one's approval on the person or thing. "A workman approved is a workman who has been put to the test, and having met all requirements, he has won the approval of the one who has subjected him to the test."¹⁸³

For Paul, subjecting oneself to the test meant to suffer for Christ. To him, it was expected and he considered it an honor. This is not a unique concept to Paul. In both testaments, there are other examples of how suffering functioned to purify (Is. 48:10) and as a result, glorify God among His people (Zech. 13:9, Mal. 3:2-3), even in the individual as these trials produce perfection (James 1:2-4).

Paul always thought that he would experience trials because he had been a persecutor of the Church. Not only that, he believed that his suffering was also the result of being faithful as a preacher, apostle, and teacher of the Gentiles (2 Tim. 1:10-12). On two other occasions, Paul contrasts his decision to seek the approval of God by dedicating himself to the preaching of the gospel with the easier route of seeking to please man (2 Cor. 10:18 in the context of the chapters 10-13, Gal. 1:6-10). In the same way, the servant of Christ should strive to present himself/herself approved by God, no matter the circumstances, and should always reject the easy way out of pleasing man.

The correct use of the word. For Paul and the church of that time, the Word of God was the writings of the Old Testament and the teachings of the apostles that would later be converted into the New Testament. A repeating theme for Paul in the three pastoral letters was to confront those who were preaching a different gospel and to maintain oneself faithful to the Word of God. At the same time, Paul worried that Timothy and Titus would involve themselves in unproductive conversation that would distract them from what was important.

Paul continually encouraged Timothy and Titus, his "sons in the faith" (1 Tim 1:2, 2 Tim 1:2, Tito 1:4), with practical counsel on being faithful to the Word, Paul's teaching, and transmitting both. Furthermore, there is a plethora of references concerning those who were preaching and teaching a different gospel with exhortation to Timothy and Titus to avoid this trap. The following are a few examples of the counsel and warnings of Paul to Timothy and Titus that related to teaching and sound doctrine:

Counsel

Warning

1 Tim 1:5 "The aim of our **charge** is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith."

4:6 "If you put these things before the brothers,[a] you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the **words of the faith** and of the **good doctrine** that you have followed."

4:11 "Command and **teach** these things."

6:20-21 "O Timothy, **guard** the **deposit entrusted** to you..."

1:3 "...I urged you...charge certain persons not to teach any different **doctrine**," 1:4, "nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote **speculations** rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith." 1:6-7 "Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into **vain discussion**, desiring to be **teachers** of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions." 4:1-2 "Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and **teachings of demons**, 2 through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared,"

6:20, "... Avoid the **irreverent babble** and **contradictions of what is falsely called 'knowledge'**, for by professing it some have swerved from the faith."

2 Tim 1:8 "Therefore do not be ashamed of the **testimony** about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God," 1:13

"Follow the pattern of the **sound words** that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus." 1:14 "By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the **good deposit** entrusted to you." 2:2 "and **what you have heard from me** in the presence of many witnesses **entrust** to faithful men,[a] who will be able to **teach** others also." 2:15 "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.**"

3:10 "You, however, have followed **my teaching**, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness,"

3:14 "But as for you, continue in **what you have learned** and have firmly believed, knowing from whom[a] you learned it"

3:16-17 "All **Scripture** is breathed out by God and profitable for **teaching**, for reproof, for correction, and for **training** in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."

4:2 "...preach the **word**; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and **exhort**, with complete patience and **teaching**"

4:5 "As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, **fulfill your ministry.**"

2:14 "Remind them of these things, and charge them before God **not to quarrel about words**, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers."

2:16-17 "But avoid **irreverent babble**, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, and **their talk will spread like gangrene.**"

2:23 "Have nothing to do with foolish, **ignorant controversies**; you know that they breed quarrels.

3:13 while evil people and **impostors** will go on from bad to worse, **deceiving** and being deceived.

4:3-4 " For the time is coming when people will **not endure sound teaching**, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves **teachers to suit their own passions**, and **will turn away from listening to the truth** and wander off into **myths.**"

Tito 1:9 "He must hold firm to the **trustworthy word as taught**, so that he may be able to give instruction in **sound doctrine** and also to rebuke those who contradict it." 1:13-14 "This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, not **devoting themselves to Jewish myths** and the commands of people who turn away from the truth." 2:1-3 "But as for you, **teach** what accords with **sound doctrine**. Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. 3 Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good," 2:6-7 "Likewise, **urge** the younger men to be self-controlled. Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your **teaching** show integrity, dignity,

1:10 "For there are many who are insubordinate, **empty talkers and deceivers.**"

1:11-13 "They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain **what they ought not to teach**. One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." This testimony is true."

The basis of both the counsel and warnings was the emphasis that Paul placed on the correct use of the Word and, in contrast, the incorrect use and the distortions of the Word by those who were preaching and teaching another gospel. The phrase "correctly handle" (NIV) is from the Greek work ὀρθοτομέω (orthotomeo), a compound word made up of the word τέμνω (temno) "to cut" and ὀρθός (orthos) "straight." Together they mean to "cut straight"⁹¹, an apparent reference to the masons or stonecutters who cut large stones. To the preacher, pastor, and teacher, our "straight cut" is the correct use of the Word. We should not, nor is it necessary to change the Word to accommodate the person. The good worker will know the Word, use it well, and share it with clarity. A worker like this will have no reason to be ashamed.

Approved as teachers. Although the primary and principal source of approval is from God, it is not the only source. Yes, it is possible to concern oneself solely with God's approval. One could say, "It is only God who approves me." Nevertheless, we recognize and accept the importance of being approved as a member of an organization. I thank God for the emphasis that the Assemblies of God has placed on the formation and preparation of its ministers and by Christian Education Services (*Servicio de Educación Cristiana*) that coordinates the unified Christian education effort that serves from the local church level to the master's degree level (*Facultad de Teología*). Among the Assemblies of God ministerial training programs, our program is unique in its size and strength, and in its role to prepare and *approve* more than 50,000 credentialed ministers.

Currently, there are 43,000 students involved in our ministerial training program in LAC, in more than 1,000 seminaries and Bible institutes, extensions, and study centers. We have more than 6,000 pastors and leaders that teach and prepare these harvest workers. Thank God for the Assemblies of God Theological Association for Latin America (ATAL, in Spanish) that is accrediting both professors and the seminaries and Bible schools where they teach. In the last two years more than 500 professors have become members of ATAL. We recognize the importance of not only seeking God's

approval, but also the approval of the accrediting organization over us.

Conclusion

As teachers, we take seriously the task of correctly handling the Word of God. We have the enormous responsibility to study, understand, and practice the Word. So, **teacher**, “*Work hard* so you can present yourself to God and receive his approval. Be a good worker, one who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly explains the word of truth.” Yet, we thank the Lord that we’re not alone. We are inspired and helped by fellow teachers, friends, even students who are a part of the process. Most important, we have the Holy Spirit who accompanies and helps us. The apostle Paul, in his letter to the Philippians, reminded them in one single breath, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure (Phil 2:12-13 ESV). Yes, we have to work hard in our growth and development. While we do, we can be sure that the Spirit is at work in us!

The story is told of a mother who was teaching her son to play the piano. To encourage him, she took him to a concert of a master pianist. They arrived and took their seats. The mother saw a friend in the next row and began to talk to her. When the lights were dimmed to begin the concert, the mother realized that her son was not in his seat. Frantically she looked around only to see her son seated on the piano bench. He began to play, Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star. The master pianist entered and put his arms around the child and said, “Keep playing. I’ll help you.” And that boy, with the help of the master, filled the concert hall with wonderful music.

Teacher, work hard! Do your best. But don’t forget that you’re not alone. The Lord will take your “best” and He will make it what is necessary to fulfill His purposes!
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Questions to consider...

Does the church continue to suffer today from false teachers and the false gospel?

How prepared is the church today to stand against false teaching?

How effective is the teaching ministry of the church to prepare “approved workers”?

^[1] The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. ESV® Permanent Text Edition® (2001). (2016). Wheaton, IL: Good News Publishers.

^[2] *The Holy Bible: King James Version*. (2009). (Electronic Edition of the 1900 Authorized Version., 2 Ti 2:15). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

^[3] Holy Bible, New International Version® (2011). Colorado Spring, CO: Biblica, Inc.

^[4] Holy Bible, New Living Translation (2015). Carol Stream, Illinois Tyndale House Publishers.

^[5] Knight, G. W. (1992). *The Pastoral Epistles: a commentary on the Greek text* (p. 411). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

^[6] Wuest, K. S. (1997). *Wuest’s word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. (2 Tim. 2:15)

^[7] Knight, G. W. (1992). *The Pastoral Epistles: a commentary on the Greek text* (p. 411). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

^[8] Wuest, (2 Tim. 2:15)

^[9] Wuest, (2 Tim 2:15).